

UNDER
THE
BASHŌ
2016



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Under the Bashō 2016

Traditional Haiku

Editor: Seánan Forbes

Ink

light slips away from
bare forsythia branches
you've yet to return

Willey, Ian

this wrinkled woman
touching my wife's tight belly –
cherry blossom tea

riverside at dawn
a meadowlark's song unfurls
from a port-o-john

holiday traffic
a painted turtle watching
from within its shell

Under the Bashō 2016

Stand-alone Hokku

Editor: Don Baird

Brager, Mark E.

not sweeping
the last cobweb . . .
deep winter

each
in their proper place . . .
snowflakes

summer dusk . . .
the last echo
returns home

Cooper, Bill

a bubble
under the frog's chin –
shifting colors

Novak, Veronika Zora

i too know
the touch of winter . . .
frozen butterfly

long winter . . .
what to make of this
cocoon?

preening
the edge of twilight . . .
black swan

Read, Dave

creek side ...
my shadow swims
without me

late summer ...
a cyclist rolls back
the earth

river ghosts ...
casting at flashes
of sunlight

Shaw, Adelaide B.

dim sunshine –
a robin's silhouette
on the bare maple

yellow wall –
the translucent wings
of a moth

Strange, Debbie

painted gourds
purple martins sway
with the wind

northern lights
melting into the lake
a loon's quaver

bent grasses
the flattened shadows
of mule deer

wilson, robert d.

sultry night . . .
the moon staring
at himself

not now, crow . . .
the wind's painting
canyon walls

moon gazing . . .
a carp feeding on
my shadow

a river
above the moon . . .
late autumn

from my chest,
jasmine petals . . .
stirring stars

a dragon
becomes a cloud?
twilight dawn

late night . . .
the buoy bells in a
gray whale's wake

deep morning . . .
a salmon waving
to stone

evening chill . . .
the mute songs of a
billion stones

mountain gorge . . .
the child inside me
swimming

tall grass . . .
a line of ants bearing
the past

midwinter . . .
slipping into a
crow's belly

child, your
twisted brown legs . . .
humid heat

thick darkness . . .
the poison toad
not singing

the dance of
kelp and ashes . . .
elm trees

your sadness . . .
the fallen stars
of morning

elephant grass . . .
can a butterfly eat
a heron?

late night . . .
an old man cradling
autumn

and the moon . . .
squatting in a
still pond

cracked earth . . .
the last words of
dry leaves

deep morning . . .
a chorus returning
to slumber

they cannot
see, the boatmen . . .
heaven's river

above and
below the clouds . . .
summer dreams

this window . . .
how many straw hats
dreamt this field?

new rice . . .
soldiers towing a
mother's dream

jasmine tea . . .
an old man sipping
dragonflies

this field . . .
the darkness in
a worm's eyes

stone buddha . . .
an old man sucking
shrimp heads

buddha . . .
that tune inside the
bamboo shoot

somewhere . . .
the song you sing to
me at night

the gold
they made you from . . .
tin roofs

crashing waves . . .
how unpredictable
my hokku

sifting sand . . .
the ashes of a
banana tree

late spring . . .
oregano sipping
sunlight

whispers . . .
the dryness of a
thousand dreams

hoarse laughter . . .
the weeds dancing
at noon

scorched earth . . .
worms tunneling
darkness

(for Robin Williams)

the echo
of laughter in the stars . . .
oh captain!

dry soil . . .
have the worms aged
as well?

dew drop world . . .
a butterfly stretches
her wings

old woman . . .
feel the dew sliding
down petals

ebbing heat . . .
gray whales towing
porridge clouds

breeching . . .
is it true that
a whale dreams?

teasing me,
this humid breeze . . .
chatting tin

night breeze . . .
the whisper of heaven's
river

this wind . . .
a wounded leopard
in tall grass

volcano . . .
the whisper of a
thousand fish

your smile . . .
weaving clouds into
a dream

without song,
the river's stones . . .
high noon

the same dark
hour as another . . .
thick silt

haunting,
the loon's cry at dusk . . .
this wind

dew drops . . .
wishing the night
was longer

shriveled plants . . .
not enough, bowing
to clouds

high noon . . .
a laborer picking
her shadow

husking corn . . .
now follows her
through the stars

moth wings . . .
is there a shortcut
to the moon?

autumn cool . . .
what are the stars to
a gray whale?

gray skies . . .
an egret painting
shadows

and summer . . .
the fisherman's net
dredging dreams

my poems?
somewhere in the old
tree's hollow

summer breeze . . .
everyday, the canyon
stretches

autumn breeze . . .
a laundry woman
tossing clouds

high noon . . .
the breeze above
me, captioned

humid day . . .
the ice vendor's
shadow

old woman . . .
your shadow is
dancing!

twilight dusk . . .
a gray haired monk
breathing

a ballroom
the asphalt road . . .
high noon

new rice . . .
leaning into
a mirror

wisp past me,
wind, between cracks . . .
talking tin

late evening . . .
the whiteness of
a seagull

Under the Bashō 2016

full moon . . .
light dancing on
canyon walls

Wit, Ernest

summer vespers —
a stranded sparrow
hits the skylight

Under the Bashō 2016

Modern Haiku

Editor: Kala Ramesh

Adow, Kwaku Feni

father's charity
the scarecrow standing
in my old clothes

recycled
waste bin papers
become boats

muddy trail of footprints
I step inside the shoe
of another

Agyei-Baah, Adjei

moon wet night
a lone spider threading
the stars

streetlights out
the sudden departure
of my shadow

open grassland
a stray sheep on the horizon
almost a cloud

morning path . . .
dots of dew
share the sun

ai li

his gentleness
the dustman
when i fell

sudden downpour
caught in a doorway
with your smile

candle flame
i smell
wings burning

old blanket
it used
to warm us

one mourner
at the crematorium
one paid mourner

whistling out
of tune i must
be frightened

Ashdown, Jess

pitted skin war
me and the mosquitoes arguing
who does own my blood

light across a wooden floor
quiet feet move through a spring moon

mountain lilies rest between boulders
on the road toward home

Ayinbire, Blessmond Alebna

wavy sea~
a lad and his boat
seesaw

Brager, Mark E.

spring equinox –
the dancer's shadow
in arabesque

atonal music
the weight
of winter stars

past midnight
letting go
of the rain

climax
our breath the color
of birdsong

desert breeze
the border fence
sky blue

Buckingham, Helen

sickle moon
a sapling
in the wind

bluebells linger
in the shadow
of the spire

playing field
lambs muddy
their whites

touch line
sheep huddle
in their fleeces

Cates, Anna

woodpecker drills
my stained fingers reach
for more blackberries

Chambers, Paul

snow flurry
the lingering scent
of her sleep

mist after rain
a cormorant slips
through its shadow

mountain wind
the goatherd's whistle
darkens

gathering dusk
the slow sphere
of pine needles

Chocilowska, Marta

coming storm
the fishing boat engine
gets hiccups

into the wind
on my bicycle jacket
a swallowtail rides

white chrysanthemum
who will remember me
when I'm gone

All Souls' Day
I write down a new name
in the family Bible

rolling thunder —
a hay waggon driver
shoots the whip

table for two
in a tiny tea room
the scent of mint

blindman's buff -
my blind grandson removes
the blindfold

Feddersen, Harold

surviving the bears
a single blueberry
cloaked in fresh snow

Basho visits
from across the Pacific
into my palm

truck's long honk
barking dog on the road
goes silent

creek rapids
 fallen Autumn leaves
 separate again

evening sun
 fills my father's mouth
 as he naps

Gage, Joshua

red hibiscus
the dart and swoop
of today's hummingbird

my daughter giggles
at sparkling juice bubbles—
midnight

winter rain—
crocheting,
I miss a stitch

pre-dawn flurries—
all these Christmas trees
among the trash cans

crunch of snow
teaching my daughter
the chickadee's call

new diagnosis—
avoiding frozen puddles
all the way home

lake effect—
the depth of the deer tracks
across my driveway

Father's Day
our bubbles
chase each other

Galton, Grace

funeral ...
a child's floral umbrella
amid the sea of black

crossroads ...
each departing leaf
finds its wind

night train
a stranger and I
synchronise watches

hospice tea ...
for a moment Mother
remembers my name

from dusk till dawn
the length of starlight

Gardiner, Tim

the rain eases
a cockerel crows
for the first time

Pompeii tour
lovers locked
in a tight embrace

Rusunoki statue
the pine cricket's
ceaseless song

blackberry picking
auntie's basket lighter
this autumn

Fuji blossom
I dust the last ash
from my boots

Hambrick, Jennifer

geese in formation
your eyebrows
when your father calls

Hanson, Jeffrey

first snow
a deeper gratitude
takes wing

autumn rain
with each drop
I know less

who will fly
into my life today?
bird seed

first snow
a distant train
whistles the stars

fog
a herd of deer
circle back

Hanson, Simon

before the breeze
the first stirring
on the water

from the stern
long lines of foam
trail into the night

Harrison, Devin

along the path
and into my dreams
wildflowers

raining moon
the alpha rhythms
on the shingle roof

frown lines
deepening on her brow
first frost

stormy skies
wedges of geese crossing
the 49th parallel

plastic flowers
moths mistake a streetlight
for the moon

ongoing rain
it all comes down to
this moment

Hena, Aziza

Her breath
after the last chemo
Spring breeze

Summer heat
street dogs fight
near a water tap

Deep meditation
under closed eyes
my lost father smiles

Holland, Jean

talking
to the empty side . . .
our double bed

Jastermsky, Peter

a handful of roses
. . . the petals fall
when touched

Joan, Eva

morning mirror -
my life
unvarnished

the moon floats slowly
from east to west -
night of Father's death

Kadric, Elmedin

they leave behind
everything on your headstone
sparrows

the same war
all over again
plum blossoms

summer's end
a parachute takes
the shape of waves

in the
spring breeze
Are Prisons Obsolete?

mating dragonflies
in the borrowed pot
I'm waiting to wash

in and around
where the river goes
midnight stars

seaside sound of waves
 weighing our pillow talk
 in my hands

Kelly, David J.

skyscraper
which side of grief
should I jump from

on a short leash
the dogwalker's arm
stretches a little

Kendall, Mary

hospice –
rubbing lotion
into her still hands

bitten nails . . .
holding the pain
in her hands

worry beads –
one by one I parse
your silence

nightshade –
the smoothness
of an aubergine

lonely night –
even the moon
looks around

darkening forest –
a wood thrush
begins to sing

chance of a lifetime –
my finger in front
of the lens

unable to swallow
childhood memories
rise up

Kent, Brendon

storm clouds
a shepherd's whistle
finds his dog

going nowhere
the housefly's
insistence

falling leaves ...
reading the same line
over and over

this slow drift
of thoughts, downstream
a single leaf

is my world
just like yours?
day moon

Khan, Mohammad Azim

dry village pond ...
the baked earth
smells of fish

rainbow
the story runs deeper
than the colours

canyon walls
the eagle drags
its shadow

ominous clouds ...
the wind fans
the raven's tail

old frog ...
the pond wobbles
under its belly

ancient castle ...
the smiling portrait
cobwebbed

moonlit night ...
the iron shadows
on the sidewalk

sudden rain ...
the homeless shifts
his home

Kiernan, Hilde

on the pier
a whiff of lightning
before the rain

seaside town
the soft resonance
of lapping waves

Kolodji, Deborah P

pink blush
behind us
the belt of Venus

campfire embers
a match
on the bear's DNA

first blueberries
each plastic pail
a different color

school uniform
she picks through
the button jar

line of gulls
behind the fishing boat
summer's end

Krishna, Neha R.

jasmine scent
escaping from my tresses
autumn wind

Lange, Jill

hours now
since sunrise ...
still no cat

zen intensive—
end of the first night
the full moon

late summer—
my old cat dozes
with morning glories

Levy, Mark

slow falling rain
a door opens
between the drops

Losak, Amy

morning chill ...
so many souls
in fallen leaves

moonlit parking lot ...
the purr of passing cars
so close, so far

Mahala, Ajaya

old letters
the smell of friendship
in the cursive writing

road enquirer...
his beautiful wife
in the next seat

Miller, Mark

drought –
an orb-weaver's web
in the tyre swing

peak hour downpour –
weaving between cars
a red umbrella

Naskova, Elena

social media...
flies buzzing over
a piece of poop

first zit...
she borrows her brother's
hoodie

giant sequoia
the inch worm
an inch higher

rushing river
two falling trees holding
onto each other

autumn rains...
the dampness settles
deep inside me

bedridden...
the sound of
dripping icicles

Oche, Akor Emmanuel

camera clicks ...
two siblings smile
at the dawn

Pavlinović, Dejan

little hands
after the red ball
into the horizon

first gaze...
my own reflection
in his little eyes

besides a smile
nothing else moves...
sad face

fighting for
a swimmer's attention
wind and wave

Pedersen, Martin

deep in the grass
praying mantis
sits out the storm

walking in a Kyoto park
thinking about a woman
a petal lands on my forehead

Powell, Perry L.

waking up to rain
a thousand wishes
written in water

Rabang, Anthony Q.

a child draws
his father's lungs
black moth

street in bloom
bees swarm all over
the food stall

pitch black
a cold voice begins
to shed light

sunshine park
a kid dancing
with the leaves

mountain top
soft clouds mask
our weariness

lantern parade
Northern Star shines
across the street

balikbayan box*
a child keeps looking
for her mom

*balikbayan box - is a carton shipped or brought to the Philippines from another country by a Filipino who has been living overseas, typically containing items such as food, clothing, toys, and household products (Oxford Dictionaries).

Rajan, Geethanjali

divorce notice –
a sunray strays
into baby's room

this tea a tad sweet ...
when did we stop
knowing each other

winter sunset
another ember dies out
while we argue

cobalt blue –
guessing the colour of sky
in your land

temple visit –
the homeless man's feast
in a leaf-cup

Ramasubramanian, Sindhuja

succulent lemon
crushed under new wheels
for good luck

Read, Dave

lilac bush
the thickness of
my breath

twilight
every bird
a crow

overcast
a ripple of fish
in the clouds

underfoot
a twig snaps
my silence

the wind ...
I put a cap
on it

Richardson, Duncan

after the storm
the fallen archway
blocks my path

rock shelf
 joint lines play
 with my eyes

Robinson, Chad Lee

conference
on the little league mound —
leaf chatter

game of catch —
the things a son needs to hear
from his father

carving a pumpkin —
the face I put on
my father's cancer

rope burn ...
selling the horse
for less than it's worth

harvest dusk
the sky deeper
by a cornfield

Sacramona, Tom

tree rings—
rain and drought years
of our marriage

ice skaters
on and off
the curious mink

the tuft of flowers
its in the way things
catch light

Salzer, Jacob

smell of lavender
foreign words drift
in the wind

heavy rain
a forest trail
lost in mud

Scully, Ron

mid morning squirrel
scampers down the stone wall
late for work

Shaw-Diaz, Tiffany

a game of hide-and-seek
the memories
I've lost

nearby storm -
my words and yours
soak the air

exhale...
grass yielding
to afternoon wind

shadows cast
upon a broken sidewalk
his hand in mine

dandelions inch closer -
today's gossip
fresh

Shaw, Adelaide B.

last page –
it's time to begin
the day again

Stevenson, Richard

sheet music
the silhouettes of these
birds on the wires

fingernail moon --
the fuchia shoes
of the first jogger

hummingbirds sip --
two moony-eyed teenagers
in a cafe booth

Cottle Lake
bullfrogs larrup
as we leave

Newcastle sandstone
a forty ton column supports
a butterfly

Strange, Debbie

spangled web
one thing holding
us together

Teneva, Diana

class reunion -
a belated tango
quickens my pulse

slow pulse ...
everything is still mine
for a moment

unfinished dream
under my eyelids ...
daybreak

winter morning
a frost-bitten child begging
for an Eskimo kiss

overgrown town –
children's voices echo
along the old graveyard

hot wind ...
a spider swaying
from the clothesline

Tomczak, Maria

chasing the sunset
roadside dandelions
almost closed

mental hospital
a woman with a smile
of the Cheshire Cat

in exile
a jellyfish thrown
on the shore

rising moon
puddles form the Milky Way
on the country road

Voicu, Steliana Cristina

dandelion seeds –
all my dreams
about you

yellow leaves –
the steps of a passerby
echoes in the rain

Wiggerman, Scott

time to ponder
in the library
the clock's loud tick

airport pre-screening
the small gift of keeping
my shoes on

early morning
dental appointment
too many smiles

I step from the car
go from sixty to ten
spotting my parents

tree stump
squirrels leap
through empty space

last cup
from the coffee pot
the daily grind

wind gauge
roadrunner stands
atop the tile roof

leopard-skin panties
bunched at the trail head
two turtledoves

Willey, Ian

a shrine bombed in the war
the old man paints
a different picture

the oak stump
its roots still buckle
the pavement

narrow street
the space taken
by a dead sparrow

Wit, Ernest

full moon
our supper
half eaten

a lamppost
in the middle of the pavement
parting lovers

a dull pain
in the old scar
spring buds bursting

leaves falling
behind our backs
golden sunshine

Zhuanglang, David He

howling wind
the bird nest soaked
in moonlight

snowfall
the stone Buddha
changes clothes

an old man bows
on the temple step...
setting sun

Zimmerman, J.

