



Steven Carter is a retired emeritus professor of English and former Senior Fulbright Fellow at two Polish universities, having taught for thirty-eight years. The author of over forty published books, he is the recipient of numerous literary awards, including the Schachterle Prize presented by the National Society for Literature and Science; UNESCO's Nuove Lettere International Poetry and Literature Prize (twice); the Eric Hoffer Foundation's Montaigne Medal; 1st Prize in the 2012 British International Haiku Awards competition (haibun section); 2nd Prize in the 2011 Haiku Presence International Haiku competition; and 2nd Prize in the 2012 Irish Haiku Society International Haiku competition. His haiku and tanka collection *The Distances of Sleep* (Alba Publishing, 2013) was shortlisted for The Haiku Foundation Touchstone Distinguished Books Award 2013.



Alba Publishing

US\$15.00 / UK £10.00 / €12



Ocean in the Drop

Steven Carter



Ocean in the Drop



Steven Carter

Ocean in the Drop

By the same author

Snow Moon

After Blossom Viewing

Pillars of Fire

Ginkgo Leaves

Chrysanthemum Garden

Interiors

The Distances

Leaves and Angels

Ekphrasis

River Mist

Invisible Rivers

The Sound of Purple

The Distances of Sleep

City of Shaded Light

Heart Murmurs

Letters to My Parents

A Wilderness of Mirrors

Ocean in the Drop

Steven Carter

Alba Publishing

Published by Alba Publishing,
P O Box 266, Uxbridge
UB9 5NX, United Kingdom
www.albapublishing.com

© 2014 Steven Carter

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-910185-08-7

Edited, designed and typeset by Kim Richardson
Cover picture © Claudiodivizia/Dreamstime.com
Printed and bound by Bookpress.eu

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Acknowledgements

The following haiku and tanka originally appeared in the following journals: “Wind on the hill” and “Sea-spray” in *Presence*; “Coffee shop”, “May Day”, and “Chip in our china” in *FreeXpression*; “Mother’s death” in *Red Lights*; “Shaman chant” and “Our silences” in *Blithe Spirit*

Contents

Book I – <i>Honey of Generation</i>	7
Book II – <i>One Folded Rose</i>	33
Book III – <i>The Mime’s Funeral</i>	49
Book IV – <i>In Praise of—</i>	71
Book V – <i>Ocean in the Drop</i>	107

For Janice, Michael, Rachel, and the Bubs

There is no end to things of the heart

Book I

Honey of Generation

Moon impaled on Swan Peak
From the beach
—*So when does the hurting stop?*

The bent back
Of the gravedigger
Blossoms

After making love—

Go

Don't go

Yin and Yang

Sea-spray paints a rock I forget the Big Picture

Coffee-shop windows

Reflections

Reflecting me

Glass cat—

Her other gift

In lieu of

Fulfilled—
 Yet what it was is
 Not enough

—Then

Dull knife testing it one last time I cut myself

Drooping

Only one boot top

Lost in the trees the river and I divvy up nowhere

Seashore holding Mum's hand the toddler roars back

. . . Where the path's infinity stops

Cello

Her innocent eyes—

I love how he holds it

Amphitrite

the sea chills my groin

Ospreys hovering

I think of grief

Turning my head to check her out
 . . . A waiter pours tea
 In my Long Island iced tea

Shooting star my gaze falls upward

Taking me for granted—you, hidden moon

I glance briefly

At the moon

In her gaze

Branch still rocking

loving letting go

Stephen on a new gravestone

close

Dotted with blossoms eyes of the wolf skull

I contact she stood me up anyway

Knowing—knowing in my bones where . . . I get lost

Dust to dust

Motes in a beam

Let us see the light

Whispers

Peach-blossoms falling

Palms sweaty the fortune-teller waives her fee

One more winter I re-introduce my selves

1.

Down to earth
The Anasazi still
Waiting for rain
Still, the sad Plough
Furrows the stars

2.

