

muttering thunder

an annual of fine haiku & art



edited by Allan Burns

art by Ron C. Moss

No.1, 2014

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Dedicated to the Memory of Martin Lucas
Poet, Editor, Naturalist, Friend
(1962–2014)

Preface

“Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art”—Walter Savage Landor, “Dying Speech of an Old Philosopher”

“What we are hoping to develop is a mind that is fascinated by *life*.”—Sylvia Boorstein, *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There*

We created this project in the spirit of “build it, and they will come.”
And *they* did.

Our aim was to foster the creation of sophisticated nature-oriented haiku, rich in both content and craft. We believed that this project would not simply siphon off a few quality haiku from other worthy publications or provide a home for work that might not otherwise have been published—we believed it would encourage poets to create haiku that otherwise would not even have been written. Correspondence with a number of the poets indicates that this is precisely what has happened.

These haiku knowingly build on the Japanese aesthetic-philosophical tradition of such masters as Bashō, Chiyo-ni, Buson, Issa, and Santōka as well as the English-language adaptation of that tradition in the work of Hackett, Spiess, Wills, Bostok, Lamb, Dickson, Lucas, and so on. We believe this collection demonstrates that this tradition remains vital and is able to speak to pressing concerns of our time.

The first haiku in the volume, Stephen Addiss’s

a sawed-off stump covered with moss and mushrooms

illustrates something significant about the subtle ways in which haiku communicate. A casual reader might vaguely discern the image and pass along with a shrug or a “So what?” Those who linger on the implications of the image (not to mention the delicate sound patterning), however, will be rewarded by this little song of the earth. The static image here actually limns a dynamic set of relationships between humans and trees as well as among the organisms of a complex ecosystem, in which an onflowing renewal of life proceeds tenaciously, even in the face of unnatural incursions.

The collection’s other haiku communicate by means of similar—yet also various—subtle and implicit strategies, their auras and shadows evoking larger wholes, their images and moments implicated in the cosmos and eternity. In most, the human observer and recorder is merely an implied presence, an attentive and sympathetic witness to some revelation of the natural order; but in a few, human elements come explicitly to the foreground, and the poem charts a resonant intersection with the natural realm.

Each haiku extends an invitation to the reader to linger in a skillfully evoked situation that may well seep into our own lives and enrich them. Take a last pass through the raspberry patch. Step into snow bent pines. Visit Big Sur, Paris in the springtime, the Badlands of South Dakota, and Kirkstone Pass in the Lake District. Study inland waters—or, if you please, clouds. Marvel at a poem shaped like a blackberry containing a multitude of suns. Remember that naked ladies are also flowers and that black rail chicks indeed resemble shadows. Remark a variety of forms, some even 5-7-5.

Note a line that breaks in the act of describing a broken object. Take time to step out and see the super moon.

The art for this issue is a further exploration of haiku aesthetics in terms of a moment in time replete with the beauty, richness, form, and relations of a natural setting. Black-and-white photography, with its high contrast and tonal values, can be seen as a modern variation on the wonderful traditions of *sumi-e* and *zenga* paintings. The selection and placement of images honors the techniques of linking and shifting, which permeate the haikai arts—in particular, haiga and renku.

Supplements include a classic essay by Robert Spiess, which remains an insightful and useful exploration of an important haiku topic (despite the sexist pronouns and the fact that coots aren't ducks), as well as a stimulating and wide-ranging interview with one of Spiess's most notable protégés, Wally Swist, a leading haiku and lyric poet of our time.

This project—both the annual ebooks and their website home—aims to nurture fresh haiku that extend the tradition documented in the anthology *Where the River Goes: The Nature Tradition in English-Language Haiku* (Snapshot Press, 2013), both by providing them with a dedicated home and by setting them in a broad cultural framework that gives consideration to philosophy and intellectual history, other literary and artistic genres, as well as critical environmental and animal welfare concerns. In a parallel with Thich Nhat Hanh's "engaged Buddhism," we believe in the possibilities of "engaged haiku."

muttering thunder will continue to serve as a home for haiku written out of a compassionate, intuitive, and artistic response to the world's *otherness* and our ineluctable connection to it.

