

NOON

ALSO BY PHILIP ROWLAND

*together still* (Hub Editions, 2004)

*where rungs were* (Noon Press, 2007)

*someone one once ran away with* (Longhouse, 2009)

*before music* (Red Moon Press, 2012)

*Something Other Than Other* (Isobar Press, 2016)

AS EDITOR

*Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years* (Norton, 2013;  
with Jim Kacian & Allan Burns)

# NOON

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT POEMS

*edited by*

PHILIP ROWLAND

ISOBAR  
PRESS

Published in 2019 by

Isobar Press

Sakura 2-21-23-202, Setagaya-ku,

Tokyo 156-0053, Japan



14 Isokon Flats, Lawn Road,

London NW3 2XD, United Kingdom

<https://isobarpress.com>

ISBN 978-4-907359-26-3

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## CONTENTS

*Introduction / 7*

*Poems / 15*

*Contributors / 151*

*Authors' Books / 157*



## INTRODUCTION

This anthology, unlike those which gather work from a variety of sources, draws its contents from a single journal, the thirteen issues of *NOON: journal of the short poem* that have appeared to date: 2004–9 in print, 2014–17 online. *NOON* is very much a personal project: as I am the sole editor, the work included in each issue, and now this anthology, inevitably reflects my own preferences and preoccupations. Naturally, then, this book does not set out to offer a comprehensive representation of ‘the contemporary short poem’; it is simply, as the subtitle states, an anthology of short poems. On the other hand, the contents are more various than most anthologies of short poetry, which tend to be devoted to particular movements or genres, such as haiku. The anthology closely reflects the journal not only in this combination of stylistic variety and personal perspective, but also in format and editorial approach. A fuller introduction to *NOON*, the journal, may therefore be helpful.

Issues 1–7 were published in limited editions of two hundred copies, hand-bound in Tokyo in traditional Japanese style. More recent issues have appeared online, following the example of the print issues in length (usually seventy to eighty pages) and layout, with a poem, however short, per page. This has not only given – especially in physical book-form – each poem the space to ‘breathe’; the poem must also, so to speak, warrant the page. In this way the journal’s format has helped open the question: how much can these poems of very few words do, individually and collectively? The challenge is one of concision – but also connection, for each issue is meant to form a sequence of poems, short enough to be read at a single sitting. (To heighten the sense of flow and focus on the

writing itself, in print issues contributors' names appeared only in an index, rather than on the poem-pages themselves.)

Likewise, the arrangement of poems in this anthology has been a crucial consideration: they have been carefully juxtaposed throughout. Thus it is not simply a 'best-of' collection, but rather a new configuration of selected poems – a retrospective special issue, effectively. Given the scarcity of the print issues and the 'virtual' form of the later ones, the general aim has been to provide a representative sample of poems from the journal in a more readily available book, offering, it is hoped, a distinctive and wide-ranging selection of contemporary short poetry.

This, then, is much more an anthology of poems than of poets; hence the decision to arrange the contents creatively rather than alphabetically by author. The ultimate goal was not the fullest possible representation of each author, but cohesion (without loss of variety or individuality) among the selections. A number of poems that I'd have liked to include were left out, eventually, to maintain a smooth yet stimulating flow. Editing an anthology inevitably involves difficult choices and reluctant omissions; one could even argue, as did Laura Riding and Robert Graves in their provocative *Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928), that anthologies uproot poems from their contexts, imposing misleading categories upon them. But in the approach taken here, I have tried to make the most of these limitations, through meaningful, often playful, juxtaposition and sequencing of the poems, to produce a newly distinctive body of work that is relatively unconstrained by narrow genre-definitions. The result is a *renga*-like chain of over two hundred poems by almost half as many poets. This 'collectiveness' reflects my assumption that the shorter the poem, the greater the importance of



context; and many of the poems in this book are, indeed, *really* short.

Which raises the basic question: how short is ‘short’? The focus in NOON is on poems shorter than fourteen lines, with the exception of particularly ‘skinny’ or expansively spaced (but verbally spare) ones. This is largely, of course, to stay out of sonnet territory, though occasionally it has seemed fitting to include particularly pithy or minimalist sonnets (Jim Kacian’s ‘Sonnet for Philip Glass’ on page 107 being a striking instance). Many of the poems, however, fall well below this line-limit, with haiku and minimal poems (sometimes as short as one line, even one or two words) being featured for their particular openness and concision.

Indeed, one of my reasons for starting the journal was that I wanted to read good haiku more often alongside and ‘in conversation with’ other varieties of innovative short poetry – to explore new kinds of poetic community, rather than to reinforce existing ones. One of the pleasures of editing the journal, and now the anthology, has therefore been to find and foreground connection, sometimes surprising kinship, between quite different poems, often by poets who would not usually be found in the same publication. This may have the effect of dissolving, to some extent, preconceived ideas of distinct or opposed ‘schools’ of writing: the experimental as opposed to the traditional or pastoral, for example. On the other hand, there are clusters of poems in this anthology by poets with shared histories: in North American haiku, in the innovative British poetry scene, in collaborative writing projects, in acknowledged debts to other poets, and so on. These groupings will seem to reflect more ‘natural’ lines of tradition and development.