cucumber soup
the clarity
of the choreographer

deadheading
all the long evening
neighbors' stories

hop harvest
she adds her wages
to her hope chest

willow fluff
catching the drift of the sky
with my Dad

Under the Bashō 2016

One-line Haiku

Editor: Johannes S. H. Bjerg

Agyei-Baah, Adjei

winter zipping the swallow to the tail

a lone tree conducting the winds

twilight mountain erupting sunrays

ai li

you steal into my night and leave me bleeding

leaving the smoke behind & a baby

fishing town the women in black again

i'm still in pain taking off my wedding ring

late night ramen i hear myself eat

Blöttenberger, Meik

in the hush of grief a resurrection fern

inside a pebble what the river said

early-onset shards of sea glass underfoot

between friends the swoop of a swallow

foam on the back of a horseshoe crab wavelength

Lent a crocus punches through snow

Brager, Mark E.

slipping the leash the dog walker's shadow

desert rose the same moon over Babylon

neither particle nor wave cool morning mist

completing my thought a bend in the river

Dad's empty shot glass breaking the winter light

turning into dusk the snow geese on fire

Bruck, Ingrid

grass shivers in moving sunlight that glints off a rifle barrel

sunset ignites an invisible jet under a moon in the clouds

night comes at four knee deep in mist on the bridge to nowhere

salt on the tongue tang in the air makes fog believe the sea is there

Buckingham, Helen

cowboy gods' cosmic bolas

seventh circle of the karman line

words parkour off the page she's on it

outside. his comfort zone

daybreak spinning plaster grapes

God too heavy to rise

Cates, Anna

cloudless blue geese glide into the next stanza

summer breeze a fossil in the scree

warm night my pocket full of stars

orion's belt holding the night together

Cooper, Bill

rusted trestle rumbling of a navy train

the crawl of a blue lobster cloud

lapping water sunset silhouettes of Moia

chief as piñata as childbirth

Under the Bashō 2016

moving the question of saltwater intrusion

cold midnight oiling the third trumpet valve

Gardiner, Tim

leaping around grasshopper moods

catching a cold fly fisherman

Hanson, Simon

centred leaping into the ripple i make

harbour fireworks god knows what the fish think

coconut oil the blue sea beyond the flesh

Holland, Jean

grinding out the butt break over

cicada gaining momentum his fist her face

Imperial, Alegria

out of a starfish a mountain lake

Venus rising a shore behind your ear

Hubble peeking from the other end I wonder about my head size

through the microscope an ovum I dreamed a comet could be

with my upraised skirt still I lose a falling sky

Kadric, Elmedin

two parking lots ago a fragile company of homes

as long as not knowing is starlight

this green corn moon an acquired taste

rain soaked buds on the news waterboarding

Kelly, David J.

none neutral incivilwar

saw teeth where none were meant to be bedside tumbler

prostaglandin wrestling a flash drive from its shrink wrap

gods of war given each day their daily dead

an extinct rhino species 49 shades of grey

Kendall, Mary

lone tricycle blue in the whirlwind of leaves

burnt butter that morning in Provence

Krishnamurthy, Shrikaanth

time trickling sparks from the notes in triple rhythm

shadows shrunken clouds more white than black

the sheen where she had been a shell

Limbach, Eva

backstage a mocking bird unplugged

june bugs my sluggishness tilt

ignoring the barbed wire cottonwood fluff

Losak, Amy

pecking at crumbs the red eye of a pigeon

Mahala, Ayaya

silhouetted marshland s-necks and reverse s-necks

twilight selfie a lotus pond slowly erases

rats gnawing mango wood midnight sharpens

Maris, Anna

every wave over small stones a new tune

barbed wire another country

brittle paper not only his poetry

shallow breathing that thing with feathers

super beginning and end nova

crossroads without myself in a juxtaposition

McGregor, Marietta

the ache of half the story gibbous moon

never knowing how it ends melatonin fix

board meeting the headlong rush of ego on the rocks

desert cold a dingo's midnight whimper howl

economy going under a flat stone flat spider

Miller, Mark

dusk and the road melding into mist

after her bath water beads on her hair on my cheeks

convalescence the wonder of water lilies opening

Novak, Veronika Zora

shared silence the praying mantis and i

circling the sky that circles them vultures

lightning searches for thunder searches for lightning

feng shui i re-arrange the cobwebs in my head

re-inventing the sound of sky starlings

Pathak, Aparna

standing firm in running water moon and I

every ripple a river in the river

the star mother pointed to before becoming

Sacramona, Tom

on the origin of species drought year

swish through the big dipper crickets

a key apart mosquitoes

Pegasus another one-horse town winter

to crow to reflex to me

Sawitri, Ken

pomegranate season the transparent grenades ticking delicately

urban sardine his unsaid words flow

a stethoscope's smile while the cold metal tipped on my naked chest

pomegranate harvest a summer tank rattled off its emptiness

Scully, Ron

mason jar of lifetime keys collectible tumbler of time

USNAVY fork engraved and balanced glaring on the table at 5:15

my brother willed the blackjack nicked with secrets and lies

thumb worn rosebud rosaries kissed stained cross spare us

nightwatchman's ring of keys jangling one lock fits all

folded flag presented the first born seven spent shells seven words

Shankar, Shloka

2:1 the echo of reason fading

Under the Bashō 2016

wormhole the time it takes to remember

penumbra the side of me you

the evolution of species in your ear

Shaw, Adelaide B.

lilac buds growing into their scent

maiden grass sweeping the brick path the wind

Stoyanova, Iliyana

morning somehow I breathe in the morning

a super moon flicking cameras the super moon

the black lace of winter forest gateau on my tongue

forty years from another birthday candle smothers

self portrait dad's smile gone yellow

while the grasses hold fireflies on the windowsill

flowers for eternity the grave I couldn't find

Szeglowski, Lech

a snake sheds its skin on the stone human shade

Toft, Stephen

autumn moon illuminating a murder

falling leaves the doctor's phone rings and rings

crows on a branch the suicide note writes itself

Winteridge, Sara

sickle moon passing a kidney stone

walking the common dog violets

street food the sound of frying in cantonese

leaves winter downstream drifting confessions our

graveyard the long and the short of it

zoetrope the animation of snow

oed the cat starts again

Gloria this bent over storm in a palm

wagtails resort the permalight at terminal 3

puritans leaving the sky impaled on a bulrush

Wit, Ernest

a cloud passing through the moon passing through a cloud

as blind as the mirror reflections

Under the Bashō 2016

a queue of the dead waiting for nothing

waves still setting off on a maiden voyage

rain falling on us falling dusk

Under the Bashō 2016

Concrete Haiku

Editor: Carlos Colón

Agyei-Baah, Adjei

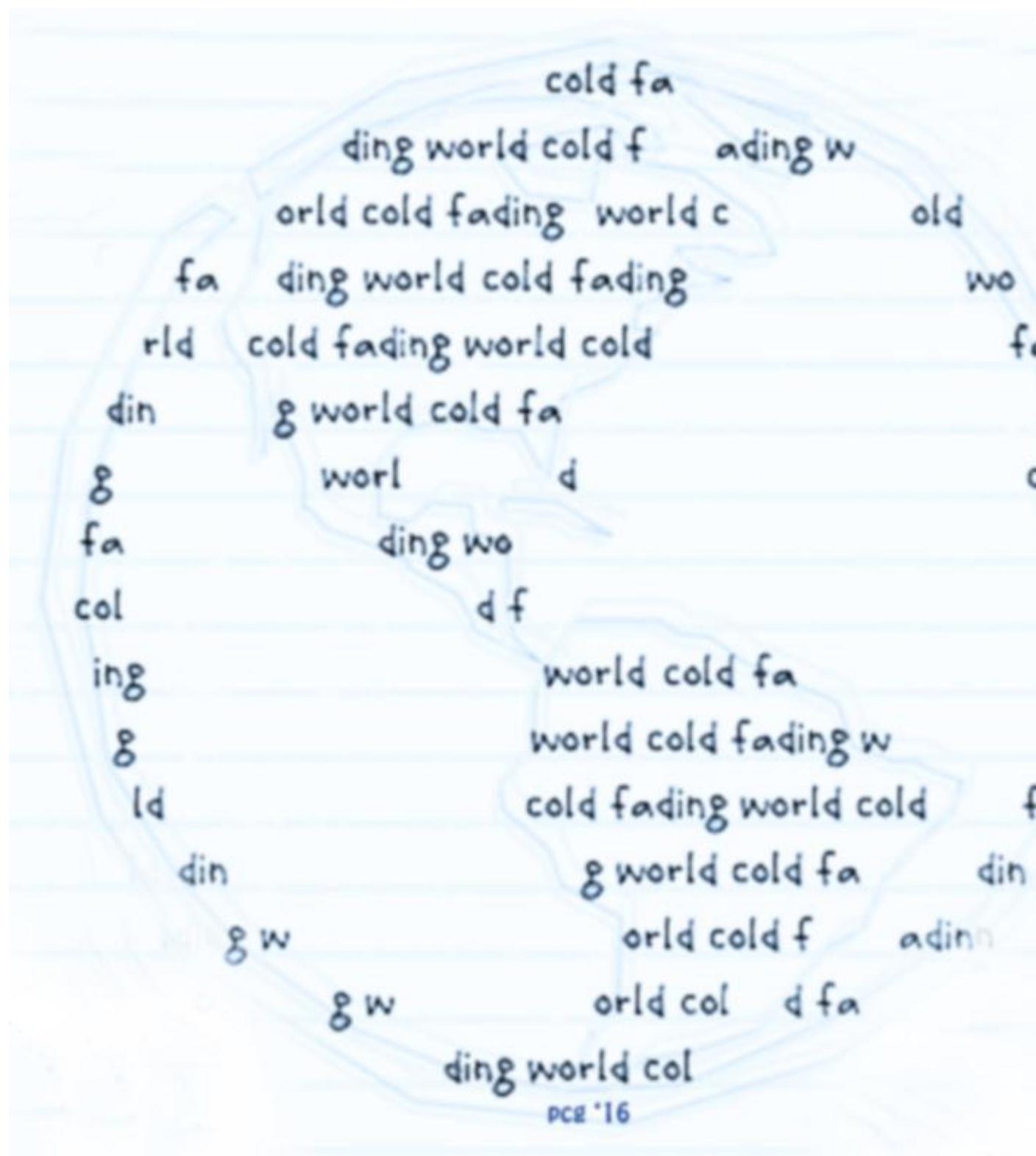


Buckingham, Helen

midlife---zipwire
|
to

shuncool

Geyer, Pat







the
right thin
g to do the
right thing to
do the right t
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right thing to do the right thing to do the
right thing to do the right thing to do the r
ight thing to do the right thing to do the r
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right
pcg '16

global warming

**b
i
l
a
t
i
o
n**

Hanson, Simon

H₂O ly water
every river
lake and sea

moon
rise
moon
fall
ici
cle
dr
i

p

Hurst, Rick

black birds flying
the tree-line shadows
disappear

a murder of crows
on the old oak tree

b
l
e
e
d
i
n
g sap

Under the Bashō 2016

Kadric, Elmedin

PLANeT

Kelly, David J.

smeared
on black and *white* pages
blue bottle

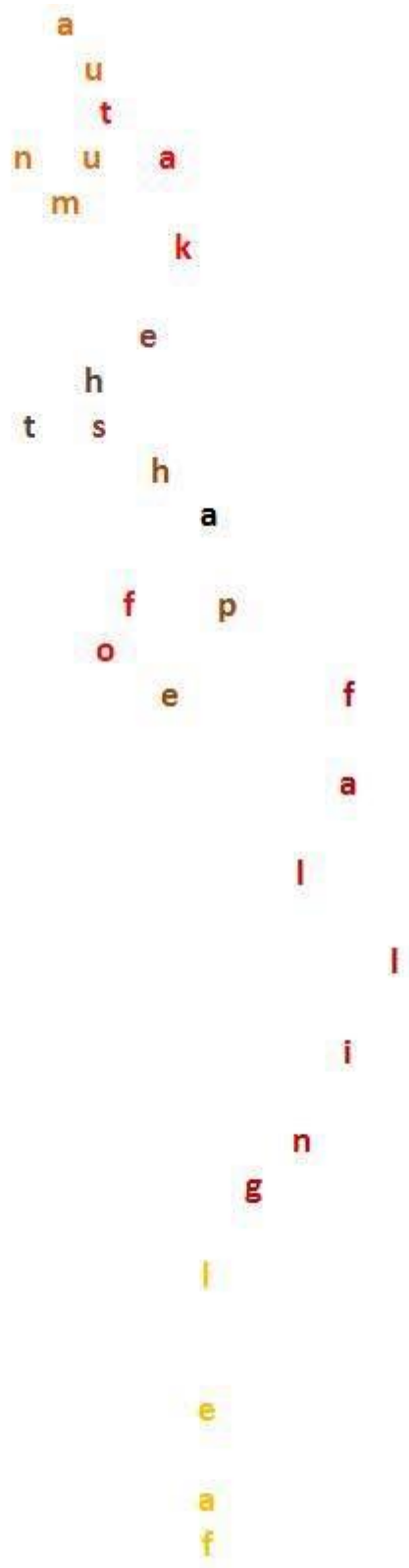
k k k k n
c c c c a
u u u u w
disembodied tails

hawkbit lifting the weight of the afternoon

h
t e
d n
o y
e b
s u
m m
i t
r e s
h u
t m
o m
n i
a t
n
a o
n t
e h
h e
t r

layer∞ovum∞chick∞poult∞poussin∞

Krishnamurthy, Shrikaanth



shrikaanth krishnamurthy

peeling an onion . . .
each inner layer
thicker and
thicker
until

ran go li
the dots still un
con nec ted

ತಿರುಪಂಡಿ
ಶೇರಿಪಿಯಾದ
ಚುಕ್ಕೆಹ
(The haiku in Sankethi)

ರಂಗೋಲಿ
ಕೂಡಿಸಿಲ್ಲದ
ಚುಕ್ಕೆಗಳು
(The haiku in kannada)

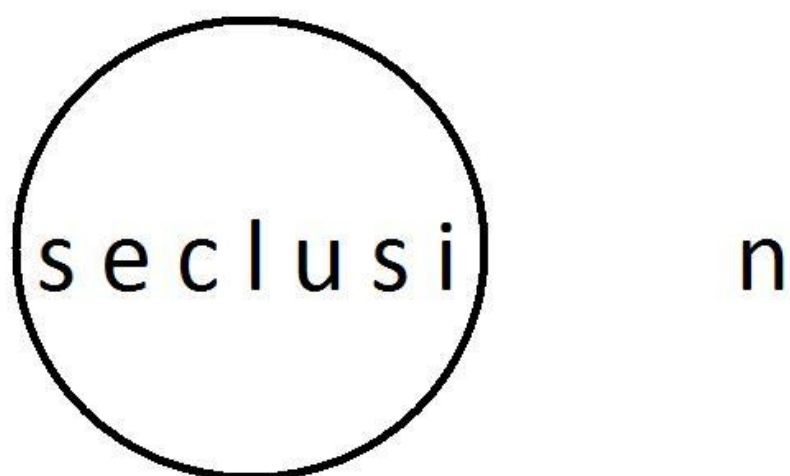
Mahala, Ajaya

ecstatic sleep

the newly-weds

book 16m

each other



side waves
a power boat **UNZIPS A LAGOON**

AJAYA MAHALA

Sacramona, Tom

l o n g d i v i s i o n
the scrape of a s/n/e/a/k/e/r
through sidewalk chalk

snowmelt brook,
the rock wall
ga ps
wh
i white
ter

Sawitri, Ken





m
w o m b
w o m b
o m
b

Schopfer, Olivier

sequoia
giant
the
at the bottom of an anthill

rushhhour

sn@il

Scully, Ron

 s c
 e e
 r n
 c t
 scar above the eyeslit

snowman's
skull

icehouse
eyesockets

onyx
moonstones

un

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↳

t

t

o

n

s

her white silk blouse

Shankar, Shloka

wa i ti ng fo r the ne x t SNE EZE

sthulefd playli  t

Tomczak, Maria



*autumn*nightturninggreenneon*signs*

Personal Best Haiku

Editor: Kala Ramesh

Adeleke, Barnabas I.

after the muezzin's call
a market din turns off
shed by shed

Heron's Nest, Volume XVIII, Number 2: June 2016

Adow, Kwaku Feni

asphalt vapour. . .
afternoon raindrops
return to the sky

Third Place, 12th Indian Kukai

Agyei-Baah, Adjei

roasting sun
the egret's measured steps
in buffalo shadow

The Heron's Nest Award, March 2016

ai li

in a room
with no windows
drawing stars

still 2 one 1998

Antebi, Debbi

day moon
I point out my flaws
in other people

[*Sonic Boom*](#), December 2016

Antonio, Billy

cold night
a beggar and his dog
share shadows

First Place, Shiki Monthly Kukai, December 2014

Baranski, Johnny

summer moon
my prayers for peace
go unanswered

Bates, Gabriel

warm sheets of rain:
the old dog trembles
not knowing

Benson, Jan

lifting geese
white-fluff cattails
in the spindrift

My Haiku Pond - Contest #2

Bruck, Ingrid

restless ocean
a coiled snake
pauses between waves

Mataroyshka Poetry Journal - [June 16, 2016](#)

Buckingham, Helen

petting moon
the universe
beyond

Blithe Spirit 26.1

Camargo, Claire Vogel

swirling snowflakes
clothe cactus in velvet shawl -
the winter prom

World Haiku Review, Winter, January 2016 - Zatsuei (Haiku of Merit)

Chocilowska, Marta

migratory birds
key to the summer cottage
under the doormat

27th ITO EN Oi Ocha New Haiku Contest (2016) Sponsors' Award (Haiku International Association)

Gardiner, Tim

distant hill
a swallowtail butterfly
obscures the view

The Heron's Nest 17.4

Guzlowski, John

I can't imagine
a God who wants me
to kill you

(Haiku for Paris)

Hambrick, Jennifer

evening bird –
for once
we're both listening

World Haiku Review June 2016

Hanson, Simon

hallway mirror
a vase of flowers
made of light

Jane Reichhold International Haiku Prize 2016, First Place

Harizanova, Zornitza

winter night
a stray dog barks at
a snowman

Frogpond, Volume 37:2, Spring/Summer 2014, p.59

Harvey, Karen

jazz night
at the grill bar
voice over easy

The Bamboo Hut, Autumn 2015

Kelly, David J.

scattered showers
the birth and death
of rainbows

A Hundred Gourds 5.2 2016

Kendall, Mary

hospice . . .
a glimpse of moonlight
on the bed

The Heron's Nest - June, 2016

Kent, Brendon

toy soldiers --
the grandkids playing
refugees

The Mainichi - Jan.11th 2016

Lange, Jill

red poppies—
one war
to another

A Hundred Gourds - June 2016

Laughing waters

handcrafted cross
on the poppyhead
mother's milk tears

Losak, Amy

sun clock...
my day unwinds
with low-flying sparrows

Mahala, Ajaya

winter wind
a spider web holds together
the swaying bamboos

Winning entry, Indian Kukai #13, September 2015

Maris, Anna

home town
in the familiar houses
strangers

hemstad
i de välbekanta husen
främlingar

First published in *Mayfly*, issue 59.

