AN ORIGINAL RELATION TO THE UNIVERSE:

A STUDY OF NORTH AMERICAN HAIKU

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1950's literally thousands of collections of haiku poetry have appeared in the United States and Canada. Hundreds of thousands of haiku have been published in scores of magazines, and the rate of publication is steadily increasing. A contest sponsored by Japan Air Lines in 1989 drew more than 40,000 submissions. Yet English language haiku has so far not made its presence felt in the traditional academic community. Certainly the vast majority of the haiku published in the United States and Canada does not merit sustained, or for that matter even limited, critical attention. But then the vast majority of poetry in any genre is of minor significance. Though it was wise for Western critics and scholars to be skeptical of this new and seemingly exotic literary genre and to avoid embracing a potentially transient literary phenomenon, haiku has proven to be far more than a passing literary fancy. Over the course of the past few decades haiku poetry in North America has reached the level where I believe it merits the attention of those seriously interested in literature.

Several reasons may explain why haiku has so far not spurred such attention. Haiku composition, especially in the early years, attracted more than its share of dilettante practitioners. Its simplicity made it seem deceptively easy to write, and the exotic atmosphere one could shroud oneself in was alluring. These early poems tended to be sentimental, full of cherry blossoms and incense, written not because haiku furthered the author's poetic practice, but because these writers sought to ally themselves with an orientalist image of Japan--precisely the opposite attitude, I might add, from an exacting attention to the mundane details of local, common life that epitomizes the haiku aesthetic. Unfortunately these poems defined the genre for many people and obscured the serious work being done by a few good poets.

Another less easily countered criticism of North American haiku is the assumption by many people, reinforced by the Japanophiles, that it is a fundamentally foreign, highly specialized art form that is a unique product of Japanese culture, and it is therefore unable to serve as a valid means of expression for North American poets writing about North American life from a North American perspective. This view is primarily held by those seemingly best prepared to appreciate haiku--scholars of Japanese poetry. No less a haiku scholar than Earl Miner has argued this point in his 1974 entry on haiku in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. He contends that haiku is "too reduced in form and grows too complexly out of its cultural background to be adaptable as a whole into Western languages."

A native Japanese poet and scholar, however, has defended the possibility of a North American haiku. Hiroaki Sato has pointed out that the view that haiku is unsuited to North American literary practice tends to idealize a body of haiku consisting of "a dozen or so famous pieces by Bashô, Buson and Issa, and not to include pieces from the diversified world of modern haiku" ("Diversified"). In short, Sato contends, it may not be possible to successfully write North American haiku in imitation of Bashô, but it indeed can be written in the same spirit in which contemporary Japanese haiku is written. If the poetry of Bashô is codified as the model for true haiku, then, Sato argues, not only the haiku of North Americans, but the contemporary haiku of most Japanese as well, would be found deficient. At Miner's suggestion, Sato wrote a revised definition of haiku for the 1986 Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms. His entry refers favorably to haiku written in North America.

Though I agree with Sato, my perspective on the basis for the viability of North American haiku is slightly different from his. In addition to broadening the definition of haiku to reflect developments in the past few hundred years, as Sato reasonably suggests, I also wish to approach haiku as a current manifestation of a trend in American poetics that begins in earnest in the writings of the transcendentalists--in particular, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman--and that has continued under various guises in the work of, among others, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wright, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder, Robert Haas, and in fact a sizeable number of other contemporary poets. In short, I would contend that haiku is a genre that fulfills the poetic aspirations of important trends in American literature that have endured throughout the past 150 years. Assuredly such a slight genre could not otherwise have so greatly influenced such an imposing cast of poets did it not fulfill some deep-seated necessity in their poetic practice.

The poetry of this tradition is a poetry of exploration; a poetry more concerned with revelation than with creation; more concerned with what is said than with how; a poetry that attempts to see, feel, smell, taste, touch the world anew, and to transmit those sensations, and whatever insights the poet may have gained from them, to the reader; a poetry, as Emerson said, of receiving and imparting; and a poetry the veracity of whose report we expect to be able to verify. It is likewise a poetry that seeks to reveal the value immanent in the world and in the self, rather than a value transferred to the world and self from a transcendent external force. It is a poetry coming in to us like dispatches from an exploring party beyond the frontier, a frontier that marks the boundary between self and world and that confronts us with the essential facts of life in all of their various manifestations.

