

BOOK REVIEW

HAIKU FOR AFRICA

Marié Heese

Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2014

pp. 74 plus audio CD. Softcover. ISBN 978-1-86888-724-8.

A *haiku* is a Japanese poem in 17 syllables arranged in three lines that do not rhyme. The content usually draws from nature.

Haiku for Africa contains 53 poems, each in 17 syllables and in three lines, combining several cultures: the context is African; the format is Japanese; the expression is English; German, Spanish and other European symbolisms abound. The poems are obviously linked to oral traditions from a variety of cultures.

The author, Marié Heese, is well-known among Afrikaans readers, especially for her classic work *Die uurwerk kantel* (1975). She is lesser known for her English writing, and for her work in education management at the University of South Africa, from which she retired at the age of 57 in 1999. Unisa Press did well to honour her with this publication of her haiku collection.

Some of the poems, indeed, observe nature. *Bushveld afternoon* reads: 'Into the dry cup...of the hot day the rainbird...pours its liquid note' (1). Also, nature is observed to teach wisdom. *Cyclone Demoina* reads: 'A storm stripped the farm. The substratum is pure clay. So now we make bricks' (8).

There are poems on love and motherhood, and on being human, poems that display sadness and irony, also drawing from nature. *A haiku lie* reads: "Summer promised not...to take an autumn lover – ... but she lied, she lied" (12). And *After birth*: 'Nobody told her...she would carry the child for...the rest of her life' (45). And all can identify with *Long live the king*: 'Vultures are circling...Just to frustrate them, I shall...survive one more day' (60).

The book is illustrated with beautiful linocuts by Edith Bukani, and includes a CD on which Natalia Molebatsi reads the haiku.

This is indeed a ‘travel companion’ as advertised on the cover. It can be read simply for the delightful composition of the poems as well as for the wisdom of their contents. It can be presented to a colleague in celebration of collegiality. The poems can be used as prompts for speeches – and even sermons! The book is suitable for a coffee table, but also to be left lying around for its sheer beauty. This is a product for export.

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