Under the Basho 2014

edited by
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Under the Basho 2014

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Editorial

Welcome to the 2nd publication of Under the Basho!

Photo by Don Baird, 2014

A year ago we decided to present UTB as an ongoing, organic journal, allowing visitors to see, poem by poem, its development and inspiration. Poets from around the world have collectively produced a fine representation of haiku following the interminable tradition of altruistic artists before them. In this unique approach, we have offered six divisions for poets to be showcased: Traditional (5/7/5), Stand-Alone Hokku, Modern Haiku, One-Line Haiku, Concrete Haiku, and Personal Best.

This year we have also presented three features for your perusing. They are humble proposals that are thought provoking, artfully

prepared, and engaging. Geoffrey Wilkinson offers a terrific story comparing Basho and Keats. His story begins in Iga Ueno at the birth of Basho and takes the reader along on a fantasy trip down the "Narrow Road to the Western Isles" as "If Keats had journeyed with Basho." Midway, Wilkinson offers this thought:

"The most extraordinary parallels are between the sensibilities of Keats and Bashō, and their ways of expressing what they feel they are trying to achieve in their writing."

Pondering Haiku - 21st Century Ripples is a new addition to the journal. It presents the first three of twenty-three discussions held in a public forum. Topics were posited and discussions ensued. The opinions of poets from several countries unfolded through engaging explorations of thoughts and ideas as to what haiku is, what it should be (if anything), and where it might be heading to. Traditionalists (Basho centric) to visionary modernists, loosened their belts, leaned over their computers and pondered together — "Haiku: what is it?"

The first Pondering is focused on the "engine" of haiku. The second challenges the panel to post haiku that represents their perspectives as unveiled in the first Pondering. The third one challenges the haiku poets to, once again, attempt to define haiku in both a "dictionary worthy" and "beginner worthy" way. The second aspect of Pondering #3 is "do you think that beginners and advanced poets operate from different definitions?" Examples of a few of the fine haiku accepted for publication are:

Stand-alone Hokku:

snow sky . . .

the blackbird's fluid

sumi-e stroke

Mark E. Brager

One-Line Haiku:

rain beating on rain he cracks

Chen-ou Liu

Traditional (5/7/5):

Japanese garden

from one path to another–

nothing on my mind

Adelaide B. Shaw

Modern Haiku:

food bank

a pigeon joins

the queue

John McManus

Personal Best:

mayfly

no time

to look back

Gregory Longenecker

When different styles of haiku are combined as they are here, the breadth of the Under the Basho collection is revealed. Our team hopes that you enjoy reading the content contained in this publication, and that while we perhaps retain differing opinions as to what haiku is in the present climate, we continue to respect the artistry and creative force of the poets at hand.

Traditional Haiku

Adelaide B. Shaw

a slow afternoon–
time alone with a hard rain
beating the grasses

damp infested wood–
growing in the garden shed
two types of mushrooms

Japanese garden
from one path to another–
nothing on my mind

grapes ready to pick–
cobwebs connecting bottles
in Grandpa' s cellar

dinner al fresco–
candles sputtering the scent
of citronella

footprints on the floor–

beginning the mud season

with a new rag mop

Carl Seguiban

thanksgiving dinner—

the muskellunge father caught

keeps getting bigger

Hansha Teki

soundless by starlight —

the poet sipping darkness

from a mirror's eyes

awake with the birds

I distill the who I am

from the edge of light

William Seltzer

mountain villages
between them the woodsman walks
fallen leaves . . .

spring house cleaning –
on a shelf in an old box
forgotten haiku

an autumn moon –
beneath it pass the wild geese
of another year

Stand-alone Hokku

Adelaide Shaw

rain on the pond–

the connecting ripples

of my life

Asni Amin

a wolf's

howl, this full moon …

shifting rivers

cirrus clouds …

ignoring all the signs

I follow a butterfly

Ben Moeller-Gaa

spring breeze --

following the moon

into morning

confluence --

overrunning our

conversation

milk thistle --

no longer a weed

in bloom

Carl Seguiban

the river

changing its tune —

snowmelt

Chase Gagnon

moonless night...

the gypsy's finger-cymbals

pinch the stars

d.e. connelly

monsoon rain . . .

ten-thousand things

drumming

Ernest Wit

evening gnats –

a fish punctures

the cosmos

Gregory Longenecker

crows call-

breaking open

the clouds

oak limb-

holding the sleep

of nestlings

withered field-

where it begins

and ends

Hansha Teki

scented night —

a moth enters the hush

between stars

an apple

here in hiding

. . . nothing more

Marion Clarke

moonlit grave —

cracks appearing

in the mist

Mark E. Brager

soft rain . . .

deeper and deeper

the autumn leaves

snow sky . . .

the blackbird’s fluid

sumi-e stroke

branch by branch . . .

a crow’s caw gathers

the moon

Maya Lyubenova

almost dawn –

the light molds a face

in the mud

sunbeam…

spider silk supports

the leaning trunk

the b-flat

fades from her piano…

autumn wind

Paresh Tiwari

prayer flags...

slowly the snow fills up

my footsteps

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

ugadi —

one more butterfly

flits away

muntharis* —

all the shades of green

around her

*Muntharis or Emu apples are a type of berry in Australia

Sonam Chhoki

summer laundry . . .

from a pillowcase

a butterfly

field of chillies —

how calmly deer graze

the moonlight

Terri French

winter solstice --

a folded napkin beneath

the table leg

Christmas Eve --

in every raindrop

the hope of snow

Tuvshinzaya Nergui

my son

traces a butterfly

flower to flower . . .

Modern Haiku

Adelaide B. Shaw

a slow afternoon–
time alone with a hard rain
beating the grasses

damp infested wood–
growing in the garden shed
two types of mushrooms

Japanese garden
from one path to another
nothing on my mind

grapes ready to pick–
cobwebs connecting bottles
in Grandpa' s cellar

dinner al fresco–

candles sputtering the scent

of citronella

footprints on the floor

beginning the mud season

with a new rag mop

Angelo Ancheta

spring rainfall

overloading the weight

of growing up

Aruna Roa

Google Chat

talking to invisible friends

while invisible

right click >

one option

leads to another

my lies

grow bigger and bigger:

how the whale evolved

home

right when I adjust

time to leave

Bill Cooper

red leaves

i loosen a tuning peg

on the cello

a goldfinch across

the pale green cranberries

staccato flute

Brent Goodman

canning jars

line the cellar shelf

first frost

mouse droppings

in the blanket drawer

autumn chill

still too cold

to call it spring

raucous jay

torrential downpour

a cabbage moth climbs

his daughter's hand

Carl Seguiban

southbound geese —

what's left of a kite

flaps with the wind

winter hearth—

a sparrow's home

crackles

rook after rook

an oak loses its shadow

— winter sunrise

dark clouds

rising from the salt marsh

echoes of gunshot

a depression

on her side of the bed—

winter deepens

Chen-ou Liu

swan song...

silencing

the silent

a willow

painting the spring wind

my dog and I

her empty bed ...

get-well cards catching

winter sunlight

between me

and a waking dream

the monarch

David J. Kelly

all across the lake

summer stirring

beneath swallows’ wings

Debbie Strange

jasmine tea

how your scent lingers

in the morning

brushfire

a fox carries her kits

to the river

purple iris...

the bruises around

my sister's eyes

Deborah P Kolodji

loading his bicycle

on the bus

a dozen roses

withered field. . .

here, there

a ground squirrel

the rash words

of our argument

stinging nettles

spring shadows

the hollow sound

of bamboo

her bare feet

on the path ahead

hummingbird sage

Devin Harrison

piercing the fog

that envelopes my mind—

ship’s whistle

trapped

in a dust web—

untold story

Ella Wagemakers

haiku verses ...

the tree and I lean

against each other

September rain

unaware of any pain

a peach falls

my fiftieth summer

the clouds are drifting away

very quickly

wild sunflowers

thinking of those days

when I was hungry

Ernest Wit

night river rowing

the canoe turning into

an open coffin

long winding dirt road

I walk her out

of my heart

the flow of time

I’m staring into

the still of rain

my bladder

woke me up three times

that autumn moon

Geethanjali Rajan

blue gum
I taste a mouthful
of mountain air

meditation time –
the mountain stream
gurgles past

birds crisscross
the evening sky-
alone again

Grace Galton

beachcombing…

my labrador's nose

deep in seaweed

hush of dawn

the spaces between

your words

Gregory Longenecker

weekend trip

the weight of something

left behind

Hansha Teki

overhead

galaxies swamped

in equations

losing heart

a loss of words

fills the air

first light

the fall from it

all around

Helen Buckingham

in and out the peonies...
Mum stands by
to scoop up the petals

her first day--
I cling to Mum's hand
as we enter the hospice

a white butterfly skims
the living room window
    over and over

lunch with my sister
en route to registering Mum's death
tough pancakes

how like a wedding

this bright July day...

reuniting you with Dad

under a cloud--

unable to tell

sun from moon

apples and mulberries

wrapped in Mum's pastry

trees bathed in mist

Jeffrey Hanson

loneliness…

morning clouds

etching the blue

new moon...

the life

I did not chose

Jerry Dreesen

ageing...

the endless drip

of a faucet

library sale -

we were never on the

same page

after the storm

playing a game of

pick-up sticks

Jim Applegate

morning fog

the silence broken by

unseen sandhill cranes

silver inlaid saddle

special boots

on his casket

John McManus

leisure center

a flood victim searches

for his family

food bank

a pigeon joins

the queue

my children wave

as the train pulls away

winter evening

one-way conversation

I touch the top

of his tombstone

Ken Sawitri

on a chop board

a bitter bean caterpillar

wakes up

Maria Kowal-Tomczak

northern wind

naked branches dance

on the bedroom wall

Valentine's Day

she watches his heartbeat

on ECG

Marion Clarke

spreading ripples

a heron leaves

the lake

budding blossoms

the old story teller spins

the same tale

turning tide

an empty shell

returns home

dried lavender

she wishes the world

would stay the same

Myron Lysenko

Valentines Day

the baby listens

as we argue

slow moving river

cigarette ash falling

onto a steak

Nicola Scholes

lifting cuticles

a crescent moon

comes into view

Olivier Schopfer

homesick...

the turtle tucks its head

into its shell

forget

what the future brings—

forsythia

waiting for you...

the crackle of logs

burning on the fire

camelia petals...

I remember

your skin

outdoor poetry reading

between the lines

the whisper of the wind

on the road again

last night rain

dripping from the trees

Paresh Tiwari

cloudless day...

a field of dried grass

in italics

at the cusp

of a tiger's breath...

stone Buddha

plumeria...

a smear of sun on

the bride’s cheek

brother banyan...

do you still whisper

in the tongue of birds

Peggy Heinrich

aquarium visit

my grandson names the fish:

puffer, seahorse, Nemo.

across tree tops

the shadow of a hawk

early winter

marching through

a pile of leaves

just for the crunch

early thaw

a patch of purple crocuses

surprising the snow

Poornima Laxmeshwar

old cemetery

a cluster of stars

play peekaboo

Pravat Kumar Padhy

hanging fruits--

the boy jumps to

catch the sky

Ramesh Anand

first light

last night's rain

cupped in a mushroom

Rehn Kovacic

Brushing the cat —

nothing else but

brushing the cat.

Shloka Shankar

summer heat...

the smell of pickled garlic

from the kitchen

curtain call

how quickly another

season passes by

geranium sky...

I bury my secrets

one by one

shooting star...

too many things

to wish for

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

scorching day

my dad pours water

for the ants

sizzling pan

amma and i share

our old joke

bubbling soup

the dishes saying

what she doesn't

Simon Hanson

coastal cliffs

reddened by sunset

softened by mist

descending

onto the estuary

the quiet of evening

over the estuary

low flying cormorants

in perfect time

evening fall

moonlight slips

into our room

one clear night

leaving the church

the stars

Sonam Chhoki

sleepless . . .

a moth chases its shadow

around the bedroom

a bomb scare

grounds flights in the valley -

how loudly birds sing

prison fence —

as if caught on the barbs

mist hangs in shreds

her broken face . . .

the iridescent blue

of ripened plums

late night ambulance -

rain on the windscreen louder

than his heartbeat

Tomislav Maretić

away from home--

our morning glory blooms

on my laptop

thrown acorn –

the squirrel first chases

the starling away

Vasile Moldovan

newborn covered up
under warm maternal love-
moon in the nursery

angling by night
my fish hook gets stuck
in the Great Bear

just like a fulcrum
for the Leaning Tower
the Morning Star

Vessislava Savova

accordion

on the underground platform

a blind musician

William Seltzer

first spring warmth
and this river's frozen shores
are parting

young children
writing in late snow
words of love

hot and humid –
another sleepless night
how tiring

lightly resting
on our morning paper
cherry petals . . .

One-line Haiku

Abraham Freddy Ben-Arroyo

escalator going up..up..up..redheaded miniskirt

Adelaide B. Shaw

early morning breathing spring after rain

Sunday sails on the river becalmed

Archana Kapoor Nagpal

in sound sleep the first kick in my womb

wearing snow a bare tree awaits the spring

Aruna Rao

falling into the moon through the windshield

surf shadows unwet by the surf

under the gulls' wings tornadoes

sitting in the fold of a scribble a doodle

your body the smell of camphor before cremation

monsoon slipping on the mud the names of all the Gods

Brent Goodman

blackout city beyond another moon

bioluminescent subconscious system update

another philosopher waxing crescent

September begins to look a lot louder

god put me in your planner friday morning

power out of the ways out of here

Carl Seguiban

the weight of an ocean a whirr on fishing lines

on spider web dew beads where daybreak waits

deeper each time the summer well

bluest through a deer's rib cage violets

Chen-ou Liu

she recalls the story in pieces a blood moon

rain beating on rain he cracks

smell of death between the lines of my poem the gap

Diana Teneva

storm end the fragile plum sapling still alive

Don Baird

in the abyss moon fall

without thought a bird anyway

fading light passing thoughts between

setting sun upside down myself

Gregory Longenecker

winter clouds my shadow indoors

still fragile from the chrysalis from rehab

Helen Buckingham

while roses pollinate my siesta

barbecuing next door's gnomiture in my head

a contrail recalls his duty-free puff

shirt-free a golden eagle works the drill

woodland exchanging titanium rings

snapping the man with the poodle around his neck

Johannes S. H. Bjerg

slip it on his face his hands

aging stars lightly doctored

on the other side 72 toy-boys?