McGregor, Marietta

backyard water games
a brother and sister leap
to split a rainbow

27th ITO EN Oi Ocha New Haiku Contest; MERIT AWARD

Mindova, Radka

cave chapel –
wished – upon coins
in salt water

The 143th. WHA Haiga Contest (06/2016)

Novak, Veronika Zora

ice storm . . .
crescent moons strewn
across the floor

Oche, Akor Emmanuel

palm tree shelter
the bird adds to its nest
an olive leaf

mamba journal of Africa haiku, issue 2

Pavlinovic, Dejan

from star to star
down the Milky Way
a little finger

The 20th ITOEN "Oh-I Ocha" New Haiku Contest, Tokyo, Japan 2009, (Merit Award)

Read, Dave

autumn dawn
the apple tree
ripe with robins

A Hundred Gourds [5:1 December 2015](#)

Sacramona, Tom

a boy's drum
moves the dragon's feet
New Year's Day

The Heron's Nest [Volume XVIII Number 1, March 2016](#)

Salzer, Jacob

how many
become one
sound of rain

Frogpond 38:3

Sawitri, Ken

hazy moon
a first satellite dish installed
in the fisherman's village

The Heron's Nest [Volume XVIII Number 1, March 2016](#)

Shaw, Adelaide B.

cutting brush –
over the Russian sage
bees power up

Stylus Poetry Journal, 2009

Stoyanova, Iliyana

broken seashell
my heel the colour of
sunset

The Asahi Shimbun, ASAHI HAIKUIST NETWORK. October 7, 2016

Strange, Debbie

fog deepens
the sound of rabbits
nibbling night

Grand Prize, 2016 World Haiku Contest - Lyrical Passion Poetry

Szeglowski, Lech

cherry blossom –
it is between
me and God

The Sacred in Contemporary Haiku, [Ed. Robert Epstein, CreateSpace, 2014](#)

Teneva, Diana

I read carefully
the moles on your skin –
Braille letters

Blithe Spirit 26.3

Tomczak, Maria

winter field
the crows devour
the last light

IRIS Little Haiku Contest, 3rd Prize

Voicu, Steliana Cristina

Grapes harvest
Baskets of light
Delay the dusk

Runner-up Prize, 25th Basho Haiku Festival, Japan, 12th October 2013

Under the Bashō 2016

Willems, Gail

cherry blossom
mirrored in the pool
until it falls

Published in Butterfly Dreaming (translated into Chinese) and Famous Reporter

Feature Articles

Editor: Don Baird

A Review of Yanty's Butterfly

WRITTEN BY ILIYANA STOYANOVA

“Yanty’s Butterfly Haiku Nook: An Anthology”, 2016

Edited by: Jacob Salzer and the Nook Editorial Staff

Book review by Iliyana Stoyanova

When I was asked to write a book review on “Yanty’s *Butterfly*” I started thinking about the best way to approach it, how to do justice to a book which was obviously far more than just a simple collection of poems. And then I decided to jump in with both feet and started to read. The more I read, the more I realized, sensed and felt what this book was all about – a colourful and very powerful celebration of life.

Yanty Tjiam (1981-2015) was a valued member of a small haiku community on Google+, the Haiku Nook, where poets from all around the world shared their work and helped each other on their fascinating journey into haiku. As the group developed their poetry became stronger and stronger but then suddenly Yanty, an integral part of the group, died. Having to cope with the sad loss of a loved one brought the group even closer and the idea of creating a fit tribute to Yanty was born. 21 poets from Canada, Germany, Persia, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Ukraine, the U.K. , and the U.S. came together to create “Yanty’s *Butterfly*” - an international anthology of over 600 poems, spanning the variety of haiku forms: three-line haiku, two-line haiku, one-line haiku, four-line haiku, traditional haiku (5-7-5), concrete haiku, tanka, and haibun. There is a dedicated section for Yanty’s own haiku and finally we go “haiku travelling the single line” with Alan Summers who takes us on a journey with the Haiku Nook members’ monoku with his enthusiastically written article.

In the preface Willie R. Bongcaron writes: “*Our anthology carries the power of compassion, born from the nurturing attitudes of people who supported each other on their haiku journey. It is about the selfless and untiring dedication of people who wanted to make a difference, however small it may be, in a world that is increasingly becoming callous, and indifferent.*” In the editor’s note, Jacob Salzer points out that the anthology is “*also a celebration of our work in this genre and the power of haiku to connect people, across countries, across boundaries...*” And indeed, as if Yanty’s spirit is guiding the authors throughout the book and when reading the poems we could vividly sense her presence. Sometimes she could rise with the birds (James Ciriaco), fly like a butterfly caught in the wind (Momolu Freeman), or even become the wind itself (Willie Bongcaron); she could even sing like the winter stars (Eva Limbach) or elegantly float like a lily pad (Michelle Hyatt). Yanty’s presence is also felt in the summer haze (Lovette Carter) as well as in the autumn dawn (Momolu Freeman), or as Yanty’s brother Fei Zhan writes – in each dew drop:

after rain
different worlds
through dew

Of course the haiku dialogue with the reader means that each and every one of us would explore the various parts of the anthology in our own unique way. The book offers a great choice of styles and forms and invites the readers to discover their own favourites. After reading the anthology several times, these are the highlights I would like to share with you.

Three-line haiku: Yuting Lin, Malintha Perera, and Nakta Roodgari – for their gentle images and the lightness of their poetic brushes; two-line haiku: Dana Grover, Nicholas Klacsanzky, and Jacob Salzer – for the brevity and elegance of their word choice; one-line haiku: Fei Zhan, Francis Franklin, James Ciriaco, Eva Limbach, and Michelle Hyatt – all showing excellent examples of multi-layered monoku; four-line haiku: Willie Bongcaron, Momolu Freeman, Malintha Perera, and Jacob Salzer – for presenting a variety of images and techniques that all work best as four-line poems; I also have to mention Steve Woodall's two 'pluto' haiku – as a 3-line and here as a 4-line where by only changing the fragment and keeping the same humorous phrase we could see two very different poetic pictures. Also worth mentioning are Gabri Rigotti's brilliant sense of humour which shines through almost all of his work; Alan Summers' mastery in using the abstract in his haiku but especially vivid in his haibun; and finally the strong presence of several authors who feature in every section of the anthology – like Eva Limbach, Malintha Perera, Momolu Freeman, etc. As for the concrete haiku section, I have to admit that the quality and the imagination behind each and every poem was outstanding. And it makes "Yanty's Butterfly" a welcome addition to the modern haiku literature of the 21st century.

The other sections in the anthology – 5-7-5, tanka, and haibun are so carefully selected by the editing team that I found it particularly difficult to pick out any favourite ones. In fact the whole book shows great professionalism, attention to detail and more importantly – it demonstrates the unity of the Haiku Nook member's, their mutual understanding, their love of haiku and the huge respect for their lost member Yanty. The small selection of her poems at the end displays Yanty's great potential as a haijin, her spirit and kindness, and is highlighted even more by her brother's participation in this project with his own poems and artwork.

An anthology which is indeed a product of Love! Read on, enjoy and you'll experience the true power of love!

careful, butterfly!
the breath of your wings is felt
all over the world

--- Francis Franklin

Iliyana Stoyanova is the Living Legacies Editor at "The Living Haiku Anthology"; member of the British Haiku Society (Communications Officer and BHS Awards Administrator), United Haiku and Tanka Society (UHTS), Shoshin Haiku Circle and Haiku Club - Plovdiv; Doctor of Theology.

Beyond Kigo: Haiku in the Next Millennium

WRITTEN BY JIM KACIAN

In August 1999 the First International Haiku Symposium was held in Tokyo. Over two hundred Japanese haikai, as well as representatives of English-, French- and German-speaking haiku poets attended. The event was occasioned by what was perceived to be, in Japan at any rate, a crisis in haiku, as well as the realization that haiku is now the most practiced form of literature in the world. The hope was that some consensus of what the haiku of the future may look like might be achieved. A further consideration for the Japanese was, what role would it be advantageous for them to take on in the burgeoning of the form far beyond the constraints of its cultural hegemony. These are not light questions: haiku is arguably Japan's foremost cultural export, and to watch it proliferate in foreign cultures without influencing its propagation is tantamount to letting it find its own course. This means having no influence on how it might grow in the future outside of the work of its individual poets as exemplars of excellence in the form—in short, an equal influence to the rest of the world.

Several issues were discussed, most notably what is essential to haiku as it is currently understood. While the usual and expected range of opinions on syllable counting and appropriate content was present, it is interesting to note that the element most vehemently attacked, and defended, was the issue of *kigo*. This is most fitting, I believe, since *kigo* are bound up with the very nature of what a haiku is in a way that no amount of counting ever could be: *kigo* carry the cargo of the cultural perception of Japan. It may be true that the rhythm of the speech of the Japanese is reflected in its poetic forms as well as advertising, sloganeering and much else, but *kigo* are an evocation of the way the Japanese people perceive their universe. It is no wonder they might be loathe to forego this understanding as the underpinning of the form they created. If they surrender this, what about the genre remains essentially Japanese?

Conferences rarely solve such matters, and it was no different here. Nevertheless, the fact that such issues were being discussed at all suggests an awareness that was not present in the international haiku community only a few years ago. What was assumed to be inviolate up until very recently has now come under questioning. This reflects, I believe, the fact that so many people are writing haiku today, in so many different places, with so many different needs and such different content to convey. And since haiku has become so international, it is fitting that these matters come under consideration, so that what is truly essential and universal in the form may be distinguished from what is simply local.

What I wish to discuss here are some alternatives to *kigo*, and what the implications of choosing such alternatives might be to the future of haiku.

There is no question that *kigo* have been indispensable in the development of the classical Japanese haiku. Further, they have supplied the most important structural

element in a form where structure is most exposed. *Kigo* make it possible for poems to open outward, to call upon the broadest possible range of human experience within the context where this experience is encountered. Haiku as it has developed is inconceivable without the existence of a formal system of *kigo* to brace it up.

However, it is incontestable that the Japanese experience and expression of climatic, geological, astronomical, not to say personal, conditions cannot be universal, any more than the European or American experience may be. Since haiku aspires to international status, the element which permits them to open must not be limited to the truths and observations of a single culture, but must be amenable to a more universal inclusiveness. Further, it must remain open-ended, to permit growth from subsequent input from other cultures and experiences not yet attending haiku.

That said, I believe *kigo* will continue to matter in haiku in all cultures. They are the leavening which makes the dough of haiku rise. Nearly all people have had the experience of rain, of wind, of snow or drought, and nearly all have at least heard or seen pictures of tornado and flood. It is this shared experience which makes such elements work for so many people. What may not be so apparent is the value placed upon such elements in different cultures. The onset of rain means something completely different to people in India, in England, in the Pacific Northwest. Yet it would be reasonable to expect the poets of these regions to write their haiku based on such experiences in English. It seems unlikely that the same *kigo* would suffice for each of them.

Further, the diversity of climate within a large country, the United States for example, means that any meteorological or climatic event meant to speak for an entire culture would perforce occur at different times within the same culture—even if we grant that the culture is uniform within its geographical boundaries, which is patently not the case.

What we want, then, is a *kigo* not restricted in its meaning. Cherry blossoms, to use a well-worn example, will connote spring in the specific clime where the poet resides, even if it does not suggest March 15, say, in all cases. If we lose a bit of precision, we gain an inclusiveness. And most importantly, in this model poets take their cue from nature, rather than the other way around. A *saijiki* does not decide when cherry blossoms will appear, but merely records the previous experiences of close observers. Our own close observation may be added to the rest, often reinforcing what others have found, sometimes surprising us with an aberrant timing. In any case, the *saijiki* should be consulted to place the observations of the poet within a context, not to determine when an event, and a poem, ought to take place. And a *saijiki* is nothing more than a collection of *kigo*.

Kigo will continue to proliferate. There is not a fixed limit to the number of perceptions of life we might have. When there is a new perception or means of expression, it is not burdensome to add a new *kigo* to the list. At the same time, it is not important that *kigo* be presented in any fashion which intends to be exhaustive, as in, for example, a *saijiki*. The only people who might be concerned about the proliferation of *kigo* are *saijiki* editors and publishers.

* * *

The natural cycles and their poetic counterparts, *kigo*, will continue to be used in haiku for the foreseeable future, since they continue to offer so much structure and breadth to poems. But is it possible for other structural elements to be as useful to the poet as these have been? Or for the old elements to be used in new ways?

Any replacement for *kigo* must function in the same fashion as *kigo*, that is, must be omnipresent and yet particular, emotive and yet self-contained, suggestive and yet free, expansive and yet confinable; in short, a replacement for *kigo* must contain as much information and structure as *kigo* do. Or else, such a replacement must function in some completely different fashion. I do not mean to be simplistic here: what I am suggesting is that *kigo* are perfectly suited to the function they perform, and a replacement must replace it exactly or enlarge upon it, or else the whole notion must be reconsidered and an entirely different set of parameters chosen instead of those which have determined haiku to this point. It is debatable, of course, whether the products of such a choice will also be called haiku.

So let us, then, explore two paths: exact or enlarged replacement; and complete alternative.

The fact is, there would be no need to replace *kigo* with anything if it was truly inclusive. But it is not: there are hundreds of poems which look and function like haiku, indeed are haiku, which do not contain *kigo*. Sometimes these are shrugged off as "serious senryu" or "non-seasonal haiku," but this begs the question. How can a poem be a haiku if it doesn't include all the elements of haiku? Either we must conclude that it's not a haiku, or else our notion of what must be included in a haiku must be adjusted.

In truth, *kigo* are not exhaustive. They are not the only context in which we might experience what we call a "haiku moment." And so haiku are written without *kigo*—but what do they contain?

What such poems contain may be called *keywords*. The keyword is a near kin to a season word. In fact, it may be a season word. But it may be other things as well.

The most useful way of thinking of the idea of keywords is not as a one-to-one replacement for *kigo*, but rather as an overarching system of correspondences available to the haiku poet which incorporates *kigo* within its bounds. Consider, for example

moonlight
river divides the forest
into two nights

Nikola Nilic

What we would have done in the past is to call this a non-seasonal haiku, or else assign it a season. It certainly could have been written in any season, and to place it in the "Winter" season, for example, would be arbitrary at best. This is the way we have worked within the mindset of *kigo*.

In the new way of reckoning, however, a *kigo* is not an assumed part of a haiku, but a keyword is. A word or phrase which opens up of the poem is employed, in this case “moonlight”. There are thousands of others, including all the known *kigo*. The poem, then, is a haiku employing a keyword, with a seasonal feeling (since it is a natural event being described) but not a definite seasonal attribution, or *kigo*. *Kigo*, then, operate as one large and important subset of all keywords, but are not the only words which a haiku may employ to the same effect.

Consider some poems from the international compendium *Knots: The Anthology of Southeast European Haiku Poetry*. While there is certainly plenty of “spring rain” and “autumn sky” as there ought to be, there are also poems such as these:

my best friend died –
some tiny grains of dust
on our chessboard

Robert Bebek

deserted town –
hungry war victims
feed the pigeons

Mile Stamenkovic

These poems choose obvious and important subjects for their haiku moments. They are closely observed, have a moment of insight, have an emotive core which touches the reader. Few people would argue that they are not some sort of haiku, even though they do not contain *kigo*. But clearly “dust” and “victims” work in an analogous way here, and are the pivot and purpose of the poetry. These are not non-seasonal anything. They are poems that work in the tradition of haiku which call upon a larger context than even *kigo* can supply for their impact. Recognizing and exploiting this is one of the chief characteristics of much of contemporary international, including Japanese, work. It seems somewhat beside the point to insist upon the one, when the other, more inclusive, covers the situation. There are many, many more such examples as these in *Knots* and in other contemporary books and journals of haiku.

Keywords, then, can replace the notion of *kigo* completely, and successfully, without radically altering the nature of haiku as we know it. And this is a successful, perhaps the only possible successful, means of doing so.

However, another alternative is also being tried, though perhaps less successfully to this point. *Kigo* attempt to embody an entire ethos within their structure, and so it would make sense that a replacement for *kigo* must substitute its own ethos for that of the natural cycle. And in fact there are many examples of such attempts: the internet is littered with them. They range from the ludicrous, as in spam-ku, to niche interests with vampire-ku and gothic-ku, to entire alternative worlds in sci-fi-ku, and many other subgenres as well.