Full moon

Empty

Big and Little Dippers

Gravestone visit

—*Those grass stains will never come out*

You're not real
Till your fur has been loved off—
70 years on
Grandpa sees stars
Through transparent skin

[First two lines from the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*]

They
Tabula
Named
Rasa
My
Of
Stillborn
Another
Brother
Dawn
Anyway

This
Singles
Is
Bar
The
—*Eyes*
End
Across
Beautiful
The
Friend
Room

[“*This is the End. . .*” by The Doors]

Always the last word

The last word in her diary—

Sadness

Whistling

Our

Past

Lost

The

Rites

Graveyard

1.

. . . Because it's there

There is a there

There

So there!

2.

The stars there

Or not

1.

40 years on
Braided memories—
The beauty of a whore
Braiding her hair
In a window;
The Anne Frank House

2.

Mountains of little girls' hair
In display cases
Reflecting my face—
Auschwitz

Moon-hush

Grandpa folds the obits

—*There's not enough light in here*

Salvation—

Game postponed

Due to whether

—FOR V.C.

The
Now
Kisses
Then
For
Then
The
Now
Love

Bourbon Street bar and laundry
The dryer round and round
Round and round and

Checking out the gawkers
Groundhog Day groundhog
—*What does it matter?*

Book II

One Folded Rose

Death-day
The sound of one hand
Touching

To heaven—
Beyond the song-bird's song
The song-bird's song

Wind on the hill a heifer felled by lightning singing bones

1.

Second version—she leaves out *it just happened*

2.

Empty bed

. . . Breathing stones

3.

Glasses off

as on a darkling plain

I read darling

4.

Dreams of sleeplessness

the moon and I cheat at Solitaire

Old Montana line shack tears of rust

From
Down
The
Beach—
Darling,
Never
And
Forever
Are
One
And
The
Same

Wrinkled sun winter trees love which came too late

Ice forms on the lake Milky Way neither colder nor warmer

After my soup and sandwich
The deranged homeless guy—
Hey buddy thank Zeus
Imaginary food
Is food

1.

The weariness
 Of their beauty
 Flanders Fields poppies

2.

Graves at Gettysburg cessation of hostilities

3.

Shiloh

Stones/men

4.

Warplanes loop the loop the same loop

Haiku in cursive

Zen master *No, no, you're doing it correctly*

1.

Makeup on for the gardener

2.

One folded rose she makes up her mind

3.

Bonsai I try not to say *banzai*

4.

Noh play I know what her answer is

5.

Loss Hissing the sibilants the word disappears

6.

Ode to Joy the cruelty of music

Spring cleaning: the words of haiku

1.

Gibbous gibberish *gibbous* gibberish
gibbous—

2.

Distant thunder no *leaf-shadows* no
harvest moon no—

3.

Winter solitude no *silence of snow* no
starry sky no—

4.

First day of spring no *autumn colors* no *rain*
on the roof no—

5.

Lonely night no *breath of wind* no
equinox [fill in the season] no—

6.

Blanket of snow no *cloud-shadows* no
moonlit river no *stormy sea* no—

7.

Spring rain no *dark night* no *cicadas*
no *lilacs* no *solstice* [fill in the season]
no—

Glaucoma last butterfly of summer

Headlights in the deer's eyes I freeze

Fork in the stream seedpods always the wrong guess

Rock and a soft place

her lip ring's cold kiss

Book III

The Mime's Funeral

Grandson's grad night
My ghost
Flips his tassel

May Day
Sprouting pens and pencils
The teacher's coffee cup

Hole in the tennis net winds try harder

Fall
Of his gaze
From
Her T-shirt logo
I'm up here

Mother's death
Ten days later
In the mail from work
Her purple sweater
With one button missing

Chip in our china
Where blue and white
Met

Anasazi moon

Flattened by a dump truck

Old trickster coyote

Dark night fear of the unknown = fear of light

Her *no, no never*

ambiguities of starlight

Watching the night watchman the night

The road taken the road not taken Darkness

River a river runs through it

April
Is the kindest month
Whispering
To snowy impatiens
Patience

You know how to push my buttons oops wrong floor

Reunion

Everyone remembering

What everyone forgets

Too narrow for two

The trail to Heaven's Peak

—Wild roses

Rain

Falling on the dead trees

Anyway

—A snow woman?

