

borrowed book
 a rust stain
 where the paperclip was

Debbie Strange is a master at setting a scene, then inviting the reader to settle in for a story. She doesn't provide the end of the story, but just enough to get us anticipating or imagining possibilities. We get the gist and feel the feeling of the tale:

porch swing
 songs where we least
 expect them

Last, but certainly NOT least, we get a sampling of haiku by Stephen Toft. The editors note "the presence of social, religious, and natural constraints" in his haiku:

a snowflake
 just out of reach
 of the prisoner □■

REVIEWED BY KRISTEN LINDQUIST

The Language of Loss Haiku & Tanka Conversations by Debbie Strange (Sable Books, Greensboro, NC: 2020). 38 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Matte cover, perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-7333671-2-7. \$12 from sablebooks.org.

Debbie Strange is a widely published, award-winning Canadian poet from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her book, *The Language of Loss Haiku & Tanka Conversations*, was the winner of the 2019 International Women's Haiku Contest, judged by Roberta Beary, as well as an honorable mention in the HSA 2021 Merit Book Awards (see page 146), judged by Ce Rosenow and Bryan Rickert. Strange's experience shows in this thoughtfully curated, assured, and masterfully evocative collection of 32 tanka/haiku pairings, arranged one pairing to a page.

As a poet, I couldn't help but wonder at the time and creative effort that must have gone into putting together this exquisitely well-crafted collection. The tanka and haiku were presumably not written together or to specifically go together—I know I've seen some of these haiku, for example, published on their own in various journals—so every pairing gave me pause as I parsed it from a technical standpoint and imagined what went into each choice Strange must have made as she constructed this book.

As a reader, I found myself marveling with each turn of the page at the layers of meaning and emotional resonance created on at least three different levels: first, the conversation between tanka and haiku in each pairing on the page; then, the internal juxtapositions within each poem *per se*; and finally, for all but the first and last pairings, the associations made with the pairing on the opposite page. There's so much going on here, and it's a great pleasure to spend time with each page-spread to let it all sink in.

The theme of loss echoes relentlessly, yet beautifully, through this most aptly titled book, giving it a thematic and emotional consistency that hits us in the heart and in the head. For example, Strange pairs these two poems on one page:

farm auction . . .
 we have nothing
 left to lose
 except these thistles
 rooted in our hearts

empty nest
 on the for sale sign
 mourning doves

One could write an entire essay discussing the swirl of images and feelings present in each of these two poems, as well as between

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.

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