These trends link transcendentalist ideas such as the Edenic-impulse and the effacement of the subject/object dichotomy with modernist notions such as Pound's idea of the "direct presentation of the image" and Williams' statement "No ideas but in things." These fundamental aspects of such important traditions in American literature and poetics closely correlate with important aspects of the philosophy underlying the practice and the aesthetics of haiku--Zen Buddhism. In linking transcendentalism and Zen I don't mean to imply that they are identical, or even that they are necessarily all that similar (though such a case can be made), only that on these key issues that have been of paramount importance to poets of both traditions, they share related views that have intersected in the practice of many contemporary haiku poets.

So far the interpretive community for haiku in North America has been small. A widely shared code that would enable readers to understand and appreciate haiku is only nascently established. Readerly expectations of "poetry" are not often fulfilled in haiku. The American haiku poet's work does not appear in collections of poetry unless the author's authority to be a poet has been established by his or her successful composition of other poems that more obviously meet with readerly expectations. Haiku is as yet not widely accepted as a genre of North American poetry. Though Cor van den Heuvel's 1986 publication of an expanded version of The Haiku Anthology and Bruce Ross's 1993 publication of Haiku Moment may prove decisive steps towards legitimizing the form, no poet whose work consists primarily of haiku has received any status in the canon (such as it is) of contemporary North American poets.

One sees signs of change. Robert Haas, recent poet laureate of the U.S., has in intense interest in haiku. In addition to translating the work of some of the Japanese masters for publication in The Essential Haiku, during his tenure as laureate he also met with haiku poets for workshops and discussions. And Nobel Prize winning poet Czeslaw Milosz, commenting of the state of poetry in the 1990s, remarked that "I take interest . . . in the American haiku movement. There is such. And echoes of some Buddhist poetry. For me this is a very interesting trend" (45).
CHAPTER II

THE EDENIC IMPULSE, ORIGINAL NATURE, AND ZEN

During a round-table discussion to commemorate the centennial of Henry David Thoreau’s death, Walter Harding described his experiences lecturing about Thoreau in Japan:

I went over to Japan a few years ago to give a series of lectures there on Thoreau at various universities and it amazed me how widely known Thoreau is in Japan as in so many other foreign countries. I found, for example, that in Tokyo you can buy more different editions of Thoreau’s works than you can in New York City. And over and over again the Japanese would say to me, "What did Thoreau read of Zen Buddhism? He obviously understands it so much better than most of us do." And when I said, "Well, he simply hadn't read anything of Zen Buddhism; it wasn't available in his day," they were astounded. (Harding, Brenner, Doyle 87)

The reaction of Harding’s Japanese audience should not be surprising, for 19th-century American essayist and poet Henry David Thoreau does indeed express attitudes and reveal insights that correspond at many points with the Zen tradition.

As Harding makes clear, however, Buddhist texts were generally unavailable to Thoreau. In fact Thoreau made what is probably the first translation of a Mahayana Buddhist scripture into English (Fields 358). In the "Ethical Scriptures" section of the Dial in 1844, Thoreau published "The Preaching of the Buddha," his own translation from French of the introduction to the Lotus Sutra. Other than this work, however, he and his fellow transcendentalists seem to have known of Buddhism only indirectly, through references to it by Hindu scholars or by Christian missionaries.

In his encyclopedic chronicle of the history of Buddhism in America, Rick Fields suggests that Thoreau, in spite of his dearth of direct contact with Buddhism, was a "pre-Buddhist":

One might say that Thoreau was pre-Buddhist in much the same way that the Chinese Taoists were. He forecast an American Buddhism by the nature of his contemplation. . . . He lost himself in nature as the Chinese painters did, by becoming one with nature. He was certainly not the only one of his generation to live a contemplative life, but he was, it seems, one of the few to live it in a Buddhist way. That is to say, he was perhaps the first American to explore the nontheistic mode of contemplation which is the distinguishing mark of Buddhism. (62-63)

Fields' suggestion that Thoreau's relationship to Buddhism parallels the relationship between Taoism and Buddhism is telling. Zen Buddhism is essentially a combination of Indian Mahayana Buddhism with Chinese Taoism. When the early Buddhists, Sutras in hand, journeyed along the silk route to China in the first century AD, they found their most receptive audience among the Taoists, whose philosophy was similar, though perhaps more worldly wise and practical, than that of the strangers from beyond the mountains. Eventually these two traditions blended, creating a sect known as Ch'an Buddhism. When this sect arrived in Japan in the twelfth century the word "Ch'an," or "practice" was translated as "Zen."

