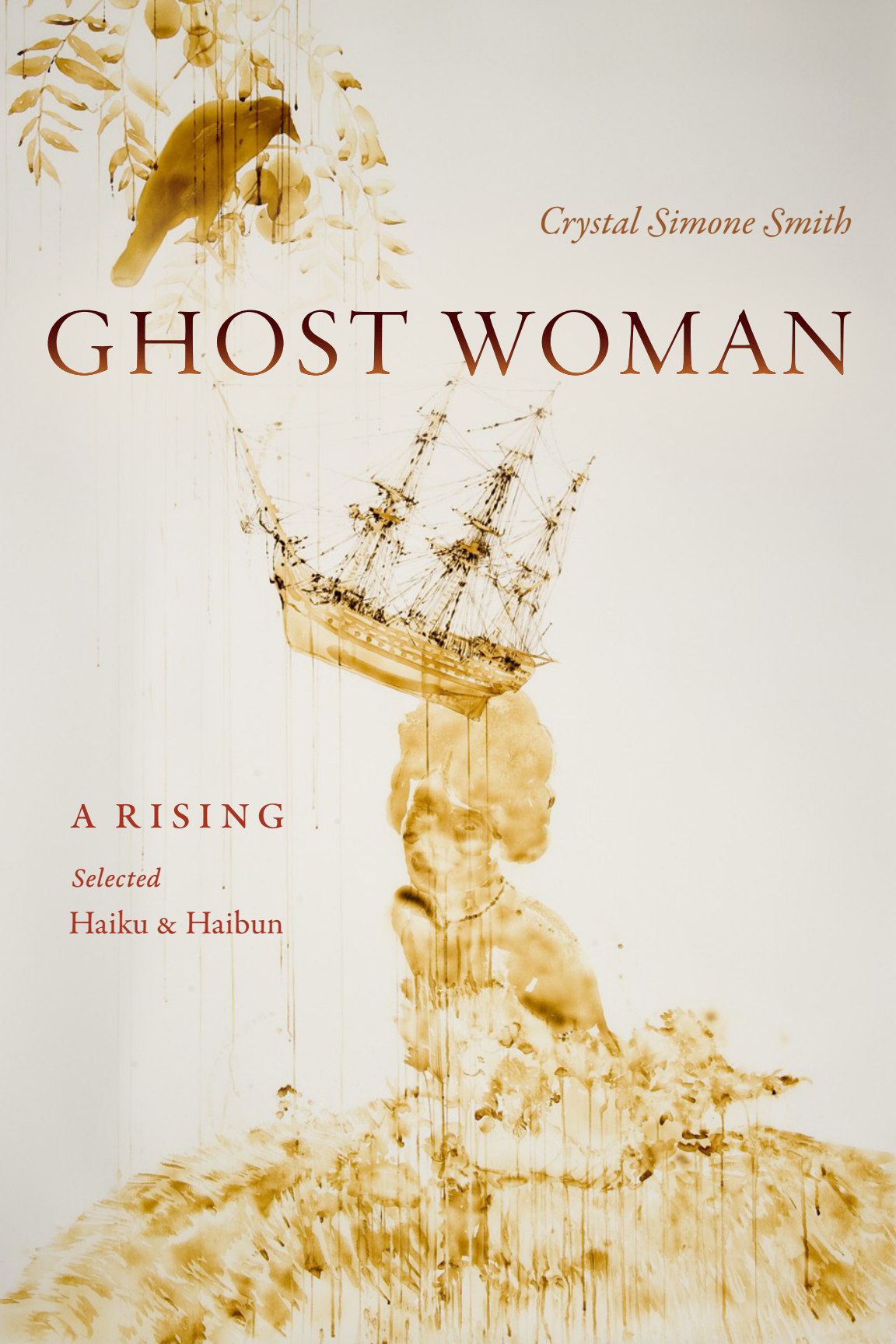




Crystal Simone Smith

GHOST WOMAN

A RISING

Selected

Haiku & Haibun

Ghost Woman

BUY

Crystal Simone Smith

Ghost Woman

A R I S I N G Selected Haiku & Haibun

DUKE

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS • DURHAM AND LONDON • 2026

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

© 2026 CRYSTAL SIMONE SMITH

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on
acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Lisa Lawley

Designed by Matthew Tauch

Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro by
Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Smith, Crystal Simone, author

Title: Ghost woman : a rising / Crystal Simone Smith.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. |

“Selected Haiku & Haibun”. — Cover.