Allan Burns & Ron C. Moss
November 2014



a sawed-off stump covered with moss and mushrooms

Steve Addiss



first day of summer
a swallowtail follows
the merry-go-round

last pass
through the raspberry patch
summer dusk

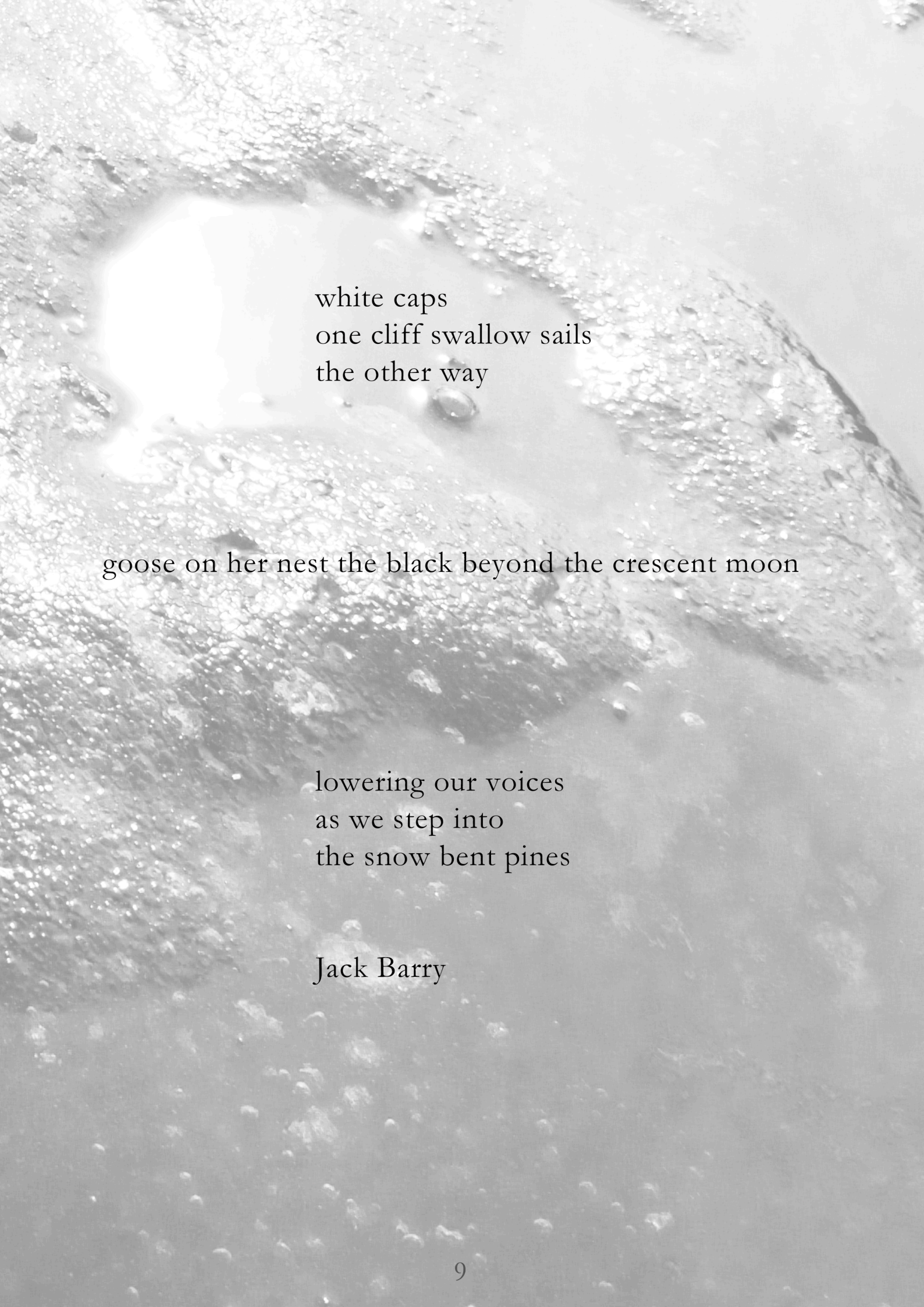
Francine Banwarth

leafspin
the colored curves
of an otter's whiskers

sandpipers feeding
on the seeds of marsh grasses
remains of the moon

winter rains
the mountains of Big Sur
will be turning green

John Barlow



white caps
one cliff swallow sails
the other way

goose on her nest the black beyond the crescent moon

lowering our voices
as we step into
the snow bent pines

Jack Barry

drought—
a raven larger than the sun
flaps by

John Brandi

black
berry a
tiny bug
explores
sun by
sun

Chuck Brickley

legendary catfish
caught once or twice
the brackish lagoon

Randy Brooks



shadows and lines
of Paris buildings—
first day of spring

Glenn Burney

silent glide . . .
gray jays appraise
the campground

Allan Burns

tranquility trail
the sound of a squirrel
climbing rough bark

Susan Constable

black-and-white warblers
the flickering canopy
of mountain ash

leeward path
sedges snagging wisps
of eiderdown

barrier island greenheads looking for a blood meal

Cherie Hunter Day



cold solstice stars
at slack tide
a scoter's wing-beat

even in the rain
no longing
for what is not

Mike Dillon

summer's end
the sunlit veins
in a maple leaf

Connie Donleycott

how a lone cricket
adds a little light
to the starless eve

Robert Epstein

the *pink pink*
of a chaffinch
foxglove rain

Claire Everett



after bushfires
the pink fragrance
of naked ladies

ashes to ashes ...
a peregrine falcon
soars into the sun

Lorin Ford

Super moon
a tiny frog
sings to it

Garry Gay

receding tide
limpets in the drying walls
of a rock pool

Beverley George