Several critics have compared Taoism, a precursor to Zen, with the philosophy of Thoreau; in fact attempts have been made to find Taoist sources for some of Thoreau's ideas. Only one scholar, however, insists on such a source, though even he acknowledges his inability to convincingly prove his case. In "Thoreau and Taoism," David T. Y. Chen presents an intriguing but ultimately inconclusive argument that Thoreau read the works of the two primary Taoist sages, Chuang-Tzu and Lao-Tzu. Chen feels such an influence must have taken place because, "the affinities between Thoreau and Taoism are too striking to be mere coincidences" (407). Chen cites Lin Yutang's claim that he could "translate passages of Thoreau into Chinese and pass them off as original writing by a Chinese poet without raising any suspicion" (407). Nevertheless, in spite of his best efforts, Chen is unable to demonstrate that Thoreau ever read a single Taoist work.

Other scholars who have researched Thoreau's relationship to Taoism have rejected the possibility that Thoreau read Taoist texts and have instead accepted the idea of parallel development. Gary Simon concludes that although "Thoreau was unfamiliar with the works of either Lao Tzu or his disciples" nevertheless, "Thoreau has a greater affinity for Taoism than for any other Oriental religion" (253-254). John Emerson reaches similar conclusions: "Thoreau's free-form 'extraverted mysticism' deviated from the Hinduism he knew of in the direction of the Taoism he was unaware of" (8). He too accepts the idea of "convergent evolution" (11).

How is this parallel development possible? I suspect it was in part because the principal quest of Thoreau and his colleagues, such as Emerson and Whitman, entailed a search for an original and unmediated relation between the individual and the universe. And it was the achievement of precisely this same quest that was the primary task set for itself by the Buddhist tradition, most explicitly in Zen.

I might suggest a few reasons why American poets found themselves on this search, though any thoroughly persuasive analysis would extend well beyond the confines of my study. First, the Protestant religious tradition the transcendentalists inherited was inexorably moving from ritualized, extremely conventionalized forms of worship--such as Catholicism--to very personal and very direct forms of worship--such as Quakerism, which influenced Whitman, and Unitarianism, which influence Emerson and Thoreau. As a result, the sense of alienation from God was diminishing. First the priests were banished, then the established rituals were no longer performed, then the more radical of these proponents of a new religious sensibility no longer opened the sacred scriptures. And finally, the most extravagant of these prophets of a New World religion--Emerson, for example--walked out from under the church roof altogether and stepped into the fields and woods in search of primary religious experience. It is no mere chance, but an event of fundamental importance to this new spiritual endeavor, that in "Nature" ex-minister Emerson describes his paradigmatic experience of religious insight as occurring not in the chapel, but in the puddle-filled fields of Concord. Furthermore, Emerson feels no need to have the authenticity of his experience confirmed by a church hierarchy, as a Puritan would have.

A critical formulation of this tendency of the transcendentalists that connects their philosophy to the philosophy of Zen is that encompassed by the term "Adamic" (or, to translate it into a relatively gender-neutral expression, "Edenic") as formulated by R. W. B. Lewis in his The American Adam. Lewis discusses the way in which this Edenic-Adamic impulse is revealed in Walt Whitman: "Whitman did go back, all the way back, to a primitive Adamic condition, to the beginning of time" (42). And he later elaborates: "There is scarcely a poem of Whitman's before, say, 1867, which does not have the air of being the first poem ever written, the first formulation in language of the nature of persons and of things and of the relations between them" (44). Thoreau similarly shared this sense of the unique opportunity afforded by America to discover a new relationship to the world. In "Walking" he makes the claim that "The Atlantic is a Lothian stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions" (Excursions 177).