missing sun spots seeds of a better violin

John McManus

almost asleep the octopus shows its face

right where I should be hummingbird

searching for the right words a train passes by

completely naked the woods empty my head

calculating the cost of the dead starlings

Ken Sawitri

family dinner dad's stony gaze bursts in my mouth

keeping a neat nest in his head an abandoned scarecrow

kretek smoke a scintilla of being javanese

magma the farmer is the weather

make up I curate my separated self

pellucid air a tailed stingray kite swoop up kid's inquiries

kjmunro

lost in the dark side of the moon viewing

sharpening the pencil marks in the margin

Marcus Liljedahl

winter thaw blackened leaves in all my faces

outside the box for one moment I'm all air

have I got a match? my heart is already pierced by light

Marion Clarke

autumn sunset his breath stolen

midsummer heat ticking deathwatch beetle

Mark E. Brager

among the white crosses fireflies

seascape the weight of the empty coatrack

driftwood the pull of your amniotic sea

no handlebars coasting the threshold dose

smoothing shadows from the fresh sheets equinox

Melissa Patterson

sipping coffee we pick up where we left off

Michael Rehling

my kigo has fallen to the floor this wilted rose

now that it doesn’t matter the clearing fog

nothing and then the red fox

is reincarnation real ... a skunk crosses my path

ocqueoc falls only the indians can pronounce it by looking

Neal Whitman

a lunar moth lifts the dusk off the field

Olivier Schopfer

white blossom from somewhere the scent of talcum powder

dead of winter the hotel neon sign says hot

fog signal silence between words

Pamela A. Babusci

high tide tossing in tomorrow's sorrow

glacier winds my depression freezes over

i boil water tea for one

Poornima Laxmeshwar

orange sunset the colour of candy painted tongues

flowing along with the river his ashes

Ramesh Anand

inside and outside of me autumn wrinkles

street sleepers mist

against the burning timber the last memory

S. Eta Grubešić

quite a small rainbow on the cat's whisker painted the room

words succumbed to paper just married

abstract expressionism in the eye of the rain's lens

the walls' late night conversation interrupted by the clock's angry ticking

Shloka Shankar

gramophone the sur and taal of this rain

chameleon my mood swings more rapid

she still has her mother's eyes funeral feast

beaver's teeth this gnawing loneliness

losing itself a shadow of doubt

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

the green all at once the rooks

joss sticks letting the ghosts go one by one

departing the tightness in that hug

the void between us our child

Simon Hanson

by what dream butterfly migration

Arabian Nights my son bemused by automatic doors

Sonam Chhoki

lichen spreading silence of dzong ruins

cattle trough full of rain full of stars

Orion’s sword the night of his suicide

a boat in the dragon’s breath evening clouds

bakery window traffic driving on cream rolls

Visual Haiku

Abraham Freddy Ben-Arroyo

tiny fliiiiliiiickering candles flicker..flick..fli..f

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O o o o o 0 o o o o

Archana Kapoor Nagpal

new moon --

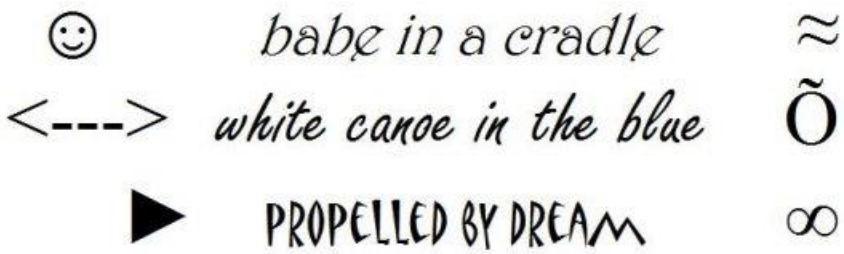
my diya f s

l o a t

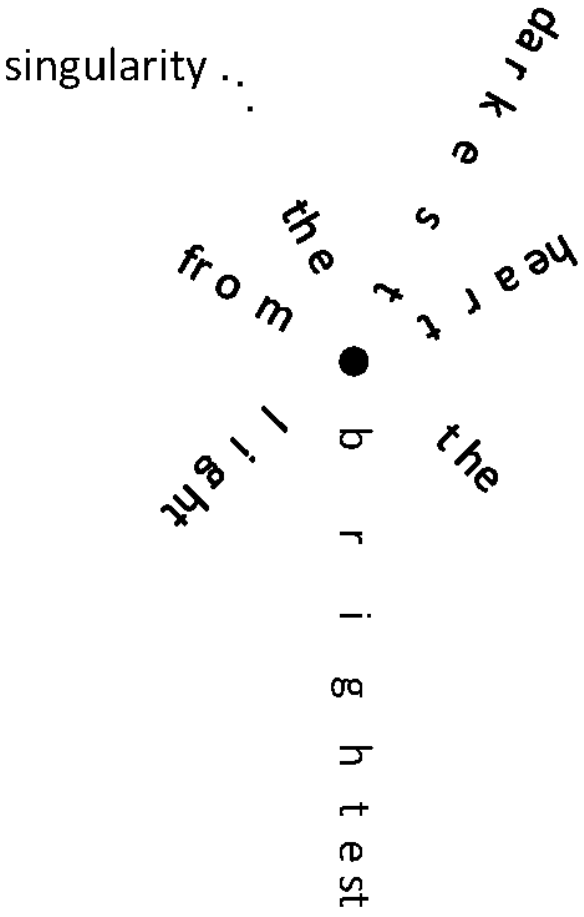
on the holy river

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diya_(light) - diya as a wishing lamp to curb darkness on a moonless night (new moon))

Brigitte Pellat



David J Kelly



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Jay Friedenberg

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public fountain

at the bottom

mostly pennies

July heat

our tree

drops

another

peach

Jayashree Maniyil

farewell —
the last autumn song

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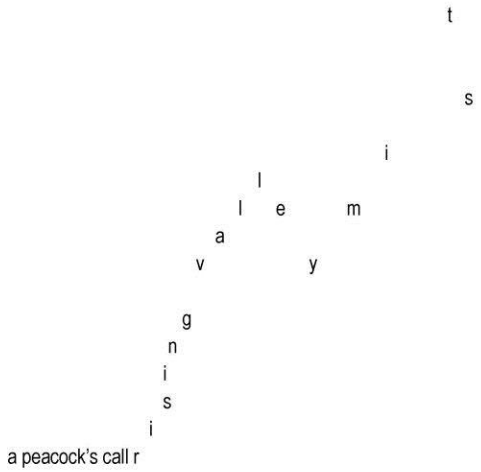


Ken Sawitri

Mark E. Brager

his dog

leading

a blind man

escalator

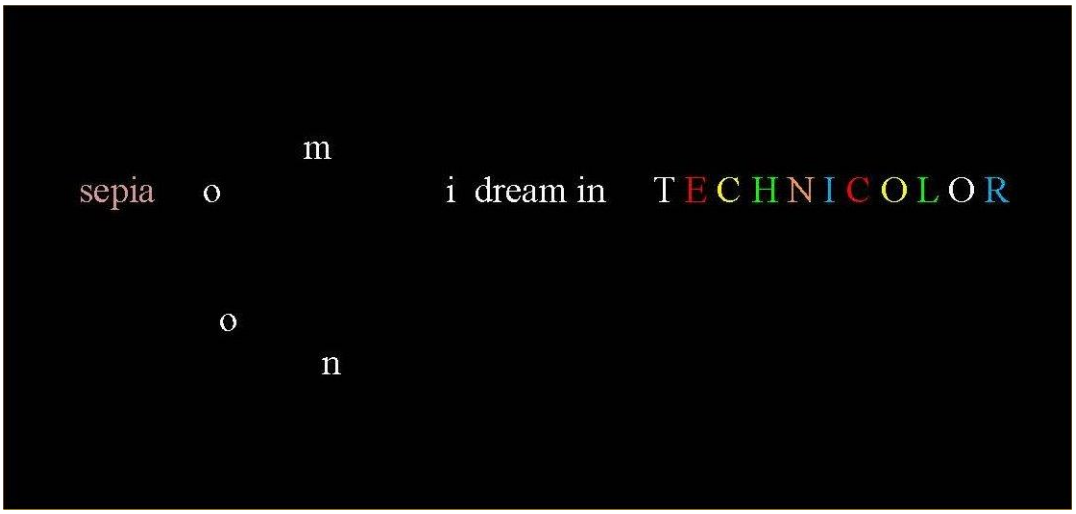
down

Olivier Schopfer

first date

poppies swaying in the wind

Shloka Shankar



out of nowhere…

a r p on my lip

a o

i d

n

t

a

m

b

u e b r

r h o
i t k t r
en s i
n
g

y
f m t h
o o
u g
h
t
s

Simon Hanson

tacking in and out of the fog so many yachts

~ m ~ o ~ o ~ n ~ m ~ o ~ o ~ n ~ m ~ o ~

ripples

down

into the distant past

the spiral staircase

Poets’ Personal Best

Abraham Freddy Ben-Arroyo

jazz trio

floating pizzicato notes -

scotch on the rocks

(The Mainichi Daily News -January 4, 2014)

Adelaide B. Shaw

death of a friend

more leaves

turning brown

Alegria Imperial

his blackened lips the flame beggars

(from 'chilled walls' (a series) bones 4, a journal of new haiku, June 2014)

Angie Werren

he thinks again of turning leaves her hands

(tinywords -- issue 11.3 Issa's Untidy Hut — Issa's Sunday Service #127)

Archana Kapoor Nagpal

punting down backwaters —

monsoon clouds

over coconut trees

Aruna Rao

hummingbird

I stop my mother's hands

from shaking

Asni Amin

flight of swans -

the river ripples

with song

(Simply Haiku, Winter 2013)

Chen-ou Liu

my face in the window ...

the full moon

of a love ago

d.e. connelly

immense darkness

the frail moon

begins again

(Frogpond)

David J Kelly

warm southerlies

stirring the winter doldrums

skeins of geese

(Frogpond 37:3)

David Serjeant

moments after

her final breath

a fine rain

Debbie Strange

on the tundra

caging a winter sky

caribou bones

(Third Place for Haiku - 2014 UHTS AHA Awards
Published in the May 2014 edition of cattails)

Deborah P Kolodji

one mistake

after another...

falling leaves

(South by Southeast, 2011)

Ella Wagemakers

June rain

the joys of an evening

falling into place

Erik Linzbach

current smoothed stones

my old neighborhood

not like i remember

(Acorn, issue No. 22: Spring 2009)

Ernest Wit

fresh snow

the warmth surrounding

your bones

(The Heron's Nest, December 2012
nothing in the window: The Red Moon Anthology of English Language Haiku, Volume 17)

Ernesto P. Santiago

I start over

with a clean slate ...

new moon

Geethanjali Rajan

clear sky--

the vendor sells clouds

of cotton candy

(Mainichi on 6.12.2013)

Gregory Longenecker

mayfly

no time

to look back

(tinywords 14.1)

H. Edgar Hix

snowdrift --

blank canvas

already painted

(Wednesday Haiku)

Helen Buckingham

graffiti

sharper

by moonlight

(The Heron's Nest, VII:1, March 2005)

Iliyana Stoyanova

a kiss by the rain

shy leaves

beneath my feet

("Островитянско хайку (Shimajin haiku)", изд. Мария Арабажиева, София, 2010)

Jayashree Maniyil

I watch this night

growing over you . . .

faraway moon

Jerry Dreesen

resin dust -

the violin's long

crescendo

John Hawkhead

practising judo

the youngest group of children

learn how to tie knots

Johnziel Ubas

Investigation

Criminals fall for the traps

- Poetic justice

Josie Hibbing

half moon

my daughter and I

share a cookie

(In One Breath — A Haiku Moment)

Keith A. Simmonds

a white scarf

around the chimney:

winter moon

(2nd prize- the Mainichi Haiku in English, Best of 2010, February 2010)

Ken Sawitri

summer rain --

socks on the clothesline

still try to escape on tiptoe

(European Quarterly Kukai #6 Summer 2014 (5th place))

kjmunro

African drums cd

skips a beat

Alaska Highway

(Modern Haiku 43.3, Autumn 2012)

Kumarendra Mallick

home visit —

I search my father's footprints

on the village road

(Presence, Jan 2014)

Maire Morrissey-Cummins

cradled

in a cluster of stars —

new moon

Marcyn Del Clements

into the mirrored

clouds and mountains

a frog jumps

Maria Kowal-Tomczak

deep silence

I feel the weight

of the snow

(Daily Haiga - 22 April 2014)

Marie-Alice Maire

the closed door

back to my childhood

key under a stone

Marion Clarke

lough sunlight

this desire to walk

on water

(First Prize, Carousel Summer Haiku Competition, 2014)

Mary Chapman

junebug-

memories of a

childhood friend

Myron Lysenko

child cemetery

a ghost gum leans

over the grave

(Paper wasp Volume 19, number 4)

Neal Whitman

a buoy clangs

the immense night sky

is silent

Nicola Scholes

morning walk

dogs make maypoles

of their owners

Olivier Schopfer

pointing at the stars

all the kids

on tiptoe

(Acorn No.10, Spring 2003)

Pamela A. Babusci

i climb the mountain with my eyes never ending snow

(Frogpond 1995
Museum of Haiku Literature Award)

Peggy Heinrich

behind me

in the wet sand

vanishing footprints

(Top Prize, Second Yamadera Basho Meml Museum English Haiku Contest,2010)

Priscilla Lignori

caught by the sunlight

an invisible juggler

juggling tiny gnats

(World Haiku Review 2010 - First Place, Shintai Haiku)

Rehn Kovacic

Moment

after moment—

a different mountain

(Issa's Untidy Hut)

Rita Odeh

cloudy morning-

a kite flies higher

than its string

(tinywords, April 13, 2007)

S. Eta Grubešić

white smoke up the hill forest's crematorium

Samar Ghose

moonless night

I draw a box

to fill with stars

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

wringing day

bundles of washed clothes

let out steam

(Asahi Haikuist Column, Asahi Shimbun, May 2014
Proceedings of the 3rd IN Haiku Utsav)

Simon Hanson

dressed in moonlight the gentle sway of kelp

(DailyHaiku Vol. 8, 2013)

Sonam Chhoki

toddler's yawn

in Tsechu masks of gods

monks leap and swirl

Tsechu (Dzongkha TSE-CHOO): Mask dance festival which is a seasonal event held in spring, autumn and winter

Terri L. French

first snow. . .

the shape of a grandchild

beneath the quilt

(HNA 2013 Honorable Mention)

Vessislava Savova

rain

the yellow smell

of quinces

дъжд

жълтият аромат

на дюли

(The Heron's Nest: Volume XVI, No 1: March 2014)

William Hart

crickets can’t see stars

and stars can’t hear crickets

that’s why there’s us

William Seltzer

summer coolness –

one breath of honeysuckle

has crossed the world

(The Daily Mainichi)

Features

A State of Awe
by Don Baird

I've dreamed of wandering with the Master Wanderer. I've pondered over his poems in wonderment and fantasy, both. How often I've whispered, "what would it be like to take a road trip with Basho?" Would it be as enchanting as it reads in his journals? Or would my soon to be weather-beaten skin and brow lead me to peril and early death? Could I learn to view the world through his eyes, yet mine? Could I find the blanks he missed: could I notice even one small life that he didn't?

first few steps . . .

a hungry mosquito

lands its song [2]

He died at 50. He was young: he was old. In spite of illness, he forged forward, continuing his emersion into the Tao and all of its wonders. His voice and poetry permeate my imagination:

"Thoughts of the three thousand leagues before me dammed up in my heart, and at the crossroads of unreality, tears of departure flowed." [1] ~ basho

departing spring

birds cry, in the fishes

eyes are tears [1]

yuku haru ya / tori naki uo no / me wa namida

Basho was emotionally overtaken by this moment of leaving. Nearly losing control of his reality, he saw everything through the blur of his own tears. He was departing; Spring was departing; he was tearing, lost in a barrage of overwhelming feelings that welled up in his heart. He turned away to once again continue his sojourn.

turning . . .

a crow unsettles,

settles [2]

"People lined the road behind, watching until our backs were mere shadows." [1] Basho continues the story of his journey and imagination. He saw things from his eyes: he saw things from theirs. "Until our backs were mere shadows" [1] is not anything he could have seen. But, it was something he could imagine - a knowing - through his keen perspective of nature, zoka, and the mystery of being.

"For now the radiance of this mountain shines throughout the heavens, its blessings extending through the eight directions . . . and at peace. And still more—but it's all so awesome, I can only lay aside my brush." [1] ~ basho

unfinished —

the winds of his brush

turn away [2]

Overwhelmed, Basho could only set his brush aside. He feared that he would diminish what he was seeing if he wrote about it, or painted it. He was living in a perpetual presence of respect and awe as he backpacked his final journey.

And then, he wrote this nearly sanctified hokku in the most fresh, engaging language that alludes to zoka and the transformation of all things:

so holy:

green leaves, young leaves,

in sun's light [1]

ara tooto / aoba wakaba no / hi no hikari

His continuum of deep feeling and gratitude brought him to write about "radiance, the Eight Directions – announcing it's "all so awesome [that] I can only lay aside my brush." [1] He didn't exclaim that he made a sudden discovery. Not-at-all. But rather, he revealed that his hokku emerged from his heart and soul through an ever-engaging, powerful sense of awe.

