

REVIEWED BY AGNES SAVICH

Crossing Bridges: A Haibun Anthology (Lulu Press, Inc., 2024) edited by Shelley Baker-Gard and Shasta Hatter. Layout by Tanya McDonald. 100 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback. No ISBN. \$15 from lulu.com.

Crossing Bridges is the second anthology by The Portland Haiku Group, featuring their haibun work, following the 2018 release of *New Bridges*, which featured haiku and tanka. A committee of five members put their expertise together to assemble the anthology. I was particularly impressed with the sequencing done by Shasta Hatter; there is a really salient flow thematically between the haibun which gives the collection a nice cohesion. The Portland group is a sort of supergroup with guest members from outside of Oregon as well, ranging from John Stevenson in New York to Chandra Bales in New Mexico, and Terry Ann Carter in British Columbia to Diana Saltoon in Hawaii. It's a rare treat to see haibun from a range of writers that include long-time masters of the form and those who find delight in experimentation and learning to write in it. Twenty-one poets present seventy-one haibun and eleven works of art. Snail Dreams, the charming cover image by Carolyn Winkler, heralds the journeys of imagination through our world that the collection holds within.

A multidimensional variety is achieved through the themes running through the anthology. Different geographic settings run across varying times and seasons, with a wide range of human and natural experience. The book functions as a travelog, taking readers through US states, Japan, India, Canada, Germany, England, and Switzerland.

Readers will traverse the seasons haunted by vivid, unforgettable images. In *Early November*, Maggie Chula sits with a dying friend in autumn; "Her birdfeeder is empty. [...] The gourd, with its lumps and warts, keeps us company." In *Lifeline*, we're struck with the image of Lisa Gerlits carrying a black Singer sewing machine through a snowy winter night. John Stevenson shows us a practical

plow unceremoniously too close for comfort to old graves in *Spring*. In *Dusky Rose*, Maggie Chula's hot girl summer moment in California in a sexy pink satin floral flowing robe will remind you too of being carefree and twenty-five.

I've not run across much of John Stevenson's haibun before, which are among the briefest in this collection. I enjoyed the short and powerful, perfectly balanced trilogy of title, prose, and haiku in his haibun, such as the one just mentioned above:

"Spring

There is no fence or enclosing wall, no waste of space or undue sentiment.

country graveyard
the close pass
of a plow"

World history makes an appearance in several of the haibun, intermingled with the personal histories. Steve Bahr intersperses the story of runner Roger Bannister's historical 1954 record breaking the sub-4-minute mile barrier with Roger's own quotes about the hunter-prey relationship of African lions and gazelles in *Milestone*. Carolyn Winkler writes about artist Judy Chicago's contribution to feminism and women's rights in *Every Step We Take*. Cathy Merritt takes us back to the Summer 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany where her father-in-law snuck away from his post in the Marines to attend events in *Let the Games Begin!*

In *Nuclear Darkness*, David Rosen describes his poignant visit to the Peace Park Museum in Hiroshima:

"When the Atomic bomb exploded, a man was sitting in front of this segment of the wall; all that remained was his shadow. That night I couldn't sleep; I was haunted by the souls of the 140,000 people killed (mostly women and children). I felt shame at being human.

Shadow burnt into the wall—
rain falls, leaving no sound
behind”

Continuing the variety, the poets explore memories of humble beginnings, different lifestyles, and tragic endings. We peer into people’s households rich in sensory imagery. In Jacob Salzer’s *Gravity*, he takes us back to “In grandpa’s basement, the musty air lingers with motor oil, dirt, and metal. [...] Boxes overflowing with nails.” Shelley Baker-Gard shows us a slice of life in *Three Cats in the House Life Used to be...* “My husband sits in his nightly spot - the depression in the couch stays whenever he leaves. The white trimmed tortoiseshell cat, Bandi, was a previously feral cat adopted from the bike trail and is cozily curled next to him.” Cathy Merritt takes us back to New Year’s Eve, 1973 in *What a Ride*; “A black, 1950s Lincoln Continental rolled up to the entrance of the family’s massive home, and my date and I, his father and wife, got inside.”

We journey further with the writers through other life events such as divorces and deaths, scenes of love and friendship, new beginnings across all stages of adulthood, and memories of childhood.

In Shasta Hatter’s *The Eyes of a Child*, her mother unloads the meager contents of the church’s monthly food box and examines her \$119 of food stamps:

“We won’t go hungry this month,” she tells me, smiling.

fresh peaches
my mom slices
the bad spots away”

Marilyn Stablein hilariously describes the fate of her new pets in *Ajar*:

“...so I squished raw hamburger into a bloody meatball to attract

flies. The frogs I figured could help themselves.

Garden fish bowl
hop, plop, scatter
two frogs on the run”

Carolyn Winkler gives us another moment of humor in *Third Grade* when she and her girlfriends decide to entertain some fellow boys with scarves from her mother’s drawer. The haibun culminates with:

“We were so exotic and the boys loved it. Our first encounter with being sexy.

unraveling
restraints
summer’s heat”

In *My Long-Eared Child*, Chandra Bales humorously calls her sister’s newborn baby’s hands “paws” and the haibun continues tongue-in-cheek with her continued questioning of whether she ever wants kids, reflecting on her desire for neatness, precision, and order in her life with her husband. Things take an interesting turn with the adoption of a bunny rabbit as a pet... and long story short, I challenge any reader to not laugh out loud at this conclusion:

“My husband builds him a house with a porch [...] Reach in to stroke him. And Brown Bunny bites me.

spaghetti meal
my niece wipes her mouth
on my white blouse”

Another haibun full of self-deprecating humor by James Rodriguez mentions the many doppelgangers called to mind by his grown out mustache. The clincher haiku in *Hey, Good Looking* seals the end of the book with a wink and a blown kiss. ◻■