D. T. Suzuki describes the goal of Zen in such a way as to make the connection between Zen and the Edenic impulse of North American literature apparent:
Zen systematically trains the mind to see this; it opens a man's eye to the greatest mystery as it is daily and hourly performed; it enlarges the heart to embrace eternity of time and infinity of space in its every palpitation; it makes us live in the world as if walking in the Garden of Eden. . . . (Introduction 45)

In Zen, he says, we get to such a state by "a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulations of intellect and lays down the foundation for a new life; there must be the awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hitherto undreamed-of angle of observation" (96).

One of the principal projects of North American poetry has been similar to this task of Buddhism, to reject, or at least to retest, as much as is practically possible, the received ideas about the relationships among humans, nature, society, the divine, and art. North American poets have imagined themselves as standing on the frontier between the known and the not known, or as awakening on the first morning in the Garden of Eden, and discovering for themselves the significance of the world and their place in it. In his survey of American poetry Hyatt Waggoner argues that:

American poets have faced the world armed chiefly with their innocence, their "not knowing." From the beginning, the most representative American poets have anticipated the characteristic that more than anything else distinguishes American poetry of our own day from that of the past and of other societies: in it nothing is known, nothing given, everything is discovered or created, or else remains in doubt. (xix)

In his introduction to Shunryu Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Richard Baker explains the value of a similar sort of ignorance to the Zen practitioner:

The practice of Zen mind is beginner's mind. The innocence of the first inquiry--what am I?--is needed throughout Zen practice. The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities. It is the kind of mind which can see things as they are, which step by step and in a flash can realize the original nature of everything. (13-14)

This is of course precisely the state of mind one might expect of Adam and Eve in the garden, and precisely the state of mind Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman hoped to achieve by leaving the Old World and its institutions behind.

Nevertheless, the transcendentalists' expressions of an Edenic possibility in their New World contain many paradoxes. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that the project of seeing the world anew, when conceived in terms derived from the earliest period of the Judeo-Christian tradition--the story of Adam and Eve--is already structured by a past conception. A recent line of argument exploiting this paradox has developed that challenges this Adamic-Edenic interpretation of these writers. In a discussion of Whitman in Destructive Poetics, Paul Bové takes Lewis to task for viewing Whitman as an exemplar of the "Adamic" impulse:

R. W. B. Lewis's treatment of Whitman in the American Adam is the paradigm of all Modernist interpretations of Whitman. The fundamental "mystification" of Lewis's misreading lies in his assumption of the possibility of absolute novelty, of freedom from the past and tradition, of a human potential for absolute beginnings at any time. . . . To some degree similar assumptions underlie all interpretation of Whitman which see him in an exclusively American context. They habitually presuppose as fact not only Whitman's success in freeing himself absolutely from the past, but the very possibility of such an escape. (134-135)

Bové's critique seems rather too easy, and rather too obvious. Of course their borrowed mythology--Eden and Lethe, for example--and the fact that the transcendentalists thought and wrote in a European language, reveal the failure of their attempt to leave the Old World and its institutions behind and to actually make the New World as thoroughly new as they would have liked. To satisfy Bové they would have needed to invent their own unique language and mythology. What their "failure" may indicate, however, is that the possibility of starting anew was more difficult than they realized, not, as Bové suggests, that it was impossible. More crucially from the standpoint of a study of their poetics, the transcendentalists' inability to make the clean start they sought does not diminish the fact that they did indeed see themselves as making such an effort and that they did indeed develop a poetics to facilitate that effort. One need not accept their philosophy in order to appreciate its role in their writing any more than one need embrace the tenets of Christianity in order to appreciate its role in Dante.

Bové not only questions their success, but the very possibility of their success. Yet it seems to me his perspective is too limited. He criticizes "interpretations of Whitman which see him in an exclusively American context," but his own context, Euro-centered as it is, seems only slightly less exclusive. A broader context that places Whitman in an Asian-American philosophical framework--more appropriate to the actual influences on Whitman--makes the success of the Edenic impulse seem more plausible. Like Whitman and the other transcendentalists, and unlike Bové, the Zen tradition does not doubt the possibility of an "Edenic" escape from preconceptual frameworks. In Zen, however, it is only after a lifetime (perhaps many lifetimes) of practice that we are able to see the world as the transcendentalists desired, without preconceptions, as though for the first time.