Overjoyed, Sora (a travelling companion) "shaved his head, put on ink black robes, and changed the characters used for his name to those meaning 'spiritual enlightenment'." [1] ~ basho

by any name —

the 'eight directions' called

his shadow [2]

"The ridge dropped a hundred feet into an azure pool dotted with a thousand stones. Sidling into the overhang, one views the waterfall from the back side" [1] ~ basho

Basho and his friend paused behind the waterfall for a short time in a tucked away spot of leisure. He wrote the following hokku:

for a while

secluded at a waterfall -–

start of the summer retreat [1]

shibaraku wa / taki ni komoru ya / ge no hajime

The area is beautiful. The waterfall is peaceful and a perfect spot to gather one's energy and thoughts. It was changing season; it was a new beginning for Basho and his journey. Where is the ah-haa!? Where is the "suddenness" thought to be found in haiku? Where is the whack on the head we've come to expect today? It isn't there, once again. Basho wrote about a secluded waterfall; he wrote about the beginning of a summer retreat; and, he alluded to his remaining behind the waterfall for a bit to rest and enjoy. He was once again, and most appropriately, in a state of awe - or as he put it, "awesome".

"Two children came running along behind the horse. One was a little girl named Kasane, a truly elegant name I'd never heard before." [1] ~ basho

"There's a temple for mountain ascetics called Koomyoo. We were invited there and worshipped in the Hall of the Ascetic." [1] ~ basho

Basho was a nomad that noticed everything. He was spiritual. His awareness was keen. Children ran up to him: he stopped to acknowledge them. He learned their names and even mentioned in

his journal how "elegant" one of the young girl's name is. He's "never heard it before," [1] he wrote.

He was simple. He was sensitive. He was responsive to his environment - attuned. He was not reactive and, in particular, he was not over-reactive. Ah-haa wasn't how Basho responded nor was it how he wrote. Basho wrote patiently. He was methodical and continued to work on his poetry throughout his life. To him, nothing was finished. He was always emerging. A deep sense of spirit encapsulated his internal presence of a constant appreciation of the Universe and its Way(s).

folding cranes —

he folded his heart

along with [2]

"Deep within Unganji Temple is the site of the mountain hermitage of Priest Butchoo." [1] ~ basho

a grass-thatched hut

less than five feet square:

regrettable [1]

"Wondering where the hut was, we climbed up the mountain behind the temple, and there it was, a tiny hut atop a boulder and built onto a cave. It seemed like Zen Master Miao's Barrier of Death or monk Fayun's Stone Chamber." [1] ~ basho

even woodpeckers

don't damage this hut:

summer grove [1]

kitsutsuki mo / io wa yaburazu / natsu kodachi

Basho continued on his journey with poems from Kiyohaku and himself. He writes, "now the image of a thousand years, truly an auspicious tree." [1] Kiyohaku responded to the moment with this hokku to Basho:

the takekuma pine:

show it to him,

late blooming cherries [3]

Basho responded with:

since the cherries bloomed,

I've longed to see this pine:

after three months passage [1]

They are both in awe of this great pine. "Time and again pines have been cut down . . ." [1] ~ basho. In the midst of their excitement there still wasn't an ah-haa. Where is this mysterious response? Is it that juxtaposition is actually revealing a condition of awe? Are there both?

in awe . . .

I too experience

this pine [2]

"Yet now before this monument (Tsubo Stone Monument), which certainly has stood a thousand years, I could see into the hearts of the ancients. Here is one virtue of the pilgrimage, one joy of being alive. I forgot the aches of the journey, and was left with only tears." [1] ~ basho

summer grass —

all that remains

of warriors dreams [1]

stillness —

penetrating the rocks,

a cicada's cry [1]

gathering all

the summer rains, swift

Mogami River [1]

"I set off once again by boat to worship during the ritual rebuilding at Ise." [1] ~ basho

like a clam from its shell,

setting off for Futami Bay:

departing fall [1]

Basho turns one last time, in awe . . .

a new sojourn;

leap-frogging the Milky Way,

the sound of Basho [2]

1. Basho's Journey, David Landis Barnhill, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2005; Copyright: State University Press

2. Don Baird, Copyright 2013

3. Kiyohaku (wrote the parting poem to Basho) Basho responded and continued on his journeys; page 58, Basho's Journey, David Landis Barnhill.

Shiki - Haiku Reformation

Shiki Masaoka Was a Fighter and Radical
Banned from Public Speaking at 15; Failed College by 1892

by Don Baird

When studying Shiki (1867-1902), his Japan, and its relationship to the rest of the world, the Tokugawa policy of seclusion (known as sakoku) must be considered, as it not only barred nearly all international trade, it also forbade the Japanese to leave Japan. The Tokugawa period of isolation lasted some 200 years (1630s-1850s). This context forms an important basis of an old-world, some would say feudal, culture, and mindset stemming from such isolation.

It is likewise important to remember that Shiki's grandfather, Ōhara Kanzan, was a Confucian scholar, Samurai, and Shiki's first teacher, who was a significant, influential aspect of Shiki's psychological foundation. Kanzan was outspoken and unwavering against the onset of western civilization:

Kanzan was adamantly opposed to the new world of the Meji period. He refused, for example, to study any Western languages. In the last line of a Chinese poem which he had Shiki copy out, he expressed his disgust for languages which were written horizontally instead of, like Japanese, vertically: "Never in your life read that writing which sidles sideways like a crab across the page." (Beichman, Cheng & Tsu Company, 2002, p. 3)

By 1892, Shiki having failed an exam, dropped out of college. "You must have heard I received the honor of failing," he wrote. (Beichman, p. 16) Following this, he intensified his studies of haiku — reading every hokku he could find. He blamed his failure at the University on that fact that he could not think of anything but haiku — he was obsessed, or as he wrote, "Bewitched by the goddess of haiku." (ibid)

Once out of college, he zealously pursued his haiku ideals and concepts. He remained outspoken and disputed anything blocking his goal of saving hokku from its impending death — soon to be re-named and reformed by Shiki as haiku.

Shiki was at odds, in regards to haiku, with the new era of Western education and influence. He was not embracing it; he was defending haiku against it:

In response to (Western) criticisms that the seventeen-syllable form was simply too brief for serious artistic expression, particularly in comparison with the longer forms being introduced from the West, Shiki argued that its very brevity was its strength and that as a result it was capable of types of expression impossible in other forms. (Masaoka Shiki, Burton Watson, trans, Columbia UP, 1997, p. 5)

In Shiki's view, "The new world of the Meiji period contained no subjects fit for poetry, no subjects that is, that could fulfill the ideal of 'noble grace'" (Beichman, p. 33). Shiki was so attached to Japanese tradition that he wrote, "New subjects and new words are not permitted in waka (haiku)" (Beichman, p. 34). He went on to describe various paraphernalia (e.g. steam engines) relating to the Western world, stating clearly that they were unacceptable for use in Japanese haiku or waka.

When further challenged, Shiki took what Herbert Spencer, a western philosopher, had written, "The shortest sentence is the best," and turned it around to use as a defense of his new style — haiku. Shiki's response was to say, basically, that haiku is therefore the best poetic form:

Which (one) has more to offer -- the scant 17 syllables of Basho's [hokku] on the old pond, with their layers of meaning or Hitomaro's tanka (a longer poem) on the long, trailing tail of the mountain bird, which expresses but one meaning? (Beichman, p. 14)

Thus, Shiki defended haiku against the low opinion, commonly held at the time, of its poetics.

The education system was being shaken and the Japanese world, as everyone had known it, was transforming. By the late 1800s to early 1900s, the Imperial government had a stronghold control of the education system, reaching deeply into Japanese lives and lifestyles with its adaptation of Western education ideals. Shiki found himself

in the midst of these changes, and he was on the defense. Shiki notes:

And when one turns to the innumerable social matters to which this enlightened age has given rise, or the so-called conveniences of modern civilization, many are the epitome of the mediocre, the quintessence of the vulgar, and totally useless to a writer. (Beichman, p. 34)

This (Shiki) is not an individual that has fully accepted the influence of western civilization and the newly developed education system at hand, as some critics have recently opined. This was sarcasm from a man “on the ropes,” fighting back. While he embraced the name of “sketch from life (shasei),” he did not adopt the perspectives Western poetics have utilized in its longer forms.

Natsume Sōseki, a friend of Shiki, said, in line with Shiki's thoughts, "To do so (letting go of Japanese tradition), will soon weaken the vital spirit we have inherited from our ancestors and leave us cripples" (Watson, p. 2). Sōseki and others believed that the Westernization of Japan equated to its demise as a culture and as a country.

Years earlier, Shiki, at age 15, was banned from public speaking by the principal of his middle school because he was a radical (Beichman, p. 8). His spirit as a fighter was evident; and the strength of his intellect was clear — as clear as his eventual efforts to save haiku from Western influence, of which he feared would bring about its demise.

When first confronted with new poetry forms/genres, Shiki tried them out, but soon focused once again on haiku and his pursuit of rebirthing it (Watson, p. 1). “In 1891 he set about in the history of the form by reading all the collections of earlier [hokku] he could lay his hands on. . . . This provided [Shiki's] critical writings on haiku . . ." (Watson, p. 2). Shiki pondered Western ideals of poetry, but consistently returned to his passions of the study of hokku and the development of haiku, his reinvention

While the Meiji period began in 1868 (the beginning of modern Japan), by the 1870s, the new educational system only included some 40%-50% of available students. The system did not stabilize until approximately 1890, and it wasn't until the turn of the century

that the government obtained a real lock-down on the entire country, eventually involving some 90% of potential students.

Shiki continuously defended Japanese culture and poetry. He remained focused on this theme throughout his life, and was steadfast as an intense researcher of hokku, eventually renaming the hokku style and applying the following qualities/poetics as the beginner's haiku guide: 1) Write about what you observe and/or remember (the things around you); 2) follow 5/7/5; 3) include a kigo (season word) — though one notes that Shiki himself often did not include kigo in his haiku; and, 4) utilize a kire-ji (a cutting word, dividing the haiku). In 1899, Shiki wrote:

Take your materials from what is around you — if you see a dandelion, write about it; if it's misty, write about the mist. The materials for poetry are all about you in profusion. (Watson, p. 7)

Kaneko Tohta, (b. 1919), an acclaimed contemporary Japanese teacher, scholar, and critic, writes:

By using cutting words you can create 'blendings' of two images. That means the reader is able to 'image' the haiku. I think that this uniquely rich haiku of visualizable image cannot possibly be outdone by the prosaic. (The Future of Haiku: An Interview with Kaneko Tohta, Gilbert et al, p. 41)

Kaneko continues, in support of Shiki's argument: "I think that haiku can be a serious form of literature, via these two elements ['blending' and 'imaging']" (ibid).

Moreover, Kaneko outlines:

[The] element of subjectivity was an extremely important aspect of haiku composition for Shiki, but he was also concerned that his haiku would become unintelligible if he composed too loosely. And this is the reason for Shiki's applying the term 'sketch' to this process. . . . Hekigoto (Shiki disciple), made a great effort to spread haiku, literally walking all over the country advocating that people compose what they directly thought and felt in haiku. (Kaneko Tohta, Ikimmonofûei, Gilbert et al, p. 27)

Robert Wilson writes:

[Shiki's] reformation was a monumental work, to which a great debt is owed. He'd single-handedly taken on Japan's literary establishment, the State-run Shinto Sect, and the Imperial Court, dethroned Basho as a god, and did so while dying of tuberculosis." (Robert D. Wilson, What Is and Isn't: A Butterfly Wearing Tennis Shoes, Simply Haiku, Winter 2013).

Wilson continues:

Shiki rightfully believed that hokku [haiku], to be effective and considered as a legitimate literary art form, must succumb to academic scrutiny, be thought of seriously, and removed from the hands of a manipulative government (ibid).

"To be effective and considered as a legitimate literary art form," (ibid), was Shiki's lifetime goal; it succinctly clarifies that Shiki was in battle, a warrior of samurai blood, defending haiku and what he envisioned it to become.

Eventually, Shiki's concepts of haiku went global: “It is ironic that the haiku, which many people in Shiki's day thought would wither away under the impact of new literary forms from abroad, has now become one of Japan's most successful cultural exports” (Watson, p. 4). By 1902, Shiki was gone — disease took his life at 35. He remained a fighter until his death, often defying Western influences and judgments, as he persisted on his journey to prove that a Japanese, brief poem of 17 syllables was indeed a worthy literary genre.

*

Masaoka Shiki haiku:

ki o tsumite the tree cut,

yo no akeyasuki dawn breaks early

komado kana at my little window

matsu sugi ya pine and cypress:
kareno no naka no in a withered field,
Fudōdō a shrine to Fudō

furuniwa ya old garden—she empties
tsuki ni tanpo no a hot-water bottle
yu o kobosu under the moon

keitō no cockscombs...
jûshigohon mo must be 14,
arinubeshi or 15

ikutabi mo again and again
yuki no fukasa o I ask how high
tazunekeri the snow is

yuki furu yo snow's falling!
shōji no ana o I see it through a hole
mite areba in the shutter...

yomei how much longer
ikubaku ka aru is my life?
yo mijikashi a brief night...

*

Endnotes

Japanese source-text:

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Romaji and English source-text:

Janine Beichman (1986). Masaoka Shiki (Tokyo: Kodansha).

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The Narrow Road to the Western Isles –
If Keats had journeyed with Bashō

By Geoffrey Wilkinson

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Abstract

The Japanese poet we know by the pen name Bashō was born in 1644 in Iga Ueno, a castle town in an old province south-east of Kyōto. By an almost perfectly tidy coincidence, he died one hundred and one years before John Keats was born in London in 1795. Although to all appearances their worlds and their lives could not have been more different, their poetic sensibilities seem to have been strikingly similar. This is not an original observation: it was, for instance, at the heart of an essay by James Kirkup in The Keats-Shelley Review in 1996.[1] But in what follows I try to give the observation a new twist by likening Keats and Bashō as travellers – travellers, that is, both in the literal and the metaphorical sense.

KEYWORDS:Keats, Bashō, openness, transparency (‘annihilation’) of self, Zen

Bashō was born into a world turned in on itself. For much of the sixteenth century Japan had been in a state of anarchy, riven by local wars in the absence of effective centralized authority. From 1600 the country was finally reunified under the Tokugawa family, whose main concern was to ensure that there was a place for everyone and that everyone was in their place. The Tokugawa regime restored an

ancient Confucian division of society that ranked the population nominally into four classes: warriors, farmers, artisans and merchants, in that order. The regime virtually cut Japan off from the rest of the world for the next two hundred years, banning the construction of ocean-going ships and, on pain of death, prohibiting any Japanese from travelling abroad or returning if they had already left. Although in reality Japan was moving to a money economy (dominated by the merchants, not the warriors), the Tokugawa maintained the fiction that it was based on agricultural commodities and a retainer`s stipend, for example, was still paid in rice. In short, Bashō`s world was feudal and largely arrested in time.

By contrast, Keats`s was a world in flux. Britain, too, was at peace once Napoleon had been defeated in 1815, but it was a restless, restive peace and not a static one. The industrial revolution was under way and would lead to fundamental social change as new wealth replaced old and people flocked to the towns to work in the mills and factories. Moreover, while dire warnings against revolutionary conspiracy issued from conservative quarters, there was a ferment of radical ideas in economics, law and political philosophy (to which, as we know from Nicholas Roe`s new biography, Keats was exposed from an early age through his schooling at Clarke`s Academy [2]).

