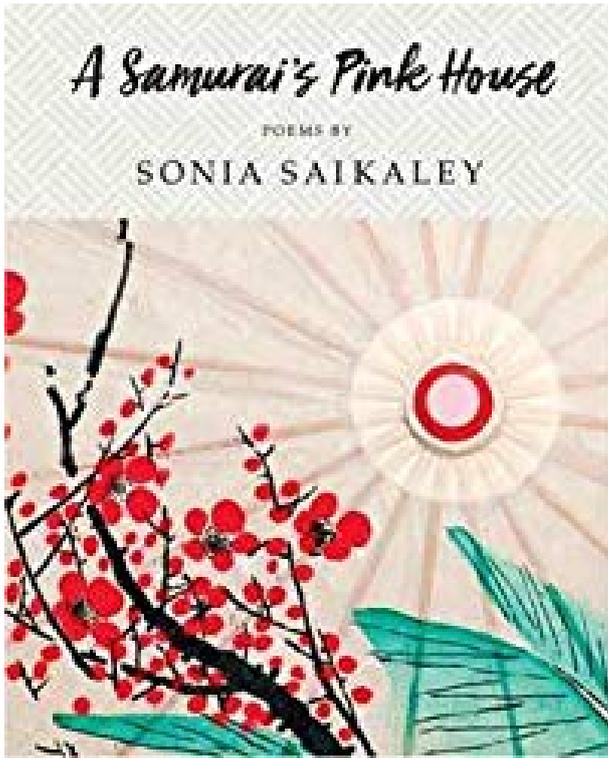


A Samurai's Pink House



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The poems in *A Samurai's Pink House* are threaded with the transformation of the seasons from Matsuo Basho's travels to a love affair between a kabuki cross-dresser and a lonely geisha and the struggles of women in ancient and modern-day Japan. The collection takes the reader on a journey through the fascinating culture of Japan with graceful and accessible language. A sensuous, powerful and beautiful collection that moves across rice fields, tea houses, cherry orchards and narrow alleys where characters, in different stages of life, strive to find identity, peace and love.

“The acuity of perception, empathetic sensibility and long imaginative reach behind these poems will authentically transport readers across historical and cultural distances into both the Japan of past centuries and the Japan of today.” —Allan Briesmaster, author of *Against the Flight of Spring and River Neither* “In *A Samurai's Pink House*, Sonia Saikaley, author of *The Lebanese Dishwasher* and *Turkish Delight*, Montreal Winter, writes slender verses that incorporate spare narratives against an exotic background to explore gender and love in its many guises. Whether it is the girl who learns ‘the fine art of sword swinging’ who is raped by the man whom she must accept as her husband or Basho who shyly discovers attraction to his own sex, whether it is compassion for the victim of a nuclear explosion encountered at Hokkaido Hot Springs or a tender farewell to a Japanese friend after a stay in her country, Saikaley’s verses are sensual and alive to all the finer emotions, including whimsy and humour (cf. ‘Basho's Haiku Goes to the Frogs’).” —Gillian Harding-Russell “These are charming poems of ‘sweet, sweet Japan’, written by a well-versed foreigner not just a tourist, one who knows who Basho is and how to shape a haiku. Saikaley walks through Japan with her eyes wide open, noticing everything, writing of Kabuki, geishas, buddhas, cicadas, and the ever-present and

ever-lovely cherry blossoms. In this delightful world, anything is possible – a pond on the temple grounds can be frothy green tea and fireflies can be tour guides.” —Mark Frutkin “At times wistful and evocative, at other times a provocative exploration of femininity and female sexuality in Japan, this collection captured my imagination until the very end.” —Leslie Shimotakahara, author of *The Reading List* and *After the Bloom*

“Sonia Saikaley’s brilliant new collection draws you on a haunting journey through time and Japanese culture. Cherry trees, rice fields, blossoms, moonlight, teardrops of rain and dew evoke a Zen beauty of discipline and quiet obedience. Sensuousness abounds: the scents of “spring and sea salt”, “sake and green / tea”, “seawater cologne”, “salmon and tuna”; the sounds of “shamisen strings”, “roar / of cicadas and fireflies”; even tastes “of seaweed and sake”, “a salty kiss”. But undercutting this deceptively tranquil surface are private suffering, as personified in poems recounting the passion and eventual subjugation of female samurai in the 17th century and the wanderings of master haiku poet Basho, the secret homosexual longings of a kabuki performer, a geisha’s loneliness, and the homesickness of a transplanted modern day teacher. Writing with a deft and delicate touch, throughout Saikaley skilfully balances the beautiful and the sad. Reading these seemingly quiet, yet so poignant depictions is like tasting exquisite confections with a surprise tang of bitters at the centre. A Samurai’s Pink House is a book I shall delight in returning to again and again.” —Susan Ioannou

“In this collection of connected poems Sonia Saikaley navigates through the ancient traditions of Japan, still present in modern day, either via memory or expressed in all kinds of living materialities. Ancient and modern Japan appear intertwined with memories of Canada and also the world—and all that extends beyond the world, the vast cosmos.... As the title may anticipate, this collection is also about women trying to escape from the trappings of patriarchal entrenched networks of Japanese society (or any society) to reach a place, real or imaginary, where they are and can be warriors: the Samurais of a new world order where the colour “pink” has the same value as colour blue. A “Samurai’s Pink House” is that incubating sanctuary for a new and necessary order that calls for genders to be equalized, in their difference.... All of this, offered to us in a gentle bath of words, singing with persistence into our ear, into our soul, calling us to a higher order. We are invited to feel and feel and feel: the sorrow, the beauty and deep pain that life is, the great longing for what it could be. Immersed in the body with its calling carnal desires and the weight and pain of the material, we yearn to take off in flight, becoming, becoming, entering the Great Buddha state and exiting the body material. A Samurai’s Pink House speaks of a love—a beautiful love that demands. A love that knows we are beings of the universe and possess a spirit that calls.” —Irene Marques

“Sonia Saikaley’s “A Samurai’s Pink House” takes us on a trip through Japan and some of its history. The reader meets a woman Samurai, haiku legend Basho, a Geisha, a teacher, and more. The characters are finely woven into a subtle, cherry blossom silk billowing in a breeze. The narrator and a woman she regularly addresses are intriguing figures. Are they really two characters, or are they both the narrator herself, portrayed once in the first person and the next in the third? We may never know. We are, however, happily drawn into the lovely world Saikaley has laid before us. “A Samurai’s Pink House” is a compelling read, difficult to put down.” —Rod Pederson

“The key characteristics of Iaido, the Japanese art of drawing the long sword in response to sudden attack, best reflect Sonia Saikaley’s approach to writing: immediate, fluid, controlled, and devastatingly precise. Her collection, *A Samurai’s Pink House*, flits effortlessly between ancient and contemporary Japan. As female warrior-poet, Saikaley draws a blade on custom, tradition and gender schemas. The outcome is both brutal and beautiful. Her precision cuts spill forth the ugly innards of patriarchal society across the ages. Yet, Saikaley is far from being the cold assassin. Her writing is heavy with the sensual pleasures of Japan: the scent of cherry blossom, sake and green tea. The outcome is a collection of poetry that is sharply perceived, with a deep sense of history, executed with the utmost skill and grace.” —Darren Richard Carlaw, Editor, *StepAway Magazine*