Perhaps the best known call to muster for this mission is found at the beginning of Emerson's Nature:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. (Works 1: 9)

Whitman responded to Emerson's call, and he accepted such a task to free himself from the bonds of inherited culture and to attempt to experience the world directly. He opens Song of Myself with the following disclaimer:

Creeds and schools in abeyance, Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten, I harbor for good or bad. I permit to speak at every hazard, Nature without check with original energy. (1: 1; 10-13)

Shortly after this passage one reads the following claim:
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.
(1: 2; 33-37)

Though both Emerson and Whitman express a desire for original experience, quite possibly no work of North American literature more clearly expresses the quest for an original relation to the universe than does Thoreau's Walden. As one of Emerson's disciples, Thoreau is very conscious of the mission he has undertaken as he ventures out onto Emerson's land at the edge of Concord to build his cabin. In the "Where I Lived" chapter, Thoreau makes the famous assertion of the goal of his sojourn at Walden Pond:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. (222)

In the first two chapters of Walden, Thoreau quite explicitly goes about dismantling the conceptual frameworks people habitually use to structure their lives but which they never question, and which, in his opinion, conceal the true nature of life from them. Expressing himself largely in economic terms, reflective of the materialist tendencies of his neighbors, Thoreau constantly inverts the accepted order of values and asks us to consider the sort of potential life such an inversion implies. At the conclusion of the "Where I Lived" chapter, Thoreau states:

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake. . . . (230)

Through his experience at Walden Pond Thoreau was able to achieve some sense of this reality. And part of what he discovered was that the ultimate reality is in fact here and now, not derived from another time or place:

Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. . . . But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment. . . . (228)

A corollary to the idea of mythic presence, to the idea that ultimate truth is here and now, is the idea of divine immanence. In the "Friday" chapter of A Week Thoreau explicitly states his sense of the the mythic present: "Here or nowhere is our heaven," and he then later elaborates:

We need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life. . . . May we not see God? Are we to be put off and amused in this life, as it were with a mere allegory? Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely? (503-504)

Similarly in Walden Thoreau's claim that "Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere" (217; "Where I Lived") uses Greek mythology to express the same idea--ultimate reality, the ground of being, God, however we choose to signify it in language--is present to us in time, present to us in space, and presented to us with every experience.

In this very anti-Platonic and anti-Christian expression, Thoreau expounds a belief that nature is the source of immanent value, not a mere symbol of a value lying elsewhere. This view represents a reversal of the prevailing perspective of his time. The Judeo-Christian tradition is transcendental--God comes down from Heaven and a fortunate few behold him. Perhaps the mythic emblem of the Holy Spirit as a bird descending from the clouds is a good representation of this perspective. As a contrasting view, we have the Buddhist image of the lotus blossom as the representation of spiritual reality, and Buddha's "Flower Sutra" as the most direct expression of this spiritual perspective. Though probably apocryphal, this "Sutra" has been established as a koan for Zen students and has become an important paradigm for the Zen understanding of divinity. In Mumonkan 6 we read:

Long ago the World-Honored One was at Mount Grdhrañuta to give a talk, he held up a flower before the assemblage. At this all remained silent. The Venerable Kasho alone broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said, "I have the all-pervading True Dharma, incomparable Nirvana, exquisite teaching of formless form. It does not rely on letters and is transmitted outside scriptures. I now hand it to Maha Kasho." (Shibayama 58)

In this regard, it seems more useful to call the transcendentalists "immanentists." These writers do in fact express the view that the ultimate source of meaning is within, not beyond, the field of nature. They represent a transition from a theology that sees the divine as wholly other--neither in the self nor in nature--to one that sees divinity as wholly within both the self and nature. As Myra Jehlen states, "the myth of America has been both ideal and material (idealist and materialist): if it is transcendent, it is immemnantly transcendent" (10). We can find numerous cases where the transcendentalists articulate a sense of immanence. For example, in Thoreau's Journal we find:

There is no ripeness which is not, so to speak, something ultimate in itself, and not merely a perfected means to a higher end. In order to be ripe it must serve a transcendent use. The ripeness of a leaf, being perfected, leaves the tree at that point and never returns to it. (12: 24; 7 March 1859)

Emerson at times express a similar attitude. As Lawrence Buell explains:

[The transcendentalists] viewed spiritual fulfillment in terms of human, natural excellence rather than in terms of supernatural intervention. "Which is greater & more affecting?" Emerson asks, "to see some wonderful bird descending out of the sky, or, to see the rays of a heavenly majesty of the mind & heart emitted from the countenance & port of a man?" [Journal 7: 236]. The true mystical experience, that is, is a transfiguration from within and not a message or thunderbolt from without. (59)
In a study of the connection between Zen and American transcendentalism, Shoei Andō comes to a similar conclusion:

What is remarkably characteristic of God in Emerson is that God is not an extra-mundane, all determining despotic ruler, but an immanent God composed of the natural and the spiritual, and constantly keeping up creative activities. . . . (101)

The fact that the transitional nature of these writers has been obscured by the very term we use to designate them is unfortunate. I suspect that their greatest contribution to Western literature may come to be seen in their efforts to make this transition.

Andō is also careful to distinguish Emerson's philosophy from Platonism, with which it is often compared: "In his view of reality, Emerson's philosophy must be strictly distinguished from Platonism, which is based upon the distinct dualism of idea (form) and matter" (Andō 101).

Though the transcendentalists were moving towards an immanentist philosophy, they never made the final steps away from a lingering transcendental idea of God. Robert Detweiler compares their partial immanentist philosophy to the full immanentist position of Zen:

> In Zen, the Buddha-infusion of all results in a complete interchangeability of all components of existence and in an absolute denial of any transcendental mode of being by Buddha. Buddha is not only found in this or that thing; he is the thing. Thus there is the total identity of mind and matter and, negatively, the sunyata--the impermanence and unreality of all individual forms--until they reach the "suchness" of the Buddha-nature. Emerson would not go so far. In spite of his insistence upon the presence of God "in every moss and cobweb," he can never complete the equation, either intellectually or experientially. (Emerson, 426)

Although I suspect both Whitman and Thoreau moved farther than Emerson toward an immanentist philosophy, I concur with Detweiler's general conclusion that, though these writers frequently expressed immanentist ideas, the pervasiveness of a transcendentalist theology and lexicon inhibited them from embracing a purely immanentist view.

A final similarity between Zen and transcendentalism can be found in the attitude of these philosophies towards the ideas of the self and self-reliance. D. T. Suzuki emphasizes the self-reliant method of Zen: "Zen most strongly and persistently insists on an inner spiritual experience. It does not attach any intrinsic importance to the sacred sutras or to their exegeses by the wise and learned" (Introduction 34). And he subsequently adds, "If I am asked . . . what Zen teaches, I would answer, Zen teaches nothing. Whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind. We teach ourselves; Zen merely points the way" (38).

Shoei Andō, however, believes that the transcendentalists were too attached to their personal self to achieve true enlightenment. He emphasizes that the transcendentalists did not go all the way to the Zen obliteration of self. They lacked the method the Buddha taught, and their own tradition gave them none. They were still attached at bottom to the individual self: "Emerson could get in touch with the eternal One at the bottom of the heart, but he could not enjoy perfect liberty of mind. He was conscious of remaining himself within the framework of individuality" (Andō 143).

Andō suggests that the transcendentalists may have attained a state known as "partial enlightenment." He quotes from Tetsugen, a Zen master of the Tokugawa period (1629-1682), to describe such a state:

> "This mental state can not be said to be that of the real Self itself, but neither is it a state of entire darkness, because all kinds of delusions are already gone out of the inner world. If a seeker of the absolute truth has attained this far, he should make much harder and harder efforts, for this state is a prophetic sign that the real satori (the awakening to the essential, immortal Self) will sooner or later be attained. This state is likened to the moments when it is already light outside, although the sun has not yet risen." (144)