As for the individual circumstances of Bashō and Keats, it is hard to imagine two lives outwardly more different. Bashō`s origins were relatively humble: his father was permitted to wear a sword, a warrior privilege, but the family itself probably belonged to the farmer class. His father died in 1656. At some point (just when is uncertain, albeit most accounts now suggest that it was at about age eighteen) Bashō entered service in the household of the local domain lord, apparently as a servant-cum-companion to his heir, Yoshitada, who was two years older than himself. The two young men evidently became close friends, studying poetry together under a master in Kyōto, and it is thought that Bashō was deeply affected by Yoshitada`s early death in 1666. Whether or not that is so, Bashō seems to have led an unsettled life. After more than five years spent mostly in Kyōto, he

left for Edo, Japan`s new capital, the seat of Tokugawa power and a centre of vibrant artistic activity. Gradually he established himself as a recognized poet, supported by admirers and, as is the way in Japan, gathering around him a circle of disciples – one of whom donated the bashō, a banana plant, that inspired the pen name. However, judging by the imagery in some of his poems dating from the early 1680s, Bashō was troubled and ambivalent about the meaningfulness of his life in Edo. It may be significant that it was at this time he practised Zen meditation. In 1684 Bashō made the first of the journeys described in his travel sketches, and the same year saw the appearance of Fuyu no hi (A Winter Day), the first of seven major anthologies of poetry associated with him. The most famous of the travel sketches, Oku no hosomichi (The Narrow Road to the Deep North, of which more anon), came out of his third journey, which he began in 1689 after selling his house – probably a sign that he did not expect to survive, let alone return to Edo. Bashō did return more than two years later, lived as a would-be recluse in a new house that had been built for him, then set out on one last journey, to southern Japan as he intended; he was taken ill en route and died in Ōsaka in late 1694.[3]

The events of Keats`s life are more familiar to us and it would be redundant to retell them here. Suffice to say that, despite all the differences described above, there are also numerous parallels between the two lives: quite lowly origins; early bereavements (father and brother Tom in Keats`s case, father and Yoshitada in Bashō`s); youthful ambition mixed with self-doubt; restlessness; melancholy verging at times on despair; spiritual and maybe psychological crisis; ill-health and death far from home.

The most extraordinary parallels are between the sensibilities of Keats and Bashō, and their ways of expressing what they feel they are trying to achieve in their writing. A much-quoted commentary attributed to Bashō (as recorded by one of his followers, Hattori Dohō) reads:

Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one – when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural – if the object and yourself are separate – then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit.[4]

Forget for a moment the particularities of time, culture and language, and this could well be Keats speaking in, say, his letter to Richard Woodhouse of 27 October 1818:

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity – he is continually in for [informing?] – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God`s Creatures. [...] When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to [so] to press upon me that, I am in a very little time an[ni]hilated – not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children.[5]

Or adjust the flora and fauna and it might be from Keats`s letter to John Hamilton Reynolds of 19 February 1818:

Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that [than] to fly like Mercury – let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive – budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from evey noble insect that favors us with a visit […][6]

Bashō surely would have agreed with Keats that ‘Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one`s soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject’, and he would have delighted at the image of Keats picking about the gravel beneath his window, perfectly at one with the sparrow.[7] But what is this paradox of the unpoetical poet, of poetry that is not poetry unless the poet is absent from it? One answer, in my opinion, is that Bashō and Keats both stand for an unconditional openness to all experience, so unconditional that it demands a complete transparency – or, Keats`s word, annihilation – of the self. Particularly as we know that Bashō practised Zen meditation, it seems reasonable to assume that for him the self probably had a religious-metaphysical meaning rooted in Zen: that is, the self represents our attachments, our preoccupations, our striving, everything that traps us in a divided ‘me/not-me’ relation to the world, and therefore it is an obstacle not just to ‘true’ poetry but to our own ‘true’ being as part of a greater reality beyond individual identity. Now while Keats`s description of finding himself ‘annihilated’ in the company of others is very intriguing and invites comparison with this Zen element in Bashō, personally I do not feel qualified to make a case (as others have done[8]) that unbeknown to himself Keats was in effect a practitioner of Zen. Nevertheless, it is clear enough that Keats had his own highly developed sense of the self as an obstacle to truthful poetry and to what he conceived of as truth in general. Most obviously, he expresses this sense in his objections to ‘the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime’, for Keats`s complaint against Wordsworth is precisely that he is an ‘Egotist’ whose vanity and tendency to ‘brood and peacock’ over his own speculations produces poetry that ‘has a palpable design upon us’.[9] Yet Keats also rails against the self in its over-rationalizing, certainty-seeking, ‘consequitive’ aspect, which is the source of all that bee-like buzzing ‘from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at’ or, as he puts it elsewhere, ‘irritable reaching after fact & reason’.[10] No, insists Keats, leave what is to be arrived at to look after itself; cease the irritable reaching and instead ‘let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts’.[11] Whether by coincidence or some more mysterious connection, Keats here both recalls Bashō and, I think, prefigures Seamus Heaney – especially two lines in the final poem of his collection The Spirit Level:

You are neither here nor there,

A hurry through which known and strange things pass[12]

We are deluded, Bashō, Keats and Heaney are saying, if we suppose that truth is something we set out to discover as we pass through the world. The reality is that truth discovers itself as the world passes through us.

To what experiences, then, were Bashō and Keats so open on their journeys? What thoughts passed through the thoroughfares of their minds? The scope is very broad, ranging from the sublime at one extreme to the earthy and even the squalid at the other. For the sublime think, for instance, of Keats`s description of the waterfalls at Ambleside, 'the first darting down the slate-rock like an arrow; the second spreading out like a fan – the third dashed into a mist – and the one on the other side of the rock a sort of mixture of all these.'[13] It is as if Keats is seeing turbulent water for the first time, fascinated by its different 'characters' (the same fascination that had impelled Leonardo da Vinci to make his sketches of water swirling and billowing around obstacles in a river?). Or think of how Keats conjures up for Tom the sight of Ailsa Craig, island remnant of an extinct volcano off the Ayrshire coast:

After two or three Miles […] we turned suddenly into a magnificent glen finely wooded in Parts – seven Miles long – with a Mountain Stream winding down the Midst – full of cottages in the most happy Situations – the sides of the Hills coverd with sheep – the effect of cattle lowing I never had so finely – At the end we had a gradual ascent and got among the tops of the Mountains whence In a little time I descried in the Sea Ailsa Rock 940 feet hight – it was 15 Miles distant and seemed close upon us – The effect of ailsa with the peculiar perspective of the Sea in connection with the ground we stood on, and the misty rain then falling gave me a complete Idea of a deluge – Ailsa struck me very suddenly – really I was a little alarmed.[14]

Alarmed by the vision, the poet finds himself looking down upon a drowned world; the vast age of the earth and the immensity of the forces that have shaped it come upon him like the huge rock itself, which is locked in its ‘two dead eternities’, first deep down ‘with the Whales’ and now high up ‘with the eglle [eagle] skies’. ‘When from the Sun was thy broad forehead hid?’, he asks the rock, ‘How long ist since the mighty Power bid / Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams’ – imagery which unmistakably finds its way into Book II (ll. 10-12) of Hyperion:

Crag jutting forth to crag, and rocks that seemed

Ever as if just rising from a sleep,

Forehead to forehead held their monstrous horns

Another island appears across another sea in Bashō`s Oku no hosomichi. The island is Sado, off the Japan Sea coast of modern Niigata Prefecture:

荒海や佐渡によこたふ天河

Araumi ya

Sado ni yokotau

ama no gawa

Over a tossing sea

the Milky Way

arches to Sado.

Bashō tells us[15] that at the time he wrote this haiku he was suffering from exhaustion and a bout of a recurring illness, perhaps represented by the rough sea; but what we are left with is the calm eternity of the Milky Way that connects all things in one great curve. In other words, Sado evokes a vision of peace and solace which

passes transparently through any personal emotion that Bashō might feel, whereas Keats confesses himself disturbed by Ailsa Craig and it is that personal response which sets him describing the scene to Tom. The sensibilities of Keats and Bashō, it would seem, are not the same at all. However, what the poets have in common – and it is in this sense that I would say their sensibilities are alike – is an openness to the natural world and a capacity to express, in their own ways, the presence of something greater than themselves, and greater than ourselves.

In a melancholy scene at the end of Oku no hosomichi,[16] the sea itself has calmed into gentler waves that tumble together little coloured shells and fragments of wild shrub, the detritus of our ephemeral world:

浪の間や小貝にまじる萩の塵

Nami no ma ya

kogai ni majiru

hagi no chiri

Mingled in the waves –

small shells and

tatters of bush clover.

Earlier, in a prose passage as beautifully balanced as a haiku, a fabled pine tree speaks for a state of natural harmony that will always return to itself, no matter how wilfully or thoughtlessly man may disturb it, and no matter how long it takes:

My heart leaped with joy when I saw the celebrated pine tree of Takekuma, its twin trunks shaped exactly as described by the ancient

poets. I was immediately reminded of the Priest Nōin, who had grieved to find upon his second visit this same tree cut [down] and thrown into the River Natori as bridge-piles by the newly-appointed governor of the province. This tree had been planted, cut, and replanted several times in the past, but just when I came to see it myself it was in its original shape after a lapse of perhaps a thousand years, the most beautiful shape one could possibly think of for a pine tree.[17]

At the earthy end of the scale, Keats and Bashō had no choice but to be open to the hardships and indignities of travel in remote regions. Keats grumbles about dirty lodgings, bad food and the unwanted companionship of ‘cursed Gad flies’, which, he is convinced, have been ‘at’ him ever since he left London.[18] On the whole, though, Keats appears to have been less taken with the creative possibilities of personal discomfort than Bashō, who, after one particularly miserable night in a gatekeeper`s hut in the mountains,[19] pens the following haiku:

蚤虱馬の尿する枕もと

Nomi shirami

uma no bari suru

makura moto

Fleas and lice,

horses pissing nearby –

such was my sleeping place.

It may be that it was through such experiences in their own lives that Keats and Bashō were open to the experiences of destitute and semi-outcast people at the margins of society, whose very existence would have been unknown or of no interest in London or Edo. One of the most remarkable descriptions in all of Keats`s letters – all the more remarkable for its misleading tone – occurs in the account of

his brief and abortive detour to Ireland. Returning to the port of Donaghadee after abandoning his planned visit to the Giant`s Causeway in Antrim, Keats encounters ‘the Duchess of Dunghill’, an old woman puffing on a pipe as she is carried along on a sort of improvised palanquin by two equally ragged girls. The scene is outlandish, grotesque, the old woman portrayed as barely human (‘squat like an ape […] looking out with a round-eyed skinny lidded, inanity’), and yet Keats cannot help asking himself, ‘What a thing would be a history of her Life and sensations’.[20] There is a tension here, it seems to me, between Keats`s undisguised revulsion at what he has witnessed and the impulse to wonder, almost in spite of himself, what it would be like to live a life of such wretchedness. The closest equivalent to the ‘Duchess of Dunghill’ incident in Oku no hosomichi is Bashō`s overnight stay at Ichiburi, the provincial border post where he has arrived exhausted and in poor health.[21] He is kept awake by the sound of whispering voices in a nearby room: two prostitutes from Niigata, on their way to worship at the great shrine in Ise about two hundred miles to the south, are talking with an old man who has accompanied them as far as Ichiburi but who is turning back the next day. Bashō is deeply moved as they entrust the old man with messages they have written for their friends in Niigata. Probably indentured to their brothel for years to come, the women are trapped in a world of calculated deceit, feigning love to gratify one client after another; what offence must they have committed in an earlier life, they lament, to be destined now to wash ashore like the foam left by breakers. Missing from Bashō`s description of the prostitutes, we notice, is the tone of disgust in Keats`s description of the old woman in Ireland. Bashō is, as we would say, completely non-judgemental: the only thing he feels towards the two women is compassion – a Buddhist virtue, yes, but also his natural and unambivalent inclination.

All of this raises one last question: how did Keats and Bashō themselves explain their reasons for taking to the road? In Keats`s case, it is tempting to turn once more to his letter to Reynolds of 19 February 1818 and the wonderful reflections there on the ‘fine Webb’ and ‘tapestry empyrean’ of man`s soul, ‘full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his

wandering'. Although the 'Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys', Keats says, it is a mistake to think that there can be no 'common taste and fellowship' between them. Quite the reverse:

Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all [at] last greet each other at the Journeys end – A old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his Path, and the child left thinking – Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees.[22]

Our wanderings, however diverse and contrary, lead us back to our shared humanity, and it is by greeting each other again at journey`s end and whispering our results that we can hope for the grand democracy of Forest Trees. This would have been a fine manifesto for Keats`s journey to northern England and Scotland, but it is far removed from what he actually said when, less than two months later, he told Benjamin Haydon of the forthcoming trip:

I purpose within a Month to put my knapsack at my back and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland – to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue – that is to write, to study and to see all Europe at the lowest expence. I will clamber through the Clouds and exist.[23]

On the one hand, Keats`s declared intention of making his tour into 'a sort of Prologue' to his life is endearingly earnest. As he tells Benjamin Bailey from Inveraray,[24] he would not be 'tramping in the highlands' if he did not think that it would 'give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry' than staying at home with his books. Directly or indirectly, Keats was indeed rewarded for his pains with some of the aphoristic insights for which we most admire him, including 'Nothing

ever becomes real till it is experienced – Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it'.[25] On the other hand, the letter to Haydon is strangely contradictory, a little disappointing even. Keats had criticized Wordsworth for poetry that 'has a palpable design upon us' and yet, it strikes me, there is something of a palpable design upon himself, a too-eager, conscious purposiveness in Keats`s own motivation for the trip to Scotland. What I am trying to suggest may be clearer if we set Keats`s letter against the opening lines of Oku no hosomichi:

Days and months are travellers of eternity. So are the years that pass by. Those who steer a boat across the sea, or drive a horse over the earth till they succumb to the weight of years, spend every minute of their lives travelling. There are a great number of ancients, too, who died on the road. I myself have been tempted for a long time by the cloud-moving wind – filled with a strong desire to wander.[26]

The clue, as they say, is in the title. The Oku of Oku no hosomichi comes from the Japanese reading of a Chinese character (奥) meaning 'interior' or 'the innermost part', which here denotes not just the wild northern provinces of feudal Japan but also a sense close to that of the English word 'soul'. Bashō`s journey through the interior of Japan is a journey through the soul, but there is nothing designed, nothing too eager, nothing consciously purposive in the way he goes about it. He is filled with a strong desire to wander. It is of no concern to him whether or not he returns. There is nothing more to be said.

The comparison with Bashō is unfair, of course. Again in his own disarmingly ingenuous words,[27] Keats was 'not old enough or magnanimous enough to anihilate self', while Bashō, established master of his own school of poetry, was beyond the edgy sensitivities and drive for personal recognition that he, like Keats, may have felt as a young man. Above all, Bashō was steeped in a centuries-old, Buddhist-influenced literary tradition that returned again and again to the transitoriness of this world and the vanity of all our individual cares and ambitions.[28] Unfair as the comparison is, perhaps we have to say that Bashō was the better traveller because, so to speak,

he was better equipped to annihilate self. Conversely, perhaps we can also allow ourselves to believe that, had Keats lived to Bashō`s age, he would have travelled many narrow roads of his own throughout the British Isles and continental Europe. And if he had, what a thing would have been the history of that life and those sensations?

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Professor Nobuyuki Yuasa for kindly allowing me to quote from his prose translations in The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches, first published in 1966.

Notes on contributor

Geoffrey Wilkinson is an independent essayist with no academic or other affiliations. His most recent work is ‘The frog and the basilisk’ (to be published in spring 2015), which compares two accounts of how Bashō`s frog haiku came to be composed, and goes on to explore the Western fear of the unintelligible – in particular, our fear that the world might just be there without reason or purpose. Email: geoffrey.wilkinson@ymail.com

Sources and notes

[1] ‘Bashō and Keats’ in Vol. 10 (1996), pp. 65-75.

[2] John Keats. A New Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 20-21 and 32.

