
REVIEWS

Bare Necessities: Selected Haiku of Francine Banwarth, eds. Randy and Shirley Brooks (Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2024). 132 pages; 6¼" × 9¼". Glossy four-color cover; hardcover. ISBN 978-1-929820-19-1. Price: \$30.00 from www.brooksbookshaiku.com

Reviewed by Lorraine A Padden

There's much to savor in spending time with Francine Banwarth and her extensive collection of haiku. Call it an abundance of riches for which a review might come across as another embellishment, given the many praiseworthy remarks about Banwarth's poetry that rightfully illuminate the book's opening pages. Randy and Shirley Brooks, Michelle Root-Bernstein, and the poet herself offer thoughtful commentary on creative process, context, inspiration, and the deep relationships underpinning this accomplished body of work. And earlier this year, *Bare Necessities* received a Touchstone Award for Distinguished Books from The Haiku Foundation.

Given the plenitude on offer, this reflection will take a broader view, one that considers the book as a whole generous endeavor—a larger frame of intentional curatorial moments that contribute to the lasting resonance of the haiku themselves.

Well over two hundred poems make up this sprawling bounty. Arranged chronologically, they span some thirty-five years of Banwarth's haiku practice. Individual poems are positioned above their publishing credits, a style of encounter that offers the reader not only a map of placement over the years, but also a speculative timeline regarding how journals and the poet herself responded to an ever-morphing genre that balances tradition with experimentation. Banwarth's are time-honored left-justified gestures that happily mingle with her monoku, concrete

structures, diverse lineation/indentation choices, and novel manipulations of punctuation and typesetting.

Page layout also offers a unique visual rhythm to Banwarth's work; at most, six haiku share a sizable two-page spread. Contrast this amplitude with just one or two haiku on a page and the reader is afforded extra breathing room to pause, perhaps remembering some introductory contextual material while the surrounding white space lends the fullness of its own resonance.

What these spatial qualities point to is a finely honed sense of movement and stillness, two fundamental energies feeding Banwarth's creative process that are beautifully articulated in her haiku. Subtle juxtapositions between pause and passage also imbue the curation of this collection as a whole, which is a stunning achievement in its own right.

Focusing in on a few fruitful juxtapositions, consider these two haiku perched alone on a single page:

the river freezes ...
silence is also
an answer

April rain ...
the moment
the heart softens

Although published individually, the relationship between these two haiku is indeed striking. Frozen water becomes spring rain just as emotional stasis gives way to tenderness. Specifics of the story unfolding between solidity of silence and poignant heart opening are anyone's guess, as the white space between poems inspires a reader to ponder. In any case, the linkage between seasonal movement and human experience is palpable in these mutual and consecutive states of stuckness and fluidity.

Another two-page spread of five poems suggests accelerating motion, as a reader might find themselves absorbed in steamy reverie.

scarlet roses ...
we give them something
to talk about

rhododendrons ...
he asks if I'm ready
for the second coming

skin off a peach —
 a slip
 of the tongue

Keeping in mind the Christian resurrection symbolism of the rhododendron in the second haiku, when placed in this particular arrangement, the poem also contributes to a tone of playful eroticism. These three gestures together flow to their fullness in a denouement of sorts on the adjoining facing page, where two haiku suggest an outcome as relatable as wind across open land. Despite the dissipation of energy however, unique memories of past loving encounters persist, perhaps now appearing in newer, cooler tones.

wind across the prairie his name keeps coming up duck egg blue
 not a single
 desire left in me

Another trio of poems on a single page offer the reader a complete seasonal cycle. Each haiku anchors a moment of transition—a settling in or an emerging (even bounding) out of their individual season. Taken together as an impromptu sequence, these three offer a satisfying sense of continuity without the explicit inclusion of the word spring, its inference adding yet another layer of subtlety to the whole arrangement.

the needle slips
 into the groove ...
 autumn night

winter melt ...
 reading the snowman's
 body language

from the lip of a lily
 a grasshopper leaps
 into summer

Taken as a whole project, chronology is the primary organizing principle supporting Banwarth's *Bare Necessities*. Within that rubric however, compelling combinations of haiku are choreographed throughout this

volume—arrangements that allow the boundaries and substance of the page to afford discreet poems a deeper resonance on their own, and when thoughtfully juxtaposed together. Energy to linger or eagerly read on follows, accordingly.

A final noteworthy point to emphasize regarding this splendid book involves comments made in the introductory material. Banwarth and her collaborators take great care to emphasize the influence of individual mentors, fellow haiku poets, editorial partners, and the inspiration of free verse poets whose legacies reside in the wider literary world. Such detailed attention to this valuable context is not often found in published haiku collections. The pivotal figures and events credited here are important to foreground and celebrate, as they remind all artists and readers of English-language haiku of the collective responsibility to record, commemorate, and publish our own paths of learning and homage to influential forebears. The vibrancy of haiku and related short forms for generations to come might rely on it. This too, seems a bare necessity.

Applause for a Cloud, by Sayumi Kamakura, trans. James Shea (Boston, Mass.: Black Ocean, 2025). 260 pages; 5½" × 7 ½". Matte color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN:978-1-939568-99-1. Price: \$25.00 from online booksellers.

Review by Cherie Hunter Day

Sayumi Kamakura is one of Japan's leading haiku poets. She began writing haiku in the mid-1970s and has authored eleven haiku collections, plus numerous essays on contemporary and modern haiku and tanka. In 1998 she cofounded and continues to coedit the international haiku quarterly *Ginyu* along with her husband, Masayuki Inui, whose pen name, Ban'ya Natsuishi, is more familiar to an international haiku audience. *Applause for a Cloud* is Sayumi Kamakura's latest collection. It is a bilingual edition with the poems in Japanese on the lefthand side and English translations by James Shea on the righthand side of each page spread.