These alternatives are not regarded very highly by the “serious” haiku community, and to the present I would say with good reason. Not much of the work which has been produced by these alternatives seems to be worthy of much attention. But I think it would be a mistake to disdain them altogether. It is not difficult to imagine that a truly powerful literary mind might indeed take up one of these spheres and make it his or her own, and in so doing utilize the resources available in such alternative universes, particularly in sci-fi-ku. If this seems a ridiculous argument, I suggest that it is no more farfetched than other artistic endeavors which have no necessary analog with the “real” world but contain their own internal logic and necessity, such as music or chess. While these disciplines may not appeal to all, those who do engage in them find them compellingly real, worthy of much study and endeavor, and consider the finest results beautiful and true and inevitable in the same way we might consider a poem to be.

* * *

In the next millennium, then, international haiku will have dispensed with the notion of *kigo* in favor of the more overarching concept of keyword. This process is more evolutionary than revolutionary. Through such a development haiku will continue to be grounded in a universal system of value which is communicable to its practitioners and readership; there will be a smooth transition since none of the “classics” of haiku need be thrown out due to the adoption of radically new values; and new work which speaks to a far larger and perhaps more contemporary audience will find acceptance within the canon of haiku because of the enlarged understanding of how such poems function. And it is possible that one of the niche forms of haiku will have become the personal provenance of a truly unique sensibility, which might further restructure the way we look at haiku. It will be interesting to watch these developments over the coming decades as our old haiku becomes new. And this is necessary, since an unchanging art is a moribund art. Haiku, beginning its new international life, is anything but.

Jim Kacian

First Published in *In Due Season: Acorn Supplement #1* [2000]

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Haiku in English in North America

WRITTEN BY GEORGE SWEDE

A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH HAIKU

The haiku originated in Japan about six to seven hundred years ago and thus is one of the world's oldest surviving poetic forms (Henderson 1958). However, the English-speaking world did not learn of its existence until after 1868 when Japan opened its shores to the West and envoys from England started to translate the form (Giroux 1974). A short while later, French visitors to Japan took up writing haiku and in 1905 published an anthology of their work in France. Then, in 1910, two anthologies of Japanese literature in translation were published, one in France and one in England and both included haiku (Higginson 1985).

While these anthologies created little general interest, they did catch the attention of a much-heralded group of English and American poets headquartered in London and in Chicago between 1910 and 1917 who called themselves the Imagists and who took a special interest in the haiku (Pratt 1963). Its members, among whom were such luminaries as James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg and William Carlos Williams, used the haiku as a model (along with the classical Greek lyric and French symbolism of the vers libre type) for what they considered to be the ideal poem, one "in which the image was not a means but an end: the image was not a part of the poem; it was the poem" (Pratt 1963, 29).

While the Imagists thought of the haiku as an ideal, none of them quite managed to ever write a true one. Pound's famous "In A Station Of The Metro" is often described as a haiku by persons with only a tenuous knowledge of the form:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals, on a wet black bough.^[1]_[SEP]

(Pratt 1963, 50)

Successful as a short poem, it fails as a haiku because only the first line deals with an immediate experience while the second line involves the memory of an image that the poet uses overtly as a metaphor. A haiku is a haiku because all the images it conveys occur simultaneously in a person's present perceptions of the world. To become a haiku, Pound's poem would have to indicate that he saw the faces at the same time as he saw the actual petals, in the flesh, not in memory.

In "Ts'ai Chi'h," Pound comes much closer to the spirit of a true haiku:

The petals fall in the fountain,
The orange-colored rose leaves,
Their ochre clings to the stone.

(Pratt 1963, 58)

Here he manages to deal only with things perceived in a particular moment, but fails to achieve the needed brevity which can be defined as a comfortable breath-length (Yasuda 1957).

W.J. Higginson (1985, 52) considers "Autumn Haze" by Amy Lowell to be "one of the best hokku [haiku] by a self-styled Imagist":

Is it a dragonfly or a maple leaf^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
That settles softly down upon the water?

However, this haiku has the same problem as Pound's "Ts'ai Chi'h" -- it is too wordy. In sum, while the Imagists saw the haiku as a model for their aspirations, they wrote pieces that were either too metaphorical or too wordy and usually both.

After the Imagist movement broke up around 1917 (Pratt 1963), North American interest in the haiku per se languished for several decades until after World War II. Scholars such as Higginson (1985) and Thomas Lynch (1989) have tried to trace the path of the form during this period of more than thirty years and suggest that a continuing interest in the haiku way of seeing was kept alive by the work of a few major poets who made their mark during this time, such as William Carlos Williams (beyond his Imagist days), Wallace Stevens and Charles Reznikoff.

Williams' 1923 poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" is most often quoted as evidence:

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

(Williams 1958, 37)

As Lynch (1989, 141) states, "All that keeps this poem from being an excellent haiku is the opening two lines, which by haiku standards are quite unnecessary."

To this editorial comment, I would add that the title is also superfluous. Good haiku do not need titles. The meaning should be apparent from the actual poems themselves.

Both Higginson and Lynch also single out Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" as proof of the haiku's influence on eminent North American poets: the first stanza of the thirteen composing the poem is the most frequently quoted:

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
Was the eye of the blackbird.

(Stevens 1971, 20)

As with Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," only a small change is necessary to make this a true haiku. As it stands, it lacks the immediacy required in a haiku, but this can easily be remedied by dropping the verb "was".

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" was first published in 1917, during the last year of the Imagist movement. Thus the poem might simply have been the young Stevens' lone experiment with haiku-like poetry. But we can find similar writing in later work such as this stanza from the 1936 "A Postcard from the Volcano":

At what we saw. The spring clouds blow
Above the shuttered mansion-house,
Beyond our gate and the windy sky

(Stevens 1971, 127)

Nevertheless, such direct images are rare in the more mature work of Stevens which is richly metaphorical in the best tradition of Western poetry.

On the other hand, Charles Reznikoff did show a steady kinship with the haiku way of seeing throughout his long career as Geoffrey O'Brien (1982, 21) points out:

Reznikoff wrote in a variety of forms ... but most typically he employed brief lyrical forms, often grouping short units into such comfortably loose sequences as "Autobiography: New York" and "Autobiography: Hollywood", sequences which do not rise toward a climax or seek an overall symbolic meaning but rather collect a series of powerful moments related only by their position in the author's experience.

Here is one of his poems that needs no editing to become a true haiku:

About an excavation^[SEP]
a flock of bright red lanterns
has settled.^[SEP]

(O'Brien 1982, 20)

However, most of Reznikoff's work is composed of haiku-like lines imbedded in longer stanzas. The reader has to pluck them out like brilliantly colored feathers from a peacock. Here, for instance, are the last two lines from a five-line stanza:

From the bare twigs^[SEP]
rows of drops like shining buds are hanging.

(O'Brien 1982, 20)

Nevertheless, compared to Williams and Stevens, Reznikoff is probably the strongest strand spanning the years between the Imagists and the 1950s, a decade which E.S. Lamb (1979a, 5) describes as the "real beginning of what may be called the haiku movement in the western world".

The chief reason for the renewed interest was American fascination with Japanese culture following World War II. In particular, artistic and intellectual Americans became enthralled with Zen whose history as well as charm Bullock and Stallybrass (1977, 682) succinctly describe:

Zen [is] the Japanese version of the Ch'an sect of Buddhism in China, noted for its simple austerity, its mysticism leading to personal tranquility, and its encouragement of education and art. Some of its scriptures and paintings have become widely known and admired in the West; and Aldous Huxley and others in California led something of a cult of Zen, which in the 1960s began appealing to students as a way of having religious experience without dogmas or religious institutions.

For many this interest grew to encompass Japanese art and literature. As a result, the haiku translations of scholars H.G. Henderson (1934, 1958) and R.H. Blyth (1949) began to be widely read (Lamb 1979a).

Blyth's four volume *Haiku* became especially popular at this time because his translations were based on the assumption that the haiku was the poetic expression of Zen. Not surprisingly, his books attracted the attention of the Beat school, most notably writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac, all of whom had a prior interest in Zen. All three wrote haiku as well as about haiku. Kerouac especially played a huge role in popularizing the form. In fact, his book *The Dharma Bums* became:

The bible to a whole generation of American youth ... it introduces the reader to "Japhy Ryder," a character based on Gary Snyder. Japhy writes haiku--and suddenly so do a lot of other people ... Several of the poets I [Higginson] know first discovered the haiku in Kerouac's novel (Higginson 1985, 64).

While the Beats' interest in the haiku contributed greatly to its widespread acceptance, only Kerouac and Ginsberg wrote in the form long enough to eventually produce small bodies of work.

Kerouac (1971) published twenty-six haiku on four pages in his seventy-six page collection *Scattered Poems* and he collaborated with Albert Saijo and Lew Welch on a prose and haiku diary of a car trip across the US in 1959 which was eventually published as a slim book in 1973 as *Trip Trap: Haiku along the Road from San Francisco to New York* (Ungar 1982). Ginsberg has published haiku here and there throughout his long career and in 1978 produced *Mostly Sitting Haiku* which was the first collection, albeit small, of haiku by a major US poet outside the haiku movement (Lamb 1979a).

A study of the haiku written by these two Beats reveals a good grasp of the form. These two pieces, probably from the late fifties or early sixties, successfully evoke fleeting moments of heightened awareness full of metaphorical resonances:

The summer chair
rocking by itself
In the blizzard^[SEP]

(Jack Kerouac 1971, 74)

I didn't know the names^[SEP]
of the flowers--now^[SEP]
my garden is gone.^[SEP]

(Allen Ginsberg in Higginson 1985, 59)

For Ginsberg, and especially Kerouac, the haiku was a brief diversion from the other writing on which their reputations as well as incomes were based. Time spent on haiku meant time away from their bread and butter.

Around the same time that the Beats were exploring the haiku, so was an American novelist and poet from an earlier generation, Richard Wright. Apparently while sick and bedridden in Paris in 1959, he read Blyth's four-volume *Haiku* and "discovered in it something he had been unconsciously seeking to ease his mind" (Michel Fabré as cited in Lynch 1989, 144). The result was an output much larger than that of either Kerouac or Ginsberg--about 4,000 haiku which he sifted down to a manuscript of 800 entitled *This Other World* (Lynch 1989). The collection has yet to be published.

W.J. Higginson (1982) managed to track down twenty-five of these haiku in various articles and biographies. As with the work of Ginsberg and Kerouac, Wright's best haiku reach a high standard:

Coming from the woods
A bull has a lilac sprig
Dangling from a horn

(in Higginson 1982, 6)

In the falling snow^[SEP]
A laughing boy holds out his palms
Until they are white^[SEP]

(in Higginson 1982, 6)

Both are vivid and joyful and resonate with meaning. Because Wright is Afro-American, the second is of particular interest because it can be interpreted beyond a child's play with snow. Is the boy experiencing the fulfillment of a desire to be white or is he feeling the sense of equality which comes when everyone, no matter their skin color, is covered with snow?

By the early 1960s, other haiku translators, such as Geoffrey Bownas (1964) and Peter Beilenson (1962), joined the ranks of Blyth and Henderson. The effect was that even more people grew aware of the haiku and eventually grass roots organizations, in the form of haiku study groups, began to flourish, especially in California (Lamb 1979a).

Haiku interest grew phenomenally during this decade which saw the birth of the "Hippie" culture with its interest in Eastern art, literature, music, religion and philosophy that far surpassed anything generated by the Beats. A major influence during this time was the philosopher Alan Watts whose writings and recordings used haiku (what he called "the wordless poem") as a way of illustrating Zen principles (Higginson 1985, 67). Thus, Watts reinforced the impression left by the Beats that haiku had something to do with Zen (Watts 1960).

In 1963, *American Haiku*, the first magazine devoted entirely to English-language haiku, was published in Platteville, Wisconsin (Lamb 1979b). By the end of the 1960s, the interest in haiku could no longer be considered a fad. Haiku magazines and collections were being published on both coasts of the United States as well as in the Canadian and American midwest.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the English-language haiku became even more entrenched in North American culture with over a dozen periodicals at any one time devoted to publishing the form as well as its close relative, the senryu. Three of them, *Brussels Sprout*, *Frogpond*, and *Inkstone* (Canadian), have lasted over 12 years and one, *Modern Haiku*, has survived over 27 years.

Concomitant with the success of the periodicals has been the establishment of various haiku societies. Three of them, Haiku Society of America (established 1968), Haiku Canada (co-founded by Eric Amann, Betty Drevniok and me in 1977) and Haiku Poets of Northern California (established in the late 1980s), have emerged as dominant, holding their own regular meetings and conferences as well as cooperating every two years to hold one major event, Haiku North America, that has attracted individuals from around the world. Each of the Societies also publishes a regular newsletter, and, one of them, Haiku Society of America, also publishes its own journal, *Frogpond*.

In the late 1980s, the renku and renga, both variations of linked haiku usually written in collaboration with others, have mushroomed in popularity with the result that about half of the haiku periodicals now publish one or two per issue. In fact, a couple of journals, *Air* and *Lynx*, were founded in the late eighties for the sole purpose of publishing such linked poems.

WHY THE HAIKU FLOURISHED IN NORTH AMERICA

Having established that the haiku has indeed flourished in North America, I think an attempt should be made to explain why it took such strong root in this part of the Western world. After all, French and British scholars and writers were the first to translate the form and to publish the first Western haiku. Should not, then, the haiku phenomenon have begun in one or both of these countries?

I have already given the two usual explanations: American enchantment with Japanese culture following World War II and the stamp of approval the influential Beats gave to the haiku. But what created this receptivity in the first place? The curiosity of the conqueror about the conquered? Guilt, both American and Canadian, about the internment of Japanese North Americans during World War II? Such explanations are worth exploring, but beyond the scope of this article.

Thomas Lynch (1989) has formulated another interpretation, one that has literary roots and therefore is directly relevant to this discussion. In his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, he posits that an influential group of nineteenth-century New England poets, writers, and philosophers known as the "Transcendentalists" created an intellectual and emotional climate receptive to the haiku. Lynch (1989, 3) argues that especially Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, developed a homegrown philosophy quite similar to Zen Buddhism and that this way of thinking permeated their writing which, in turn, strongly affected the work of important twentieth-century poets such as "Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wright, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder". Not surprisingly, these names appear whenever haiku scholars, such as Higginson (1985), list the major poets who have written haiku or haiku-like poems.

Lynch's argument is compelling. One does not have to look far in the writing of Thoreau, the Transcendentalist most often cited as an influence by today's haiku poets, to see his concern with the immediate moment:

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line ([1889] 1975, 179-180) This attitude is very similar to those expressed by Whitman ([1892] 1969) and Emerson ([1840] 1971). Such Zen-like focus on the here-and-now is the sine qua non of haiku composition.

Lynch (1989, 58) goes so far as to speculate that a haiku-like poetry eventually would have evolved on its own in North America:

It seems to me possible, given the circumstances of American life and poetry, and given the direction established by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, that a poetry very much like haiku, and perhaps even a philosophy very much like Zen, would have developed on this continent independently of any direct contact with Buddhism or Japanese literature.

Lynch has formulated an intriguing possibility, but whether these events would have transpired or not, is, in the final analysis, irrelevant. All that really matters, for the purposes of this discussion, is that an influential ideology predisposed North Americans to welcome the haiku because, at first glance, it seems to be a Zen- (or Transcendentalist-) based form of poetry.

What the practices of haiku reading and writing and Zen Buddhism certainly do have in common is that they both stress the importance of the present. Each approach argues that focusing on the immediate moment will result in illumination, or, what in Zen is called "satori", and in haiku is referred to as a moment of awe or wonder. This shared outlook is what attracted the Beats and Alan Watts. It is also what forms the heart of Lynch's hypothesis.

But the haiku is, first and foremost, a form of poetry, not a vehicle for philosophical or religious expression. Study of the haiku's long history in Japan shows quite clearly that it has always been a form of poetry quite separate from Zen Buddhism. While the great Bashō and a few other outstanding haiku poets were Zen monks, they all

treated haiku as poetry first, and, if at all, as Zen second. It is well-known that Bashō made his living by teaching students how to become masterful haiku poets, not how to be Zen monks. Zen instruction was the job of the monks on staff of the Zen monasteries. As eminent Japanese haiku scholar Harold G. Henderson confirms in his classic *An Introduction to Haiku* (1958, 21), "Only a comparatively few of Bashō's poems are obviously religious."

In fact, Henderson (1958, 2-3) emphasizes on numerous occasions that haiku is very much a form of poetry, such as when he states:

In the hands of a master a haiku can be the concentrated essence of pure poetry. Because the haiku is shorter than other forms of poetry it naturally has to depend for its effect on the power of suggestion, even more than they do.

Further evidence of the independence of haiku from Zen comes from another Japanese haiku scholar, Kenneth Yasuda. In his also classic book, *The Japanese Haiku* (1957), almost no mention is made of Zen as an influence.

Thomas Lynch has suggested a plausible reason why the haiku form found such a hospitable environment in North America. Without question, the haiku received immediate respectability because of its perceived link with Zen Buddhism, a philosophy which evoked in North Americans, particularly those with a literary bent, the influential nineteenth-century philosophy of Transcendentalism. It is ironic, then, that in the haiku's long Japanese history, Zen played a minor role.

With which viewpoint do most current haiku poets align themselves--Blyth's haiku as Zen medium or Henderson's haiku as pure poetry? My long study of the significant haiku periodicals, the major anthologies, the collections of influential haiku poets and the conferences and agendas of the various haiku societies suggests that Henderson's outlook is clearly the more popular, in keeping with the long-held prevailing view in Japan. A telling fact is that the Haiku Society of America's annual haiku contest, the longest-running and the most prestigious, is named after Henderson and not Blyth.