Identifiers: LCCN 2026001331 (print)

LCCN 2026001332 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478039051 paperback

ISBN 9781478034087 hardcover

ISBN 9781478062646 ebook

Subjects: LCSH: Nature—Poetry | Identity (Psychology)—Poetry |

Ecopoetry | LCGFT: Poetry

Classification: LCC PS3619.M5739 G46 2026 (print) |

LCC PS3619.M5739 (ebook) | DDC 811.008—dc23/eng/20260225

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026001331>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026001332>

Cover art: Stacy Lynn Waddell, *The Fighting Crow Queen*,
2010. Singed and burned paper, 96 × 51 in. Courtesy of the
artist. Photo by Christopher Ciccone Photography.

Contents

ix	A NOTE ABOUT THE <i>GODAI</i> PHILOSOPHY AND CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH- LANGUAGE HAIKU
----	---

xi	PREFACE
----	---------

i	Wind · <i>fu</i>
---	------------------

10	Before the Storm
----	------------------

11	Post-Surgery Strength
----	-----------------------

12	Highs and Lows
----	----------------

13	Black Friday
----	--------------

15	Earth · <i>chi</i>
----	--------------------

26	First-Ever Garden
----	-------------------

27	M Club Lounge
----	---------------

28	Loose Ends
----	------------

29	The Ways of Men
----	-----------------

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

31	Water · <i>sui</i>
42	Modern Paganism
43	Ways of Doing Things
44	Good Sport
45	What We Know of Light and Growth
47	Fire · <i>ka</i>
57	Smith's Barbershop
58	Shelter Aubade
59	When Darkness Comes
60	Latchkey
61	Void · <i>ku</i>
69	Our First Place
70	Pruning Season
71	AFTERWORD
73	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

A Note About the *Godai* Philosophy and Contemporary English- Language Haiku

The *godai*, a Japanese Buddhist philosophy of thought with origins in Indian Buddhist concepts and Chinese traditions, constitutes five elements: earth (*chi*), water (*sui*), fire (*ka*), wind (*fu*), and void (*ku*). The elements symbolize the emotional nature of human beings. Earth represents stability and grounding; water represents fluidity and change; fire represents passion and energy; wind represents freedom and growth. And void is divineness or the emptiness of self.

My use of the *godai* to section this book denotes life stages and growth. Their use does not suggest that stages are always sequential but that they occur in intervals in the journey through life: Childhood wounds the adult; adulthood repairs the wounds of the child. Through the elements of *godai*, popularized as principles of Japanese physical combat (*ninjutsu*), the philosophy focuses on the internal work of connecting mind and body to attain balance and resilience.

Though considered obscure and often minimalized to syllable counts, haiku rivals free verse as one of the most practiced forms of poetry in the world. The roots of the form originated in Japan during the thirteenth century with the practice of collaborative poetry writing known as *renga*, or linked verse. The opening verse in a *renga*, consisting of three lines with a 5-7-5 syllabic pattern, eventually branched off into standalone poems called *hokko*. Renowned poet Matsuo Bashō is credited with popularizing

D

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

hokko in the seventeenth century; the form was renamed *haiku* by poet Masaoka Shiki in the nineteenth. Foundational aesthetics of haiku include seasonal images. Bashō's haiku were often inspired by Zen principles as they pertained to mindfulness and awareness.

American poets, influenced by eastern and Asian cultures in the early twentieth century, began experimenting with the form. These were largely poets of the Imagist movement whose use of the form confused vital aesthetics of line and syllable counts, and the two juxtaposed parts of the poem. Nevertheless, in many instances these renderings retained images from nature and the line brevity that evokes ambiguity, allowing for deeper meaning. Thus, it is significant to mention that English-language haiku is an adaption of traditional Japanese haiku that borrows and forfeits certain aspects of the form. The English-language haiku movement of teachers, practitioners, and scholars evolved throughout the twentieth century, establishing a set of conventions for a modern form. Readers can further explore these conventions by visiting the Haiku Society of America website (<https://www.hsa-haiku.org/>).

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Preface

In the essay *Touching the Earth*, bell hooks states, “When we love the earth, we are able to love ourselves more fully.” It was not until I began the practice of haiku that I could truly grasp this proclamation. I spent most of my formative years in a six-hundred-square-foot apartment located in a poor, overpopulated urban neighborhood. I played in the dirt and climbed trees, but there was nothing beautiful about my surroundings. I don’t recall flowers in the summers. There were patches of grass worn down by the many neighborhood kids who played outside for hours. Stray cats foraged through dumpsters. Trash and litter were everywhere, not to mention needles and other drug paraphernalia. hooks also notes in her essay that the migration “from the agrarian South to the industrialized North wounded the psyches of black folk.”