[3] A fuller account of Bashō`s life is included in N. Yuasa`s introduction to his translation The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1968). As you will have noticed, however, Bashō biography is not an exact science and no single account is likely to be definitive. All my quotations from Bashō`s prose are from the Yuasa translation [hereafter referred to as Yuasa]. The three haiku translations are my own.

[4] Yuasa, p. 33. The Japanese text can be found in the Akazōshi 「赤冊子」in Kyoraishō/Sanzōshi/Tabineron「去来抄・三冊子・旅寝論」(Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1993 reprint), a collection of works by Hattori Dohō and another of Bashō`s disciples, Mukai Kyorai.

[5] Pages 157-58 in the single-volume Letters of John Keats edited by Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 reprint). Except for the fragment from Hyperion, my Keats quotations all come from this volume [hereafter Gittings].

[6] Gittings, p. 66.

[7] Letters to Reynolds of 3 February 1818 and Benjamin Bailey of 22 November 1817 respectively; Gittings, pp. 61 and 38.

[8] See, for instance, Richard Benton`s essay ‘Keats and Zen’ in the journal Philosophy East and West, Vol. 16.1 (1966), pp. 33-47.

[9] Letters to Woodhouse of 27 October 1818 and Reynolds of 3 February 1818; Gittings, pp. 157 and 60-1.

[10] Letter to George and Tom Keats of 21, 27(?) December 1817; Gittings, p. 43. Keats`s word ‘consequitive’ occurs in his letter to John Taylor of 30 January 1818; Gittings, p. 59.

[11] Letter to George and Georgiana Keats dated 17-27 September 1819; Gittings, p. 326.

[12] ‘Postscript’, ll. 13-14; p. 70 in The Spirit Level (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

[13] Letter to Tom Keats dated 25-27 June 1818; Gittings, pp. 102-03.

[14] Letter to Tom Keats of 10-14 July 1818; Gittings, pp. 125-26. Had Keats read The Prelude when he wrote this? His alarm at the sight of Ailsa Craig immediately recalls Wordsworth`s boyhood prank of taking a boat without permission out on Ullswater and his alarm at seeing a ‘huge Cliff’ rear up and stride after him as he rows away from the shore. I refer to Book I, ll. 372-427 in the 1805 text of The Prelude edited by Ernest de Selincourt and corrected by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[15] Yuasa, pp. 130-31. As a personal interpretation for which I have no objective evidence, Sado may have symbolic significance for Bashō. The island was known for its gold and silver mines (an important source of revenue to the Tokugawa regime) but also as a place of exile: the first person believed to have been banished there, in the year 722, was a poet.

[16] Yuasa, p. 141.

[17] Yuasa, p. 111.

[18] Letter to Tom Keats of 17-21 July 1818; Gittings, p. 130.

[19] Yuasa, p. 120.

[20] Letter to Tom Keats of 3-9 July 1818; Gittings, p. 120. My italics.

[21] Yuasa, pp. 131-32.

[22] Gittings, p. 66.

[23] Letter to Haydon dated 8 April 1818; Gittings, p. 83.

[24] Letter to Bailey of 18, 22 July 1818; Gittings, p. 137.

[25] Letter to George and Georgiana Keats of 14 February-3 May 1819; Gittings, p. 230.

[26] Yuasa, p. 97.

[27] Letter to Bailey of 10 June 1818; Gittings, p. 99.

[28] Among prose works I am thinking, for example, of the Hōjōki (An Account of My Hut) by Kamo no Chōmei, a former court poet turned Buddhist priest and recluse, which begins ‘The flow of the river is ceaseless and its water is never the same’. Written four years before his death in 1216, it is a haunting meditation on the natural disasters and other calamities he has witnessed. There is a translation by Donald Keene in the Anthology of Japanese Literature to the Mid-Nineteenth Century (various editions, including a Penguin Classics in 1968).

Pondering Haiku - 21st century ripples

The contents of this section are extracted from prompted discussions or ponderings hosted on a Facebook group set up to discuss the ways that haiku are being written and manifested into the 21st century.

Pondering Haiku #1

What do you believe the engine of haiku is - the single most important aspect of haiku?

Don

The Discussion (5/25/14 - 5/26/14):

Rita Odeh

good juxtaposition, zokka,yugen(depth and mystery), simplicity, authentication

Don Baird

I'm thinking along that line as well. For me, it is the juxt and/or disjunction. Without it, it feels like the haiku is just a short poem (in any language) without the images that juxt/disjunction can bring.

Juxtaposition and Disjunction

Diana Ming Jeong

The moment of transcendence in life.

Michael Rehling

A connection with nature... Juxtaposition is sometimes overrated...

Don Baird

@ Diana: But, what writing technique brings that to poetic life. Transcendence seems like a psychological place to dwell and what I'm looking for is what writing skill or haiku poetic do you believe causes your poem to be haiku and not just a short poem, if there is a difference.

Diana Ming Jeong

For me it is the yugen... and the cut mark that gives the pause.

Don Baird

Ahhh, the "cut." That is the cause of the juxtaposition/disjunction. It is either shown by a marker or caused by the syntax. The cut is where the mystery is birthed - often referenced in Japanese as yugen. For me, that is so important, as well.

We're basically, saying the same thing - from a different lingo.

Diana Ming Jeong

Perhaps the cut marker is the juxtaposition?

Because I am still learning the lingo!

Michael Nickels-Wisdom

What I think of as the engine that drives haiku --all varieties of haiku, traditional, neotraditional, gendai, those with or without seasonality, with or without two-part structure, fragment/phrase or gramatically contiguous, and of a range of lines and brevity-preserving structures-- has been called by many names. Some of them are "pattern recognition", "resonant interval", "simultaneity", "epiphany", "resonance", and so on.

Don Baird

But which (1), Michael N-W, do you believe defines haiku the most? If any?

@Diana: yes, but syntax also implies it - a non "marked" cut.

teetering grass
just moments ago
a dragonfly

This version leaves it to the reader. The next version has more design so as to guide the reader more carefully. There are reasons to do it either way.

teetering grass . . .
just moments ago
a dragonfly

When I wrote this poem, I opted for the actual "marker."

Michael Nickels-Wisdom

As I say, the one that goes by those terms in quotation marks. Most often, as a shorthand, I think of it as "resonance" or "resonant interval".

Hansha Teki

The resonances created when two disparate images - one tapping into the 'tragic plane' of archetypes and absolutes, and the other drawn from the observable world of change, are brought into collision. The rest is the poetic art that provides the dynamism for that to be triggered in the listener.

Don Baird

So, Hansha, in a way, you are also suggesting the engine to be juxt/disjunction? Two parts in comparison/contrast - a juxt.

I love the term, resonant interval, Michael. I'm going to ponder this. Thank you.

It a short breath, Michael, how would you explain "resonant interval" and please give an example of a haiku that has it.

Michael Nickels-Wisdom

Don, it's from Marshall McLuhan's book _The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century_ (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989, ISBN 01950791080). McLuhan in turn bases his thinking partly on Gestalt psychology. It's concerned with human perception, that we experience the world as a moving dynamic between figure (immediate image or detail) and ground (all

sensory perceptions available but not attended to at the moment). Between these is the "resonant interval", where both may be perceived simultaneously. These three constantly shift from moment to moment in a person's perception. Really, any haiku that resonates has this resonant interval. I'm headed out the door right now, though...

Hansha Teki

Yes, Don, this is what gives the poem its breath of life. What Richard Gilbert (quoting James Hillman) refers to as the 'in gasp'.

Don Baird

Love it.

Diana Ming Jeong

Me too.

Don Baird

Thanks, Hansha. The "disparate" is such a clean way to describe much of this idea of juxt/disjunction. This brings us to a place where, in a way, there is no comparison - - and the key to where Richard posits the idea of disjunction from, as you allude to.

Disparate parts, juxtaposition, disjunction, resonant interval ... all attempting to bring out the possibility of deeper meaning(s).

Scott Abeles

As posed, the question is difficult to answer, as a good haiku depends on a marriage of aspects, versus a single one. In my view, that marriage is roughly between image, insight, and emotion. It so happens that there is a tried and true set of tools -- juxtaposition, seasonality, depth, openness, etc. that various trailblazer have provided us to help achieve that marriage. The key, however, is to focus on the end project, not the toolbox. The failure to heed that maxim is the source of much strife in the broader haiku community.

Michael Rehling

What Scott said!

Don Baird

I agree, Scott ... though being a martial artist (52 years), I believe a toolbox (foundation) to be inherently important in most arts. I always enjoy your take on things. And, I agree, in the end ... the poem itself, is the most important aspect. Thanks for pondering.

Diana Ming Jeong

But without the toolbox, the end project falls apart. The simplicity of the tools, the precision of the placement, creates the perfect resonance.

Hansha Teki

Indeed. None of the 'tools' are straitjackets. The 'plays' the thing but some tools seem to be tailor-made for such a brief poem.

Don Baird

This is what makes the arts tick - differences of approach - each painter, author, musician ... finding their way - following their own truth.

@Hansha: I like the way you put it: "some tools seem to be tailor-made for such a brief poem." I'm going to savor the thought.

S.M. Abeles

That's true. Just keep the toolbox open for additional tools. There was probably a carpenter happy with his hammer and screwdriver before the drill inventor came along. If he kept his focus on building a house, he'd make room for the drill too and be the better for it.

Don Baird

If we define engine as the driving core of haiku, would any of these answers change? Is there a core? Or as Michael explains, the core is a multitude of things?

If you were limited to just one thing, what would you choose as the core for your haiku based on that limitation - as artificial as this sounds - it's nifty to ponder.

Don Baird

Yes Scott! I'm there with you.

S.M. Abeles

If pinned to a single aspect, it's image. I want to leave the reader with something to see. Sometimes I may have a concrete goal -- dry leaves / the way my heart rustles / when she walks // and sometimes my goal is more open ended -- bare branch / the shape of everything / but the bird //. Either way, I'm hoping to leave you with something to remember. (Poems published in Frogpond and Modern Haiku, respectively).

Don Baird

Hey Scott:

Would you consider the image or the disjunction the most important aspect in this poem you have used as an example:

dry leaves / the way my heart rustles / when she walks

It's an incredible image. But, it also has a fully developed juxt between dry leaves and the phrase. Is it the image you cherish most? Or, the depth of meaning?

A good pondering?

Richard Gilbert

Interesting to wake up, in Japan to this. When I read "engine" and "single most important aspect" regarding haiku, I feel there's going to be a bit of the Trickster involved, old Coyote. Over here: http://gendaihaiku.com/

Uda Kiyoko focuses on "kire," -- cutting. Hasegawa Kai, likewise -- but Always we are in relationship -- when we speak of "the cut" or "mystery" (yugen) as well -- these are not meant to be definitive, objective "truths" existing within the poem. The The "engine" of a poem, haiku or otherwise, has to do with language and consciousness. For haiku specifically (distinguishing it as a genre), how would "disjunction" and also fragmentary language "absence" combined with concision -- act upon consciousness *differently* then in other poetic genres (as a rule)? To my mind (pun intended), I think the focus shifts to a psychological space(s) arising between poem and reader -- those hard to define (e.g. mysterious) qualities of this sense of space and openness -- which have a unique "taste" (with each unique poem as work of art). I believe that Hasegawa is discussing "ma" in this way. To discuss "ma" isn't easy. The experience itself requires a reader sensitive and sensitized to the genre. (In Japan you also need to be sensitized to the history and referentiality of kigo, if such exists in the poem.) I'm saying, the engine is you, and the "most important aspect" is how the poem loosens you -- loses you -- opens you --. Haiku do not exist outside of language, and are small articulations of literature -- I think with excellent haiku it's their power we love, or gravitate to. Work backward from the savor, the effect, in consciousness, towards the cause -- and as you do, that too becomes "effect" (in effect - the "feedback loops" are endless or measureless - resonate through time). An animate quality arises, a livingness. This circulation opposes closure, opposes definition, opposes completeness and finality. I like the phrase sometimes used: the opening or arising of (a) "haiku cosmos."

Hansha Teki

Nicely put. This is the touchstone of all poetic art but excellent haiku can have a dynamism beyond what can be achieved in other ways. I have wondered whether the 'form' has roots in the same

soil as the utterances of the shaman. The effect could be likened to Shamanic Ecstasy in a manner of speaking.

Richard Gilbert

Hansha, I don't think such a notion is foreign -- though not limited to haiku, certainly -- "Shamanic Ecstasy" is a tricky term; anthropologically, with narrow definition. Most obviously: where then do we journey?

Hansha Teki

There are possibly three perceptive levels of such ecstasy.

1) The physiological response, in which the mind becomes absorbed in and focused on a dominant idea, the attention is withdrawn and the nervous system itself is in part cut off from physical sensory input. The body may exhibit reflex inertia, involuntary nervous responses, frenzy.

2) Emotional perception of ecstasy refers to overwhelming feelings of awe, anxiety, joy, sadness, fear, astonishment, passion, etc.

3) Intuitive perception communicates a direct experience and understanding of the transpersonal experience of expanded states of awareness or consciousness.

Where then do we journey? I wonder whether we are taking brief excursions into Koestler's 'Tragic Plane' - "starstuff pondering the stars."

Don Baird

@Richard: A very interesting thought, and one I've been pondering, is the "cut" or disjunction between the haiku and the reader. There is a psychological distance between the reader and the poem - besides the cut within itself, either marked or not. The observed, for example, is somehow cut from time and space the moment it is "witnessed" - composed. It's brought forward from its existence into consciousness - the reader now an active part of the poem.

"I think the focus shifts to a psychological space(s) arising between poem and reader -- those hard to define (e.g. mysterious) qualities of this sense of space and openness --I think the focus shifts to a psychological space(s) arising between poem and reader -- those hard to define (e.g. mysterious) qualities of this sense of space and openness --" — Richard

Recently, I've marked a few haiku such as demonstrated by the following haiku with visible cuts before and after the haiku (though not marked in Japanese haiku, I recollect it being a traditional thought of Japanese haijin/mindset):

— dangling ...
a dandelion doesn't
know itself—

... demonstrating a cut from its existence - pulled to focus from its possible obscurity - now witnessed or imagined by a human - it is no longer vaguely being, even passively, it is here now and unobscured.

... also implying a psychological cut between the reader and the poem - at least, to me; a reader resistance occurs which again is disjunctive between reader and poem, circling back to "psychological space(s) arising between poem and reader." Further, in the midst of this example, it is internally severed with a disjunction providing an atmosphere for a strong reader resistance.

Nice seeing you, Richard.

Richard Gilbert

First, the last comment - thanks Don --. You know, Hasegawa discusses *why* Basho's 'old pond' haiku is a work of great art - and severely critiques realistic interpretations of that haiku -- by discussing, I feel, almost exactly what you are describing. If you view these first two subtitled videos, see if you agree: http://gendaihaiku.com/hasegawa/index.html

Michael Nickels-Wisdom

A book I have been reading this year, about the anthropology and practice of shamanism is _The Shaman: Voyages of the Soul, Trance Ecstacy and Healing from Siberia to the Amazon_ (Piers Vitebsky, London: Duncan Baird, 1995, ISBN 9781435106161).

Richard Gilbert

Hansha, the psycho-physiological (& neurological) world you are presenting is one on the cutting edge of cognitive science -- unfortunately such science remains in its infancy. As David Chalmers has famously said (I qtd in my paper, "Plausible Deniability"), science has not yet successfully approached the "hard problem" of consciousness. Something as crucial as the 'experience of the redness of red' (qualia) remains mysterious. And then there's the Orch-OR theory (Penrose-Hamerhoff), proposing quantum interactions as an aspect of the root(s) of consciousness. I think "Intuitive perception" and "transpersonal experience of expanded states of awareness or consciousness" relate to our deeper sense of value in life. At the same time, as discussion, we step into a world in which the terms are slippery. (Define "transpersonal" define "intuitive" define "expanded states," etc.). Within a particular discipline or conceptual framework (e.g. Jungian psych., transpersonal psych., somatic therapy, cognitive studies), the terms are viable - or rejected. ("Transpersonal" won't fly, in contempo cognitive science, I suppose.) Another mode altogether for discussion might be found in phenomenology. I've been interested in the non-duality of body-mind, presented in Merleau-Ponty (which Eve Luckring first brought to my attention). Oh, some links: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Chalmers... & http://en.wikipedia.org/.../Orchestrated_objective_reduction & I'm still pondering an older book, "Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itzhak_Bentov -- Important to express such ideas and hypotheses, yet difficult to articulate, with veracity. This is the main reason I've stuck to literary linguistics in discussing haiku -- to probe and attempt to provide haiku example-groupings of language techniques affecting consciousness which readers might find edifying, if not unequivocally. David Chalmers -

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia en.wikipedia.orgDavid John Chalmers (/ˈtʃælmərz/;[1] born 20 April 1966) is an Australian philosopher and cognitive scientist specializing in the area of philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. He is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Consciousness at the Australian National University.

Hansha Teki

Aye, that is the problem and I relate to Raymond Roseliep's

unable
to get hibiscus red
the artist eats the flower

Richard Gilbert

I don't always agree with David Abram -- that said, his work is relevant to the discussion of poetry and shamanism, and one can add nature writing and ecology, as well. His essay in "Nature Writing: The Tradition in English" (Norton, 2002), "The Ecology of Magic" is eye-opening. He further developed his ideas into several books: David Abram - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia en.wikipedia.orgDavid Abram (born June 24, 1957) is an American philosopher, cultural ecologist, and performance artist, best known for his work bridging the philosophical tradition of phenomenology with environmental and ecological issues.[1][2] He is the author of Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology[3] (2010).

For those interested, a slew of Abram's essays are freely available for reading on the "Wild Ethics" (his own and & his colleagues') website: http://www.wildethics.org/essays.html.

I'll just quote from the first para. of "Earth in Eclipse" (Abram):
"There is another world, but it is in this one. -- Paul Eluard

As a fresh millennium dawns around us, a new and vital skill is waiting to be born in the human organism, a new talent called for by the curious situation in which much of humankind now finds itself. We may call it the skill of “navigating between worlds".

”http://www.wildethics.org/essays/earth_in_eclipse.html

Alliance for Wild Ethics || Earth in Eclipse || Copyright © David Abram www.wildethics.orgFrom Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi, William S. Hamrick, SUNY Press, 2007. An early version of this essay was published as the cover article inTikkun magazine, Sept/Oct 2003.

Don Baird

"Navigating between worlds," is it. That's a significant thought regarding haiku, its engine (if such a thing) - its essence. I'm listening to Hasegawa at the moment (once again). I appreciate his presentation. It rings true and bares the deeper inner workings of Basho as a poet, and person.

Hansha Teki

Thanks, Richard. I am also interested in bush-tracking through the workings of the creative imagination for 'she' is the hidden, integrative power behind the throne.

Don/Richard: It is no mere coincidence that Mircea Eliade defined a shaman as one who "is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians [...] But beyond this, he is a psychopomp, and he may also be a priest, mystic, and poet."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychopomp

Richard Gilbert

Eliade also influenced me, especially:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_return_(Eliade)

Eternal return (Eliade) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia en.wikipedia.org The "eternal return" is, according to the theories of the religious historian Mircea Eliade, a belief, expressed (sometimes implicitly, but often explicitly) in religious behavior, in the ability to return to the mythical age, to become contemporary with the events described in one's myths.[1]

Hansha Teki

I see his influence in your explorings and I too studiously avoid adopting his politics.

Richard Gilbert

Hansha -- good one! You know, how many artists, scientists, and generally those whose contributions of art and thought we admire, would bear up well, upon close 'personal life' examination? It may be that certain philosophers in particular, have had tragic lives, whether personally or socially . . . Poets though can get away with "apparent" social irresponsibility: There's that Basho guy, always running off, for months and months on end -- and that what's-his-face Issa, declaring he is "arabonpu": a "wild man"! I'm sure there are enough sober "Confucian" poets to make my point moot -- and yet, we cannot emulate poets, the way we might philosophers . . . Shiki really hated all that "Saint Basho" crap --.

Hansha Teki

To return now to Don's question after all our explorings - "What do you believe the engine of haiku is - the single most important aspect of haiku?"

My answer would have to be brevity.

In saying this, that which is given creative utterance in this manner should carry all it needs (no more - no less) to encompass truth, beauty and the ever-echoing resonances of a 'perceiver' caught up in 'connections' perceived. Truth and beauty defy universal definition but they can be recognised in one's physiological response (in spite of oneself) from listening to or from reading the poem.

Don Baird

Brevity is a key, I agree. Most of us attempt to keep these little gems brief. But in that brevity, you have other aspects to the brevity engine: truth, beauty, resonance(s), and connections. As a group, the engine you're describing begins to reveal itself through the poetic fog and mystery of the genre.

Thanks, Hansha ... for your additional thoughts. Now, it's late at night; and, when I should be asleep, you have me pondering yet again!

Peace to all and thanks for everyone's terrific concentrated input. There is a lot to ponder about this topic.

Goodnight from California!

Alan Summers

I wonder if the engine of haiku is simply choosing wisely from the slew of techniques and devices available, and as any serious poet would be, mindful of each word, and of the power of poetry as a force beyond the sum of its parts.

I really liked this from Richard, and to paraphrase it, or hijack it, to say that haiku poetry “opposes closure, opposes definition, opposes completeness and finality.”

With all the pressure that haiku has to be a form or a genre, that it has to be seventeen English-language syllables, so prevalent on the internet, and to my concern, in one or more prestigious universities, I embrace Richard’s or perhaps my take on it, that haiku simply opposes all that is static and higher echelon and elitist, and controlling.

When even our way to freedom is disputed and bombarded there should always be haiku to come back to in the wee small dark hours, as well as the light of day.

Richard Gilbert

Hi Alan -- I like the way you knit the world together, that way. From the historical-Japanese, right to the present perspective of gendai (modern) Japanese haiku, Basho's phrase "haiku jiyu" or "Haiku is for freedom" ["Haikai" at the time] is one that seems revered. I've heard it pronounced in such a variety of contexts. Most lately, from Kaneko Tohta, describing the "intellectual wildness" of his father's Chichibu mountain village haiku group, in his boyhood. But most directly, in Basho's own youth, his young Lord enjoyed "kukai"

(haiku gathering-parties). But how was it, that farmers and samurai could mix, and how that the various levels of aristocracy could mix as equals, democratically, when social language (the use of specifically required words and phrases) itself dictated position and class relationships? For haiku, this was the gift of the "penname" (haigo) -- with one's haigo, this new democratic name, all were equals at the kukai. There is much to draw on, historically, with reference to your thought, that "haiku simply opposes all that is static and higher echelon and elitist, and controlling." This aspect, a deeply felt social sense, seems part of the backbone of haiku as practice, as a primarily social rather than single-isolate-author art form. And haigo are more outrageous yet. As Tsubouchi Nenten discusses with some brilliance, Shiki had over 100 haigo -- why? you might ask. Check it out: video #2, "Haigo--Masaoka Shiki and Haiku Persona": http://gendaihaiku.com/tsubouchi/index.html

Hansha, contemplating your remarks on brevity, three uber-brief haiku came to mind:

coughing, even alone

Hosai Ozaki

ly in the body

Jack Galmitz

tundra

Cor van den Heuvel

(an exposition of 'at the limit,' or a limit, of the form) - Oh, one more:

anchor

i

tic

Philip Rowland

Awarded the Scorpion Prize by Joseph Massey, and has some commentary here: http://roadrunnerhaikublog.wordpress.com/

Alan Summers

re short haiku, could you say something about this one?

Hi e yamu (陽へ病む) by Ōhashi Raboku (1890-1933)

It resonates for me but many people might not see anything beyond a literal translation?

Richard, re your generous comments in this thread, and your reply to my post, a big thank you. For over twenty years I've seen haiku as the ideal poetry regarding fairness and fellowship despite some excessive politics both in the past centuries and the 20th Century (I won't even touch on the 21st century) It's a major factor to me that haiku is inclusive, and your mention of haigo (pen names) makes things clearer why they were used so much, thank you.

Richard Gilbert

Hi e yamu (陽へ病む) by Ōhashi Raboku -- can discuss it with some friends in the next few days [that "e" is pronounced "eh"] -- do you have an English translation for it? (It doesn't seem easy to translate.) -- Oh, thanks in return, Alan -- haiku seem to have a mysteriously viral effect, breeding society along with plenty of commentary. Who would have thought?

Alan Summers

"Sick with the sun" (translation: Donald Keene

or:

Raboku Ohashi (1890–1933), citing one of his oft-quoted minimalist haiku, hi e yamu (“I am sick with the sun.”—Keene’s tr., in which “I am” expresses ideas included in the original, but not its words)

Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era—Poetry, Drama, Criticism. (Note that there is another volume with the same title, only differing at the end, where “Fiction” replaces “Poetry, Drama, Criticism”; that other volume is over 1300 pages long, and is not for sale here.) New York: Henry Holt, 1984. Paperback, 6×9.25″ (15.5×23.5 mm), 685+xiv pp.

Haiku is certainly unusual, whether it's written as many Westerners would like it to be written or not. I feel it's taken over from poetry that people seemed to love because poetry appears to be more and more exclusive to poets only, and a few select non-poets, but haiku will always be inclusive whether regular haiku poets want that or not.

I feel the engine of haiku is the people who embrace it, and despite many wrong turnings, it at least keeps haiku alive. Sure, there will be times when we will be swamped with weak attempts at haiku, but I’m less worried about that. With social media there is greater opportunity to communicate, to show rather than tell people how to write or read haiku.

I feel maintaining our generosity with all lovers of haiku (be what it may) is the true engine, and that we all write a greater poem haiku by haiku. That’s just not possible with other poetry which is controlled by a few people often for a few people.

Just thinking out aloud, not telling, or even showing.

Michael Rehling

Well, after all this I think I know what the 'engine' to haiku is. It is whatever the poet thinks it is, at that moment in time. Thanks Don!!!

Michael Nickels-Wisdom

And the added idea --the *necessarily* added idea-- is that haiku itself is whatever the poet thinks it is, at that moment in time. And I don't personally think there is any way around the condition that yields that kind of definition. It's what a living art is.

Michael Rehling

Indeed...

S.M. Abeles

Hi Don -- thank you. I actually don't see "dry leaves" as having a major jux -- dry leaves, rustling, and walking all seem to function on the same plane. The image I was hoping to implant is a lovely woman's behind. But, that's me -- a bit gross . I am glad you see more and always fascinated by the different takeaways readers can have as to the same poem. A scholar once posted and commented on a tanka of mine that I intended to concern, shall we say, "love of self," but read it in an utterly different way. In both cases I can at least be confident I left dreaming room for the reader. Cheers.

Johannes S. H. Bjerg

wow, that's a long thread, but I have to agree with: 1) the engine isn't that easy to pin out 2) haiku doesn't exist outside language, language doesn't exist outside consciousness and that last thing is a universe in itself and its meeting with other of its kind ... The first haiku that hit "the spot" for me was Ozaki's coughing and Right Under ... the first collection that made haiku "literature" for me.

In haiku (and all other arts) I get bored if I from the onset of a piece already know it before it's finished i.e. f it doesn't hold a vast part of "unknown"/hinted that demands my "chewing" and exploring. More than kigo and what have you of Japanese terms it's in the language for me; some faint, but distinct, thought/glimpse of consciousness that cannot be expressed otherwise - if that makes sense. I need to wonder, to be taken by surprise, to meet the unexpected etc. and I think this first and foremost lies in language.

One of Scott Metz's from Bones 3 have been in my head since I read it

Don Baird

I agree, that language is at or near the top of the list. It, in the end, is the chalice that holds the rest of the puzzle that makes haiku what it is. The operation of language is the essence and skill combined that gives haiku a chance to exist outside the realm of mind.

Interesting thread.

Thanks, to all.

Pondering Haiku #2

Post a Haiku as an Example for Discussion: with the thought of "haiku engine" in mind (related to the previous and ongoing discussion), please post, for pondering, a haiku (yours or someone else's) that demonstrates one of your ideas regarding this illusive engine as you see it. Please include a brief explanation of how the haiku works and why (in relationship to its theorized engine, if any). We are not necessarily saying the haiku is "good or bad." Rather, we are explaining our perception of the haiku and how it works - how it operates as a haiku. No qualitative judgments please.

As this is a discussion of education and advanced study, we do not need the approval of authors if we happen to use one of their poems for this discussion (as I see it). This is a friendly group of ponderers and explorers - serious students of haiku with open minds for discussion. I believe fair-use would be, therefore, in order. We cannot adequately discuss a haiku with only one line of it apparent.

Please include appropriate credits for all posts that include haiku.

Thanks!

Don

Michael Rehling:

as if i cared or not the boolean nature of snow

It works, because 'I get it', and I 'hope' others will as well.

Richard Gilbert:

What catches a mind (energizes its engines)? There are so many haiku that interest me. In the book "The Disjunctive Dragonfly" one

of the techniques discussed is "Pointing to the missing subject" (rarely used, difficult to successfully achieve in haiku). I found, last year, 9 excellent examples (there are certainly more). I'd like to mention especially:

counting down the goodness of man:
from the sixth
obscure

Hoshinaga Fumio, 2003, Kumaso-Ha (Gilbert et al, trans.)

(In case Fb messes up the third line: "obscure" is a broken-off fragment, with the 'o' lying under the 't' of "the" in the first line.) Partly I can't shake off this haiku *because* so much of it is inexplicable -- while at the same time, I care deeply somehow -- I feel an immediacy of concern. I also feel a great gap or distance of another's manner of thinking and using language, so different from my own. I feel this is a ku of social consciousness, and subversive, with a darkly playful, ironic humor. But don't we all "rate" the neighbors, judge our friends, evaluate whatever historical situation or speaker-at-large, for "goodness" -- the covert typing and judging of goodness, involves a "counting down." The uncountable becomes countable, in other words -- the uniqueness of human goodness becomes judged and measured. The poet proposes yet a further thought, that at the "sixth," goodness becomes "obscure." In Japan as elsewhere numbers have symbolic meanings. Four is related to death, five (fingers, toes) has some connection with uncertainty and luck -- but six -- is obscure. Imagine the 6th degree of goodness -- just how "good" is that? Who is the subject here? And where do I stand? Mostly in obscurity, in some vague realm, after the end -- my own "goodness" less than countable (I have to admit). However as a kinesthetically embodied reader, I arrive right between "sixth" and "obscure." See? I'm just inside the poem. And reminded of something, too: the way(s) we are lost, socially, individually, concerning goodness. Or less than appreciative, perhaps? This poem awakens me. I find, in its multiple paradoxes and bizarre hypotheses new ways of appreciating two or three things: poetry, others, and the author's ballsy outrageousness. The strength of his vision. Courageousness. The fragments of the modern exist here, expressed using a language which practically

erases itself as it is read, like the invisible ink of a spy. This haiku is so deeply human. And yet with a wry grin, haikai humor combines with a deadly seriousness. Ya got me!

Michael Rehling:

It always amazes me what a few syllables can trigger...

Don Baird:

Hey Mike. Who wrote the one-liner? I've never seen it and rather like it, too! If you were teaching haiku to a novice, how would you explain this haiku to him/her? Is it "just is" or is there a rudimentary aspect to it that a novice could learn - to emulate?

Michael Rehling:

Some guy with the same name as mine wrote it... If you know what a Boolean operator is then you will get it, if not then this may sail over your head... Boolean operators have only two responses, yes/no, true/false, on/off, etc., etc., etc.

Don Baird:

@Richard: I think I've written many various things without a subject (or at least didn't get to it succinctly enough) ... LOL

Writing a haiku without a subject while, at the same time, having it make sense (if needed) would be quite the chore! Now, I'm pondering in overtime!

Love it, Mike! Thanks!

Sometimes I think my computer is a Boolean Operator!

Michael Rehling:

Indeed it is...

Richard Gilbert:

Two more on "the missing subject":

not quite ice cream

mother dreams near

death

Richard Gilbert, 2012, RR 12:1

what swallows me more

this vacant lot

or the baby in my arms

Tyrone McDonald, 2012, MH 43:2

Don Baird:

"expressed using a language which practically erases itself as it is read," — (Richard G) has me smiling. What a thought! While we write haiku in the shadows of being memorable, we have a haiku here that erases itself as it's written and/or read ... and, has no subject!

Richard Gilbert:

And two more ("the missing subject" again):

where the lines end and the absence begins an architecture or so

Chris Gordon, 2002; H21 74; HIE 191

stars

before letting go

letting go

Marian Olson, 2002, HIE 168

Don Baird:

Reader participation is "on notice" when reading one of these haiku — the reader causative, in a way, of the subject — fills in the subject from his own experience or imagination. This style of haiku would encounter a great deal of reader resistance, possibly — depending on the intuitiveness of the reader and, again, experience.

Michael Rehling:

Don, who cares???

Don Baird:

Maybe just me?

Richard Gilbert:

Hey, ponderings -- you know are -- ponderings . . . nuff said.

Michael Rehling:

Pondering is always without a price...

Don Baird:

I love to ponder. And, I'm a teacher — for 50 years! So, I like to ponder out loud ... sharing with other ponderers and then additionally ponder how to teach something that has no subject! LOL Although, often I have, but because there was no subject, I can't remember what it was about.

Richard Gilbert:

Sometimes, priceless? Well I hope as the Western world awakes more will chime in.

Michael Rehling:

This reminds of a saying:

"He who can does, he who cannot starts a online haiku journal and appoints themselves 'editor'.

Don Baird:

I did that (though I have editors who gladly and skillfully assist, these days) ... and yet, I also write haiku. Hopefully, I even write a memorable one (the operative word being "one"). Of course, that's another subject.

I'm looking for a haiku to post to add to the discussion at hand. hmmmm

Michael Rehling:

That joke was on me... I have done it a few times you might remember...

Richard Gilbert:

Mike, that reminds me of another haiku with a missing subject:

whom one falls for on the skylight hard rain

Philip Rowland, 2012; RR 12:2

(Also a good example of Kaneko Tohta's idea of "teiju hyohaku": "settled wandering") -- something is there and yet there is also something of the subject which wanders, where? It's hard, and romantic, and true. And urban. A haiku evoking darkness and sound. "whom one falls for." It's happened, it's post-coital. It's real. And yet . . . that reaching out into space, for the truth of simple human existence. Editors who can-do publish good shit.

Don Baird:

snow

part of the

milky way

Of course, I cannot properly format it on Facebook. Formatting is too complex (lol) for them to figure out. This is a poem by John Martone that has struck me (for a few months).

I wonder if we each see the same haiku engine. Or, is there more than one engine — in perception?

Is there a subject?

This one leaves me feeling that, while a subject appears to be in the haiku, it isn't the "subject" per se. It is a very open poem that sequesters much of its meaning — leaving the reader to, once again, do much work.

Is "snow" the subject? Is the subject implied to be the connection between the snow itself and the mirrored feel of it in the Universe? Or, is there more — just not written?

Richard Gilbert:

I think "snow"...milky way" is more in the "Impossible truth" category (I opine as a nomenclatura). Very evocative, and another ku which is uber-minimal, yet evokes vast and miniscule worlds, both. Simplicity, belied.

Michael Rehling:

Wow, I like that one a lot Richard! I love 'fill in the blank' haiku, as I call them...

Don, this one is simple, and yet extreme... No 'facts' to get in the way of the image...

Richard Gilbert:

It confronts you.

Don Baird:

And this one:

moonflower

the fragrance

of names

... creating a disjunction between reader and the meaning because the phrase "the fragrance of names" doesn't readily make sense.

Richard Gilbert:

Or is it just the quietest of stray noticings?

Don Baird:

Yes. I think so.

S.M. Abeles:

I mentioned in the first post, re: my thoughts on "image" as centrality, my "bare branch" poem, which was intended to be part 2 of Basho's "withered branch" haiku, i.e., what we're left with when the crow flies off (everything else, ideally with a "cut-out" of where the crow had been). Perhaps another image-centric piece might be:

into the distance

the cafe car barista's

cinnamon eyes

(Daily Haiku, Cycle 15, by me)

The image on the first level might be a young lady's pretty eyes, but if the reader also sees the world whizzing by in them, with a tinge of sadness, then hopefully we've each done our job in helping to create a better poem than it appears on the surface. In that sense, "cinnamon eyes," is a bit of misdirection -- it's a bit punny and clever and is most certainly better than "brown," but is not the point.

It's a tool to try to keep the reader in the poem with a bit of "sweet," or long enough to see the sour too.

Yes I've noticed other posters focusing on the poems of other poets -- unlike me! But I read that as part of the invitation, so don't feel too presumptive.

Don Baird:

The meaning is in the feeling, not the words. (To me) The poem is more than words. (the snow/milky way, haiku)

All poems are welcome, Scott! It's terrific to see yours posted here as well. No worry.

Re: the moonflower haiku: My dad always knew the names of every flower, every tree, etc. The relationship between "names" and "moonflower" is the scent, in this poem. In a way, the scent is the name — which was always my answer to my father whenever I didn't know the name of a particular flower, myself. "Dad, the name is its scent," I would say.

In the following haiku, I believe the operative key is "feeling" whereas the moonflower poem seems to be "scent":

first morning bell

today the note is sadder

and forever

Ross Figgins

There is an intrinsic feeling emitting by this haiku that transcends the words that are causative of the feeling. That's an engine, in my eyes.

Mike Rehling:

I like that one a lot Don! Levels for every reader...

Don Baird:

Me too. It is a Ross Figgins haiku published in Haiku 21. Excellent haiku.

Michael Rehling:

Here is one of mine that gets 'missed'...

mandala

Mandela

mandala

I like it because it says it all with just two words...

Sheila Windsor:

I love this one (extracted from above) :

stars

before letting go

letting go

Marian Olson, 2002, HIE 168

.

not because of any objective thing or quality I can identify except that (as Michael said somewhere in the thread) I 'get it'. I can immediately identify with it, having experienced it. Before the physical 'doing' there is the thought of it. Something like that. But I'm aware that this is entirely subjective: another reader/s will not get it. Conclusion: what drives a haiku/makes a haiku 'work' is not

with the haiku alone, it is a co-creative exercise depending, perhaps equally, on writer and reader alike.

Sheila Windsor:

On the other hand, this one of Michael's:

as if i cared or not the boolean nature of snow

... doesn't 'work' for me because I immediately argue against it: I don't experience snow as being on/off. Then my mind goes to the myriad ways of snow other than/between on and off: a flake blown from a tree long after it's stopped snowing et al, et al. But then, perhaps that makes it a successful haiku (whatever that might be) because it has me dwelling on snow and its nature far longer than I dwelt on the nature of letting go before letting go. Happy ponderings to Don and all.

Michael Rehling:

If you lived where I live, snow is beautiful (we get well over a 100 inches a year so if you don't think that, you don't live here) IF you have food, propane, and other necessities, but if you don't have all the above it freaks you out! That is what I was experiencing when I wrote it. My mental checklist went right through my mind. If Than fit that moment. No poem work for everyone, the dream of the 'universal poem' is a myth in my mind.

Marian Olsen's poem you cite works well for me because I can see it from a number of angles. It allows the reader to 'read' into it from any angle. Nice.

Sheila Windsor:

I love your snow, Michael! Thanks for sharing it. I grew up in deepest darkest Shropshire (rural as it gets here) and I do recall a couple of years that the snow was above the hedgerows (tall hedgerows) and there was therefore NO SCHOOL!!!!! We tend not to get snow like that any more. . . we get a lot of winter rain!

Hansha Teki:

In keeping with 'brevity' as an engine I bring the following by Raymond Roseliep.

sky

of one bird

and I

In its very brevity resides the poem's effectiveness. It is quiet, subdued and wintry. Roseliep has trimmed his mastery of poetry to the bone. It creates resonance and is the winter by allusion to Basho's autumn as in

this autumn

why am I aging so?

to the clouds, a bird

(tr. Makoto Ueda)

Richard Gilbert:

With reference to your touching examples, Hansha, and Michael's "mandala," you may recall:

spentagon

pentagon

repentagon

Nicholas Virgilio, 1986; HIE 46

Sheila, another "star" ku, which plays with inner/outer sense and experience, with intriguing and concise language,

beyond

stars beyond

star

L. A. Davidson, 1972; HIE 76

(the last “star” should be placed to the right of or beyond “beyond”)

Sheila Windsor:

Thank you, Richard. I like this too. Sharing one of mine:

.

twilight...

through the lilacs

lilacs

Sheila Windsor:

The commonality of the human experience expressed in an infinite variety of ways.

Diana Ming Jeong:

summer moon -

a cicada falling

on itself

~ by me

To me, the engine is the yugen and not necessarily the cut marker but the resonance of the final word.

Howard D. Moore:

this was cool...i had so many insights while reading this...a great teaching tool...

Pondering Haiku #3

Take a moment and offer what you believe to be a good working definition of haiku — what a beginner might consider to be an introductory "guide" to writing haiku - dictionary worthy - beginner worthy, lets say. Secondly if you care to address it, do you think that beginners and advanced haiku poets operate from different definitions?

Interesting haiku definition examples:

"Though it can be presented on the page in three lines, a haiku structurally consists of two parts with a pause in between. Its power as poetry derives from juxtaposition of the two images and the sense of surprise or revelation that the second image produces." (Lanoue, 2003, para. 4) (The Disjunctive Dragonfly, Richard Gilbert, 2008/2013, pages 21-22)

"A non-ideational, breath-length poem aesthetically juxtaposing sensory images, usually including natural existences tinged with humanity or faint humor, that evokes intuition of things' essentiality. (Spiess, quoted in Gurga, 2000, p. 75) (The Disjunctive Dragonfly, Richard Gilbert, 2008/2013, page 22)

If you feel uncomfortable trying to define haiku, then please ponder out loud with us on how you would explain what haiku is to a beginner who has never heard of it.

Again, the ideas presented in this forum should be presented in more of an exposé fashion than from trying to be right. None of what we share here should arrive from the sticky position of being right; rather, what we enjoy here is a venue to share, in a safe way, what we believe as individuals as well as to listen to what others have to offer.

Thank you and enjoy.

Blessings!

Don

Michael Rehling:

I would not try to 'explain' haiku at all. The beat poet Lew Welch said it for me: "Somebody showed it to me, and I found it by myself."

Point people to the HSA site definitions, and then tell them to 'look' at the Henderson and Brady collections of winners. That collection goes back over a decade, and every contest is judged by two different judges, so you have a little of everything.

Very few people who I point to those sources does not give it a whirl for themselves. When they do, put them into a forum where many good poets, with open minds, can 'suggest' options to them. Some will gravitate to one liners, others to traditional forms, and some will just run with the idea in their own direction. Works, believe me.

Hansha Teki:

To define something is to fix its boundaries or limits but I do know an excellent one when I read it. It is enough of a miracle already that something so entangled with the Japanese language can propagate itself into other languages and societies and still be the minimal powerhouse we continue to explore.

Michael Rehling:

One more from Lew Welch that may make it clearer:

Step out onto the Planet

Draw a circle a hundred feet round.

Inside the circle are

300 things nobody understands, and maybe

nobody's ever really seen.

How many can you find?

There, it is a lot clearer now... I feel better. Thanks Don! Thank Hansha!

Richard Gilbert:

I strongly agree with Michael: ("I would not try to 'explain' haiku at all. The beat poet Lew Welch said it for me: "Somebody showed it to me, and I found it by myself."), and Hansha here. The examples Don qtd. from my book, "The Disjunctive Dragonfly" are set in the *negative context* of describing the *problems* of definition and why they *don't work.* I am anti-definitional, and pro-connotational. In Japan likewise, you can't find a "definition" of haiku. There are norms of course, but creative thinking in poetry, with norms in mind -- well, that is not what I want to teach beginners. YMMV. With the previous in mind, the best definition I've found, and it's qtd. in the same book, in the last Section (7.2 "Making it New"), is one penned by Prof. Haruo Shirane, pub. in Modern Haiku Journal (31.1, 2000). I'll quote it in my next comment, below.

Don Baird:

Thanks Michael! Thanks Hansha!

Richard Gilbert:

(Qtd. from "The Disjunctive Dragonfly," Red Moon Press, 2013, pp.112-113). Disjunction, a variety of sensed qualities and techniques, only becomes effective via poetic creativity. The goal of introducing the concept of disjunction is not to supplant traditional practice, but add dimension, and allow for a wider range of variation and experiment — in keeping with the spirit of Haruo Shirane's definition of haiku:

Echoing the spirit of Bashō's own poetry . . . haiku in English is a short poem, usually written in one to three lines, that seeks out new and revealing perspectives on the human and physical condition, focusing on the immediate physical world around us, particularly that of nature, and on the workings of the human imagination,

memory, literature and history. . . . this definition is intended both to encourage an existing trend and to affirm new space that goes beyond existing definitions of haiku (Shirane, 2000, p. 60).

Looking at the haiku presented in the sections above, it can be seen that they diverge in various ways from the prevailing definitions of haiku (as observed in Section 2 [contains the quotes Don inserted in his main post, "Ponderings #3," above]). As Shirane indicates, it seems timely to open the form.

http://www.redmoonpress.com/catalog/product_info.php...

Red Moon Press www.redmoonpress.com“ You might call this book Twenty-four Ways of Looking at a Haiku in the 21st Century. . . Professor Gilbert investigates how language experimentation in contemporary English-language haiku both connects and radically departs from 20th century conventions. With the heart of a poet and the mind of a c…

Neelam Dadhwal:

I started with juxtaposition of two images and the presence of kire but in long term I felt, one can only be taught if one is a dedicated disciple, otherwise it just hangs in the air. Haiku loses its definition. I agree with Michael, "one can find by oneself."

Don Baird:

Hey Richard ... an interesting thought/fact, "In Japan likewise, you can't find a 'definition' of haiku." Of course, as you mention in your book (if I recall correctly) the English language practitioners are quite behind those of Japan today. Shiki had a strong, lasting influence on our educational system regarding haiku - his format becoming the school norm - even today - not Basho etc.

Richard Gilbert:

Two more links found. Apparently you can read the entire article above, by Shirane, online here: "Beyond the Haiku Moment: Basho, Buson, and Modern Haiku Myths (Modern Haiku, XXXI:1, Winter-Spring 2000)"
http://www.haikupoet.com/def.../beyond_the_haiku_moment.html

Don Baird:

Great find, Richard! Thanks for the link.

Richard Gilbert:

And another link to a very similar, if broader question comes from one of a topical series of Peter Yovu's "Field Notes." This particular thread is titled: "Where do your haiku begin?" --which is part of an "Invited Forum" at The Haiku Foundation: http://www.thehaikufoundation.org/forum_sm/index.php...

Field Notes: Where do your haiku begin?

Ro Berta:

I was just thinking this is starting to sound a lot like Field Notes

Richard Gilbert:

Hi Roberta, the more the merrier! Different format, different crowd -- pretty intense.

Neelam Dadhwal:

Similar enigma is there if you start to teach someone other styles of poetry. Basically, haiku is not so popular yet (my experiences are limited to online and in India too). And with huge silos of knowledge on internet and due to technology available, it is obviously before one can be taught it will be lost in direction. In haiku learning, there should be levels in courses and also based on one’s aptitude and experience.

