
REVIEWS

Ea's e, by Scott Metz (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2022). 230 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-95-1. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Susan Antolin

With the publication of his book *Lakes & Now Wolves* a decade ago, Scott Metz established himself as one of the leading voices in avant-garde haiku. Comprised of nearly 300 poems, Metz's new, much-anticipated collection, *Ea's e*, will delight readers eager for more of his innovative, playful, genre-expanding poems. The work in this new collection is more than a continuation of what he began in the earlier book—these new poems reveal a mind questioning the adequacy of language itself and seeking new, creative ways to engage the reader as an active participant in the poetic process. At first glance, one will notice experiments with syntax, punctuation, and the arrangement of letters and words across the page. Linger with these poems a while and you will also find astonishing intuitive leaps and substantive, thoughtful engagement with a wide spectrum of stimuli, including nature, intimate human relationships, and even broad societal issues.

This collection is not an easy read, and Metz seems to acknowledge as much with the two epigraphs at the front of the collection. In contrast to some books with epigraphs that feel more decorative than helpful, Metz has thoughtfully chosen two quotes that provide guidance on how one might approach the work. The first, by the language poet Robert Grenier, poses the question, "Is it a long poem if you look at it long enough?" And the second epigraph, by the distinguished scholar Makoto Ueda, also addresses the issue of time: "It is as if time stopped and flowed with no regularity; in some cases, time seems to have flowed backwards." Thus, at the outset we are cautioned not to rush through the pages that follow, but

rather to be prepared to ponder and even, at times, decipher the words on the page as we embrace a sensibility in which each poem is meant to exist to some extent outside of—and perhaps at times toy with—our usual understanding of time. It may be instructive to note that Robert Grenier is not only a language poet, but is the cofounder of the magazine originally associated with the movement. The Academy of American Poets notes that language poetry “seeks to involve the reader in the text, placing importance on reader participation in the construction of meaning. By breaking up poetic language, the poet is requiring the reader to find a new way to approach the text.” Oftentimes, challenging poetry has the effect of pushing the reader away rather than inviting her in. Not so in this case. By inviting more reader participation than an ordinary haiku collection usually requires, Metz places considerable trust in the reader. The sheer volume of work included also reveals an openness to vulnerability that is welcoming rather than off-putting.

Many poems in this collection, like the following enigmatic poem, not only take significant space on the page, but also allow figurative space for the reader to contemplate potential ways to read it.

If , if (daffodils)

stay . There—

All day,

With wide gaps between words, we are tempted to fill in words of our own imagining. The unusual placement of punctuation also invites us to pause and consider various possibilities. What are we to make of the parenthesis around the word “daffodils”? Why end the poem with a comma? Is some continuation of thought meant to come to mind? As with

most of the poems in this collection, this one needs to be seen on the page to be fully appreciated.

Metz's playfulness with punctuation often complements and enhances the subject of the poem, such as in this one, which originally appeared in *Acorn* #47:

the butterfly. Just
going along. Resurrecting
this. That

The erratic movement of a butterfly, with its unpredictable stops and starts is wonderfully captured with the repeated use of end punctuation in the middle of lines. Beginning the poem in lower case and then ending with a capitalized word—as if beginning a new sentence just as the poem ends—creates a sense of coming upon a moment in progress. We witness just a snippet of time in the butterfly's flight without catching it quite at the beginning or end.

That sense of interrupting a moment already in progress happens frequently in Metz's work. A conversational tone often adds to that impression, as in this one-line poem:

anyway it looked like a leaf and it spoke like a leaf

Beginning with the word "anyway" implies a response to something preceding the poem. What conversation precedes this? Could it be a part of the grand conversation between poems and poets across time? This brings to mind John Ashbery's view of poetry as continuously flowing: "I don't look on poems as closed works. I feel they're going on all the time in my head, and I occasionally snip off a length." Viewing Metz's poems as fragments of an ongoing stream of poetry in his mind might be a fruitful way to read the collection.

While the visually experimental poems are most eye-catching, many of the poems in this collection are presented in a more conventional way.

easier to write
 about birds and flowers than
 hands and knees on necks

Without an obvious break between lines, the above haiku reads as one fluid, coherent sentence—which is in itself a departure from standard haiku form. The occasional insertion of a plainly stated truth in a collection of more complex poems has an experimental quality to it. Here, not only does this poem offer a change in rhythm and tone, but also provides a refreshing acknowledgement of social justice issues as an important facet of life, even as they evade easy capture in poems as spare as haiku.

Similarly, the following one-line haiku is also stunning for its forthright social commentary, especially when one considers the current proliferation of domestic terrorism in many parts of the U.S., particularly in Oregon, where Metz resides.

the mountainside blooms terrorists like you wouldn't believe

What is most satisfying in a collection as substantial as this one is that the sheer number of poems means we get a significant sample of the many directions the poet's mind has ventured over the past ten years. We see wildly experimental work and quieter, more intimate poems as well. Some of those quieter poems are especially appealing.

after washing vegetables
 she opens up
 all of the windows

The “she” in the poems with a more domestic focus seems like one consistent character throughout the book. While this more intimate thread does not quite create a clear narrative arc, it does provide a satisfying and authentic layer to the multifaceted whole.

o she barely whispered stars

The juxtaposition of the intimate human element with the extraplanetary achieves a moving spark. Metz returns to this contemplation of where we humans and other earthly beings stand in relation to the universe frequently.

firefly
memories
passing
through
the
skin
of
another
galaxy

The above poem brings to mind memories of seeing fireflies and also makes one wonder whether fireflies themselves have memories. Does a galaxy have skin? There is a mysterious, dreamlike quality to the poem that defies linear logic but nevertheless draws the reader in.

o and by the waves who's we

The above spare, one-line poem is a question without a question mark posed in the conversational, off-hand way of "Oh, and by the way ..." But here it is "o" rather than "Oh" and "waves" instead of "way" and the reader is invited to pause a minute and ponder, perhaps, the question "who are we" though, of course, the poem didn't quite say that. It said "who's we" which is another piece to turn over in our mind as we stand here by the waves pondering existence and identity. Returning to Grenier's question at the beginning, if we look at it long enough, and ponder and parse each word, does this short poem become a long one?

To write poetry is to struggle against the inadequacy of language to express precisely what we intend. Sometimes, if we are lucky, we get close. Metz shows us how one brilliant mind grapples with that endeavor. I have little doubt his work will inspire others to take risks, to expand their range, to play with all the elements of written language, and to do so with a willingness to be vulnerable and open.

Shifting Light, by Hannah Mahoney (Durham, N.C.: Backbone Press, 2022). 32 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7363467-6-1. Price: \$10.00 from www.backbonepress.org

Reviewed by Billie Wilson

This attractive slim volume tucks nicely into pocket or purse, and makes a delightful companion for a nature walk or other journey. After reading the first two haiku, I was hesitant to turn the page, wondering if the strength of the opening could be sustained. It could and it was. As I slowly savored each offering, I wished the chapbook were not so slender. Many, rich in sound combinations, beg to be read aloud. In the following example, listen to the “s” and “k” and “r” sounds, together with the subtle, near masterful, “th” sounds.

she takes a spin
on her birthday bike
forsythia

Mahoney’s careful word choices throughout are pure poetry and deserve to be read carefully. In addition to the poems with solid sound values, others touch emotions deep within:

night snow
my father’s handwriting
on the ornament box