I was fortunate because my maternal family was from the South. My family was rooted in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and each summer we visited my grandparents and a host of other relatives. When I was old enough to no longer require constant supervision, my mother would send me south for weeks, and it was then that I began to actually notice nature. It was impossible not to. The skies stretched beyond the naked eye. The hills and pastures were lush with greenery. There were creeks to wade and long, winding trails with nature around every corner—blackberry bushes, a field of corn, black snakes, the silence of dusking days. My grandmother had a garden that yielded varieties of squash, cucumbers, and tomatoes, so I understood that earth nurtured you physically, too. It was quiet, mostly, but there was the nightly chorus of crickets, along with the synchronization of fireflies we chased down with mason jars. This harmony with nature I had no words for yet, but it was one I craved every year. Each summer I escaped the urban blight of asphalt and blaring traffic for the serenity of my family’s land.

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

That same harmony returned when I began my haiku journey ten years ago. My awareness in nature amplified, and I suddenly began to see the world fully, finding solace in a rainstorm or breeze. Haiku requires the poet not only to notice but to make meaning of what you notice.

My favorite season is autumn. It cools down in the South, halting the oppressive heat, but it's the trees that I marvel at most. In autumn, I keep close Hermann Hesse's words: "The trees are about to show us how to let go"—and, along with the leaves, I do. Like anyone who resides in a warm climate, I love the magic of snow whenever we are afforded it. And if heaven were a physical place, I would certainly declare it the sea. As Whitman said, "The sea is a continual miracle." The ocean is powerful yet tranquil, and with every coastal encounter I find moments of profound gratitude.

The haiku and haibun in this collection were composed over the last ten years, and I look forward to the many more nature moments to come.

I would be remiss if I didn't note that haiku is not merely self-discovery and oneness with nature; it is ecopoetry. When we sustain Mother Earth, we sustain ourselves. I hope the poems in this collection offer you some thoughts in that way, too.

In gratitude,

Crystal Simone Smith

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

may you in your innocence

sail through this to that

—LUCILLE CLIFTON

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Wind · *fu*

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

100th birthday—
a balloon caught
in the power line

ginkgo shade tree
how to skip
the class I teach

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

spring break—
my boys screaming
at blue jays

campus in bloom
the white-haired professor
shuffles to class

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ocean cliff
a view to take
to my grave

unsaid words
the last wren
of the day

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

unseasonable breeze
the doctor's orders
out the window

caught
in a hurricane—
my birthday

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

menopause diagnosis

fallen nest

without a presence

honeysuckle breeze

again Mother's Day

without a mother

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

plantation tour—
I follow a swallowtail
to the slave house

Juneteenth—
we purchase boat
tour tickets

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

old slave town
we put down
all our baggage

high grass
I keep her
dying secret

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Before the Storm

Pregnancies brought on breakthrough spotting, forcing her to quit waitress shifts. The summer of 1973, she woke mornings to the coin change my father left on the nightstand. Daily strolls to the zoo a few blocks away, where she sat on a bench with an ice cream cone to the slow gaze of giraffes chewing cud. Sometimes a breeze of silence. Raised with a farmhouse full of siblings, soon she would bear three daughters. This was the most alone she would ever be, and the safest.

newborn twins

a thousand tulips

bend in wind

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

IO GHOST WOMAN

Post-Surgery Strength

After I lay static two days, they came to resurrect me. I needed sunlight, they said. The edge of the bed was a magical feat. Lifted to a stand, gravity reminded me I had indeed died a small death. Doused in sweat, I pushed one dead foot in front of another. My weight so heavy, the room became light. They insisted I sit awhile. *No*, I groaned, *let's make it to the window*.

evening storm

the nurse measures

my heart rate

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Highs and Lows

As with a missing limb, I never mentioned her illness. It was mysterious, rigid like a sleeved prosthesis. To ask was to call it up—it could rise out of her and land center room, silencing us both. Flushed as a wailing baby, she couldn't be restored by call or caress. I learned to dialogue around it—what of the rags and bucket and why was she washing the walls? She'd stop, twist her head in confusion, and say, *I don't know*, then continue.

worry lines . . .

the human face

in a tree trunk

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Black Friday

I return my youngest sister to her group home. Her two-day visit: a steady cycle of medications, cigarettes, and eating—the occasional blood sugar check. Our discussion of an early death ends with a goodbye shrug. I roam the mall alone among the grinning and shopping, digesting the notion of family. My thoughts turn to my nephew in his little prison of a dismal apartment—my other sister, his warden. I don't like child prisons, so I don't visit much.

Thanksgiving
the in-laws eat
and leave

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS