

Ditch Walker Haiku by Bernice Angeline Sorge, Yarrow Press, 2021. 9781990657023. 90 pp. \$12. shorelinepress.ca/DitchWalker.html

At 90 pages, *Ditch Walker*, the first collection of Bernice Angeline Sorge, is a book of poetry about being keenly alive and present, as should be the case with haiku.

At one to two haiku per page, plus illustrated chapter pages, the book structurally gives time to slow down and decompress with the writer. It is arranged traditionally in 4 sections from winter to autumn, “Walking the Snow-dusted Road,” “Under a Plum Blossom Sky,” “The Indolent Flight of the Cicada,” and “Dry Fall.”

The Quebec haiku tradition, more than in English North America, is to publish a book of haiku without previous publication credits or awards. The book is presented whole, new and fresh. This, though English, is published in Quebec and follows that custom.

The poems and the preface speak of how observing the cycle connects us to nature and each other. Living in the countryside it is easy to forget how comically divorced city-dwellers can be from nature’s cycles as she points out (p. 16).

no not a frog
a raven call
my city visitor

The amused twitch returns (p. 19).

snowed in
jump or
clear the stairs

Most poems are pleasant awarenesses and vignettes — a cyclist stopping for ice cream, gardening or grandchildren, or observing snow falling while indoors. It is not a poetry that in aggregate becomes a narrative arc of villains and triumphs. There is no engulfing grief or punchy satire, no sweeping eroticism or profundity. Each haiku points at one’s self here, here, here. Juxtapositions are gentle. That is not to say the poems are populated solely by tranquility and blossoms. Diaristic, there are also small events captured, albeit with more words than might suffice (p. 34).

three vicious dogs charge me
the neighbour and the scream
I never knew I had

It is within reactions, not solitude that we learn who we are. There is a gentle compassion in a few of the poem that can be read literally and on other levels (p. 57).

oncoming car
she saves the centipede
all its legs kicking

Isn't that so very human, trying to save whomever we are able to, whether they know they are being helped or not.

There is a longing flush worthy of *Tangled Hair: Selected tanka from Midaregami* in Sorge's poem (p. 45).

how beautiful
the one that didn't get picked
chartreuse parsnip in seed

It's a hard toss up whether that is my favourite poem or the following one— for its brevity and for how it is a coda for the themes of the collection, of the cycles we can't escape (p. 55).

blazing hot sun
returning the pond
to the clouds

A good number of the poems are well worth rereading and reflecting upon, perhaps with the cool water of a pond or in a garden near you.

review by Pearl Pirie