While first publication of most of the poems was in NOON,

occasionally the journal featured rarely printed or newly translated poems. This is reflected by the inclusion, here, of two of Morris Cox's 45 *Untitled Poems*, which had only been published in an edition of fifty copies from his own Gogmagog Press in 1969 before a selection was reprinted in the first issue of the journal. Richard Gilbert's and Itō Yuki's translations of Japanese anti-war haiku from the late 1930s, and Patrick Donnelly's and Steven Miller's translations of *waka* on Buddhist themes from centuries earlier, add further elements of historical interest and may suggest lines of continuity with the contemporary poems that comprise most of this anthology.

In these ways, I have sought to be inclusive without being merely eclectic, and to present, in this anthology, as in each issue of the journal, a nuanced arrangement of poems that creates a sense of quasi-collaborative authorship. At the same time, of course, the anthology is meant to point beyond itself, to contributors' individual bodies of work. I have therefore appended a list of those authors' collections in which poems first published in NOON, and included in this anthology, later appeared.

I am grateful to all contributors for their cooperation in this project; likewise, to readers whose responses to the issues helped motivate me to continue the journal, which will resume after the publication of this book. In particular, I would like to thank John Levy, the journal's closest reader and most frequent correspondent over the years, who has also provided fine cover photos for the online issues. I am also very grateful to Isobar's publisher Paul Rossiter for bringing a clear eye to the project and helping to resolve a number of sticking-points in the editing process. It is particularly fitting that this book is being published by Isobar Press, with

which NOON shares an outlook, not only in publishing out of Tokyo, but also (in line with the meteorological metaphor suggested by the press's name) in having 'no defining stylistic agenda', while at the same time hoping 'to publish poets whose writing – wherever it may be situated on the stylistic map – is working at equivalently high poetic pressure'.

PHILIP ROWLAND  
Tokyo, 22 April 2019

## CONTRIBUTORS

- Rachel Cloud Adams / 52
- Dimitar Anakiev / 24
- Bob Arnold / 123–124
- Victoria Bean / 79
- Roberta Beary / 130
- Chris Beckett / 76–77
- John M. Bennett / 94
- David Berridge / 36
- Mark E. Brager / 142
- Helen Buckingham / 88
- Emily Carr / 133
- Joel Chace / 98
- Markeith Chavous / 31
- William Cirocco / 51
- Thomas A. Clark / 43
- Morris Cox / 71–72
- Ruth Danon / 134–135
- Cherie Hunter Day / 57–58
- Susan Diridoni / 115

Patrick Donnelly & Stephen Miller / 116–117

Mark DuCharme / 63

Carrie Etter / 118–119

Gloria Frym / 147

David Giannini / 68

Richard Gilbert / 37

Richard Gilbert & Itō Yuki / 21–23

Jesse Glass / 82–84

Chris Gordon / 106

Jonathan Greene / 125

Lee Gurga / 129

Alan Halsey / 111–113

Robert Hampson / 96

Mark Harris / 59–60

Jeff Harrison / 97

Bob Heman / 54–56

Jane Hirshfield / 148

Scott Honeycutt / 32

Gary Hotham / 85–86

Peter Hughes / 38

Jim Kacian / 107–108  
Elmedin Kadric / 40  
Kit Kennedy / 30  
Burt Kimmelman / 44  
Richard Kostelanetz / 137  
Wes Lee / 34–35  
Ruth Lepson / 141  
John Levy / 47–50  
Rebecca Lilly / 92  
Eve Luckring / 61  
Peter Marcus / 27–28  
John Martone / 15–17  
Joseph Massey / 69–70  
Chris McCabe / 80  
Leslie McGrath / 67  
Scott Metz / 18–20  
Sabine Miller / 131  
Geraldine Monk / 41  
Jane Monson / 81  
Jim Moore / 128

Marlene Mountain / 25  
Sheila E. Murphy / 42  
Peter Newton / 29  
Alistair Noon / 89–91  
Stephanie Papa / 78  
Christopher Patchel / 39  
John Phillips / 126–127  
Rufo Quintavalle / 145  
Nick Ravo / 138  
Anna Reckin / 64–65  
Boyer Rickel / 121–122  
Elizabeth Robinson / 62  
Peter Robinson / 66  
Paul Rossiter / 73–75  
Philip Rowland / 144  
Barry Schwabsky / 109–110  
Larissa Shmailo / 93  
Aidan Semmens / 120  
Robert Sheppard / 95  
Sandra Simpson / 139

Eleanor Stanford / 132  
Rob Stanton / 33  
George Swede / 87  
Rick Tarquinio / 26  
Dietmar Tauchner / 136  
Michelle Tennison / 140  
Mark Terrill / 143  
Philip Terry / 99–103  
Rosemarie Waldrop / 53  
Carol Watts / 114  
Mark Young / 104–105  
Peter Yovu / 45–46  
Daniel Zimmerman / 146