
REVIEWS

A Few Words in the Right Order: Essays on Haiku Craft, by Brad Bennett. (Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2026). 276 pages; 6"×9". Four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1958408841 Price: \$25.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

A Rush of Doves, by Brad Bennett. (Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2025). 98 pages; 4¼"×6½". Four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1958408032 Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Randy Brooks

When asked if I was interested in reviewing two books recently published by Brad Bennett, I replied, of course! For several years I have admired his craft essays in the haiku journals, and I have enjoyed reading his award-winning haiku. In this review we consider his lessons on writing haiku and see how he practices what he preaches. He is both an award-winning writer of haiku and an outstanding teacher of writing haiku. What makes him such a good teacher is that he listens to his students and shares in the investigation of questions they raise. In this case, he immerses himself in the life of being a haiku writer along with his fellow writers. He joins them in the learning adventure of discovering strategies for mastering the craft of this literary art we call haiku. His essays are a means of sharing what he has learned with more distant, remote students (readers) who are invited into the ongoing collaboration about the craft of writing haiku.

Bennett is very clear about the focus of his scholarship. He is not writing essays about the literary history of haiku, about individual haiku writers, about cultural contexts of haiku, about the literary theory, nor about the essence of haiku aesthetics. He is writing essays on the craft of creating haiku. In his closing afterword, he states:

“For me, the haiku writing experience consists of two primary endeavors: the ‘way of haiku’ and the ‘craft of haiku.’ The way of haiku is about the moment. It’s about cultivating openness, celebrating essence, recognizing moments of wonder, and then transcribing them as haiku. It’s about honoring our pure relationships with entities in the world around us” (231).

Bennett’s essays do not address “the way of haiku.” He does not become a life-coach leading us to discover the world around us. He is not a psychologist inviting us to explore our inner worlds or states of consciousness. He doesn’t lead us into meditation nor forest walking workshops. The “way of haiku” is left as a mystery for the individual student (all of us) to find on our own. We get just two sentences about “cultivating openness, celebrating essence, recognizing moments of wonder” and “transcribing them as haiku.” Maybe he will address these learning experiences in later essays or books, but for now it’s kind of like Taylor Swift’s song, “you’re on your own kid.”

His essays are all about that second endeavor, “the craft of haiku” which he views as an ongoing collaboration of a literary community—in this case, the haiku community. He explains that:

“While the way of haiku is primarily a solitary engagement, the craft of haiku is often undertaken in community. When we decide to share our haiku with others, we join a centuries-old multi-continent conversation about the haiku form and its potential. Successful experiments and new understandings of traditional haiku elements are considered, adapted, adopted, and embraced by a global community of haiku writers and readers. That ongoing collaboration is all about craft. I believe strongly in the importance of the haiku’s moment. But a haiku is a poem, not just a moment, and since it is a poem, we can consider, assess, and discuss how poets create their haiku. The essays presented here are intended to add to this ongoing discussion about the craft of haiku” (231).

The following haiku from *A Rush of Doves* serves as the title poem for Bennett’s book of craft essays:

a few words
 in the right order
 wood ducklings

The book is divided into two sections. The first section, “A Few Words,” features essays “on finding the most inspiring and apt words for our haiku” (xi). Here is a listing of the essays: *Hot Words in Haiku*, *Prepositions in Haiku*, “*Verbing*” in *Haiku*, *To Be Here So Lightly: Adverbs in Haiku*, *Hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia*, *Hyphenated Words in Haiku*, and *Opening Doors: In Praise of the Thesaurus*.

Essays in the second section feature effective arrangement and organization of words and phrases for overall effects, such as tone and emphasis. Bennett describes these as “larger craft considerations about how these words interact together in the most effective way” (xi). Here are the essays on the craft of getting your words “in the right order”: *Euphony in Haiku*, *Shadow Words in Haiku*, *Short-Longer-Longest*, *Repetition in Haiku*, *Out-and-Out Vagueness*, *The Length of a Fudgesicle*, and *Pushing and Pulling: Antonyms in Haiku*.

There are no essays on wood ducklings, but as part of the “way of haiku” I would say that ducklings do line up behind momma duck and may follow their own mysteries of pecking order. Where would “a few words / in the right order” be without the wood ducklings? Just a few words on their own, without “honoring our pure relationships with entities in the world around us.”