—*It's melting too fast*

The silence of mirrors

Sullen moon did I say it or think it

Turning the clock back bedtime
—*But that's cheating, Daddy*

Thunder swells the air bees too fat for the flowers

Alzheimer's—last to go her last name or was it the first

Leaf-rust in the Garden on TV *War is theft*

Lodge-pole pines the way loses me

Montana Loop the long way around my shortcomings

Obscuring/shining the windows spring rain

Other plans making me

Threads of sunlight snap!

Sleeping bats hug themselves the cave closes in on us

The mime's funeral *A moment of silence please*

White cane dark glasses—no one sees the blind man

Echoic phone line we give up speaking

Paradise Creek our reflections going nowhere

Applause of rain on the lake the moon takes a
bow

Rhythms of her No
No
No's
Crickets
Don't miss a beat

Dark ripples—
Moons touching moons
Dark ripples—
One lake
Alone

Book IV

In Praise Of—

For Roger McPherson who wrote in my senior yearbook:

There are many friendships in this world, but even the most fleeting and transitory leave a deep impression. Ours was long enough for understanding and that is long enough.

—wherever you are

1.

Praise for the homeless guy
Crossing a dark street
Against the light
Too hungry to praise
Praise

2.

Praise for the songs
Of Eos, dawn-goddess
Ransoming colors
Of twilight held hostage
In Persephone's cave

3.

Quenching the thirst
Of shadows
We are here,
The bitter cup
They drink from.

4.

Let us now praise
Goldilocks worlds
Of dream
Where forever kids
And poems come out to play

[Goldilocks worlds: extraterrestrial earth-like planets that may sustain life]

5.

Since praise rhymes with prayers
Kudos to the cold beauty
Of stars refusing
To answer my prayers

6.

Yellow leaves fall.
Offering up praise
At table,
We remember the dead,
Pass the cranberries

7.

— *Be praised*
Fill in the blanks
With colors of sunrise
Keeping the blanks
Blank

8.

Let's you and I
Lie down in darkness
Keeping in mind
What is not praise is
The need for praise

9.

In her bones the ache
Of beauty
Of another dawn
The ache
Of carcinoma

10.

No fooling—
Praise is a firefly
Winking
For us
And not for us

11.

Praise too—a hush
Of crickets
Putting on hold
The breathing
Of the Apocalypse

12.

Come out of your cave
Dark pinks
Of twilight—
Hymns
To the NOT ME

13.

Once upon a winter morning
I held up to the light fistfuls
Of Monopoly money
Checking out the rainbow colors
And the beauty of uselessness

14.

1.
No, no, purple echoes
Don't create praise
What you say
Is not what you hear
From Coldwater Canyon

14.

2.

Crickets praise the guillotines
Of September darkness
Fallen falling
The moon's tragic lantern
Shattered

15.

Puny human words of praise
—Towers of Babble—
French, English, Chinese
Deaf ears
Turn the gods away

16.

Kids splashing each other
In the Park du Mars fountain
Praise and are praise
. . . So very necessary
They do not know this

17.

Man is a thinking reed.
—Pascal

Warming up green
Unthinking reeds
In lily ponds,
Scarves of light

18.

The termite guy is here
So are they, the rascals
Chomping a path to Paradise
Yet they too, they too,
Make up the picture

19.

Sorry—no messages
In Montana Chinooks,
Cherubs from hell
Howling down vermilion mountains
Melting dark snow

[Chinook: a warm wind in Montana, sometimes reaching over 100 miles per hour]

20.

And yes, the names of things—
Just the sound of *summer afternoon*
And no, the territory
Is not the map
For Christ's sake

21.

Early morning wind
To hear the sweet old song
Of the spider's web
You must come close, closer
Closest

22.

. . . And that white sustenance

Despair

—Emily Dickinson

. . . My testament to the world

That never wrote to me

A thank you/you're welcome

Of rain-light/white

Silences between poems

23.

—The terror of praise

For what's beyond

Music until what's

Beyond music

Listens

24.

From somewhere an *Ave Maria*
The wind catches its breath
A wink of eternity
A falling of yellow leaves
Hovers

25.

Easter morning
The last wild stars
Of dream
Sing off-key—
Was it true?

26.

Cup of praise half empty half empty
The Renaissance angel trapped
Atop a Ferris wheel
Nowhere to go but up

27.

