
REVIEWS

In the Curves, by Alan S. Bridges (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2020. 86 pages; 4 ½" × 6 1/2". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-56-2. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

Reviewed by Brad Bennett

If you haven't heard the story of how Alan S. Bridges first discovered the haiku form, it's a delightful tale of serendipity. Bridges met the venerable veteran haikuist John Stevenson on a westbound cross-country train trip, learned a bit about haiku, and bought Stevenson's books. By chance, they took the same train back east, and Bridges shared some haiku that he had written after reading the books. Launched by Stevenson's initial encouragement, Bridges has since soared with the form, becoming one of the most talented English-language haikuists today. As Stevenson writes in his preface to *in the curves*, "Alan Bridges is a natural haiku poet."

For the past decade plus, we've been delighting in Bridges' well-crafted offerings in journals and his many contest-awarded poems. Now we get to rejoice in his first full-length book of haiku. And what a debut collection it is! The book contains sixty-five poems sequenced roughly from spring through winter. Appropriately titled *in the curves*, many of the poems in this collection contain some kind of bend, refraction, or twist. In fact, this collection could be considered a celebration of the beauty and wisdom of curves in their many manifestations.

One could posit that all artists are experts at curving, if curves are defined as deviations from an expected path. All curves represent changes of some kind, and haiku are especially adept at documenting these changes (e.g. seasons and cycles). The haiku in this collection examine a wide variety of curves. Some of them are observed in nature (e.g. finch flight, a sickle moon, and the aurora borealis). Some of these curves are part of

human contraptions (e.g. a snaking IV tube, violin strings, and a Tilt-A-Wheel). Themed haiku collections can be very powerful and instructive, if done with a light touch, and Bridges has accomplished this feat. We learn much about life, its sweeps and its arcs, from his careful attention to curves.

In math, curves are defined as deviations from straight lines. So they can also create movement of some kind. There is plenty of motion throughout this collection, some of it on the micro level:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| morning sun | sine wave |
| the flick of tails | a purple finch |
| around a hay feeder | does the math |

Sometimes the motion is observed on a grander scale:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| sickle moon | a flag |
| after the last pass | with no country |
| the harvester's wide turn home | aurora borealis |

Bridges also examines the potential lessons learned by studying curves crafted by nature and by humans in tune with nature. Both of these poems feel wise:

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| canyon wall | an old song pours |
| what a river did | from a Navajo toehold |
| to what an ocean did | canyon wren |

Bridges is adept at getting the most music out of the words he chooses. Consider the sounds in this haiku:

laundry line
the long swoop
of a song sparrow

The multiple *g*'s, *p*'s, *s*'s and *w*'s, neatly tied up by all the *o*'s, conjure up the flight of a sparrow. The rhyming of *long* and *song* is deftly executed—

because the words are placed mid-sentence, they don't smack you in the face. Here's another poem with artful euphony:

into winter
the last drop of oolong
leaves the gooseneck spout

This poem has a lot going on. Note the short *i* sounds in the first line, the interesting interplay between the words *drop*, *oolong*, and *spout* and the assonant diphthongs in *oolong* and *gooseneck*. All of this helps the phrase pour smoothly. In addition, all the *o*'s resemble individual drops of tea, a nice visual effect.

Often haiku books are infused with an overarching mood. Some of the poems in *in the curves* leave the reader with a sense of bittersweetness, a powerful and apt haiku emotion. This starts with the very first poem:

wrinkle
the path
her tear takes

Several of the poems near the end of the book evoke sadness felt while experiencing endings:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| after his passing | rooster crow |
| some of him | a last arc of moonlight |
| in the sunrise | wraps around the silo |

But the sadness that Bridges documents is not without solace. The penultimate and ultimate poems in the book leave us uplifted by music and grace:

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| until the last string | in the curves |
| stops vibrating— | of an alto sax |
| holding our applause | Amazing Grace |

in the curves deserves a standing ovation. It is a masterful collection by a maestro at the top of his game. I predict that we will be applauding Bridges over and over again in the future.

Before I Forget Them, by Jamie Wimberly (Alpharetta, Ga.: Redheaded Publishing, 2020). 53 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-578-66619-8. Price: \$10.00 from the author at jwimberly@defgllc.com; or available for free download at www.redheadedpress.com/free-e-books

Reviewed by Ron C. Moss

James Wimberly's new collection of haiku and art is a feast for the eyes. The cover of an emotionally powerful heavy red, almost a darkness of red, over windblown grasses evokes a feeling of much promise to come. What follows—sixty-eight haiku interspersed with four pieces of art linked by an almost red bloodline through each—does not disappoint. Edited by John Stevenson, we can feel his light but very learned and experienced touch on what could be said to be a selection of words that are pictures and pictures that are words in the very best way.

In the chapbook's foreword, Stevenson quite rightly makes mention of Buson, the famous poet and artist and his masterful works, placing Wimberly within the venerable tradition of painter-poet. We also know that haiku master Bashō painted. In a famous story from the "Grass-Hut Farewell" and "Words at Parting from Kyoriku," Bashō asked his painting teacher Kyoriku, "Why do you love painting?" "Because I love haikai," he answered. "Why do you love haikai?" "Because I love painting." Although he studied these two arts, they came down to the same thing.

Wimberly's title, *Before I Forget Them*, not only prompts an intriguing expectation of a poet's words, but we eagerly await their unfolding in and around a complement of visual expressions. From the first, a single haiku,