

them, culminating in why “mourning doves” is the perfect fragment for the haiku and the best possible final line for this pairing. We pick up on failure of a way of life, the loss of home, a sense of shared family pain, an image of a fallow field overgrown with thistles, grief . . . and then we move on to the pairing on the facing page:

crafted with love,  
 this table you made  
 from ash trees  
 planted for the children  
 we never had

deep canyon  
 our prayers sink  
 to the bottom

More shared family pain, more mourning and unanswered prayers, and a sense of home that’s still tinged with sadness . . . Read together, the two pages thus encapsulate what could be construed as an entire family saga! This is only possible because of the combination of genres: the one-two punch of the longer, more emotionally explicit tanka leading into the terse containment of the haiku, like the two parts of an exclamation point. That a collection redolent of grief and loss could be thus represented as a series of exclamation points speaks to Strange’s remarkable abilities as a poet. □■

#### REVIEWED BY TOM SACRAMONA

*Aporia* haiku by Rebecca Lilly (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2021). 96 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-70-8. \$15 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

Readers familiar with Rebecca Lilly’s work know her to be genre defining and that remains true with her newest work *aporia*. I

wondered what the word “aporia” meant, and suspicious, I found a definition in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, edited by M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, which opened a door for me to understand the choice of the work’s title in one respect:

as applied in the criticism of literature, [it] designates a theory and practice of reading that questions and claims to ‘subvert’ or ‘undermine’ the assumption that the system of language is based on grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a literary text.

The glossary lists “aporia” under deconstruction. In “Haiku and Deconstruction” in *Modern Haiku* 45.1 (Winter–Spring 2014), Mike Spikes asserts in his essay:

at the heart of the deconstructionist view of language—that developed by de Man and Derrida, as well as others—is that language is open to multiple, contradictory interpretations. Texts are viewed as inherently unstable; no text ever finally settles into a single, consistent meaning.

Lilly’s haiku straddle a divide and fine line of incomprehension to mean a great deal, although what that is can be hard to say exactly, at least every time. In the deadlock of our lives, when pausing to read her book, we wade in her poems like we would a river and there enjoy our found openness to accept new changes in perceived meaning:

Pebbles broken off stones in the river I was born old.

“Pebbles” is one example from the book of over 40 S-shaped ku that strive to understand the limits of language and break down comprehension. Lilly is still masterfully able to communicate her experience in ways that often hit us in the gut, if because they

circumvent the rational intentionally so as to better convey a feeling or moment with impact:

Writing life into its symbols missing years of wind

We talk of “butterflies in our stomach” or collywobbles—yet with *aporia*, Lilly asks us to consider if, at our core, humans instead really have snakes inside. Peter Newton’s endorsement on the back cover of this book suggests her “serpentine, half-infinity symbol . . . verbal roller coasters are best when said aloud.” With poem after poem like this, Lilly makes a serious effort to investigate the nature of grief:

The dry woody look  
of old junipers—  
I thought, wrongly, I’d die first

Whether you prefer a Zen reading:

Pamphlets at the shrine—  
an ant follows the curve  
of the Buddha’s smile

or a deconstructionist reading:

Fog blows from the trail bend—  
my anxiety  
without an object yet

you will not be disappointed: Lilly’s book probes the meaning of existence. Between the experimental poems are traditional three-line and elegiac haiku that hold the center of this book in place. They mourn being human, other creatures, outliving parents, and even depression itself. Rebecca Lilly’s *aporia* constructs itself like it wants to be taken apart to be whole, and the experience of reading this book is the truest haiku pleasure. ◻■