wingbeats of vampires
leaving the hollow mango . . .
a shift in the wind

rasp of coati claws
probing a termite mound . . .
the clarity of moonlight

Ferris Gilli

wind subsiding . . .
shadows of a silver birch
steady the path

last light
slipping into the pool
a water vole

Caroline Gurlay



now and then
adding a measure
the grosbeak's song

mockingbird—
retreating clouds release
the mustard field's yellow

Carolyn Hall

whether chicks following
a black rail through the reeds
are shadows

Mark Harris

evening breeze
a gull slides sideways
under the moon

a bear and her cubs
wild rhododendron petals
scattered on the trail

lightning-struck
the fallen pine's roots
point into the wind

Christopher Herold

hauled into air
the ocean escapes
the lobster trap

sounds drifting up
--
high water returning to normal

Gary Hotham

windless morning the memories of pines

Jim Kacian



summer sunrise
through the open door
ripe apricots

painting their way
from the outer islands
shades of autumn

Kirsty Karkow

Trekking alone at dusk—
in bog mud, a broken
killing jar holding darkness

Rebecca Lilly



wingdust halo
a luna moth
banging the window

an eye
from the back of a tree
pileated woodpecker

Paul MacNeil

the raven's cry
far above its shadow—
cliffside ruins

alpine meadow—
a rib bone among
the wildflowers

Carole MacRury

indigo bunting
a piece of the sky
going to the pine

Ian Marshall

limnology

paddle far out & study the clouds

later at his microscope

forgetting

he's not on the lake

John Martone

flipped horseshoe crab

seagulls probing

prehistory

Scott Mason



winching a whale
out of the estuary—
spring melancholy

night falling fast
the mountains of legend
clear, bright

Michael McClintock

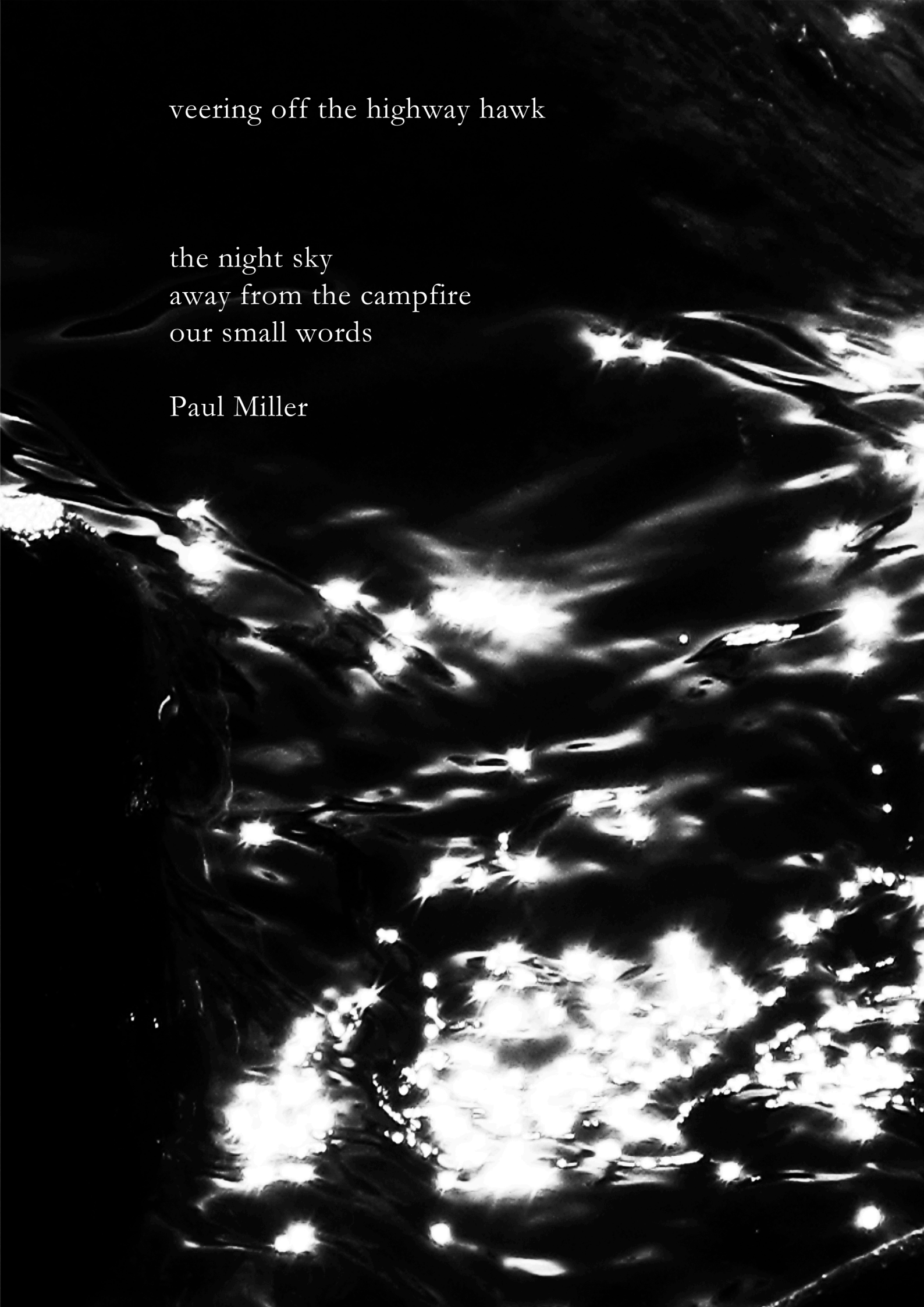
slowly the king snake
turns and passes itself
the other way