Never believe any of that about a scythe and a skull.
—Ernest Hemingway

1.
Wave upon wave
In a sea-shell
Arnold's Sea of Faith
Whispers—
Death is a little girl

2.
Seashell to her ear
She brings home the ocean
And a green toy mermaid
Remember to remember
She is a child

3.
Bad Friday morning
She tries on her Easter dress
Wanders into the garden
From her basket of flowers
A blossom spills

4.
And a little child shall lead them
All the winter midnights
Lost and found
Lost and
Lost

5.
I am become Death
The destroyer of worlds
Softly singing
She plucks petals
Petals

28.
Arcs of lamentation/birds
Of pray
White owls white moon
Quench
The desert's thirst for bones

29.

Precariousness too—
Part of the puzzle
. . . That kayaker over
The falls not before
We made I contact

30.

Hunting in Paradise
Let's thank eternal
Skies
If we have the right to prey
For rain

31.

The woman in the moon
Never sleeps
Basking if she will
In brittle half-light
Of haiku of praise

32.

1.
Infidelities of dawn
Orchids
Of morning light
Pinned to the mirror
Emptied of her

2.
Dawn—
Mirrors
Emptied of
What I fooled myself
Was emptiness

33.

Impatiens say
Beautiful
It isn't for us to say
Beautiful
Is for beauty not to say

34.

Stumbling over elegies—
Pine-roots
Above ground—
The ground gives me a smooch
I turn the other cheek

35.

Here's to the Little Tramp
Sweeping a circling
Beam of light
Into a dustpan—
He keeps trying.

36.

The Irish—
When God made time
He made a lot of it
Each day an elegy
For tomorrow

37.

Basho's river of heaven
Flows through us
—Or no
For us
An unreasonable facsimile thereof

38.

Poetry is made of metaphor
—Robert Frost

The seduction of *icicles*
On the eaves of night—
My poems have no desire
To sleep with stars
And blackness

39.

Paradise Creek—
Clear water flows
Over clear colors
Of pebbles
O the need to do this

40.

Pricks—
Nettles/ fireflies—
Thus my senses simplify me
Unto death
Unto

41.

70 is the new 32
—So?
I rewind to my fear of dying
Kicking in guess when?
Age 32

42.

Ravenous twilight
... Hunger pangs of a raven
Seeking to be filled
With the sound of *raven*
In Shoshone

43.

Hush . . . crickets . . . hush
. . . Crickets
They seem to say
Steven, consistency counts
For zilch

44.

—Goldilocks gaze of the homeless guy
Neither warm nor cold
Brother can you spare the time—
There's a strange dignity
In having no dignity

45.

Foreclosures—
Streetlights illumine ghosts
Of houses
Of leaves
Blown by shadows
Definitely alive

46.

We lift our glasses
Holding our gaze
Held by our gaze
Trapped in amber-
Colored Chardonnay

47.

Supple as a seal he dives—
My 12-year-old self
I watch poolside
He sees the balding, wrinkled guy
He thinks: *Does he mean me harm?*

48.

1962
Forbidden colors—
Tints
Of October sun
Infinite curls

49.

Assisted living—
Reminiscing
They fill in the blanks
Helping each other remember
Each other's names

50.

Jacaranda!
Jacaranda!
The sound
Of purple
—Jacaranda

51.

I confess to all my illusions
—All I'm afraid of is
Death refuses
To make the words real

52.

Talismanic—
A rack of clean dishes
The ambulance left quietly
Leaving me with sounds
An empty house makes

53.

It wouldn't have worked out
It wasn't meant to be
Etc.
Try telling it
To my 20-year-old ghost

54.

It's going to be good
The dying Irish poet whispers
Of the afterlife
—Him, him, translator
Of my beloved Poet of Evil

[The Poet of Evil: Baudelaire]

55.