Nevertheless, the belief that Zen and haiku are inextricably intertwined continues to be held by a small, loose-knit but active group of haiku poets. Its members feel the Zen practices enhance the composition and appreciation of haiku and some of them regularly meet at various Zen retreats found chiefly in the New England states. I wonder whether the ghosts of the Transcendentalists can be found there as well.

Ironically, West-coast poet James W. Hackett (1968, 1983), the best-known and most influential advocate of haiku as expression of Zen, holds himself relatively aloof from this group as well as the general haiku movement. To the public at large, Hackett became the spokesperson for haiku after winning the first of a series of haiku contests run by Japan Air Lines. Lamb (1995, 10) describes the first one which was also the most successful:

In 1964 something over 41,000 haiku were submitted to their National Haiku Contest. Seventeen contests conducted by radio stations in different parts of the country screened the entries and five winners from each local contest were

submitted for final judging by Alan Watts. Japan Air Lines published the 85 national entries in a booklet entitled Haiku '64. James W. Hackett won the grand prize of two round trip tickets to Japan. Note the date of the contest--1964. This explains why it captured the public's attention in a way no subsequent contest did. As stated earlier, the sixties was the heyday for worship of things Japanese.

By the way, the winning poem by Hackett is considered a masterpiece by the Zen-oriented as well as the regular haiku community:

A bitter morning:
Sparrows sitting together
Without any necks.[[1]]
[SEP]

(in Lamb 1995, 10)

For three years (1981-83) I ran haiku workshops at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto and found that the majority of newcomers to haiku possessed an already established interest in Zen. They expected to heighten their Zen-ness by writing haiku. In addition to having read some Hackett, many came to the first class imbued with Eric Amann's ([1969] 1978) *The Wordless Poem: A Study of Zen in Haiku*, essentially an essay self-published as a booklet. On page thirty-eight, Amann summarizes the view that these students found compelling:

The main point of this essay has been to show that haiku is not to be regarded primarily as a 'form' of poetry, as is commonly assumed in the West, but as an expression of Zen in poetry, a living 'Way', similar to the 'Way of the Brush' and other manifestations of Zen in the arts and in literature. Their dismay was palpable when I told them that the workshop was going to focus on haiku as poetry, not Zen. But it was nothing compared to the news that Eric Amann had by this time publicly (at Haiku Canada meetings) divorced himself from the idea of haiku as Zen and was embarrassed by the attention his old views still garnered. In spite of this double-whammy, practically all students stayed with the workshops and became quite proficient at writing haiku as poetry (Swede 1981).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN HAIKU AROUND THE WORLD

Once rooted, the vigorous North American haiku spread its seeds throughout the English-speaking world and beyond. In 1990, The British Haiku Society was formed and immediately became a powerful force, holding monthly meetings, annual conferences as well as publishing its own journal, *Blithe Spirit*. Shortly thereafter, a couple of independent haiku periodicals took hold as well. Similar developments have occurred in Australia and New Zealand and, not surprisingly, in countries speaking tongues other than English, especially Holland, Germany, Croatia and, most recently, Poland.

Has Japan, where the haiku first blossomed, shown any interest in these developments outside its shores? Most definitely. Currently, a number of Japanese literary periodicals, such as *Ko* and *The Plaza*, as well as more general publications, such as the newspapers *Mainichi Daily News*, *The Daily Yomiuri* and *The Asahi*.

Evening News regularly publish English-language haiku. Several others, particularly *Poetry Nippon*, have had long commitments to the English haiku, but have ceased operations.

In 1989, the three major Japanese haiku societies, the Modern Haiku Association, the Association of Haiku Poets and the Association of Japanese Classical Haiku, formed Haiku International Association. The purpose for the creation of this new umbrella organization was given in an official announcement mailed around the globe:

To promote friendship and mutual understanding among poets, scholars and others who share a common interest in haiku, though they may live in very distant parts of the world.

True to its stated aim, Haiku International has its own periodical, *HI*, which publishes work from numerous countries in the original language and Japanese. About half of every issue, however, is devoted to haiku from Japan which are printed in Japanese and English. This makes sense considering that Japan still has far more haiku poets than any other nation.

As we approach the twenty-first century, writers, teachers and scholars of haiku can justifiably argue that the form is the most popular poetry in the world. None of the other long-lived forms, such as the englyn, ghazal, limerick, rondeau, sapphics, sestina, sonnet and villanelle, are considered with such universal interest. This status is in no small way due to encouragement by the Japanese who, in addition to publishing work from everywhere, also hold international contests and conferences to which they invite, often with all expenses paid, the winners as well as the presenters.

Further proof of the haiku's widespread influence is that many notable Canadian and American poets include the form, or approximations to it, in their collections. A quick check of my bookshelves found haiku or haiku-like poems in the works of Canadian poets Milton Acorn, Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney, Roo Borson, Michael Bullock, Christopher Dewdney, Ralph Gustafson, and I stopped the alphabetical search, realizing the futility of listing practically everyone. An examination of my smaller selection of American poets had similar results: John Ashberry, Wendell Berry, Richard Brautigan, John Judson, W.S. Merwin and so on. Lynch's (1989) thesis about the legacy of the Transcendentalists certainly offers one plausible explanation of why the haiku has had so much influence on poets from both sides of the border.

One more indicator of how the North American psyche has welcomed the haiku is the fact that the current Poet Laureate of the US, Robert Hass, has "championed haiku for many years" (Welch 1995, 35). An English professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Hass recently has published *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa* (1994). The book is part of a series put out by New Jersey's Ecco Press called "The Essential Poets," and puts the three Japanese legends of haiku in the luminous company of poets such as Blake, Keats, Poe, Shakespeare and Whitman. It should not be long before the haiku gets the same attention in university curriculums that it now enjoys at lower levels.

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Originally published in *Haiku Canada Newsletter*, vol. 10, no. 2, January 1997 and vol. 10, no. 3, March 1997.

Re-published in *Simply Haiku*, vol. 4, no. 3, Autumn 2006.

Re-published in *Under the Basho*, 2016, with permission of George Swede.

Little Catastrophes: The Topological Structure of Humor and Haiku

by Michael Dylan Welch

“The union of the mathematician with the poet, fervor with measure, passion with correctness, this surely is the ideal.” —William James, *Collected Essays and Reviews*

“Mathematics and Poetry are . . . the utterance of the same power of imagination, only that in the one case it is addressed to the head, in the other, to the heart.” —Thomas Hill

“Science is not omniscient, nor is it omnipotent, and there will always be room enough for haiku.” —D. T. Suzuki

Introduction

In 1988 Professor John Allen Paulos of Temple University published a best-selling book called *Innumeracy* (New York: Hill and Wang). His overriding concern was to draw attention to the fear and misunderstanding of numbers and mathematics in modern American culture—and to emphasize the unfortunate consequences brought on by mathematical illiteracy. He is probably best known for this book. In an earlier book, titled *Mathematics and Humor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; all page references to this edition), Paulos asserts a three-dimensional model for the structure, development, and understanding of jokes and humor. Numbers and things mathematical may seem far removed from the ken of haiku—except perhaps for the counting of syllables, if one is so inclined. Yet the structural development within many haiku bears a demonstrable resemblance to the mathematical model that Paulos employs to reveal the methodology of humor. Indeed, the structure of jokes and the realization of humor hold many similarities with the structure of haiku and the “aha” moment that releases this small poem’s reverberations. Haiku poets have realized this similarity on an intuitive level for many years, but through *Mathematics and Humor* it is possible to review the subject in significant detail. With a close study of Paulos’s book, haiku poets might readily recognize the parallels in this model to the moment of heightened awareness in haiku.

Critical Assessments of Humor

Before exploring this mathematical model as an aid to understanding haiku’s structure and development, it is helpful to know Paulos’s application of the model to humor. In prelude, however, Paulos reviews a short history of the various critical assessments and classifications of humor. Many of these observations also hold true of haiku. William Hazlitt, for example, stated in 1819 that “the essence of the laughable is the incongruous” (3). Given haiku’s common technique of

juxtaposition—which sometimes leads to incongruity—it is no wonder haiku shares similarities with humor. Hazlitt also described humor as “the disconnecting of one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another” (3). He could easily have been talking about haiku. Other philosophers and critics have emphasized the surprise and the unexpectedness in the incongruity of humor—and again this is part of what makes haiku work. Specifically, in 1790, Kant proposed that “Laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (3). Is this, perchance, the nothingness of Zen? In 1818 Schopenhauer wrote of humor that it “often occurs [when] two or more real objects are thought through one concept; it then becomes strikingly apparent from the entire difference of the objects in other respects, that the concept was only applicable to them from a one-sided point of view” (3). While haiku usually seek to present a unity that does not come apart, certainly humor shares with haiku at least that initial unity. That two objects could be thought at first similar in humor is akin to the technique of internal comparison in haiku. Yet perspective is also essential to haiku, intrinsic to the poet’s voice. In humor that perspective or one-sided point of view is intentionally flawed or absurd, but in haiku it takes observation and juxtaposition beyond the merely playful to hint at profound wholeness. Herbert Spencer observed that laughter can occur “when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small” (4)—which is exactly the focus of haiku, enabling readers to notice small and intimate details. No wonder an appropriate response to the sudden awareness found through haiku is a knowing smile, a quick chuckle, or perhaps a laugh, even if the haiku itself is not intentionally “funny.”

The “incongruity theory” of humor has been emphasized by critics into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baudelaire expanded on the idea by saying that laughter “is at once a token of an infinite grandeur and an infinite misery,” going on to say that “it is from the perpetual collision of these two infinities that laughter is struck” (5). Indeed, haiku makes an effective “approach to infinity”—the infinite now—by focusing on small objects or brief events.

Central to all humor, of course, is an innate playfulness. Here again humor shares a similarity with haiku, for even the word “haiku” in Japanese means “playful verse.” The writer Max Eastman emphasized this idea of playfulness in developing his “derailment theory” of humor in 1936. He suggested that some humor takes unpleasant topics and intentionally derails our negative emotions toward them by making light of them or observing the humor within them. In January of 1994 the Los Angeles area suffered a devastating 6.8-magnitude earthquake that killed 61 people and caused over \$20 billion in damage. That same month, Midwestern Americans were suffering through one of the most consistently cold and snowy winters on record. Lee Gurga wrote to me at that time and shared an amusing “catastrophe” theory: He said that the L.A. quake was caused by all the Midwesterners shivering. Furthermore, one can judge the depth of emotion in response to a tragedy by noting how long it takes for jokes about it to begin circulating—if at all. For example, how long did it take for jokes about the death of Princess Diana to appear? Likewise, it took a very long time for jokes about September 11 to surface, and they still make many people feel uncomfortable. Rather than belittle the tragedy, such jokes derail our negative emotions and help us recover emotionally.

By the means of derailment, humor helps to disengage readers from what is

unpleasant. In contrast, haiku usually seeks to engage rather than detach the reader from life (see Paul O. Williams' article, "Engagement and Detachment in Haiku and Senryu" in *Woodnotes* #19, Winter, 1993, reprinted in *The Nick of Time: Essays on Haiku Aesthetics*, Foster City, California: Press Here, 2001). Yet the engagement in haiku is similar to the disengagement in the derailment theory of humor, in that the means to both ends is playful—that is, creative—and that the net aim is to create shared understanding. Humor of the "derailment" kind may disengage the reader from something negative, but it does still engage the reader in something positive to take its place—humor.

The contextual nature of the derailment theory of humor—where one must know that an earthquake just happened or a tornado just swept through the nearest trailer-park, or know the values or morals of some intended victim—is one recent understanding of humor. D. H. Munro wrote in 1951 that a sense of humor takes "delight in what is new and fresh" (7)—a comment that applies equally well to haiku. Having a "sense of haiku" is exactly what is meant by the haiku spirit and living the haiku life. In fact, Arthur Koestler commented very directly on the similarity between the "creative insights" of both humor and poetry. In 1964 he wrote that "the logical pattern of the creative process is the same in [humor and poetry]: it consists in the discovery of hidden similarities" (7). Indeed, T. S. Eliot's notion of the objective correlative—whereby an external object of nature may be found that intrinsically embodies and conveys an internal emotion without the stating of that emotion—is central to successful nature haiku, and relies heavily on the observation of exactly those "hidden similarities." Koestler notes a difference in the emotional climate between humor and poetry, yet calls attention to the similar structure or pattern. Of larger significance, however, is the fact that Paulos follows "Koestler's principle that creative insights in all fields . . . share the same logical pattern" (8). Paulos summarizes this notion by saying that, "for something to be funny, some unusual, inappropriate, or odd aspects [of something] must be perceived together and compared" (9). While haiku typically embraces and finds virtue in the usual, appropriate, and ordinary, the way haiku works—in the perception and comparison of sometimes disparate objects or events—is similar to the way humor works. Whereas the humor of a joke lies in the resolution of ambiguity, so too the understanding of a haiku lies in the similar resolution of a carefully crafted ambiguity—what I like to call a "perpetrated ambiguity," wherein two or more ambiguities are intentionally suggested. Whether ordinary or odd, the revelations of suchness in both haiku and humor are strikingly similar in pattern, structure, and even response.

For humor to work, however, Paulos stresses that the "emotional climate" must be appropriate (10). As an example, earthquake jokes are hardly appropriate while one is excavating the debris of a fallen building looking for bodies—or survivors. As already mentioned, the severity of a disaster may be measured by the delay after which jokes about it begin to surface. Even the common preface "Have you heard the joke about . . ." serves a useful purpose because it alerts the listener to the onslaught of a joke. Thus, despite all its cloying, it helps to create an appropriate emotional climate. By this emotional climate Paulos means to acknowledge the contexts and psychological aspects of humor. These can become quite involved, and if one wants to delve into the writings of Freud and others batting about this topic, one may do so, but it is not directly relevant to the study of the structural patterns of

humor—or haiku. Of relevance to the subject of haiku, though, is the analogy that, as with humor, perhaps the “emotional climate” must also be appropriate for haiku. I fear this topic is too large to explore adequately here, and would only diverge from the topic at hand. But it would be worthy of exploration. Suffice it to say that haiku and humor both require an appropriate emotional climate—and this similarity again strengthens the idea that haiku and humor have much in common.

Affinities Between Mathematics and Humor—and Haiku

For his purposes, Paulos notes numerous affinities between mathematics and humor. Many are also surprisingly true of haiku. Not only does he state that “both mathematics and humor are forms of intellectual play” (10), but that they are both “economical and explicit” (11). What could be more true of haiku? The elegance of brevity is no more refined than it is in haiku, and explicitness may also be found in haiku’s directness and objectivity. I cannot vouch for most mathematical proofs, but a long-winded or awkwardly told joke seldom makes one laugh.

Paulos also suggests that “combinatorial ingenuity” (14) is strong in both humor and mathematics (the cleverness of combining unexpected things in the right way). This is emphatically true for haiku, where the choice of which elements to juxtapose is central to the vibrancy of the poem. More subtle, but vitally important for haiku, is the similarity in logic. For all the absurdity in humor, it is always held together by some internal logic or the joke would not work—it makes sense on *some* level.

Mathematical proofs also depend on logic, of course—and so do haiku. Paulos indicates that humor requires “a perceived incongruity with a *point* and an appropriate emotional climate” (10, emphasis added). Just as there must be some “point” to a joke, a haiku flounders like a badly told gag if it does not have some sort of goal such as showing the unity or internal comparison of two carefully selected objects or events in juxtaposition. By “goal” in haiku, I do not mean just the poet’s *intent*, for the poet’s desire for his or her poem can be misguided or the experience may be inadequately told in words. Nor do I mean any overarching moral or manipulative message—polemical agendas that seldom have a place in haiku anyway, because the poem seeks simply to reveal the suchness of things without agenda or ego assertion. Rather, I mean that the goal of a haiku is to have whatever element makes a haiku work, *if it works*. In a sense, this elusive goal is larger than the poet. Perhaps what I’m saying can be made clearer by stating that a jokester’s “intent” may be to make another person laugh or to prick the conscience through satire, but the method of *how* the structure of a joke brings about that laughter or realization of satire is quite distinct from what he or she says or may have intended by the joke. In other words, my focus on humor and haiku is objective rather than subjective, a focus not so much on *what* is said or intended, but *how* it is said. The similarity to the logic of humor and mathematics is that for the haiku to work, that “how” must, of necessity, be internally logical.

Paulos also notes an assertive tone in most humor. This assertiveness, the surety of what is being said (“this is so”), is also a clear trait of successful haiku. Its apparent assertiveness arises, I think, from the poem’s clarity, concision, and directness. In a good haiku, as with a good joke or refined mathematical proof, no redundancies exist to suggest doubt, no woolly phrases or flawed syntax, just the clearest verbal path,

the most elegant means to an end (one could say that they have the ideal organic form, to use Denise Levertov's term). The implication for beginning haiku poets is that their work might improve if they write with greater assertiveness—not naively, of course, but to strive after the substance behind the poem that intrinsically gives rise to polite assertiveness.