In this review, I will provide excerpts with examples from five of Bennett’s craft essays and a short sampler of haiku from his new collection.

Hot Words in Haiku

“The hot word is the one that entices, intrigues, or incites. It’s the word that blazes, pulsates with energy, or reverberates. In such a short poem as a haiku, it can be risky to give so much weight to one specific word. But I believe that haikuists can successfully utilize hot words in their poems. What makes a particular word the hot word? Perhaps the most vital attribute of a hot word is its freshness. Maybe it’s the word in the haiku that

is the most surprising or striking. Maybe it's a familiar word utilized in a new way. Maybe it's a brand-new word. It could be a word with more than one meaning that yields effective ambiguity and multiple interpretations. It could be a word that does multiple jobs in the haiku: semantic, visual, emotional, and/or euphonic" (3).

storytime
she wants the one we read
yesternight

— Francine Banwarth

"Verbing" in Haiku

"Verbing can be used to great advantage in English-language haiku for a variety of reasons. First, it can create surprising, dynamic, and effective freshness. Second, it can contribute to the precision and concision of our haiku. Third, since denominal verbs start as nouns, they are inherently flexible and can yield effective ambiguity. Fourth, denominal verbs can provide euphony, or harmonious sound, in our haiku. Last, they can help to create *karumi* (a light touch), humor, and a friendly, colloquial voice. Let's examine these advantages with examples" (41).

early spring
a grackle robins ahead
on the trail

— Brad Bennett

"If you're a forest bather like I am, you've probably encountered robins foraging on the trail ahead of you. When you walk toward them, they fly away farther up the trail. When you approach them again, they fly ahead again. One day I noted that same behavior in a pair of grackles. Rather than try to (probably unsuccessfully) cram a description of that particular behavior into my small haiku, I used "robin" as a verb to accurately and more succinctly describe the behavior" (43).

Note that when discussing the origins of this haiku, Bennett provides a slight peek into his “way of haiku” life.

Euphony in Haiku

Perhaps the most well-known and widely cited essay in the collection is Bennett’s essay on “Euphony in Haiku.” He writes that: “an essential element of a poem is how it sounds, what use it makes of language to evoke the haiku moment and linger in the reader’s mind. A successful haiku resonates. It coheres. So, as haiku poets, we need to think about how our poems sound, in addition to whether we’ve captured the haiku moment. If we are able to construct an authentic haiku moment, and also choose words made of sounds that enhance the music, create more unity, and add to the meaning or emotional resonance of the poem, then we are getting the most out of our poems” (105). But how do we craft haiku that will sound just right? The essay explores that question and considers the use of sounds, rhymes, near rhymes, alliteration, assonance, shadow words, and other techniques.

creek trickle
a chickadee lands
on my hand

— Brad Bennett

Short-Longer-Longest

“Historically, the short-long-short three-line structure (SLS) has been the predominant one in English-language haiku. This structure is a direct descendent of the 5-7-5 sound unit pattern that has been an essential element of Japanese haiku for centuries because of its pleasing rhythm and mnemonic quality, meaning that it supported memorization. For English-language haiku, the classic SLS structure can create effective asymmetry in a three-line, two-part haiku that helps to enact the poem’s all-important juxtaposition. But perhaps we rely too often on this structure in the

English-language haiku world. ... Has SLS become too much of a default structure? Have our brains become overly wired to organize our haiku moments into that specific arrangement? Are we missing opportunities to explore other structures? There are, obviously, other ways to present a three-line haiku. One alternate framework is the short-longer-longest structure" (149).

In this essay Bennett explores various effects and emphases available from the SLL arrangement. Here is an example from his collection, *A Rush of Doves*:

still
in slippers
spring morning
— Brad Bennett

The Length of a Fudgesicle

I want to close my overview with a quick look at this essay in which Bennett considers the ways we use familiar images to communicate everyday measurements. He explains:

"When we read a haiku, we compare the two parts of the poem (phrase and a fragment) that are being juxtaposed by the writer. These comparisons are often about similarities and differences in physical properties. Haiku can highlight a variety of properties, such as distance, time, height, width, depth, volume, weight, and speed. One way that haikuists describe these traits is by measuring them. For instance, we can include details like the width of an object or the span of time an action takes. To do so, we use standard units of measurement such as inches or hours. On occasion, however, haiku writers create new, surprising, and intriguing ways of measuring that create resonance and metaphor in effective ways" (205).