This passage rather fortuitously reflects the imagery of Walden. Thoreau begins Walden with an epigraph in which he expresses his desire, like chanticleer in the morning, to "wake my neighbors up." At the conclusion of the book, Thoreau states "there is more day to dawn. The Sun is but a morning star." Images of morning and of waking both bracket and permeate the book. A rather telling juxtaposition of transcendental and Buddhist images can highlight this link between the two philosophies. Thoreau's goal in Walden is to "awaken" himself and his neighbors. The term "Buddha" means "the Awakened One" and the goal of Buddhism is to awaken the practitioner. As Walden ends with the morning star, so the Buddha is said to have achieved his awakened state one morning when he glanced up from his meditational posture beneath the Bodhi-tree to observe the morning star glittering in the dawn. As Andō suggests, however, Thoreau does not achieve the final awakened state of the Buddha; for Thoreau "there is more day to dawn." But as Tetsugen proposes, even in such a partial state we might still gain momentary glimpses into essential reality. Though the unenlightened individual cannot sustain such experiences, these glimpses are nevertheless of great significance.

Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman attempted to recount and explain such glimpses in their writings. Similarly, the Buddhists developed or adapted a variety of art forms in an analogus attempt to express these moments of insight. One of the art forms that has been most successful in recounting such moments is haiku. As Andō says, Bashō's haiku "are expressive of his inspired experiences of sudden awakenings to the real Self through the medium of the sense of hearing, seeing, smelling, or touching" (19).

Alan Watts expresses a similar appreciation for Bashō's haiku that relates them to Emerson's plea for us to seek an Edenic, original relation to the universe. "Bashō's poems," Watts suggests, "have the same inspired objectivity as a child's expression of wonder, and return us to that same feeling of the world as when it first met our astonished eyes" (The Way 184).
CHAPTER IV

JAPANESE HAIKU

The nature of haiku cannot be rightly understood until it is realized that they imply a revolution of our everyday life and ways of thinking.  

R. H. Blyth, History of Haiku

Haiku Origins and Linked-Verse Forms

The term "haiku" has been in use only since Masaoka Shiki coined it at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the roots of the form reach back at least into the seventh century and the earliest written records of Japanese literature. We can trace the history of haiku from pre-literary songs to the highly refined court poetries, tanka-- composed by a single poet, and renga--a linked-verse composed sequentially by a group. Then, through a "vulgar" form of renga, the haikai-no-renga, we can trace the growing independence of the first stanza of haikai, the hokku, to the eventual creation of haiku and its own "vulgar" offshoot, senryu. Finally we arrive at the "free-meter" haiku of the twentieth century, which disdains many of the formal features of the tradition, and yet claims, in a claim that seems quite valid, to be true to the spirit of this ancient lineage. In this history we see a constant interplay between elegance and vulgarity, innovation and conservatism, spirituality and aesthetics.

Though it is impossible to know for certain, it is not unlikely that some of the features of the haiku form--its 5-7-5 syllabic structure, for example--existed even earlier than we have record for, in the poetic and narrative oral tradition, but only slight evidence exists to support this conjecture. In the earliest records of folk songs, especially in the Kojiki (AD 712), the first book written in Japanese, we already find a predominance of songs using the alternating 5-7 syllabic pattern. According to Donald Philippi, the metrical form of 5-7-5-7-7, which developed into the tanka form--the standard for courtly and most other poetry for 500 years--was already dominant in the Kojiki. One hundred and seventy-three of the 313 songs he has collected are in this form (xvi).

Even more interesting for the study of haiku is the fact that 13 of the songs in his collection are in only three lines, though the syllabic pattern is 5-7-7 rather than the haiku's traditional 5-7-5. These facts indicate that in the first written accounts of Japanese poetry the syllabic pattern and approximate length of haiku were already established. Further, since these written records are simply transcriptions of traditional oral poetry and song that may already have been long in existence, we can speculate that Japanese poets were using the syllabic pattern of haiku much earlier. Another possibility is that Chinese metrical patterns, which frequently used lines of 5 and 7 characters, may have influenced this structure. Given that the Japanese writing system was adapted from the Chinese, such an explanation is plausible, though Donald Keene suggests that Chinese influence on the Kojiki was "comparatively little" (Anthology 20).