A final trait of both mathematics and humor that also applies to haiku involves the necessity of deduction. Just as one may deduce the conclusion of a syllogism through logic, and just as humor works by offering surprise deductions, haiku has its life-blood in the deductions of both writer and reader—little leaps of understanding. The writer makes the first deduction, of course, keenly perceiving one or more elements of nature or human nature in a moment of heightened awareness, deducing an internal comparison or objective correlative or using some other haiku-writing technique to convey meaning. But, because haiku is a poetry of implication, it is also up to the reader to deduce those implications. This is why haiku seem unfinished, like “a hand beckoning, a door half-opened,” as R. H. Blyth has said (*Haiku*, Volume I: Eastern Culture, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1949; 272). This is what sets haiku apart from most other poetry, in that the reader has to be engaged to complete the poem (and perhaps why many haiku poets read each of their haiku twice at public readings). And as with humor, where the listener reaps the reward of a joke by “figuring out” the punch line and making a leap of understanding *without* the joke being explained, so too the haiku works best if it avoids explanation. If the poet knows when to stop and lets the reader figure out what makes the poem work, then *that* is where the haiku begins to reverberate and reward the reader. For example, consider this poem of mine (from *Frogpond* 14:3, Autumn 1991, and second-place winner in the Haiku Society of America's 1991 Henderson haiku contest):

an old woolen sweater
taken yarn by yarn
from the snowbank

I've shared this poem in workshops and seen the light go off in the eyes of students when they realize that this poem is about a bird building a nest. Yet it takes a risk in hinting at that meaning, and not all readers get it. The light doesn't always click on. But I believe the poem creates a greater reward by not explaining itself or by avoiding excess information that would make the poem easier for a less sensitive reader. As Toni Morrison once said, “All art is knowing when to stop.”

Nevertheless, too many haiku, especially by beginners, fail to let the reader figure anything out. For example, a statement of emotion, or an explanation or intellectualization about the relationship between certain natural elements chokes all hope from the poem with these shortcomings. Even concrete poetry must be put together or reconstructed and thus figured out. It would be absurd to explain a successful concrete poem; such an explanation would kill it just as surely as explanations kill the humor of jokes.

Incidentally, this is one reason why I consider Cor van den Heuvel's controversial “tundra” poem to be a haiku, though some poets and critics do not. In this poem, the reader figures out that the white space of the page is snow surrounding the lone

“rock” of the word “tundra”—or that the expanse of white space is a concrete representation of the tundra itself. This “putting together” of the poem occurs in a spark of understanding, a leap of enlightenment. Indeed, the very “haikuness” of this poem *takes place in that realization*, rather than in the verbalization or the space of the poem. Meaning has been put in a different place, and it’s up to the reader to figure that out. Because the verbal (surface) structure is so reduced in Cor’s poem, having only one word, it leaves little for poets to understand as “haiku” unless they grasp the metalevel (deep) structure—the relationship of this *particular* word to the expanse of space around it. To say that any word could be tossed onto a page by itself and called a haiku is a grave mistake that ignores the spark of deep-structure realization that defines not only this minimalist haiku but also more conventional haiku. For me it is this spark, this vital leap of understanding so perfectly crystallized in haiku, that *defines* haiku and its spirit more than any other characteristic. What seemingly confuses some poets into disallowing “tundra” as a haiku (albeit experimental and on the fringe), I suspect, is too great a focus on the object level or surface structure of the poem, and inadequate focus (even a total lack of awareness thereof) on the metalevel or deep structure of this poem—the level at which I feel haiku is *truly* defined. I do not mean to suggest, however, that more haiku should be like “tundra.” Quite the opposite, in fact. It’s been done, and because it’s so short, most poems like it would be overly derivative (John Stevenson’s “core” being one brilliant exception). Rather, more haiku poets could benefit from recognizing this poem’s deep structure and how it serves to create a moment of realization. Perhaps I am being generous, but it’s that similarity of deep structure and the emotional effect that “tundra” has on the reader that makes it akin to more traditional haiku, and thus makes it, in my estimation, a haiku.

Levels and the deep structures of transformational grammar will be returned to shortly. For now, however, note that the *understanding* of a joke is different from its *humor*. Similarly, the understanding of a haiku is different from its implied emotion. The problem is simply that some haiku are too often explanatory, thus committing a sin equivalent to the explaining of a joke.

The traits of deduction and other similarities between humor and haiku temporarily aside, much of this discussion might be abetted with some examples of haiku. The best examples, however, show the failings of specific haiku, and I would rather not discuss any individual failed poems. In general though, consider the example of a haiku that explains too much. In such a case, the explanation removes the element of deduction, the very “playing with the poet” that makes the game enjoyable—worth playing, even. With too much explanation in a haiku (directly stating one’s intellectualization or emotion rather than freshly describing an object or event, for example), the poet is saying, in effect, “watch *me* play.” This completely misses two essential aspects of haiku, those of suppressing the ego, and of actively engaging the reader, getting him or her off the bench to join the game and help “finish” the poem. A game of tennis is no fun—indeed, not even possible—without a partner.

As for the understanding of jokes, Paulos asserts that they are like mathematics because they “depend for their humor on an implicit understanding of the axiomatic method” (19). He summarizes this method as the selection of “certain self-evident statements as axioms and deducing from them, by logic alone, other statements, which often are not so self-evident” (19). The corollary to haiku is extremely

compelling: The haiku poet selects certain self-evident (that is, universal) objects or events as axioms from which certain intrinsic, *non*-self-evident conclusions may be deduced. It's where we get the haiku poem's leap of understanding, indeed, the aha moment. This is the heart of how haiku works.

I note with more than passing interest, incidentally, that the logical deductions that may be made from the so-called "axioms" in a haiku are sometimes confused with a mystical sort of intuition. Some readers *think* they "intuitively" understand what a poem is about. That may be so, but quite likely the truth in the way they understand a poem is less subjective: they may have simply deduced a meaning by objective logic, thanks to the axiomatic nature of the primarily noun-based elements of haiku. Indeed, Paulos suggests that axioms may be thought of "as being clues to a mystery and the different possible scenarios for the crime as being models of these axioms" (22). Likewise, the elements of a haiku are indeed clues to a mystery. It may not be a dastardly crime, however, when the poet fails to understand the poem's intrinsic structure.

Object Levels and Metalevels in Humor and Haiku

Another vital distinction to do with mathematics and humor—and also haiku—is between "object level" and "metalevel." In terms of haiku, what a haiku *describes* is the object level—a rock, a tree, a passing glance. But what the poem is *about*, that is, what it *implies*, is the metalevel—old age, loneliness, love, or whatever, and the emotions related to the implication. I have at times described haiku as "a brief poem using objective words to convey heightened subjective feeling about nature and human nature." Here the objective/subjective dichotomy maps quite neatly to the object level/metalevel distinction—and to surface and deep structures in terms of transformational grammar. I feel that many beginning poets confuse these levels, and doom their poems to failure by trying to directly state a subjective feeling within what is best left as an objective domain. Yet often the very *subject* of a poem is best *removed* so that the reader can be left alone to figure it out and make that leap from the objective to the subjective (hopefully, the *same* subjective intent as the poet). It is in the metalevels of meaning where haiku begin to reverberate. Paulos emphasizes the need to rise to the metalevel for humor to succeed: "to get (i.e., understand) a joke . . . one must ascend, so to speak, to the metalevel at which both interpretations, the familiar and the incongruous, can be imagined and compared" (26). The same is also true with haiku, yet again this "ascent" to the metalevel, the level of meaning, need not be considered mystical.

I find another intriguing parallel between humor and haiku in Paulos's assertion that certain basic paradigms must be understood by a common body of people for humor to work (among those people at least). Perhaps, in the widest way, in Jungian terms, this is nothing less than the collective unconscious, which asserts that we all know, feel, or understand certain paradigms and archetypes. In haiku terms, these basic paradigms include the so-called "universal" in the particular that haiku so often espouses, and also include the common understanding we have of most seasonal references. If a poet describes an obscure local custom or insect or place, that poem's meaning is necessarily limited even among a body of knowledgeable haiku readers. But if one describes what is more universally known, or archetypal, as in the

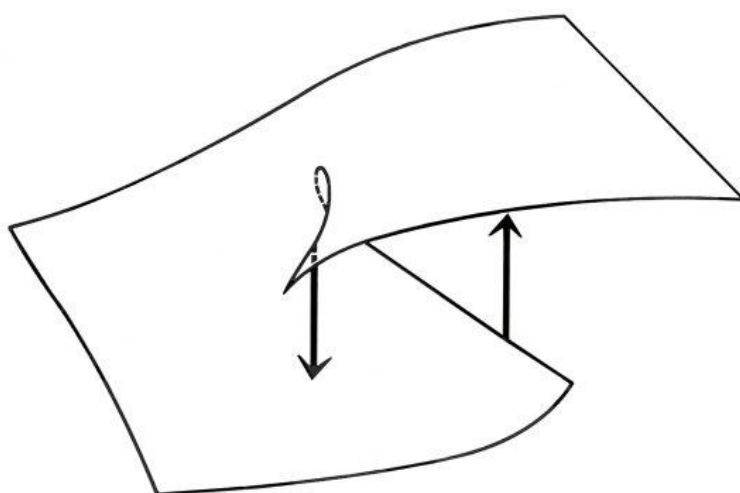
common name for a certain genus of flowers (rather than, say, *Helianthus annuus*), the chances of successful communication are vastly improved—first on the obvious object level, but also on the more important metalevel. Actually, if there is no possibility to ascend to any metalevel, that is, if the poem operates only on the object level, then no reverberations are possible and the poem will be unremarkable and forgettable—a “so what?” poem. Paulos puts it this way: “With no feeling for what is correct, congruous, or natural, there can be no perception of what is incorrect, incongruous, or unnatural” (27–28). It is not completely accurate to call the metalevels of haiku “incorrect or unnatural,” necessarily, but certainly something unexpected or incongruous is the domain of the meaning level in haiku. Former Haiku Society of America president Virginia Brady Young has described haiku as “leaping the chasm” (*Raking Sand*, Foster City, California: Press Here, 1993; 28). The point regarding humor and haiku paradigms is that haiku poets must first stand on an identifiable, common cliff edge before they can go about leaping chasms. If poets begin with carefully chosen commonality, they will more readily engage the reader with their leaps to what is uncommon. This is an assumption inherent to humor and haiku that is too often overlooked.

In contrast to the ideas of object level, metalevel, and shared paradigms, Paulos reminds his readers that Zen philosophers have suggested that “[dualistic] notions like truth and falsity, subject and object, external and internal, while essential in everyday life as well as in scientific thought, nevertheless prevent one from attaining a mystic, oceanic union with the universe” (52). Because some jokes, especially paradoxes, intentionally confuse and then resolve levels, and challenge the notions of truth and falsity, they “might thus be taken as a reminder of this essential is-ness of the universe—a reminder that these distinctions, in some fundamental sense, are unimportant” (52). How true this is of haiku. Certainly the ascent to the meaning level/metalevel in haiku, while not necessarily confused and then resolved intentionally, does remind one of the is-ness and suchness of our surroundings. Therein, it would seem, lies the fundamental brilliance of haiku: By using objective words to convey—that is, imply—heightened subjective feeling about nature or human nature, haiku lays an object-level groundwork from which the reader may make the gestalt leap from the subjective metalevel, and, *in the process*, unifies the objective/subjective dichotomy into the holistic suchness of Zen’s eternal now. That’s a mouthful, I realize. The point is that, if we trust it, the right objective imagery, carefully juxtaposed, can have magical poetic and emotional effects. The end feeling can seem in many ways mystical or euphoric, like a taste of enlightenment, but here again it is a result, not the full process. And it is, in effect, a *meta*-metalevel. This figure/ground wholeness might be thought of, if you will, as the grand unifying theory of haiku. At its very base it shows that haiku recognizes that the universe simply is. Just as one laughs at the point when one has resolved a joke’s incongruity, one also breaks into a knowing smile at the “aha” moment of resolving, when it occurs, a haiku’s apparent incongruity. At the instant of resolution in haiku, the levels seem to dissolve, the objective and subjective are superseded by the meta-metalevel, and one returns—leaps—to the ultimate yet intimate suchness of life, a mystical unity that is as Zen as Zen can be.

Catastrophe Theory: A Topological Model for the Structure of Humor

Paulos proposes a three-dimensional topological model, based on René Thom's catastrophe theory, for the unifying moment central to humor. It also fits the structure of haiku, as I hope the reader will see. But before introducing the model, Paulos discusses types of humor, transformational grammar, deep and surface structures, and larger aspects of philosophy. He explains, for example, that "a pun forces one to perceive in quick succession two incongruous and unrelated sets of ideas" (61). This much is already understood, but then he immediately goes on to say that "the *suddenness* is, as in much humor, very important" (61, emphasis added). He means the suddenness of one's realization of a joke, and here again is a parallel to haiku—its subject is here and now, but the sudden realization of its metalevel is very sharply here and now also. In presenting a mathematical model for humor, Paulos emphasizes "the idea of an abrupt switch or reversal of interpretation in the sudden perception of some situation, statement, or person in a different and incongruous way" (75). He might just as well say this of haiku. This abrupt switch or discontinuity is akin to René Thom's topological mapping known as *catastrophe theory* (and here "catastrophe" is meant more in its primary definition of "the culminating event of a drama . . . by which the plot is resolved," rather than any natural or personal disaster). As Paulos explains, the model "provides a sort of mathematical metaphor for the structure of humor [and helps observers] to visualize that structure more clearly" (75–76). When I first noticed that this model applies rather neatly to haiku as well as humor, it was not without a good deal of intellectual excitement.

This topological model presupposes the understanding of a three-dimensional coordinate system, where points are located by their x, y, and z coordinates. Much of the mathematics and topology is perhaps best avoided here, but essentially, given any response to a joke that depends on two factors (that is, an incongruity and its resolution), and given that it is discontinuous and satisfies mild general conditions, a consequence of Thom's main theorem is that a graph in three-dimensional space of empirically measured results gives rise to the following surface shape:



In the middle of this model is a double layer where the graph of responses may jump from one layer to the other over an inaccessible gap. In terms of humor, it is here that one's understanding of the multiple meanings of a pun, for example, may

oscillate back and forth. Paulos believes this model is readily adapted to the study of humor (84). Similarly, I extend that adaptation to the study of haiku.

Specifically, Paulos adapts the graph's application to humor by considering ambiguities. He explains it thus, with my extrapolations regarding haiku and the graph's layers:

An ambiguity results when a statement or story [or haiku] has more than one possible meaning [represented by the graph's two layers]. Usually only one of these meanings is apparent (or, if both are apparent, only one is understood in a particular context). The statement or story [or haiku] in which the ambiguity occurs can, however, be developed further so as to change the likelihood of the ambiguity's being interpreted in a particular way. At some point, in fact, a person suddenly (discontinuously) changes his understanding (gestalt) of the ambiguous story, and there is an abrupt interpretation switch. (84)

In the epiphany of this sudden change of understanding lies the "aha" moment of haiku, the practically involuntary reaction to humor in the form of laughter, and that sweeping meta-metalevel sense of unity. Paulos ties this mapping more directly to humor as follows:

A joke . . . depends on the perception of incongruity in a given situation or its description. A joke can thus be considered a kind of structured ambiguity, the punch line precipitating the catastrophe of switching interpretations. It [the humor as well as the haiku] adds sufficient information to make it suddenly clear that the second (usually hidden) meaning is the intended one. (85)

In terms of humor, Paulos cites a joke about a young man who requests from a computer dating service someone who enjoys water sports, likes company, is comfortable in formal attire, and is very short—and is then sent a penguin (26). He maps this joke to the graph as follows:

Here the developing first meaning is that of a woman and a certain life-style (pictorially, gradually ascending the upper layer over the ambiguous region). The punch line, "the computer sent him a penguin," reveals the hidden second meaning and brings about the catastrophe (pictorially, dropping from the upper to the lower layer of the graph). (85)

Catastrophe Theory in Haiku and Senryu

The mapping of catastrophe theory to haiku may be a little trickier, and may have its limits. But in a typical haiku (or senryu), certain facts are presented (at the object level), and then the reader ascends to a new or larger interpretation of these facts (at the metalevel). This new interpretation produces the catastrophe, which is, in haiku, that unifying leap between now-resolved but seemingly divergent interpretations represented by the graph's layers. Note that the ascent to the metalevel is *not* the same as the catastrophic jump back to the object level. It is the understanding of the metalevel, represented pictorially by reaching the graph's second layer, that *causes* the jump that, in turn, is the meta-metalevel. Let me illustrate with one of

my own poems, in this case a senryu, from *Fig Newtons: Senryu to Go* (Foster City, California: Press Here, 1993; 4):

at his favourite deli
the bald man finds a hair
in his soup

Notice, first off, that this poem does not have two parts in any kind of grammatical juxtaposition. Such a juxtapositional structure does map to the layers of the catastrophe-theory graph, but is not required. Furthermore, senryu do not require such a structure the way haiku do, but this “one phrase” structure (lacking a *kireji* or the equivalent of a cutting word) still maps to the three-dimensional model. Here, the initial “meaning” (which is by definition limited to objective facts on the object level) is a person’s discovery of a hair in his soup. At home or at a restaurant (no matter how fancy), the diner’s fleeting concern centers on *whose* hair it might be. Removing the offending hair is a relatively trivial concern. Before performing that odious task, however, one is somehow more repulsed if the hair is identifiably someone else’s—being red, especially long, curly, or otherwise distinctive from one’s own, if one’s hair happens not to be red, long, or curly. My personal experience, having (at least in the past) plenty of common, short, straight, brown hair, is that I can seldom tell if a hair lurking in a bowl of soup is mine or someone else’s (and no, this doesn’t happen to me often!). But in the bald man’s case, the implication is that this man is *completely* bald: this hair in his soup couldn’t possibly be his. That is the gestalt of the poem.

The mapping to the topological graph is perhaps not as obvious as with a simple pun or any other linear or progressive resolution of ambiguity, but the description of a man finding a hair is pictorially akin to gradually ascending to the second layer. The poem is essentially read as a whole, seen all at once like a picture, however, so the poem’s structural “development” takes places not as one reads it linearly, but as one’s *understanding* of it unfolds in the mind. This is a subtle but important difference, at least for this poem. It is vital here because the word “bald” carries the weight of causing the catastrophic jump in meanings (specifically, this could not be his own hair because he is bald). Pictorially, this is where the graph drops from the upper to the lower level. Again, the “bald” detail does not appear at the end of the poem the way a punch line does at the end of a joke, but the *perception* of the poem does unfold in a manner similar to a joke, and the gestalt jump is clearly made when the reader comes to the unexpected understanding that the hair in the soup did not grow from that man’s head. Adding to the poem’s overall effect are two intensifying factors. First is the irony that this “catastrophic” event takes place in the man’s favorite deli, and second is the innate humor of total baldness—although the innateness of such humor is undoubtedly more apparent if one is *not* bald (I am, alas, finding it increasingly less funny myself, but I digress).