The title of the essay comes from this haiku:

summer walk
the length of
a fudgesicle

— Jacquie Pierce

“Distance is usually measured in feet, meters, miles, and similar units. Or in this poem, the distance of a ‘summer walk’ could have been measured in city blocks or sidewalk slabs. And time is usually measured in seconds, minutes, hours, and such. But Pearce compares the length of the walk to the length it takes to eat a frozen summer treat. She’s invented a fun, new, unconventional unit of time or distance: the fudgesicle ... the use of creative ways of measuring takes us into the realm of metaphor. Metaphor is part and parcel of haiku, though not usually in a deliberate, up-front way. Paul O. Williams suggests that haiku utilize ‘unresolved metaphors.’ The ultimate metaphor that occurs in a haiku is more within the reader’s purview, as they bring their own comparisons, interpretations, and meaning to the poem” (206).

Brad Bennett’s “way of haiku” is more evident from reading his new collection, *A Rush of Doves*. Consider his use of a hyphenated word to measure time in this opening one:

sunlit moss
a sit-awhile bench
in the silver maples

And the euphony of this one about communion with the heavens:

our neighbor
strings his ukulele
first stars

Does this elicit a shadow word when you read it out loud? Twinkling?
How light and fun to share such an evening of moon viewing.

Notice how things pile up at the end of the following short-longer-longest haiku:

thunderstorm
bunched-up sheets
at the bottom of the bed

And is that hyphenated hot word “bunched-up” one of those fudgesicle measurements of a restless night? Must have been quite a thunderstorm that rattled the bedroom windows or roof!

How about this “verbizing” haiku?

toward sunset
a flock of blackbirds
jockeys for sky

The “jockeys” metaphor is an apt imagistic verb we immediately understand from watching those crowded starts and finishes of horse races? What’s the hurry blackbirds? Are you running out of sunlight soon? Time to go home?

off-season
a long beach scattered
with solitude

Here’s a haiku leading with an adverb that suggests both duration and a contrast to usual visits in season. The overall emotional effect is up to the reader’s imagination, especially when they consider sporadic solitude. The “long” adds to the duration of the time along the beach without the usual crowd. The adverb is the hot word in this haiku.

Let’s end with the title one-line poem for the collection:

sheer quarry granite a rush of doves

In this haiku I compare the imagined colors of the granite and the doves. Both are a mix of whites and grays with geologic and feathered move-

ment. They are rock solid and lighter than air. The rush is puzzling. Perhaps the “hot word” of this haiku. What’s the hurry? Where are the doves going? Will the dove and granite find each other in a city someday in the future? In this haiku they are fresh dug from the quarry, not yet structured, but in movement and interaction with each other. The “sheer quarry” brings a measurement of height, a cliff of sorts exposing the granite and harboring the doves in the nooks and crannies of the quarry walls. Perhaps this is a natural environment just as in the city buildings. A back-to-nature haiku in our Anthropocene age. Sounds like just the right few words in the right order to me. The way of haiku. Thanks teacher!

Mindful Renku: The Spiritual Journey of Linked Verse, by David G. Lanoue (Lexington, Ky.: Haiku Guy, 2026). 304 pages; 5¼"×8". Matte four-color card colors; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7333016-8-8. Price: \$19.99 from online booksellers.

Reviewed by John Stevenson

Renku is sneaky. It’s a fun little language game that you can play with friends, but before you know it, you start realizing how healing it is, how sane it is—to let go of your selfish obsessions for just an hour or two to explore, with friends, this thing called life. (page 174)

For English-language readers, David Lanoue’s is a rare book, one that is exclusively devoted to the history, aesthetics, and practice of the Japanese collaborative poetry known as renku. While a few “how to haiku” books devote a chapter to the topic, I’m aware of less than a handful of books that have treated renku in such depth. Lanoue has proven, beyond doubt, that renku deserves book-length attention.

Mindful Renku: The Spiritual Journey of Linked Verse delves into the approximately thirteen-hundred-year development of renku, from the earliest known two-verse/two-poet creations, up to the present day, in which it has come to be practiced in many other languages and cultures. While taking a wide view, Lanoue gives special attention to the role of