

## OREGON POETS WRITE OF PLACE

By Mike Shuler

When I recently browsed the shelves of the Oregon Poetry Collection at the Oregon State Library, I was attracted to a contemporary (2007) anthology of poems by an evocative cover photograph, an intriguing title, a listing of 33 included poets on the front cover, and a well-written synopsis and positive reviews on the back.

“Deer Drink the Moon: Poems of Oregon,” edited by Liz Nakazawa, was published by Ooligan Press and the Publishing Program of the Center for Excellence in Writing at Portland State University. An acknowledgement within the text notes that Ooligan Press takes its name from a Native American word for one of the tribes’ natural sources of wealth in the northwest—smelt. This word was the origin of “Oregon.”

“Deer Drink the Moon” focuses primarily on natural environments in Oregon. It is divided into seven sections by geographical region: Coast Range, Willamette Valley, Cascades, Eastern Cascade Slopes and Foothills, Blue Mountains, Klamath Mountains, and Northern Basin and Range. It includes brief biographies of the 33 poets represented in the volume.

The text begins at the Coast, with “Waiting by the Sea,” by William Stafford, and ends with “A Thousand Friends of Rain,” by Kim Stafford, as an epilogue. In between are 92 additional journeys by poets who find remarkable experiences in everyday life close to where they live—from a tidepool at the edge of an ocean, to Rockaway, to Amity, to Boones Ferry Road, to a cherry tree and its surrounds, to a hop field in winter, to Mosier, to high mountains and canyons, to the Siskiyou, to Wheatland, to Harney Lake.

Within their journeys are places each poet perceives as microcosms, such as Stafford reveals in “Waiting by the Sea.” So Vern Rutsala celebrates sand dollars, and James Grabill and

Paulann Peterson praise trees. Other poets attend to dew on spider webs, to blue jays in fields, to cherry blossoms in spring, to lupine on hills. George Hitchcock shares an afternoon of “old men gutting trout,” and Janice Gould her exploration of late-night radio and welcome tuning to “...finer things:/rustle of leaves,/winking pulse of stars,/the shape of the wind.”

The places written about in this volume are Oregon places, the images familiar to those who live here and who travel the state. The perspectives of the poets can become ours as we are allowed to look over their shoulders into their worlds.

“Deer Drink the Moon” is rich with poetic treasures worthy of its cover. However, it doesn’t exhaust all of Oregon that is remarkable. Another poet may see a beach, wheatfield, cherry orchard, mountain range, daybreak, or waterfall from another viewpoint. There are places yet unseen. There are urban places in Oregon generally unrepresented in this collection, with microcosms of their own. There is rain, there are rivers and mountains, there are windows to the universe. There is love of this place.