Peter McDonald

veering off the highway hawk

the night sky
away from the campfire
our small words

Paul Miller



a crust of frost
still in the shadows . . .
calls of a nesting coot

a banksia leans
into the stream . . .
the egret's ripple

Ron C. Moss

blackbirds calling down the sun a splash of red

Peter Newton

troubled waters—
floating, the otter
munches on a clam

silent in the cracked conch the sea it held

Marian Olson



quiet current
a resting damselfly
pulsing its wings

a skipping stone the billowing sky

for Martin

Christopher Patchel

safe harbour
a mutton bird emerges
from the setting sun

Greg Piko

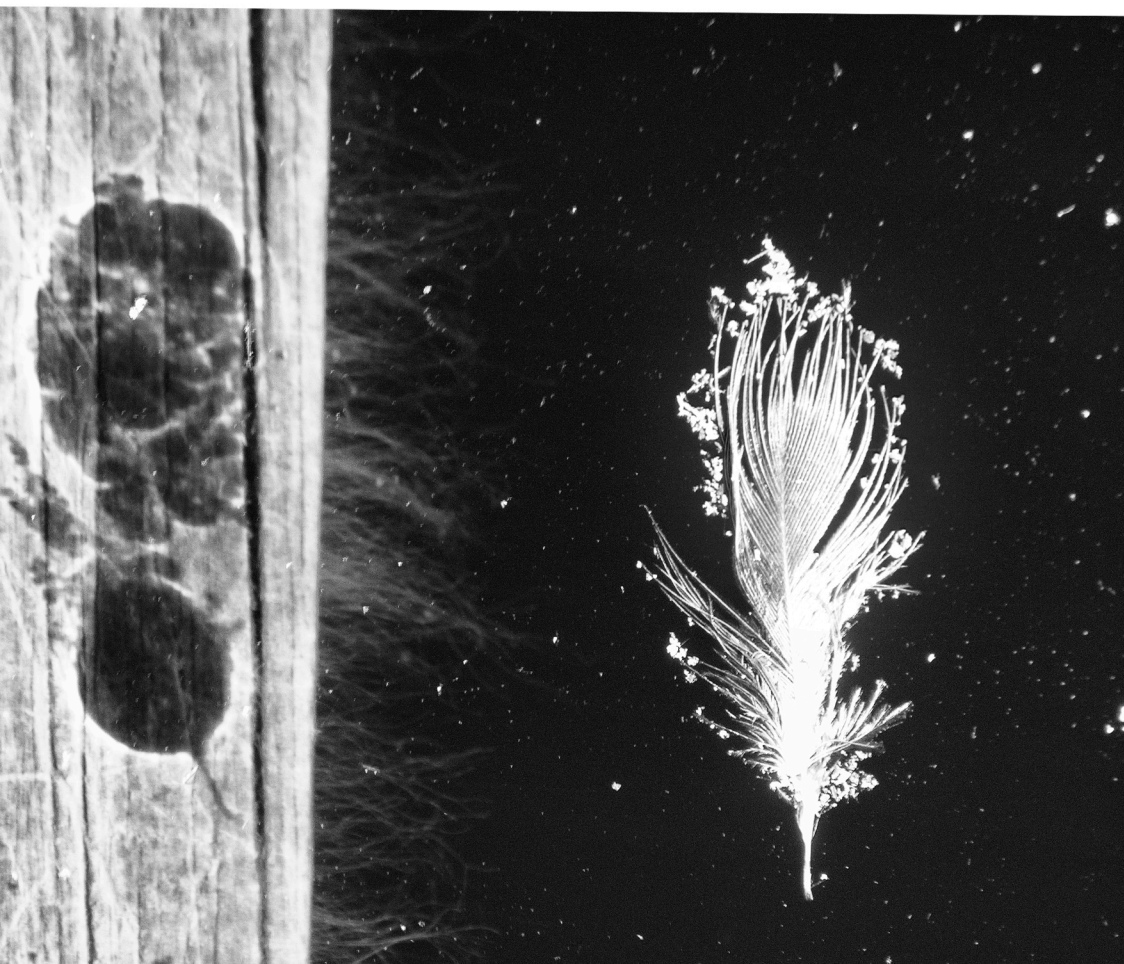
midnight the moon on a snail's shell

Patricia Prime

millstone weir a downy feather slips downstream

fell wind from the hawthorn tips a little rain

Stuart Quine



call of lapwings . . .
a jackal somewhere in
the moonlit field

K. Ramesh

picking seashells
a reflection of the moon
as waves recede

Kala Ramesh



blue hour
the open-bottle moan
of a greater prairie-chicken

wild horses
in the wind
their wind

sunrise clouds
red and yellow fossil soils
streak the Badlands

Chad Lee Robinson

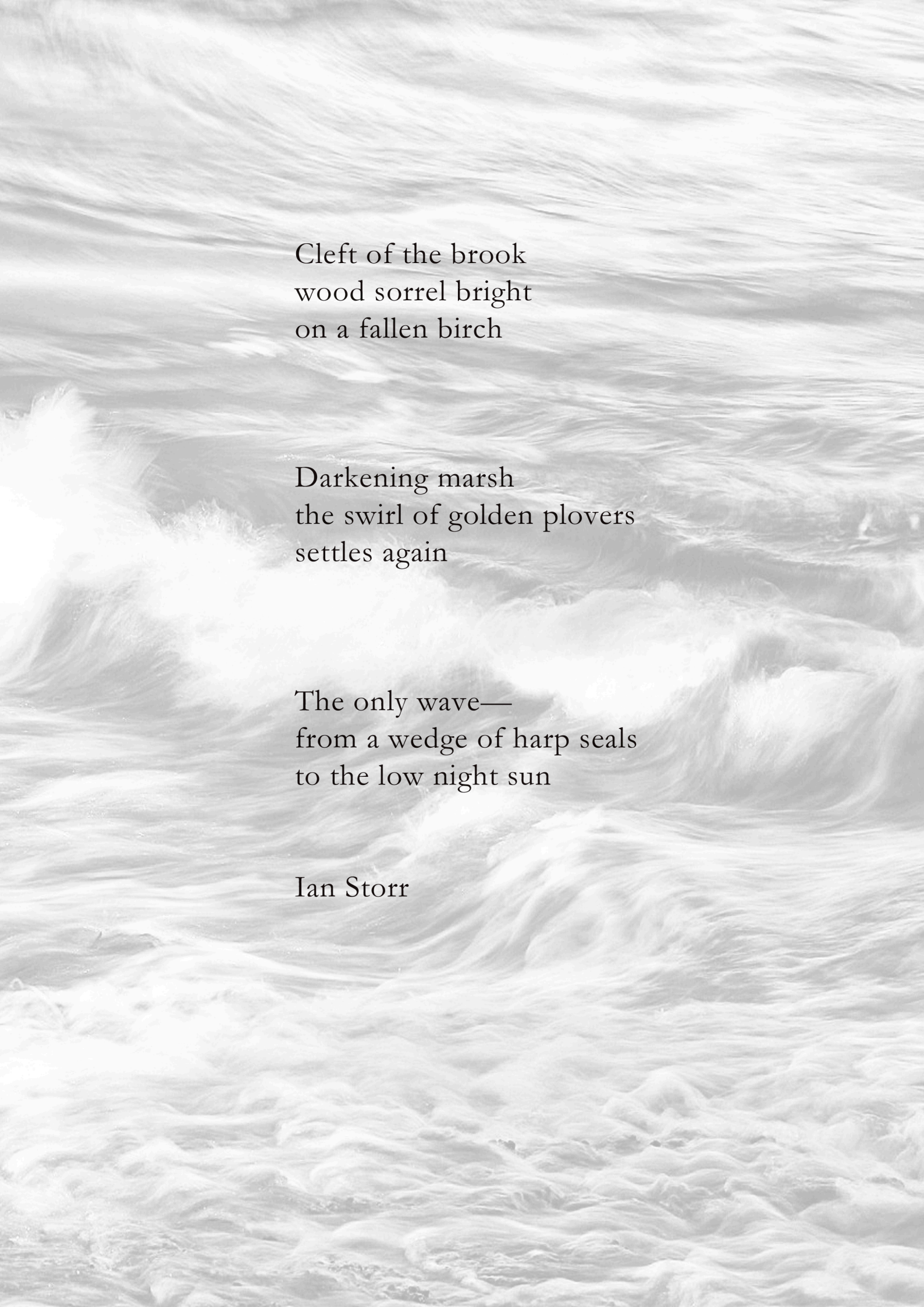
strawberry season
the muted humph
of a black bear

Bruce Ross

field guide
lost somewhere among
the wildflowers

Steve Sanfield





Cleft of the brook
wood sorrel bright
on a fallen birch

Darkening marsh
the swirl of golden plovers
settles again

The only wave—
from a wedge of harp seals
to the low night sun

Ian Storr

Kirkstone Pass
a sheepdog gathers
its part of the world

hard frost—
the snail-hammerings
of a song thrush

Alan Summers

landing between dandelions a yellowhammer

André Surridge

canyon campfire
our shadows as large as
the lives we wished for

mass grave site
a nesting partridge peers
thru the tall grass

George Swede



between thunderstorms . . .
the flicker's head bobs up and down
probing for worms

