

The Dry Bones, by Paul Chambers (England: The Red Ceilings Press, 2021). 54 pages; 4" × 5¾". Matte four-color card covers; perfect bound. Price: £8.00 from www.theredceilingspress.co.uk

Review by Jeff Hoagland

In *The Dry Bones* Paul Chambers offers us his third collection of poetry. This is an offering we should embrace, rich with images that linger, and with a sense of a connection to the spiritual life. It is a pocket-sized collection, perfect for travel and accompaniment, on the train, on the park bench or out in the wild. The book is dedicated to Nanna, an expression of love and a testimony of her influence on the poet. Shall we thank Nanna for instilling a sense of appreciation for natural beauty, as well as a sense of a spiritual world and cosmos?

This collection contains eighty-six haiku, two per page (with two exceptions) presented in four unnamed sections. Opening with a monostich, the reader pauses, for an undeniably haunting image:

a shadow across the crucifix hunger

This is the first of a dozen poems that utilize concrete spiritual images. This poem with Jesus on the cross reveals an awareness of mortality and even more, a sense of spiritual longing. We also have a brilliant shadow, for a moment undefined, and at the next moment, larger than life. This poem, and others in this collection utilizing Christian symbols, illuminates the arc of life we travel and the passage of time. They leave us pondering what follows:

scent of october ...	the arm
the lengthening shadow	of a roadside cross
of the lychgate	bent by snow

Chambers contrasts these haunting images with equally striking images of childhood. Throughout the collection we find moments from the early stages of life's journey that transport us back in time, to feel the exhilara-

tion of simple joys and pastimes. I wonder if these haiku were recently observed moments, Chambers's reflections on his childhood, or both? I also wonder how many readers, like myself, will relive these moments with Chambers as they encounter them in this book:

distant thunder
a boy sets his coin
on the rail track

with each throw
the boy's stone lands
in the centre of the universe

a girl skipping
with electric cord
blossom wind

Embracing wabi-sabi, through scenes in nature, or our intersection with nature, the poet broadens the theme of mortality inherent even in these childhood vignettes. There seem to be challenges represented in so many of these poems, yet whether a still life, or a cinematic moment, we find a stark beauty:

gathering dark
a broken antler
in the leaf litter

suddenly winter —
a stray dog
gnawing a stone

pre-dawn stars ...
plumes of breath
from a cattle truck

If we observe nature closely, we find evidence of the journey's end. Some may shy from such encounters in person but the poet embraces these moments, presenting them without filter or commentary, a reminder again of the cycle that we all inhabit—birth, life, death, repeat:

gaping
at rush-hour rain
a dead hawk

slow thaw —
a calf's stillness fixes
the buzzard's orbit

There is a strong sense of place throughout this book. While the few churches and cemeteries create a spiritual backdrop, much of this book focuses on the natural landscapes of the poet's home and travels. Engaging our senses, the poet transports us to places we soon want to be. At the edge of the sea...

headland mist
a curlew at the tip
of a cry

long afternoon ...
the sky trickling
from a tide pool

out in the meadows and moorlands...

morning coolness
the meadow holds the shape
of a deer

moorland edge —
darkness hardens
to a crow

or in the forest...

just enough rain
to darken the scent
of the pine woods

The reader will linger with these images just as the poet did, feet on the ground, mind open. These haiku ferry us to another place, another time and perhaps, another consciousness. Chambers combines the skillset of a poet and a marketer for the Department of Tourism.

We also meet numerous inhabitants of these landscapes through this collection, some a testimony to the agrarian life, others living in the wild. The poet expertly captures these moments. A painter reading this collection will want to have paint and brush ready for many of these haiku:

moon at dawn
the mare's breath
whitens the cold

sun shower —
a slug curls around
a celandine stem

meadowsweet
notes of a blackbird
after rain

This rich and varied collection of haiku provokes not just our senses, but our sense of being. Chambers is a poet who moves through life with an awareness not simply of his immediate encounters but of the larger journey. *The Dry Bones* offers readers a chance to join him on the path.

the path down
to the river
flowering gorse