

ends Hackett is able to achieve through his classically constructed poems. The reader who may be familiar with Hackett's pioneering poems only through a few selections in haiku anthologies will indeed find his or her interest in the poet's work, and its "wider purpose," sparked by Miller's book.

*My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson*, eds. Randy & Shirley Brooks (Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2021). 160 pages; 6¼" × 9¼". Matte red and white covers; hardcover. ISBN 978-1-929820-21-4. Price: \$30.00 from [www.brooksbookshaiku.com](http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com)

*Review by Cherie Hunter Day*

The term *quale* (plural, *qualia*), from the Latin for "of what kind," was used by philosopher C. S. Peirce in 1866 to describe how we perceive sensations—the thus-ness of phenomena. One common example of a *quale* is the redness of red. When someone says "red," we immediately think of the color on the electromagnetic spectrum with a specific wavelength and frequency. No one can touch this red or compare your perception of red against mine. And yet they exist independently with qualities that are intuitively understood. These discernments are purely subjective and thus cannot be debated.

John Stevenson launches us into the middle of this theory of mind with his title poem.

pretty sure my red is your red

It is seemingly straightforward, but as we consider the concept of *qualia*, it is anything but simple. Stevenson is a master observer of human nature and a distiller of sensations.

The impetus and the selection process for *My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson* is clearly stated in the Publisher's Note that opens the collection. This title is part of a clothbound series of books by haiku

poets that “have spent a significant portion of his or her life’s work in this genre.” The process began with John Stevenson looking back over all 2,183 previously published haiku and senryu to date and selecting 774 of his favorites. These haiku were then sent to seven readers for their feedback. This shaped what Randy and Shirley Brooks ultimately incorporated in the final count of 196 poems. On the Brooks Books website there is a YouTube link to a promotional video that John Stevenson commissioned to celebrate the release of this collection. It features Stevenson reading his work to Logan Rando’s video editing of music and chosen images. Very well done.

The book format is larger than Stevenson’s six previous collections. The binding is clothbound heavy-duty cardboard and features a portrait of the author in red by Jessica Seabok. It signals that this collection is about the poet and not just about the work. This is a marked departure from haiku writers eschewing the ego. There is ample front matter by the publishers, an author’s introduction, and an eight-page foreword by Jim Kacian, who published five of Stevenson’s previous titles. There are also nine pages of back matter including the author’s biography, acknowledgements, and award credits for forty-one of the poems. The poems themselves are laid out one or two per page with more than enough white space to provide counterpoint *think space*. Certainly the scope and treatment is befitting a best-of-the-best edition.

The poems are presented without any section headings and without reference to when they were published. I would have liked to see poems grouped together that were released in the same collection. It would allow readers to chart the progression of the poet through a lifetime of writing haiku. Jim Kacian mentions some of the thematic movements in his detailed foreword. In the titles published by Red Moon Press there was a mixture of one-line and three-line haiku and senryu, along with tanka, and short haibun. One of the hallmarks of Stevenson’s work is the way he controls the readers’ progress through the material. I miss that modulation in this collection of mostly three-line haiku and senryu.

Obviously it is a daunting task if you begin with such a huge pool of poems and omit more than 90% of the material in an effort to find the essence of the poet. To make the task more difficult, the selected poems

must satisfy ten different opinions. But knowing the size of the initial pool of material and seeing the amount of white space, I feel cheated. There could have been more poems included without being crowded. Don't get me wrong, there's still plenty to enjoy. Stevenson continues to be a prodigious haiku writer and there will be future additions to the best of the best.

in American Sign  
the lily  
opens

under the  
blackest doodle  
something unerasable

honeybee  
does your language  
mention the moon

never touching  
his own face  
tyrannosaurus

banquet table —  
just out of reach  
the good conversation

rehearsing my words  
until I arrive  
saying something else

fresh snow  
sadness for  
the old sadness

reversible jacket  
the side  
I always show

in the dream  
my dog has a whistle  
only I can hear

curling tighter  
a leaf  
catches fire

In the author's introduction Stevenson gives his answer to: why haiku? "There are so many of us. If even a small part want to be heard it seems only fair to be brief."