the woodsmoke
of her voice . . .
cinnamon-scented leaves

in memory of anne mckay

Wally Swist

between blossoms & dust
pollen days

Dietmar Tauchner

a chaos of geese
lifts from the grassland . . .
patterns form

Max Verhart

dazzling spring sunshine everywhere white blossoms

the ache
of spring
gardening

Anita Virgil



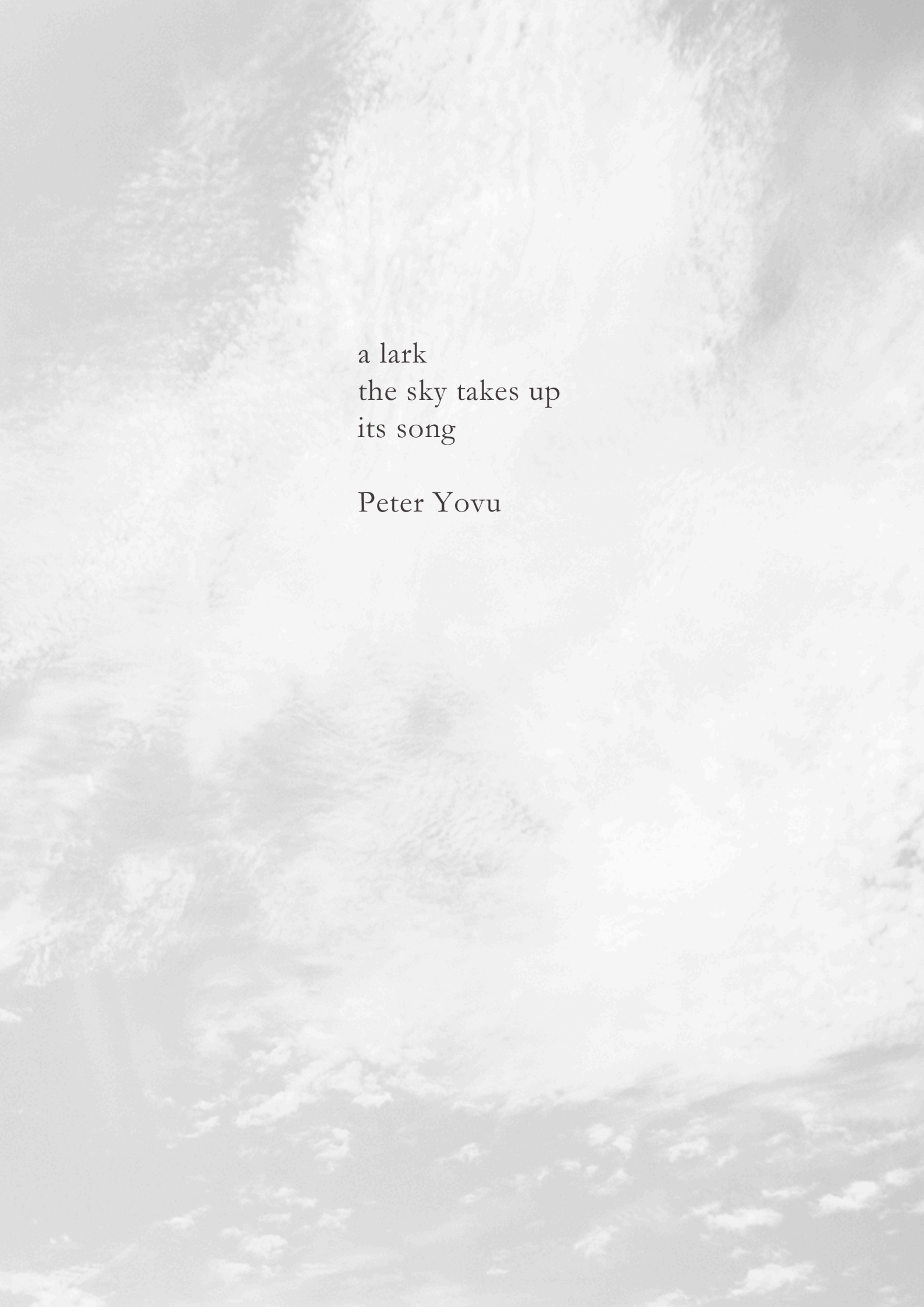
the hummingbird's sheen
changes with the cloud—
end of summer

Michael Dylan Welch

burning cane
a pathway of smoke
to the moon

flock of ibis
the leader doesn't
look back

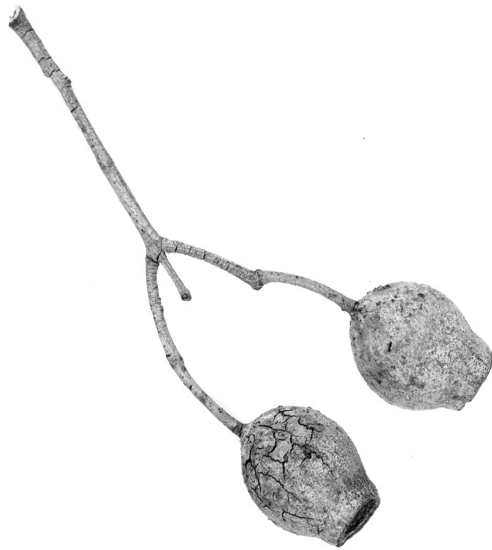
Quendryth Young



a lark
the sky takes up
its song

Peter Yovu

Prose



Specific Objects in Haiku

by Robert Spiess

In his haiku the poet names what he apprehends. And just as the names **lion** and **tiger**, **robin** and **starling** are more concrete than such abstract terms as **animal** or **bird**, the haiku poet should ordinarily find it truer to his requirements of excellence to name an object at a quite specific level rather than at a more general level. Thus, **tree** frequently is less effective than **oak** or **birch** or **maple**, and forgoing **butterfly** for **monarch** or **swallowtail** or **sulphur** often makes the haiku better because it sharpens the image. Perceptive haiku poets and readers figuratively find night and day difference between a birch and an oak or between a maple and a spruce, and between the color, size and flight characteristics of a swallowtail and those of a sulphur.

Some writers deliberately use abstract and vague terms in an attempt to make a haiku seem to have a wide range of associations or to appear “mystical,” but all that this results in is confusion, dullness or complete lack of aesthetic meaning or value. Other writers believe that they must try to cram as many objects or “things” as possible into a haiku in order to “tell a lot” and to force the haiku to seem full of meanings and overtones.

