

Ironically Celesta does not realize the relationship she seeks with her cousin Henry mirrors his with niece Clara. Nor is this indicated in any of the response haiku.

Overall Marco Fraticelli's pairing of his high-quality haiku and Celesta Taylor's diary entries is both sensitive and successful. Highly recommended.

(d)ark, by John Stevenson (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2014). 74 pages; 5¼" x 7¾". Glossy color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-27-0. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Paul Miller

Stevenson is well known to the haiku community: an award-winning poet, past president of the Haiku Society of America, past editor of its journal *Frogpond*, current managing editor of *The Heron's Nest*, and member of the Route 9 haiku group, among other things. His fifth collection *(d)ark* contains a nice mix of haiku, senryu, and tanka.

I have always thought of Stevenson as a poet who is interested in what it means to be a person (or persona) in your own skin. One of my favorite poems of his is the title poem to his 1999 collection *Some of the Silence*: "a deep gorge... / some of the silence / is me." This sense of personhood is a theme he has mined successfully through later collections. His newest collection continues that journey. Three examples:

my house
without me
autumn wind

maybe an ant
next time
maybe this time

a man in a crowd in a man

The last poem is especially appealing and seems to me the flipside of “deep gorge” in which (I believe) the poet also contains his own gorge. In “a man” the poet moves from the individual, to the mass, to the mass within the individual. Stevenson has filled in that gorge and now must reckon with the landfill.

Stevenson is also curious about his place in that “crowd” and I find his sketches of “others” often obliquely include himself (there but for the grace of god goes he ...), and as such, his observations are often tender. This is perhaps due to his involvement in Playback Theater in which the actors inhabit the stories of audience members. It has sensitized him to the viewpoint of others.

the memory
of his memory
cherry blossoms

never touching
his own face
tyrannosaurus

Stevenson has always been a bit of a wise cracker so it is not surprising that other observational musings are more traditionally senryu.

mansion tour
big mirrors
of the rich

as I always say spontaneity

A reader soon discovers that Stevenson’s poems contain a fair amount of humor, even when they appear to cover the darkest of human failings.

outside
the cinema
a line
of people waiting
to be shot

Like the “ark” in “dark,” even the darkest poems often have a sly wink. Finding the small pun in the last line makes the cinema poem bearable. I do not suggest that Stevenson attempts to minimize the shooting in

Colorado—which it seems likely he is referencing—but that he has found a method to cope.

In the introduction to the collection, Scott Metz suggests that the “ark” in the title can be taken “in various ways: the ark as symbol of body, mind, and psyche; the ark as poem; and the ark as a collection of poems.” It is a “story about survival, endurance, and overcoming the flood.” Stevenson, through his own humanity, is an optimist. I would add that it is this optimism that is the sp(ark) in the (d)arkness; his small acts of creation such as these poems.

This creation extends to other wonderful haiku that have a classic feel.

Ash Wednesday
snow drifts
over the river

four people
picket for peace
midwinter snow

And he includes a few that are playful in their use of language, yet because of his own humor are not out of place.

Maker of wolves
and clouds that
look like lambs

daylight as the exception it is

But what about those lines bordering the poems top and bottom? Every poem in the collection is contained by a pair. Thematically they could be considered enclosures for the poems, the way animals would have been penned on the biblical ark. However I find their consistent usage throughout the collection risky. For readers of haiku used to the white space that normally surrounds a poem they can feel claustrophobic. If they were used sparingly (I’m thinking of the cinema or a man in a crowd haiku) they could be an effective way to impart emotion at a non-language level. This would also be true in the cases where the text is longer than the lines, where the action is literally bursting out of the scene. This adds a sense of energy to some poems, but on the whole the lines feel random and a bit gimmicky since they are used across the board. However, their use is not materially detrimental to the collection, and

quickly becomes something like the color of the ink or the typeface—something seen but in most cases not given much thought too.

Like all good poets Stevenson has more than one trick up his sleeve. *(d)ark* is a satisfying collection and well worth picking up.

spring in the lobby
let's not wait
for the elevator

BRIEFLY NOTED

Chispas de Pedernal, by Diente de León (Medellín, Colombia: Mi Libro, 2014). 118 unnumbered pages; 15 cm; 6"x6". Hardbound; green hand-made paper-covered boards, embossed with color label; Smythe-sewn. No ISBN. No price given; inquire from edicionesmilibro@gmail.com.

This collection of 223 haiku from Diente de León (Juan Felipe Jaramillo), the organizer of the WHA conference in Medellín, Colombia, in September 2013, presents an important new voice in Latin American haiku. The book is divided into several thematic sections: "Life in the Temple," "Like the Sea, This Love That Comes and Goes," etc., each prefaced by a short meditation on nature, humans, and poetry. A sample from the section "Fleeting Time" with Charles Trumbull's translation: *Brisa mensajera— / de la amada difunta, / el olor de la tierra.* messenger breeze— / from the dead lover / the scent of the earth.