The example I’ve just shared, a senryu, is by nature humorous. But nonhumorous haiku can also be mapped to the catastrophe-theory graph. Consider another poem of mine, this time from my book of earthquake haiku, *Tremors* (Foster City, California: Press Here, 1990; 4):

after the quake
the weathervane
pointing to earth

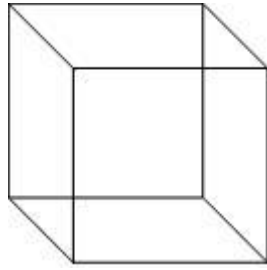
Now this poem depicts another kind of catastrophe, but I hope that fact doesn't confuse matters. Here again the reader is presented with objective facts: after an earthquake a weathervane is seen pointing to earth. There is no stated interpretation or explanation here. The apparent cause-effect explanation is what the reader perceives in that gestalt moment of figuring out the poem. Here the detail of a bent weathervane pointing to the earth in the context of an earthquake is pictorially mapped to the ascension toward the graph's upper layer. In this poem, perhaps more clearly than in the bald-man poem, there is at this point an ambiguity: why is the weathervane pointing to the earth when it normally does not? Again, this ambiguity passes by very quickly as the reader perceives the facts in the poem as a whole—it is not sequential or linear in the way one actually reads the lines of the poem (the lines are arranged as they are for syntactic reasons that have little to do with the progression of perception in so short a poem, at least for the sake of applying catastrophe theory to the structure of haiku). This ambiguity is resolved in the catastrophic gestalt that the earthquake shook so much that it capsized the building or bent the post that supports the weathervane—that the earthquake caused the weathervane to point to the earth, thus even laying “blame” where it seems rightfully to belong. This again is the jump that maps to the model pictorially.

By extension, I would suggest that many successful haiku can be mapped to René Thom's topological model of catastrophe theory in a similar manner. I find this to be true for English-language haiku. And, just as Paulos assumes that the *structure* of humor is universal, regardless of language (105), I believe the structure is likely also the same for many successful haiku in other languages. I would even wonder if a haiku might be defined as successful *if* its structure and development in any language maps to this topological model of catastrophe theory. Anything else, it would seem, is merely confusing or a “so what?” poem, a failed attempt at haiku. But that is speculation, for the topological model of catastrophe theory may have limits in its application to haiku. If perchance the model cannot be mapped to certain successful haiku, then at least an understanding of this structure affords a closer insight into the way *many* good haiku do work.

Conclusion

Paulos goes on to discuss concepts called “divergence” and “hysteresis” that explain why certain jokes misfire or fall flat if told inappropriately (for various reasons they fail to ascend to the second layer, thus preventing any catastrophe or jump). The application of these concepts to haiku, and why poor ones fail, offers itself as an intriguing avenue for further exploration. Paulos also points out the inaccessible gap between the layers in the model. This gap “illustrates the fact that only one or the other interpretation can be made at a time” (87). The same is typically true of haiku, even though rapid oscillation between two different meanings may be attempted—and even enjoyed. It may be likened to viewing the Necker cube, where the three-dimensional shape can be seen to face one way or the other, but not both ways

simultaneously:



The “pops” that one’s eyes experience as the cube faces first one way and then the other are just like the leaping of the chasm that is the essence of haiku. It therefore seems serendipitous that Jack Kerouac’s early name for his Americanized haiku was none other than “pops.” Furthermore, this oscillation of visual meaning also reminds me of Allen Ginsberg’s concept of the “eyeball kick,” the brief “double-take” spasm of the eye when it moves from one color to another contrasting color, a technique he adapted in his poetry by combining dissimilar images—the high and low, the holy with the unholy. As Paulos emphasizes, in applying catastrophe theory to humor, “the model, in neatly combining the cognitive incongruity and the emotional climate aspects of humor with the release theory of laughter, provides one with at least the beginning of a pictorial insight into the structure of humor” (90). So too, of course, with haiku—which, incidentally, Paulos mentions in his sequel to *Innumeracy*, entitled *Beyond Numeracy: Ruminations of a Numbers Man* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

Paulos’s models for humor, however, do not stop at three dimensions. He also explores two- and four-dimensional models, and also explains that René Thom posits a total of seven catastrophe models, not all of which necessarily hold true for humor—or haiku. Nevertheless, catastrophe theory provides a convenient pictorial model that not only provides insights into humor, but into haiku as well. Paulos notes in his conclusion that he has employed catastrophe theory to “model the structure of humor, but [suggests that] applications to other cognitive processes are possible” (103). I hope I have accomplished exactly that task for haiku, and recall with interest Paulos’s formula for humor being “a perceived incongruity with a point, in an appropriate emotional climate” (104). Could not haiku be defined in precisely the same way? No wonder Arthur Koestler claims that “the logic of the creative process is the same in art, science, and humor, and that only the ‘emotional climate’ differs” (106–107).

Indeed, that is the conclusion. To reiterate, haiku has much in common with humor, structurally to be sure, and this structure is neatly expressed through the topological model of René Thom’s catastrophe theory. Also, and of greater import, perhaps haiku writers can better understand haiku by learning from and understanding the structure of humor, particularly in the ideas of object level and metalevel. Because humor is so prevalent, it can form, in all its many varieties, a handy structural analogy to haiku and help poets master the art of this brief yet bursting poetry. As Paulos concludes, “since humor is such a complex and human phenomenon, any

understanding of it will necessarily enrich our understanding of thought in general” (102). So too, indeed, of haiku.

Five Postscripts

1.

One of several serendipitous discoveries in writing this paper was the idea that haiku are *assertive*. A second discovery was the necessity for an appropriate *emotional climate* for haiku. These topics are certainly worthy of further thought. But I believe the most important concepts to be gleaned from this paper, for those so inclined, are the ideas of object levels and metalevels, as well as meta-metalevels in haiku. Understanding *where* meaning resides, and how the poem is often structured, can help us in teaching haiku and in writing and revising our own poems. Nevertheless, haiku poets would do well to remember that haiku is an intuitive poem, a poem of feeling more than intellectual meaning (“since feeling is first,” as E. E. Cummings said, the person “who pays any attention / to the syntax of things / will never wholly kiss you”). Indeed, whatever strides may be made toward understanding the structure of meaning in a haiku, more important is the poetic effect of that meaning in recreating a desired mood and intuitive feeling.

2.

Some ideas in this paper may be intuitive to some readers. And they are hardly new, as I mention at the beginning. In the *Canadian Haiku Anthology* (George Swede, ed., Toronto: Three Trees Press, 1979), Marshall Hryciuk wrote that “The strength of the haiku is in the bounding line between figure and ground leaping from its vibrancy into an uncanny sense of transcendence” (58). It is exactly this transcendence that makes a strong haiku leap off the page. It leaps, of course, because of the underlying structure that matches what we find in catastrophe theory. Consider, for example, the following poem:

snow melting
the village brimming over . . .
with children!

Kai Falkman singles out this poem to illustrate “the mechanism of surprise in haiku.” As he explains, “The first line provides a factual picture of melting snow. The second line excites the imagination: there is so much melting snow that the village is flooded. The third line brings the surprise: with children” (from *Understanding Haiku: A Pyramid of Meaning*, Winchester, Virginia: Red Moon Press, 2002, 38). Comedians understand Falkman’s “mechanism of surprise,” because the same mechanism is at work in a good joke. As a master joke-teller, so to speak, Issa sets up the situation: “snow melting / the village brimming over . . .” and then hits the reader with the unexpected punch line: “with children!” The children have been cooped inside during the long, cold winter. Now, as the snow melts, they burst outside, “flooding” the village with their shouts and laughter. This is the satori-like power of catastrophe theory, in miniature, at work in haiku. The leaping of the gap in haiku is indeed a sort of satori, and here it is worth quoting D. T. Suzuki’s description of satori, which might just as well be talking about haiku (*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, New York: Grove Press, 1964, 95):

Satori is the sudden flashing into consciousness of a new truth hitherto undreamed of. It is a sort of mental catastrophe taking place all at once, after much piling up of matters intellectual and demonstrative. The piling has reached a limit of stability and the whole edifice has come tumbling to the ground, when, behold, a new heaven is open to full survey.

In her essay “Haiku Is Not” (<http://www.ascentaspirations.ca/haikuisnot.htm>), Naomi Wakan says that “His [Suzuki’s] ‘behold’ is the ‘Aha!’ moment of haiku.” Indeed, haiku’s “aha” moment is exactly this instant of catastrophe when readers leap that amazing gap that unifies emotional understanding.

3.

A third thought has arisen in my recent reading of Philomene Kocher’s essay “Inviting Connection Through the Gap in Haiku” (*Language & Literacy* 11:1, Spring 2009, online at <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/langandlit/article/view/9746>), in which she says that “There is a tension or ‘gap’ created by the association or contrast of two things, and this ‘gap’ invites participation by the reader or listener.” She also adds that “the gap provides both an absence (it does not appear in words) and presence (it is suggested) of connection. The revelation or epiphany experienced by someone when they *jump the gap* is well described by Natalie Goldberg.” She then quotes a passage from *Long Quiet Highway* (New York: Bantam, 1993, 35): “The real essence of a haiku is the poet’s awakening, and the haiku gives you a small taste of that, like a ripe red berry on the tip of your tongue. Your mind actually experiences a marvelous leap when you hear a haiku, and in the space of that leap you feel awe. Ahh, you say. You get it.” The gap in haiku, of course, has been described as being like the gap in a spark plug. If the gap is too great, the engine won’t fire. Similarly, in haiku, if the gap between the poem’s two parts is too great, the poem will simply be obscure and unclear, pushing the reader away—readers won’t make the leap between the poem’s two juxtaposed parts. Likewise, if the gap is too small, and the leap is too easy, then the poem will seem too obvious—a so-what poem—in the same way that an engine will misfire if the spark plug gap is too close. The art of haiku lies in making the gap in the poem just right.

Kocher also notes the following, which I could easily have used as an example in addition to or instead of my reference to the Necker cube: “I am reminded of the picture used in psychological testing that can be viewed as either a vase or two faces.” In viewing this picture, the viewer oscillates between seeing the vase or seeing the two faces. Haiku, in its combination of two parts, is like seeing both the vase and the faces simultaneously. She also quotes poet Tom Clausen as saying “Our being, our haiku, is the connection of events, phenomena and the closing of the gap.” Kocher also mentions that some haiku poets focus on novelty, and said that “novelty can act in a similar manner to the punch line of a joke.” And perhaps of closest similarity to my essay here is the following statement, worth quoting in full:

Both haiku and jokes are characterized by incongruity that invites interaction. The structure of humour as described by psychologist Lucille Nahemow (1986 [“Humor as a data base for the study of aging.” In L. Nahemow, K. .A. McCluskey-Fawcett, and P. E. McGhee (eds.), *Humor and Aging* (pp. 3–26). Orlando, Florida: Academic

Press, Inc., 1986.]) could easily describe the structure of haiku: “The discrepancy between the expected and that which transpires accounts for the humorous experience. However, incongruity alone appears insufficient. There must also be resolution for the joke to make sense” (p. 6). Nahemow also notes that “[t]he recognition that something is funny contains both emotional and cognitive elements” (p. 8), and this kind of wholehearted response is true for haiku as well.

4.

In his introduction to Delia Chiaro's *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play* (London: Routledge Press, 1992), Ronald Carter quotes Roman Jakobson, who noted the following: “A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms” (ix). This is a finger-wag of sorts, for linguists to remember poetics, and for literary scholars to remember linguistics. It's in that spirit that I offer my essay, not with an intention for practicing haiku poets to have something to take away with them to improve their writing, necessarily, but to consider deeper linguistic and structural contexts for how haiku poetry works. Chiaro, who in 1992 was a lecturer in English and linguistics at the University of Naples, has much else to say in her book that's relevant to haiku and the catastrophe theory of humor. For example, she refers to “a quizzical element” in jokes, and says that “an information gap exists between the [writer] and the reader” (27). Is this not the same as in haiku, where a gap is resolved when we “get” the leap? She also says that “If word play is to be successful, it has to play on knowledge which is shared between sender and recipient” (11). We can easily say the same thing about haiku. She echoes Jakobson when she says that “three systems interact with each other in order to make up the sort of competence required in order to get a joke: linguistic, sociocultural and ‘poetic’”. Richard Alexander . . . defines poetic competence as the ability to recognize the ways in which linguistic options can be manoeuvred in order to create a desired effect—the recipient of a joke, in a sense, is in a similar position to the reader of poetry; both need to appreciate exactly how the comic/poet has toyed with the language” (13). Ambiguity is helpful in poetry and jokes, of course, because it is so often the source of double meanings and humor, but I think it's useful for poets to control the ambiguity in their poems, to prevent misreadings—which is all part of how the poet “toys” with the language. Chiaro also notes the moment of disjunction that occurs in jokes, which is akin to what happens in many haiku, at least in that “leap” between layers in the catastrophe theory model, and the implications it creates (think of the Japanese notion of “ma,” or space, in haiku, and how it allows and nurtures implications and reverberations). She says “It is this very implication, this cryptic element which differentiates the joke [and haiku] from many other texts” (53), adding that “Two totally different elements are put up for comparison” (32) and that “The ‘joke’ is obviously more enjoyable if the reader can appreciate it on both levels [of meaning]” (31). She says that a punch line “is the pivot around which a joke is centred” (49), which is like the implications that haiku focus on, and of course like the technique of *kakekotoba* or pivot words in haiku. Ultimately, she says, “certain jokes can be defined as being *poetic*” (28), and that “some jokes can be seen as being formally similar to . . . poetry” (87). Some additional thoughts relevant to haiku are that “poetry and puns tend to encounter similar difficulties when an attempt is made at translation” (88), and that “some jokes are worth comparing to poetry in terms of the density of translation obstacles to be overcome” (88). Chiaro concludes her book by saying that “word play [like haiku] can

be considered a form of ‘layman’s poetry’” because “playing with language can bring out the poetic side of the layperson” (123). Finally, she says that “The form of ‘poetry’—jokes—which is generated by these ‘poets’ is accessible to anyone who understands the language and the culture” (123). That is certainly true of haiku—a genre of poetry that, as Kerouac said, should be “as simple as porridge.”

5.

On 21 August 2015, I had the pleasure of listening to a presentation at Microsoft on the subject of laughter. It was by Bob Mankoff, cartoon editor of the *New Yorker*. I was fascinated by a number of his comments that resonated with my essay. First, quite simply, Mankoff said that “Humor deflates.” To be deflated, of course, one must start at an inflated state. In terms of catastrophe theory, an inflated state could mean one level of meaning that one jumps from to a second layer of meaning—the deflated layer (since deflation is a source of humor, although not the only one). However, I don’t think deflation applies to the layers of catastrophe theory, since it has more to do with what Hobbes called the “superiority theory” of humor. The key point is that movement happens, a shift in emotional states. We could easily take the inflated state to mean a state of self-importance, which humor loves to skewer, or a state from which we look down on others or take pleasure in the inferiority of others.

Speaking of the superiority theory, by which we deflate others (if we happen not to be deflated by them), Mankoff summarized Thomas Hobbes by saying that “the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others.” He mentioned this in his talk, and it also appears in his *New Yorker* essay of 25 April 2012, “Hostility Is the Soul of Wit” (<http://www.newyorker.com/cartoons/bob-mankoff/hostility-is-the-soul-of-wit>, accessed 18 May 2016), in which he suggested that Shakespeare’s oft-quoted “Brevity is the soul of wit” might replace “brevity” with “hostility.” Of course, not all humor is hostile, although on some level it often has a victim, even if that victim is merely language.

In the same presentation and *New Yorker* essay, Mankoff also quoted Plato, who said that laughter is a “mixture of pleasure and pain that lies in the malice of amusement.” That mixture would seem to speak to the two layers of the catastrophe theory model. Both Plato’s claim and Hobbes’ perception of humor seem relevant to understanding senryu, and most likely haiku as well. In dramatic terms, tragedy is about people better than us, and comedy is about people worse than us. In very broad terms, if we extend this thought to haiku and senryu, haiku may be thought of as tragedy and senryu as comedy, even while both haiku and senryu may be either light or dark.

Mankoff also said that “Arthur Koestler coined the term ‘bisociation’ to refer to the mental process involved in perceiving humorous incongruity. According to Koestler, bisociation occurs when a situation, event, or idea is simultaneously perceived from the perspective of two self-consistent but normally unrelated and even incompatible frames of reference. Thus, a single event ‘is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths, as it were.’” This is like our perceptions of the Necker cube or other optical illusions that seem to oscillate, and certainly akin to the catastrophe theory in humor.

For a general overview of theories of humor, the Wikipedia page at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theories_of_humor provides basic understandings, including theories of relief, superiority, incongruity, and other less-prominent theories.

Acknowledgments:

I am grateful to Professor John Allen Paulos of Temple University for permission to quote heavily from his book, *Mathematics and Humor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and for the inspiration to explore his ideas.

Thanks also to Ron Moss for help in refining the topological image that models catastrophe theory.

Never really gone...