1.
Loss
(The sibilants
Of her sighs
Under caresses)
Loss

2.
Solitaire
Not for the first time
He takes note
Of the beauty
Of the Queen of Hearts

3.
Warming herself in the light—
For it must be a she—
At the edge
Of shadow a spider
Stops

4.
The Collected Poems
Astride Lorca's green wind
He flees the surrealism
Of empty houses,
The gaze of glass cats

5.
Amsterdam's red light district—
That gorgeous whore
In the window
Dark
Ripples in the canal

6.
Beginning of a two-page imaginary letter—
Talking always at cross-
Purposes
In a sense we always were
On the same page

7.
Remarks to a friend—
Well, it's June 21
First day of winter
Smiles at the friend's reply—
Of course you mean summer

8.
Ospreys lolling/shiftless
Montana winds
From his private Purgatory
He approves—
Yes, a match made in heaven

FIN

*Thanks and no thanks
To the cleverly
Concealed Artist:
I am the sculpture
In the stone*

[cf. the newspaper feature: *The artist has cleverly concealed a face in this landscape.
Can you find it?*]

Book V

Ocean in the Drop

Grimacing
As he works
The window-washer
The world
Clearer

Hidden pool
 Weary of me
 My own reflection

Our shadows hold hands across the fields forming fog

SUV hitching a ride to church devil's moth

Legs too short for the pedals
Her *Vroom!* — *Vroom!*
Louder than the engine

The baby pees in Mum's eye apple of

Dead pregnant doe I supply the road rage

All to myself

all to

all

Shaman chant Song of the wolf then I hear it

Kamakura smile of rain

Our silences its shadow shrinks the heron

Undoing love's math I mustn't tell you less than once

Future pluperfect

God,

You must be joking

Veiled

By morning mist

Morning mist

Umpteenth reading her words begin to change

Regrets I mustn't confess *one size fits all*

Church turned mosque turned

Endless depths of her obi in the end I give up

“Timeless song of the crickets” hell my foot keeps time

I see her in me she turns from the mirror

. . . *Be yourself*

which one

Brontosaurus in the room the subject changes us

Zen pilgrimage 3 roadside signs

When in doubt

Doubt

Doubt

Roadside sign *soft shoulder* I touch yours/swerve

Foreplay of the storm dragonflies go for it

Sunset hush—a sunflower

Flirting with the moon biker chicks

Rain-light I make the baby laugh

Thaw—
Wishing
The
I
Lake
Weren't
Becomes
Someone
The
Else
Lake

Eyeing spilt milk of moonlight Old Calico

1.

Texas Friday night—

Blotting out the stars

Lights of the football game

2.

Stars on both teams

Know

They'll never die

Destination firmly in mind we go there anyway

Darkness of irises

Her eyes

Flowers

Free
Biker
Of
Girls
The
—Free
Trees
Of
A
The
Full
Trees
Moon
A
Climbs
Pale
—*Low*
Sun
Clouds

Endless
Skipping
Death-day—
Stones
My
Closing
Father's
My
100th
Eyes
Comes
Before
And
They
Comes
Sink

Jagged
In
Shadows—
The
Smoothing
Window—
Out
Two
The
Old
Moonlight,
Insomniacs
Wings
The
Of
Moon
A
And
White
I
Owl

Violet
Just
Hour
Passing
Quarreling
Through:
With
Our
Dusk
Voices,
A
Dandelion
Lone
Seeds
Raven

Where her tan line ends
 Where her pale line begins
 Where her pale line ends . . .

Wildflowers so many we step on a few more

Circles

And yet the same circle

—Red-tailed hawk

Ruins runes the simplicity of moonlight

Bullet train to the deep north
Basho
Has a frog in his throat

1.

Going down
All eyes on the floors
Above the doors

2.

High skies

All eyes

On the grounder to third

["High skies": baseball term for cloudless skies making fly balls hard to see]

Moonrise

in mid-chirp a porcelain bird

moonset

Rudely interrupting
Our silences
Silences

Nana's hourglass figure
Sands
Of
Time
Sifting
Since

58,000 names the map is the territory

Winter stars nothing to tune the tuning fork

Teller in the box I confess forgetting my password

Scratching one foot with the other

Moonrise

From next door

That is not an argument

Kids kicking up dust to dust

Lullaby for my grandson I fall asleep

Inuit's 52 words for snow *Hey, it's snowing*

Dove *is it morning or mourning* Nana says *No matter*

. . . Content if she'd given me the flu—*anything*—

Grandkids down for a nap
I go back to *The Big Sleep*

Murder of crows sleuth of bears mischief of rats grieving of rain

Last day of summer
Ocean
In the drop