The haiku, however, achieves its unique effects in ways that are the opposite of these. It needs to be concrete, to be particular and exact. The words used in a haiku should be simple ones, unaffected and lacking in “grandeur,” without highly charged emotional content or presumptuous cosmic implications. They should be as individualized or particularized as possible. And it may be said at this point that simplicity and concreteness do not limit the associations or nuances that the haiku is capable of containing or suggesting; rather, both enhance or add to them and keep the haiku from becoming amorphous or jellyfish-like. Simplicity and concreteness give the haiku sinew and backbone.

The precise naming of objects in a haiku (without carrying precision to esoteric or recondite extremes), permits shadings, nuances and associations that broader terms cannot convey, because broader terms abstract a few general or common characteristics from several or many specific or individualized objects. Broad terms cannot include important, differentiating attributes that characterize one individual or species from another. And distinct attributes are what help to make the haiku image artistically pleasing and aesthetically significant, precisely because they are closer to the object, nearer to its nature. Thus, particular attributes make the haiku more intuitive, because the beclouding intellect with its abstractions is remote.

The examples that follow are of haiku that have merit. Therefore, the comments about them are given in the spirit of suggestion—that further particularization could enhance the quality they now possess.

In the following haiku, it is possible for the reader to extrapolate a duck of whatever kind or species he wants, when he reads the words, **a wild duck**:

Trapped in thin ice,
a wild duck waits patiently
for the sun to rise.
—Anne Landauer
(AH, IV, 1 : 36)

I believe that the poem lacks the instantaneous quality necessary for a fully effective haiku, because the reader must make a purely intellectual effort in order to form the necessary image. The immediate, intuitive aspect is lost as he ponders the size of the duck, whether it is dark or bright-plumaged or is gray to match the ice, etc. If the poet had particularized the duck—mallard, canvasback, coot—the somewhat abstract tone of this haiku probably could have been eliminated. Incidentally, the use of **patiently** in this haiku is not very apt. Psychologically, “patiently” is a word that applies mainly to people and probably should not be used in reference to wild creatures. A wild creature is as it is; by nature it has this wonderful quality that we humans have to give a name to when we find it in ourselves. The word **waits**, coupled with **wild duck** (or a duck of some particular kind), would be sufficient; the perceptive reader will intuitively grasp the instinctive nature of the duck in this situation.

Intellectual intonation and lack of particularization combine in the third line of Marjorie Bertram Smith's

Autumn is golden
 in garden and ripened field . . .
 each seed a miser.
 (AH, IV, 1 : 51)

The third line is a rather bald intellectual statement; it is not a suggestion of the quality of “miserliness.” (Again, **miser** is too much a human term to apply to an aspect of creation that is intuitively closer to itself than we humans seem to be to ourselves.) Had the poet indicated one or two specific kinds of seed instead of using the very general term **seed**, the haiku might have been more successful. I also wonder if it is necessary to use three words—**autumn**, **golden**, **ripened**—to inform the reader of the setting of this haiku. The perceptive reader needs but one or two such words in a haiku in order to grasp the mood and automatically and immediately project the applicable aspects of the mood to the objects named in the haiku.

Had she named the particular kind of tree, Willene H. Nusbaum might have enhanced the effect of her fine haiku

The woodpecker taps
 a black stripe path up the tree
 hunting frozen worms.
 (AH, IV, 1 : 39)

She did not particularize, however, so the reader must bring his intellect into the image. Even in winter each species of tree is recognizable by its overall shape, characteristic angle and degree of fullness of its branches, etc. To me, in the context of this haiku, the word **tree** tends to limit the image to the trunk of a tree that has indistinct branches. I have to make a conscious effort to visualize the other aspects that I believe are necessary for a full image, and this intellectual effort—trying to formulate a tree, selecting from several tree images that rise up in my mind—is somewhat disconcerting.

At this point the reader may ask: “But isn’t one of the major functions or aspects of haiku that of suggesting, of letting the reader use his imagination to ‘fill in’ as his experience or abilities warrant?”

True—but at a level more profound than that of selecting an appropriately colored and shaped jigsaw puzzle piece and fitting it into an outline to complete a “picture.” The suggesting comes at the level where words are incapable of directly imparting “information,” because the “information” is so deep in existence, in things, in ourselves, or is so subtle that words are too crude an instrument to be used directly. Once more I must fall back upon the word **intuitive** to halfway express my meaning: the haiku must suggest—arouse, bring into aesthetic focus—the intuitive aspect of the objects in the haiku—that is, their relation to each other, to ourselves. Intuitive suggestion cannot be evoked by vagueness; it can only be triggered by particularity and individualization—for it must be an immediate suggestion, requiring little or no abstractive intellection.

(reprinted from *American Haiku* 5.1, 1967)

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A Breath of Fresh Air: An Interview with Wally Swist

How did you first become aware of and find yourself drawn to write haiku?

My initial interest in haiku was sparked in the autumn of 1973 when I began practicing Zen with a group of devoted practitioners in the basement of the Yale Divinity School Chapel. Our small group, led primarily by my mentor at the time, Ed Bednar, who was working on his Ph.D. with Harold Bloom, also met at the Master's House of Berkeley College at Yale. It was then that I found the first edition of Cor van den Heuvel's *Haiku Anthology*, published by Doubleday, in the first bookstore I worked in, Book World in New Haven. I went on to immerse myself in reading Eastern philosophy and literature and reread van den Heuvel's anthology so many times that the pages came loose from the binding of the book. I also began my first, often *wooden*, attempts at writing my own haiku; however, I did begin to experience aesthetic breakthroughs in my haiku practice, and Randy and Shirley Brooks published some of these successful haiku in *High/Coo*. So my history with the Brooks, who later published *The Silence Between Us*, goes back forty years. Also, the mysterious Matsuo Allard accepted many of my early haiku for a magazine he was publishing in New Hampshire.

What is known by the haiku world as "Western poetry" was my first love. I began writing poetry at the age of sixteen and published those initial attempts in local newspapers. I also assembled several mimeographed collections of poetry and sold them in Washington Square Park in the Village of New York City for a quarter a piece. So I began by writing longer poetry and then discovered haiku and from that point forward have always written both.

You've mentioned on many occasions how you looked to Robert Spiess (who wrote the "Muttering thunder" haiku, of course) as a mentor and an inspiration. Could you tell us a bit about your recollections of him, his influence on you, and how you see his influence on the development of English-language haiku in general?