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL REHLING

Jane Reichhold **1937 - 2016**

Jane Reichhold was a friend to so many haiku poets it is better to say she was a friend to the form itself. In one way or the other she connected with most haiku poets during her lifetime, either directly or through her many poems, books, online workshops, and her tanka and haiku online journals. I first met her over some technical projects, and set up some activities of hers on my servers. Most of those sites are still operating to this day. She was at the first a strong determined woman, and if it were not for women such as Jane I most likely would not be writing haiku today. They not only took me into their 'club', but taught me the rules of the road to haiku with firmness that was laced with kindness. Jane wrote about the women in haiku elegantly on her site, and you can read "[THOSE WOMEN WRITING HAIKU](#)" here, and learn this important part of the history of the form. Jane will remain for me a potent memory, and will never be far from my poetic spirit. There are many who feel as I do, of that I am certain.

We will never really be able to 'lose' Jane either. She left a lot of herself in her websites, which I pray are preserved, and in her many publications over the years. Her translations, her poetry, her art, and her observations of a life of poetry are her real legacy.

I will never know the reasons for her leaving us the way she did, but I have learned over my seventy years to see it as an individual choice, and the reasons don't belong to anyone else. As humans we often 'cling' to people we care about, but after much trial and error in this private area of my mind I have discovered that what people leave of themselves for others is more important than 'how' they left us. Let any more thoughts about the nature of her death end here.

Jane left us many poems, here are two that William Higginson used in his book, *Haiku World*:

All Saint's Day
the Jack-o-lantern
full of gnats

across the canyon
the neighbor hammers
on an echo

That second one 'nails' the spirit of the senryu. It is, like so many of her works, a pure rendering of the moment. What is telling about it is that it speaks of the poet's

observation of the neighbor, and also provides a potent glimpse into the neighbor's persona as well. Like all fine haiku/senryu there is more revealed than the sum of the words by themselves could ever speak. She seemed to know how to be natural and clever at the same time.

Jane Reichhold was an accomplished translator, poet, and artist. Her haiga combined techniques from both the old and the new, and her poetic voice moved with the images. In short, Jane was the whole package. Her contributions in every area sparkled and motivated others. I hope her spirit is at peace now. Peace is what she richly deserved as a reward for the many positive impacts that she had, and will continue to exert even after her passing, on haiku. Every poet that writes these short poems can learn and grow from the contributions she made to the form. In that sense, Jane will never really be gone.

A fuller bio of the poet can be found at: [Meeting Jane](#), written by the poet herself.

Review of Robert D. Wilson's "A Soldier's Bones"

WRITTEN BY DON BAIRD

Hokku and Haiku by Robert D. Wilson

Did you let this gem slip by you when it was released? Did you not hear of it before today? These questions may be answered yes by many readers and scholars alike—they indeed missed it!

Robert Wilson, often under the radar these days is one of the foremost English language haiku poets. He was also the Editor in Chief (owner with Sasa Vasic) of *Simply Haiku* an eminent haiku journal. His efforts regarding the *Simply Haiku* Journal are unparelleled—featuring collections from the finest haiku minds of modern times—through poetry, interviews and essays.

Robert is passionate about writing. There isn't a day that passes that doesn't include him augmenting his prolific haiku/hokku repertoire. *A Soldier's Bones* is an example of his efforts. It is a book of fine haiku that clearly demonstrates his ability to employ Japanese poetics in English language haiku. Such aesthetics as *ma*, *kokoro*, *yugen*, *wabi-sabi*, *kireji* are delicately entwined within his psyche of which are readily unearthed through his engaging poetry.

He addresses the seemingly impossible,

full moon . . .
an egret kneading
darkness

starsong . . .
the wind inside
my dreams

while at the same time, lures the reader into *yugen*—the mystery that dwells deep within nature and human psyche, combined. He touches on darkness, austerity, and lamenting that lies not only within nature herself,

eternity . . .
the distance between
two mirrors

morning mist . . .
a rice field's quiet
bridges

but within human natures and their unique abilities to wonder about themselves—to ponder their extant relationship with the universe.

Basho gravitated toward change. It is not ambiguous that he was a ponderer—and more than willing to embrace aesthetics he hadn't previously pursued. *Karumi*, a sort of lightness in the choice of words—using words that were readily understood became, arguably, his final poetic. It seems he didn't want his haiku to be heavy in language or mood of which the following haiku in English demonstrates well:

try another
song, cicada,
punk rock's out!

As do fine haiku/hokku poet's of ancient times, Robert has a keen sense of observation. He is aware of micro and macro; he is aware of sounds and silence; he is aware of change; he is aware of *koto* (comings and goings of all things—process); he is tuned into *zoka* (Chi/qi of existence); and he is aware of himself—his strengths, his shortcomings, his tears, his laughter—and he diligently embraces it all through his poetry.

even the
parrot holds its tongue . . .
humid day

thick fog . . .
a coyote stretching
quiet

Robert Wilson is sensitive and rediscovers himself over and over through the goings on of nature—

moonless night . . .
all that remains of a
cicada's song

relating himself to the profound conditions of life itself—relating himself to a wolf's beckon, a sound of wind, a feel of mist, a dark night of
. . . where's the moon?

He sticks to his style; he stands by Japanese haiku/hokku traditions while writing in a foreign language separated from the bounds of hokku culture in Japan. But amidst profound cultural disjunction, he discovered his voice—a way—a style of English language haiku/hokku—and passionately retains key poetics of the mother culture—Japan—the spawning grounds from which his mind creates.

your flight, owl . . .
painting me into
a dream

. . . unveils how he perceives himself. It is a poem that, upon close reading, is quite revealing as to who Robert is . . . and how he dreams with nature.

Under the Bashō 2016

This is a "must-have;" and it is one not to be missed by any reader or scholar. It can now be found in our [Library](#), on the shelves of the Living Haiku Anthology.

February 24th, 2016

Don Baird

The Romance of Endings in Haiku

WRITTEN BY RICHARD GILBERT

As fireflies

Who are we, and how briefly? the haiku seems to ask. Like a firefly, a cicada, the poem rises with a sudden flare of brilliant light and life and is gone, disappearing in the few instants of its first reading. Knowing is dying. In the art of haiku, life isn't just close to death it is creased by it. When we think of death, there is usually some kind of pause in contemplating what has occurred and is occurring all around (leaving us out, for now). So in haiku, both poet and reader boldly ignite consciousness in invoking sudden and ever-brief images. As with love, the art of haiku may be dangerous: we are urged by the poem to experience an edge — on one side is here-ness, on the other gone-ness.

In longer forms of poetry a narrative structure ensues which allows for story, and we travel, walking, riding, flying, driving, through landscapes of imagination and reality with explanation as guide. By contrast, in haiku each word and image is etched stark; solitary islands surrounded by seas. Haiku is an art-form suited for adults who have experienced love and loss; as works they intrinsically possess this canvas. The love of singular, evanescent images living so long as attention (rather than narrative) provides, intermingles with the mystery of disappearing, of unknowing. The sea of language may represent fertility and potential, yet also harbingers personal extinction.

Haiku play in this way with presence and absence, and also with the present as “ever-now,” presence as an un-fleeting eternal. The very brief non-narrative poem lives and dies, brightens and fades in the way we attend through presence, in reading and contemplation. Such “edgy” aspects of context, background and backstory promise haiku romance.

Romantic love

As a moonlit pillar desires to bloom? If you so, as you like.

— Ikeda Sumiko (Japan)

“If so, as you like” is an offering, a prayer spoken of love, to the void, to a lover, or to you in barely veiled metaphor in promise of sexual intimacy. Where is the romance, you might ask? It must be in what lingers, in feelings that persist beyond the death (ending) of the poem; in the way we are able to return, reminded of an offering in re-reading. Following this logic, all haiku possess an atmosphere of romance if they succeed in lingering, as seduction.

Examining the entirety of haiku worldwide, the topic of romantic love is rarely attempted, and is even more rarely successful. Reading through the [Living Haiku Anthology \(LHA\)](#) archive, out of several thousand haiku published internationally perhaps two dozen examples have been found, and of these, only a dozen seem excellent. For romance to bloom in haiku, “person” must lose to or become sintered by depth, to those seas which surround and relativize the human. The significance of human love in haiku is entwined with insignificance, not as an either-or dialectic, but as a *third way* sensibility: an “insignificant significance,” if paradoxically so. The Hamletean soliloquy amended: “to be and not to be in a question” regarding the relationship of romantic love, a human experience so strong that as Helen Fisher points out, we will kill or die for it:

Around the world, people love. They sing for love, they dance for love, they compose poems and stories about love. They tell myths and legends about love. They pine for love, they live for love, they kill for love, and they die for love. As Walt Whitman once said, “Oh, I would stake all for you.” Anthropologists have found evidence of romantic love in 170 societies. They’ve never found a society that did not have it ([TED Talks](#), 2008).

In haiku romance, love romance, personal pronouns are usually present. This is a poetic challenge, because as readers we cannot know the “I” or “She” or “Him” of the poem. The poet is in love, and I am not with them. In effect, haiku proclaiming romantic love run the risk of irrelevance, or worse, a cheapening of sensibility. One means of resolving the conundrum of personal-self foregrounding is through reference to nature as implicit metaphor,

whatever happens
the song
of the river

— [Coralie Berhault-Creuzet](#) (France)

The first image-instance “whatever happens” here invokes a *media res*: the reader is immediately inserted into the midst of a relationship. Part of the poet’s design is that “song of the river,” a patently stereotypical-romantic image, allows the reader to finish off the first line (mentally) as “whatever happens *to us*,” or “whatever happens *to me*.” Poetic abstraction (“whatever happens”) juxtaposes with romantic trope, and this conflation acts through reflection, recollection — one recalls a love-situation specific to the poem’s scenario: a romance just after its first blooming. In this way, past becomes presence for the reader. What resurfaces is also gone (is but memory), even as the “song of the river” moves endlessly on.

A similar move or approach to romance, and a starry one at that, is presented next:

scattered stars
the space between us
tastes of pine

— [Peggy Willis Lyles](#) (US)

This haiku ends with an “impossible” synesthesia combining the taste of space as pine. A geomantic series of worlds arises in interacting geographies: the distance of lovers walking together, the forest (or park), the night sky, and its scattered stars — evoking a play of human significance/insignificance among world-relations. The poem speaks both to promise (“tastes of pine”), and possible loss (“scattered,” “the space between”; “pine” might also reference “to pine for”). Islands of words matter here as much as images — mid-step is there to be, or has a mis-step already occurred? Is the refuge of an already-lost relationship to end in pine (as a barrens), or does “tastes of pine” infer mutual intimacy — a walk together in shared post-coital bliss? Intimations of truths pondered in reader-experience, the poem leads us into its mystery.

Romance may also be expressed anti-romantically:

where ancient cedars stood the ache the blue sky mine
— [Lorin Ford](#) (Australia)

in the exact erasure of all that was, projected into the sky. This poem is a great silent cry, which begins and ends with “mine”: not the “mine” of ego, the “mine” of knowing. Re-reading offers circular continuity in the single looped line, as “blue sky mine where ancient cedars stood the ache the (&c)” circulates in a sensed depth of aesthetic beauty: truth down to the bones. Romantic naiveté is done away with as the loss is to a world, a cosmos, a landscape valued as soul, as psyche. Who but the poet is left to care, as a lover of presence in this world, even if humbly, as remembrance? The poet passes on, and the poem survives — but the trees, they’re already gone. Now we too know, and not only through image, also through the rhythmic drumbeat of love and grief: “the *ache* the *blue* sky *mine*,” evocative whether as song or prayer, steps to a new ecology of mind.

In plying romance in haiku, among the difficulties is the problematic dichotomy of “her/his, “I/me/mine.” “Pronounced” protagonists typically fail, though there are some survivors:

sublime message
her hand in his
how it’s getting colder

— [Ralf Bröker](#) (Germany)

“Sublime” is what we might desire haiku to reveal through nuanced inference, so the *overt* use of the term here strikes a discordant if not inexpert note. As such, this haiku presents an in-your-face attitude in confronting genre-possibility. As with “whatever happens” in Berhault-Creuzet above, Bröker first offers an image-abstraction in “sublime message.” This haiku faux pas is compounded by another, “her hand in his.” Up to this point, it seems haiku disaster, and not of the romantic kind. The following phrase “how it’s getting” is likewise a careworn trope from the annals of haiku-land. Yet this poem charms from “colder,” due to a dislocation: the question of objective subject arising from “it’s” in the last line. Is the “it” here her hand, the weather, the sublimity, its message, his heart? “It” is a question of what (and who) we hold onto, in dreams of loving, together. We only have each other —

yet something more — and thirdly, much less. In the winter of this romantic sublime, the romance of endings appears in the ending. And the curtain closes fast.

To be and not to be in a question

To remain uniquely individual while also holding to genre limitation provides for creative tension in haiku, and presents a challenge to composition. How much can be said of a romantic relationship in which a love story is successfully encapsulated in about 12 syllables (the median length of haiku in English)? As in the examples above, what is revealed reflects intimately on what is in question. Let's look a bit further into it, in terms of reader experience. The art of haiku relates to incompleteness in several ways. 'Images as islands' implies the use of fragmentary language: an extreme brevity of syntax with grammar parts often left out, from which the reader must intuit sense. Another mode of incompleteness relates to disjunction: the reader is left to forge coherence out of a series of images for which the author provides no obvious semantic glue.

For instance, in the above examples, how does "If so, as you like" connect with the "moon," how does "whatever" connect with a "song," how does "the ache the blue sky" relate to "ancient cedars," and how does a "sublime message" relate with "colder"? In finding or encompassing the poem as a whole, the reader moves toward *some third thing* regarding placement of perspective.

This *third* may be where the poem lives. In a recent essay, "[Grief and the Collapse of 'Distancing' in the Reader — Haiku and Ethics, a Brief Consideration](#)," aspects of distance as a notion of this "thirdness" of form were discussed (here slightly amended):

Interestingly, haiku fragmentation and omission allow for a potent universalism, in that universals of love [etc.] in all the haiku above are relativized by each individual reader, via subjective, idiosyncratic experience. Each in a uniquely specific manner persuades a collapse of emotional distancing in the reader.

What can be added to this idea is that the collapse of emotional distancing is itself (paradoxically) created through forms of distancing — not of the reader, but of the poem with regard to the reader. Incompleteness in language, in image, and ambivalence as to meaning (haiku become effective as they become ambivalent regarding any singular extractive meaning) creates removal, creates distance. Images and possible meanings and feelings are evoked, enter us — yet the poem also distances itself from us. This phenomenon can be termed *instrumental distancing*. It is this removal and resulting obliquity which allows the poem's images to linger.

Where does the poem go, and what is the texture or field of this distanced space? While there cannot be a single answer, for haiku of romantic love, the poem itself acts much like a third sense of "person," a poetic of personification, or at least, animate presence. In general, this *third* space may be referenced in Japanese criticism as "*ma*" (a space of in-betweenness, psychological interstitiality), combined

with “*ba*” (which indicates location: a place in space, home). Semblance as a personification of “an in-betweenness which is home” represents this third element of haiku.

As a rule, critics throw up their hands at this point, or turn to a group of poems under discussion to illustrate the effect. Yet considering haiku of romantic love specifically, the power of romance forges a sense of “person” out of distance, binds us to a wish, a dream, as a more concrete reality. The poem itself insists on its own reality as romance; the author limns this poetic world into being as a third thing — a third space or place, even as a third voice: as an embodiment.

As a moonlit pillar desires to bloom? If you so, as you like.

Regarding romance, the “who” (the “I” or self) of the haiku might here be the author, their lover, yourself, your lover — “person” remains indeterminate. Yet what is unambivalent is that within the imagined scene of the poem there is a relationship: an intimacy of a ‘you-and-I,’ in place, space and time. The ‘you-and-I’ of the poem neither exists, nor lacks in significance. More strongly, this “other” ‘you-and-I’ pertains to what is most significant in embodying romance in the poem; that is, to what activates intimacy for the reader.

Where exists the space in which language becomes image?

This poem provocatively poses the question. Where is the space in which how we dream, to wish to be touched to be free, in touch, blossoms? It is out of this distance that intimacy blooms — depending on the reader. So, this *third* isn’t the distance itself, yet there is distance. What is meant by distance then? The distance is as far as imagination travels in its creation of fragmentary, incomplete images of romantic love. In haiku, the truth may be told, though excursions must be instigated in search of it. Consequently, resolutions rely on reader intuition. When there ensues a collapse of distancing in the reader, intimations are made intimate.

Haiku create an intimate distance through which, in subtle ways, the poem itself elides into “person” — a thing becomes animate, a dreamlike scenario becomes significant, real to us, intimate, and valued. The theatre of haiku relativizes the human in part because the poem itself, modest instrument of language and most minimal object of artifice, is given independent existence on its own terms, in its own space, as a being, by the reader.

Taking this perspective, inquiries can be made regarding a given haiku on its own terms. When I read:

scattered stars
the space between us
tastes of pine

What infuses the scenario with romance is “the space between”— a space which “tastes of pine.” Who lives there, in that space? Neither the lovers of the poem, nor myself; the distance is traveled in an alternate direction, into the poem’s own

dimension, deeper into the mirror of being implied by its language. Presence felt in the body, yet imaginary at the same time. By focusing on the minimal-elemental as haiku do, there arrives a unique form of artistic satisfaction.

In each of these poems one finds aspects of instrumental distancing, which may paradoxically cause a collapse of emotional distancing, an embodied intimacy, in the reader. Just as we may wish to unite or reunite with a lover, feeling equally their apartness, otherness (alterity), haiku of romantic love reflect imaginal being through the lens of poetic distancing, and its opposite may ensue as union, or apotheosis.

sublime message
her hand in his
how it's getting colder

Haiku is freed by the reader — or conversely, the poem frees *itself* from *its* reader. In the distance which pierces resides the arrow of romance.