

Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years

Little Jewels--Haiku



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If you like haiku or are merely curious about the art, dive into this book. It traces the origin of the form in English from Ezra Pound's "In a Station at the Metro" through the effusive Beats (Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsburg) to contemporary masters of these powerful small poems. In the introduction, Billy Collins describes his love for these small gems and unlike many of the other artists included here, he writes in the familiar 5-7-5 syllabic pattern.

Here are a few of my favorite haiku included in the collection. But alas, there were so many good ones, it was hard to choose a small sample:

passport check
my shadow waits
across the border
--George Swede

pregnant again?
the fluttering of moths
against the window
--Janice Bostok

a deep gorge?
some of the silence
is me
--John Stevenson

tree
by tree
the summer fog
--Paul O. Williams

The book also includes an extended afterword on the history of the form in English by one of its editors, Jim Kacian. This in-depth essay makes a fine, easily understandable introduction to the art. He covers what elements current haiku writers find essential, and it is not the familiar 5-7-5 pattern that we all learned about in school. These elements include: a *kigo* or season word that both connects the poet to the world happening now, but it can also refer back to other poems in the past (frog leaping in a pond, anyone?). Another necessary aspect of haiku according to Kacian is a *kire* or cutting word that marks the juxtaposition between two images.

Over two hundred poets from around the world have work included here. This fascinating collection will charm and inspire you and would make a great read for anyone who loves this short form.

And to get a feel of traditional haiku by the original Japanese masters, try Robert Hass's
The Essential Haiku: Versions by Basho, Buson, and Issa.

Posted by Dory L. on January 2, 2014

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