Michael Nickels-Wisdom:

The last time I did this online, I was excoriated for it... But I dislike universalized definitions. I do like the well-known essays by Charlie Trumbull and A.C. Missias about the complexity of definitions and how there seems to be an aggregate definition that mimics a biological organism in some ways. (Don't ask me to dig up the essays right now; that might take some lengthy effort at the moment.) I do also prefer a polythetic definition to a monothetic one (more biological terms). Though I don't like a universalized attempt,

I do have a working definition, which comes in three parts as definitions for art, poetry, and haiku...

“Art happens when anyone in the world takes any kind of material and fashions it into a deliberate statement.” –Thomas Hoving

“A poem is anything said in such a way or put on the page in such a way as to invite from the hearer or reader a certain kind of attention...We signal that we are doing something special, and we listen or read with a readiness to accept something special...And the state of readiness is the essential factor.” –William Stafford

"A haiku is a brief poem using sensate imagery that resonates in a reader's mind." –MNW

I make my working definition, as both a writer and a reader, as purposefully broad as I can possibly manage. I do this in order to preserve the necessary writerly and readerly readiness that Stafford talks about above.

With regard to how to direct a beginner, I think Mike Rehling's advice is good. I would offer a small variety of definitions and sources, mainly a yuki teikei definition, the HSA definition, William Higginson's excellent _The Haiku Handbook_, and something like my own explanation above, with some detail added. Everyone has to start somewhere and grow from there, if it gets serious enough. Yuki teikei, though I almost never practice it in full, at least offers a definition that is recognizable to beginners and is challenging (though I say this as an aside, not as a directive).

Yes, I do think there is likely to be a difference between beginning and experienced writers' definitions, and this will again imply growth if one is deeply enough committed, and time, because haiku is a living, developing literature.

Richard Gilbert:

Michaels, &c., I'm in the lucky and unusual position of teaching first-year Japanese university students a semester seminar,

"Introduction to Haiku in English." They don't know a lot more about traditional Japanese haiku then you do, and likely have a far more negative impression, since they were forced to memorize certain poems and details for very difficult testing regimes, in no way related to personal growth or enjoyment. As for modern (gensai/gendai) haiku -- they generally haven't a clue. Senryu on the other hand, not being "professional/academic/technical" is a different story. The last thing these kids need is (moribund) rules. I generally kick off the class by commenting that haiku in English is much like good senryu, because there are no kigo in English (ergo, no Saijiki, no difficult old-kanji-equivalent or English-lang. vocab. to master). This is very relaxing for students. I tell them each language has its own, unique forms of poetic power, and some haiku in English are very good modern haiku in my opinion. Then I point them to a few online collections of good-to-excellent haiku, and ask them to read for a week and pick some favorites and discuss them. A few weeks later they are writing them. I tend to create thought-experiments -- use an "inside-mind" image and an outer image, for example. then I show them a bunch of abstract expressionist and color-field paintings -- and ask them to choose a few favorites (from google search etc.), then write a non-linear haiku (i.e., a haiku which does not "explain or narrate" the painting). I could go on ... It's not so hard to grasp haiku though exposure and play (and playfulness and experiment), but as we know, writing excellent haiku is not so easy. I can't show "Roadrunner Haiku" right off -- but some students are already in a pretty avant-garde frame of mind, so why limit them? I think it's up to teacher-pedagogy and style of course, but really, what's the big deal? The leg up I think Japanese students may have is that they don't seem particularly caught in naturalistic/literalistic thinking (as American students seem, and also stuck with some 5-7-5 syllable idea). Their great difficulty seems universal however: the concept of "kire" cutting is quite difficult to grasp (in Japanese or English). One kind of game is let one student write say the first 2/3 and then pass to another student to "cap" the poem (collaborative composition). Even for second-language students, over a semester they begin to appreciate the intricacies of excellent haiku -- but this is just my opinion.

Hansha Teki:

Hmmmm "... please ponder out loud with us on how you would explain what haiku is to a beginner who has never heard of it."

Perhaps a roleplay/parable would be in order.

"My child, with your love for words and rapt attentiveness to the world about you, you may find a outlet for your urge to create by writing in the manner of haiku."

"Master, what is this haiku you speak of?"

"Let it reveal itself to you in this way. Close your eyes and listen to your body breathing.

Hear the sounds of what can be heard distinct from your breathing.

Hear your breathing.

Now visualise the nature of one of the sounds outside of your body. In as few words as possible make its reality present in your mind as it is without limiting it by mere description."

"Yes, I have that."

"Now find words to evoke the present nature of that which is breathing."

"It is done."

"Good now bring the first set of words together with the second and watch how the images interact."

"Ohhh, I see!"

"Good! Now shape your words that others may, matching their inhalation and exhalation to yours as they read them, recreate in their own selves what you have found."

Richard Gilbert:

Hansha, I like what you playfully describe -- which could be a "way in" for all sorts of (genres of) poetry. One of the most eloquent beginnings I've read (in Weinberger's translation) would be those lines (which are also the ending/endless lines) of the circular poem, Piedra de Sol/Sunstone, by Octavio Paz (1957; New Directions, Weinberger, trans., 1987):

a crystal willow, a poplar of water,

a tall fountain the wind arches over,

a tree deep-rooted yet dancing still,

a course of a river that turns, moves on,

doubles back, and comes full circle,

forever arriving:

the calm course

of the stars or an unhurried spring,

water with eyes closed welling over

with oracles all night long,

a single presence in a surge of waves,

wave after wave till it covers all,

a reign of green that knows no decline,

like the flash of wings unfolding in the sky ...

Don Baird:

@ Roberta: Regarding the format: I really enjoy FN interplay and the musing that ensues. However, I have been longing for immediacy; I like FB for that reason — that we are operating in "real time," often without delay. FB is an easy, immediate format for roundtable discussion that just might cause us to go to bed slightly

late and/or draw our attention away from work — even if briefly — and, be in the moment.

I'm hoping this group remains somewhat casual without losing its scholarly overtone. The FN material (responses) are often lengthy and well researched (I mean this in a very, very positive way). I like that; it will happen here as well. But this environment also allows for quick and casual exchanges of which I embrace whole-heartedly.

I appreciate your being here and thoughts . . . always.

@Richard: Yes. A resounding yes. The more of this kind of exchange(s) the merrier. The wars are over. Exchange is in play; ideas are not demanding sameness as a result (anymore). I posit honest "ponderings"; our group offers sincere thoughts/responses. And, we learn about haiku — we learn about each other.

Richard Gilbert:

I wanted to quote the beginning of "Sunstone" because as well as deeply moving, the lines (and let's not limit them to the category of "magical realism," please!) incorporate many of the qualities Shirane urges (in 2000, 14 years ago) that we might open to and incorporate, in English-language haiku approaches. I'm referring to the same article liked above: ""Beyond the Haiku Moment: Basho, Buson, and Modern Haiku Myths," but further along, where Shirane is discussing the "vertical axis" of haikai. I'll quote a small section:

"If Basho and Buson were to look at North American haiku today, they would see the horizontal axis, the focus on the present, on the contemporary world, but they would probably feel that the vertical axis, the movement across time, was largely missing. There is no problem with the English language haiku handbooks that stress personal experience. They should. This is a good way to practice, and it is an effective and simple way of getting many people involved in haiku. I believe, as Basho did, that direct experience and direct observation is absolutely critical; it is the base from which we must work and which allows us to mature into interesting poets. However, as the examples of Basho and Buson suggest, it should not dictate either the direction or value of haiku. It is the beginning, not the end. Those haiku that are fictional or imaginary

are just as valid as those that are based on personal experience. I would in fact urge the composition of what might be called historical haiku or science fiction haiku.

Haiku as Non-metaphorical:

Another rule of North American haiku that Basho would probably find discomforting is the idea that haiku eschews metaphor and allegory. North American haiku handbooks and magazines stress that haiku should be concrete, that it should be about the thing itself. The poet does not use one object or idea to describe another, using A to understand B, as in simile or metaphor; instead the poet concentrates on the object itself. Allegory, in which a set of signs or symbols draw a parallel between one world and the next, is equally shunned. All three of these techniques - metaphor, simile, and allegory - are generally considered to be taboo in English-language haiku, and beginners are taught not to use them. However, many of Basho's haiku use metaphor and allegory, and in fact this is probably one of the most important aspects of his poetry."

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I think it's useful to graze among the lines of Paz, Neruda, and others (as Higginson did in "The Haiku Handbook") for the wider, vertical concepts Shirane urges -- and which have been integral to haiku/haikai from more ancient times. (Shiki likewise has many fanciful "imaginary" haiku, it must be said--Kaneko argues "shasei" was never meant to be "realism" as such). I think there is no single haiku anthology that "takes the cake" as a beginner's guide, though with "Haiku in English" and "Haiku 21," plus the previous anthys (especially Cor van den Heuvel's "Haiku Anthology editions), and some of the intro-to-haiku books already mentioned... There is potency in Shirane's prescient message to our literary community, writing at the dawn of this new century. (Ref. http://www.haikupoet.com/def.../beyond_the_haiku_moment.html)

Don Baird:

I've always pondered the thought that the greatest freedom comes from the most supportive structure. Martial arts is profoundly based

on structure — the newest students are not allowed the same freedoms that the more advanced are because without basics, their more advanced skills won't perform well and put them in danger. As a result, I have a tendency to teach haiku with a little more structure at the beginning — a place to start. To do that, I've felt compelled to use a description (definition).

Tonight, while I see that haiku and martial arts clearly have commonality, they are also very different. The idea of having haiku students learn by reading quality haiku from advanced poets is terrific and workable. "The" definition, as a result, can become more descriptive/broader, more inclusive of differing ideas, and support what they are learning-by-reading instead of telling them — telling . . .

I cannot teach a martial art style in this manner. However, it seems only logical at this point, to do so with haiku. There is a difference between them after all.

Nice thread. Thank you.

Don Baird:

This is an interesting thought, Richard:

"Allegory, in which a set of signs or symbols draw a parallel between one world and the next, is equally shunned. All three of these techniques - metaphor, simile, and allegory - are generally considered to be taboo in English-language haiku, and beginners are taught not to use them." (Richard)

It reminds me to once again remember (over and over) that Basho's most famous haikai (the frog poem) was largely, almost completely fictional (imagination) — from Basho"s "world of mind," as Hasegawa might put it.

In attempting to define haiku (haikai, hokku), it was over simplified for English speaking folks so that it was more accessible as a style/genre of poetry/literature. In the short run, it was helpful; in the long run, there is now much for us to unlearn in order to learn.

Richard Gilbert:

Shirane again: “Without the use of metaphor, allegory and symbolism, haiku will have a hard time achieving the complexity and depth necessary to become the object of serious study and commentary. The fundamental difference between the use of metaphor in haiku and that in other poetry is that in haiku it tends to be extremely subtle and indirect, to the point of not being readily apparent. The metaphor in good haiku is often buried deep within the poem. For example, the seasonal word in Japanese haiku tends often to be inherently metaphorical . . . The emphasis on the "haiku moment" in North American haiku has meant that most of the poetry does not have another major characteristic of Japanese haikai and haiku: its allusive character, the ability of the poem to speak to other literary or poetic texts. I believe that it was Shelley who said that poetry is ultimately about poetry. Great poets are constantly in dialogue with each other. This was particularly true of haikai . . .”

Alan Summers:

Great thread, and Richard, great posts because it's a major reason why haiku are not respected or 'articulated' well and that is the mistaken taboos of haiku in English from metaphor to including our self, to be aware of literature and art as a whole.

Hansha Teki:

Richard, you do well to quote Piedra de Sol. It has always been part of me.

http://antantantantant.wordpress.com/.../octavio-paz.../

OCTAVIO PAZ modern haiku 36.1
antantantantant.wordpress.com

A DAY IN THE CITY OF LAKES : : The white palace white on the black lake lingam a...

http://www.mysterium.com/sunstone.html

Michael Nickels-Wisdom:

Here are three resources to which I want to refer fellow haiku poets. They have broadened my understanding of both haiku and other poetries. They have deflated for me many of the "don'ts" of the haiku world, which now seem embarrassing. They are...

A Glossary of Literary Terms, M. H. Abrams, Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999, ISBN 9780155054523.

A Poet's Guide to Poetry, Mary Kinzie, University of Chicago Press, 1999, ISBN 9780226437392.

A Poet's Glossary, Edward Hirsch, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, ISBN 9780151011957.

Along with Shirane, you, Richard, and others, these books have confirmed for me that trope *are* used in haiku; that the idea of "moment* has a long history in English literature; that despite claims of objectivity vs. subjectivity, English-language haiku have been fed by quite a lot of subjectivity in the forms of Romanticism and Transcendentalism; and many other such realizations.

Michael Nickels-Wisdom:

One caveat: Hirsch's entry on haiku is poor.

Peter Yovu:

There is a degree of overlap between Haiku Ponderings and Field Notes, which is a feature on the Forum of The Haiku Foundation. Perhaps an overview of Field Notes (hereafter FN) will be helpful, especially to those who may not know of its existence.

FN is an online symposium wherein a group of invited panelists is given a subject to write about, and the time to do so. Contributions range from a few sentences to several pages in length. There is no emphasis of approach. The emphasis is on exploration, and on the belief that writing about something may be as revealing to the writer as it is to the reader.

This was set up because some of us involved with earlier forums were often baffled by the lack of participants. It seemed the equivalent of a sparsely attended haiku conference, or a feast which hungry people shunned. After all, don’t haiku poets want to

discuss haiku? The solution seemed to be to actively solicit participation, to give some people who didn’t wish to maintain the kind of day-to-day commitment that online discussions sometimes require, the chance to offer their views in much the same way as presenters at a symposium.

And, as usually happens at symposia, the "audience" is then invited to ask questions or to present their own views. And that is where the overlap with Haiku Ponderings dwells. Those who wish to discuss the subject under consideration, panelists and non-panelists, may do so. Discussions at times have been lively.

Michael Nickels-Wisdom:

I think one reason why people are reluctant to participate is fatigue over the endless disagreement over virtually any haiku subject. I know that has been my own case more often than not.

Don Baird:

Thanks for popping by Peter. The FN series at the THF is terrific. I'm enjoying it very much. But, I do miss the immediacy of communication that forums like this can offer. It seems, the mix of the two offer the most opportunity for continued haiku chatter.

I hope you don't mind that I stepped forward with this other side. And, possibly, this, as many forums have, will fall by the wayside of disinterest.

Thanks again for all you do for the THF. It is greatly appreciate by us all.

Don Baird:

@Michael N-W: In regards to this forum, there is zero tolerance for "arguments." It's a simple place of explaining your point and if folks want to learn from it, fine . . . and if they don't want to, then fine as well. Sharing is the operative word here.

Enjoy, and thank you for participating.

Michael Nickels-Wisdom:

Thank you for adding me to this forum, Don. Its freedom and non-confrontational style are why I have been speaking up here.

Don Baird:

I'm very glad you are enjoying it, Michael Nickels-Wisdom. I know that our members have terrific tolerance for others' ideas/ideals and I'm enjoying the excellent interaction as well. I've tried confrontation ... it's a burden ... and I set it down. Haiku will be what-ever-it-will-be and I'm in for the long run.

There is so much to learn; and often, it feels like there is so little time - especially when that time is spent in a negative space/place. It's not healthy ... and it doesn't make much room for friends, either.

Blessings ....

Alan Summers:

I have to agree that we are able to reply much quicker here, but also that those who might be reticent to respond elsewhere know they can here, and be acknowledged. I love hearing new and old voices, as I learn from them all.

Diana Ming Jeong:

As a web developer, I have been taught that the perfect alt tag for a photo is a haiku. Alt tags are important for screen readers because it is here that the image is presented to a visually impaired user. A haiku therefore conveys a feeling and/or moment of life as it is unfolding, while using words that are simple and direct.