I first met Robert Spiess through the mail. His rejection slips sent to me when he was editor of *Modern Haiku* often read: "Close but not quite." In the summer of 1977, I was reading the free verse haiku of Ippekiro, which I just loved, in that gorgeous but simple collection titled *Cape Jasmine and Pomegranates*, and I composed some haiku then that I sent to Bob. His response had always been prompt, but this time, it didn't arrive until some months later. I had attached stamps to the SASE I enclosed with Scotch Tape, which the USPS found objectionable, and the letter had wound up in the dead letter office in Boston. Bob explained to me that the SASE was eventually sent back to him, and he kindly placed new stamps on the envelope that he mailed back to me. In this significant nearly star-crossed correspondence Bob informed me that he had accepted my first haiku for publication in *Modern Haiku*.

I continued to publish single haiku in issues of *Modern Haiku* for the remainder of the 1970s, after which I left the academic rigors of the Yale community, got married, and moved to rural Massachusetts. I did not take a degree at Yale, but it was there that I acquired my education. At this point in my life, I stopped writing completely, largely because I assisted my late wife in the management of a small healthcare facility in Monson, Massachusetts. After leaving that job, as a live-

in caretaker, I thought I might write again and made the conscious choice to begin to write haiku and longer poems when we moved into a refurbished barn next to the Haskins' Flats wetlands that stretch from North Amherst to the Leverett town line. It was there that I could open the front door and hear the rush of Cushman Brook and that over the next twelve years, from 1984 to 1995, I composed several thousand haiku. My correspondence with Bob Spiess at that time flourished, and he began to perceive through the haiku I was composing that I lived in and among nature. My submissions and his letters numbered three to four a month, and he invited me to become the book review editor of *Modern Haiku*. I reviewed more than ninety books for the publication from 1986 through 1995. Also, during this period Bob came to visit my late wife and me for a few days in 1989. Bob's kindness and thoughtfulness were evident in both his letters and in person. He was a delightful human being. What I learned from him was the craft of writing—in a journeyman's kind of way. I had apprenticed in New Haven, writing poetry as well as journalism for *The New Haven Advocate*. But it was with Bob's help, especially while writing the book reviews, that I took my prose to a higher level. Bob was a taskmaster: My sentences needed to be perfect, as they should have been in the first place.

He and I continued to correspond until only weeks before his death in March 2002. He kept the bar high for everyone in the haiku community through his impeccable editing, his *Speculations* on the craft of haiku (which in my opinion should be brought out in a hardcover edition), and his persona, which demonstrated that kindness to others is as significant as the craft of haiku.

What other writers, both inside and outside haiku, have had a substantial influence on you or have served as key inspirations, particularly in terms of your writing about the natural world?

I have been an avid reader all my life and have read much outside of haiku and poetry, including nature guides on flora and fauna. I also immersed myself in Eastern classics, such as Gia Feng-Fu's and Jane English's translation of *The Daodejing* by Laozi, which now, some forty years after having fallen in love with that work, I have translated myself in a collaborative project with David Breeden, a Unitarian minister in Minneapolis, who is also a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, and Steven Schroeder, who is a poet and translator of note, the director of the Virtual Artists Collective, and has taught philosophy at the University of Chicago. This new version of *The Daodejing* is forthcoming from Lamar University Press. I also read and reread the poetry of Robert Francis, who was another great mentor of mine. Robert Frost called Francis "the best unknown poet in America." I also knew the late Jack Gilbert, who is in my mind another one of the finest American poets. Additionally, I have been reading and rereading W.S. Merwin for the last forty years. He read at Yale Law School on my twenty-third birthday, and I sat in the second row to listen to him, as he read every one of my favorite poems of his that evening. Now what a memory that is to carry with you for the rest of your life—much like a spiritual lantern always there to lead you out of the shadows along the path.

Could you tell us also about the influence of specific regions and landscape on your writing, particularly those places you are most associated with, such as Haskins' Flat and Mount Toby? And what is your overall sense of the relationship between haiku (and poetry in general) and place or landscape?

Sense of place is the core of my life and my poetry. The rolling waves of mist and fog that would cross Haskins' Flats at dawn or at dusk still distill and rise within me. Mount Toby is my own spiritual

mountain—as small as it is, at 1,269 feet, with a view of Mount Greylock in the Berkshires, Mount Snow in Vermont, and Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. That view from the fire tower will wash your psyche clean, as nothing else. I can feel the wind up there even as I write that sentence. The outer landscape *informs* the inner landscape. Call it psyche and soul. It is in that interaction that the ego drops away and the best haiku are written, and, now, in my case, the two-page lyrical poems I am writing that honor that *sense of place*. Gary Snyder writes in *Turtle Island*: “learn the flowers/ go light.” That’s it, right there. However, we forget that as writers and as human beings every single day. The planet is in plight because of our not being mindful of Snyder’s wisdom, as well as that of so many others such as Henry David Thoreau. Money and ego are an ugly combination.

You’ve dedicated a number of haiku to other haiku poets, including the one to anne mckay (who was a talented nature poet) in this annual. It’s a gesture that strikes me as both magnanimous and replete with a sense of tradition. How did you come to write these tributes and what is your sense of tradition or continuity within English-language haiku?

Oh, I just have loved the work of some poets that has sustained me and nourished me, so my tribute haiku and homage poems are my small gift to them in return. anne mckay and I were close friends and published a renga we worked on for several years in a journal that does not usually publish haiku and related genres, an international publication from Deerfield Academy, *Osiris*. I also felt it was somehow apt that anne and I were on such felicitous terms since we both hovered on the outside of some of the norms of the greater North American haiku community—she with her haiku-like short poems and me with one foot in the smaller pond of haiku and the other in the greater sea of American poetry. Most recently, I wrote a twenty-line poem titled “Homage to W.S. Merwin” because he has given the world more than sixty years of his mastery in the highest art of poetry. In my own way, when I write these tribute haiku and homage poems, I am just attempting to reciprocate what certain writers have so lavishly given me.

Back in 2005, you wrote, “Haiku is a poetry of consciousness” (in the essay “A Poetics of Walking,” which serves as the preface to your haiku magnum opus, *The Silence Between Us*). Could you elaborate a bit on what that definition means for you?

Kinbin, as we might know, is walking Zen meditation. When I hike or when I walk in nature, my ego-self falls away, like a false cloak from my shoulders, and bumblebees that buzz beside me also buzz within me; the hawk’s shadow crosses above me but also within me. Joseph Campbell once described life itself as being an active and ongoing meditation. When one, after long practice, experiences what is commonly known in the genre as a *haiku moment*—that converging of consciousness in an electrical synchronicity—that is the sacred emerging in time. I would call the results—and more importantly the process of that—a poetry of consciousness. So much other poetry and writing is *not that*. A poetry of consciousness, such as what I am trying to describe, is space not prone to any *noise*, even if the moment experienced involves *noise*.

Over the past fifteen years or so, your focus as a writer has shifted to a considerable extent from haiku to lyric poetry, and you’ve created quite a substantial and honored body of work in that field, with many book-length collections. What led you to want to devote yourself to longer forms of poetry and in what ways, if at all, do you feel that haiku informs your longer poems? Another way of putting this might be: Do you write lyric poetry in a particular way because of your previous practice as a haiku poet?

I have always written both longer lyric poems, although they were not always as accomplished as they are now, *and* haiku, along with various other genres. For example, I recently finished a major freelance writing project—since that is how I support myself financially these days—by contributing 250 pages to a book about the socio-economics of retirement during the same period when I was waking up at 4:30 a.m. to translate passages from Laozi's *Daodejing*. I was also recruited to write a new version of *The Great Russian Nutcracker* for the Moscow Ballet while I was finishing proofs of my award-winning book of poetry, selected by Yusef Komunyakaa, *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, which was published by Southern Illinois University Press. I wrote a haiku recently in homage to Martin Lucas while I was revising a two-page poem I had written about being in Emily Dickinson's bedroom at the Emily Dickinson Museum, which is being restored and where I had been invited to write for the purpose of contributing the results to a planned anthology.

My entire focus as a writer has shifted from when I lived beside Haskins' Flats, where I wrote many haiku. I've trained myself since then *to be open to a longer lyric flow from the moment of expanded consciousness in nature*. When I experience what is known as a *haiku moment* now, the consciousness ripples as if it were a pool beneath a waterfall. Then the awareness of flower or bird, mammal or tree, pours through me in a poetic language, which is not confined, or defined, by three lines or seventeen syllables but a longer substantiation of that singular moment, lyrically, though still studded with the kind of images we find in haiku. When I do write haiku now, I often use the full seventeen syllables. It very well may be because I am invested in writing longer poetry. I compared notes with Billy Collins, whom I hosted at Trinity College in Hartford in 1999, and he mentioned that he prefers to use the 5-7-5 syllabic structure in haiku as a discipline, as *something to push against*. But I also sometimes do not write within the strictures of a 5-7-5 form, and I still love the free verse haiku of Ippekiro.

How do you see the intersection between nature poetry (of whatever genre) and the current environmental situation of our world? Do you feel that poets who write about the natural world (or even poets in general) have a responsibility to address environmental destruction and the damage that humans are inflicting on other species? If so, in what ways?

Spiritual practice certainly includes seeing things for what they are. I know in my own poetry, especially the two-page lyric poems I have written this spring that now make up a new unpublished manuscript titled *Candling the Eggs*, it is still the epiphany in the natural world that is the central focus of my work. A review of *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, which appeared in *Pleiades*, mentioned my *eco-poetry*. So, just perhaps, writing odes to nature qualifies as raising the consciousness of those who actually read the work. Does any one poem or haiku by anyone, though, prevent further pollution? Probably not. Do I set out on any hike specifically to address the multitude of infringements of the industrialized world? No, I don't. We do the best we can, as poets and as human beings. Do we have a responsibility as writers and does our aesthetic integrity depend on being aware of environmental disaster: *most definitely, yes*.

Could you share some thoughts about being a writer—and specifically a poet—in early 21st-century America?

It is perhaps one of the most difficult choices one can make to be a writer, and specifically a poet, in the 21st century. Who reads your work? Who goes to readings to listen to your work? You do it because it's your aesthetic and spiritual practice. It is how you have lived your life. However, that is never an easy life. One is on one's own. Get used to that, and move on with the accrued grace that

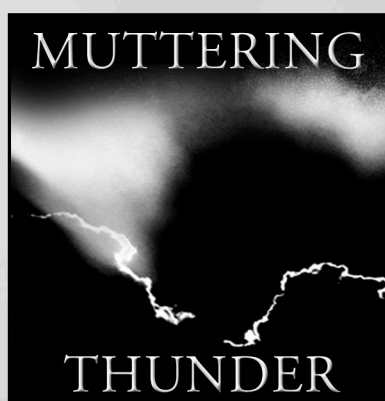
comes in living this way, respecting the essence of the word, honoring the sacred in every line of poetry that you are fortunate enough, through the sweat of your brow, to compose.

What directions do you anticipate you'll pursue in your future writing, and do you have any thoughts about the development or potential of English-language haiku?

My writing is at a point of breakthrough. I have written a manuscript of what are essentially two-page poems in a white heat during the months of April and May. Where else can my writing go? I often enough tire of the world of poetry, but not of poetry itself. I can only imagine that I will continue writing and also honing and distilling my craft as a lyric poet and a practitioner of haiku. I recently received a request from my friend Masako Takeda, who has taught at Osaka Shoin Women's University since 1991 and who is a respected Emily Dickinson scholar, to assist her in *adapting* some haiku into English that she had initially translated. Also, I will be continuing my rather wonderful affiliation with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder, and we plan to be working on a new translation of *The Way of Zhuangzi*, another Taoist classic.

With respect to English-language haiku, my own suggestion for practitioners is to remember Bashō's wisdom regarding the pine and the bamboo, to learn from them, to respect and honor them as you do yourself. That just might change the world. I believe nature to be so multitudinous that we could write haiku for the entire 21st century and into the next without duplicating subject matter, because of nature's endless facets. Nature stays news. It is hugely tragic that we humans, as a species, have disrupted that reality and its balance. Shiki mentioned that the best way to become a poet was to wake up in the morning and go to work. We can do our part by getting up in the morning and smiling at whomever our neighbor is, observing the world around us, pulling out our pocket notebook, and beginning the first words of a poem that might be read by someone in the 22nd century, who just might consider the words you craft into a haiku, or poetry of any kind, a veritable breath of fresh air.





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