Equally important for the genesis of haiku was the development of poetry composed by two or more poets. Among the poetic forms in the Kojiki and the subsequent collection, the Nihonshoki (AD 720), was the katauta, a poem composed by two authors in the form of a question and a reply. Earl Miner, undoubtedly the most important scholar of Japanese linked-verse forms writing in English, tells us that:

We can begin with the earliest surviving poetic records, which give us remainders from pre-literate times of poems of joint authorship. Most are dialogues, which, with riddles, are among the commonest kinds of primitive composition in many cultures. Both assume participation. (JLP 8)

Such poems were frequently exchanged between lovers. Examples of these poetic dialogues can be found in the Tale of Genji, composed by Lady Murasaki Shikibu (978?-1015?). In the "Broom Tree" chapter Genji and his new love exchange farewell verses as he departs at dawn. Genji then laments:

"Why must they startle with their dawn alarms
When hours are yet required to thaw the ice?"

The lady was ashamed of herself that she had caught the eye of a man so far above her. His kind words had little effect. She was thinking of her husband, whom for the most part she considered a clown and a dolt. She trembled to think that a dream might have told him of the night's happenings.

This was the verse with which she replied:

"Day has broken without an end to my tears.
To my cries of sorrow are added the calls of the cocks." (44)

Were the form to have remained at the level of statement and reply it might not have developed much further; however more complicated relations between the parts were developing. As Earl Miner says:

As early as the Man'yoshû (AD 759), poems of joint composition exist that are not dialogue poems. This development is crucial for linked poetry, which does not consist of expostulation and reply but of more subtle continuance and of sequence posed on the incompleteness of a poetic process begun with an initial stanza. (JLP 9)

Hiroaki Sato relates a story told by Minamoto no Toshiyori (1055-1129) describing the composition of a two-part poem. As Sato tells it, Shigeyuki, a well-known poet, came to visit the local governor, Tamemasa. After drinking plenty of warm sake, Shigeyuki pushed open the paper doors and looked out to view a snow-covered mountain. He asked, "Which mountain is that?" On hearing Tamemasa respond, "That's the famous Mount Stallion," Shigeyuki replied:

Because it snows Mount Stallion looks piebald
Tamemasa attempted to "cap" the verse with a 7-7 stanza, thereby making a complete tanka. He could not, however, think of a verse. Kōbunta, a bodyguard, aware of Tamemasa's difficulty, "loudly coughed for attention and came forward out of his peers on his knees." Tamemasa rebuffed the guard for his insolence, but was eventually forced to relent by his own inability to compose a rejoinder. Kōbunta, though resentful, finally responded:

When will summer bring chestnuts
(itsu natsukage ni / naramu to suramu)

Toshiyori concludes his account:

Tamemasa clucked his tongue, taken aback. But Shigeyuki, hearing it, stood up and danced. He was so overwhelmed he took off his clothes and gave them to Kōbunta as a reward. Truly, the way he gave his clothes and walked away in dignity was, I'm told, quite marvelous. (One Hundred Frogs 4)

This anecdote reveals a number of aspects of this early form of linked-verse that will hold true for several hundred years: 1) It is of necessity a group activity, quite unlike the Western poetic tradition; 2) The stanzas are written in direct response to natural scenes observed at the time of composition, as we have also seen in the case of the stanzas quoted from Genji; and 3) Cleverness is a major objective. The originality of Kōbunta's stanza, and the cause of Shigeyuki's gesture of humility, lies in the excellence of its word play. Indeed, witty word play, puns, and a tendency towards befuddlement grew to characterize the genre. Sato explains the pun in this poem: "Ashige means both "piebald" and "terrible," and natsukage, both "brown with dark spots" and "summer foliage" (One Hundred Frogs 7). As he points out, his translation reveals only half of the effect—carried by the pun on the English word "chestnut" as both a kind of horse and a kind of tree. Stephen Kohl has observed that the pun goes even further: "The chestnut is not just a chestnut and a horse, it is also a horse chestnut as opposed to a more domesticated one" (Letter).

Over time these sorts of poems lengthened, with three or four poets composing linking verses of 36, 100, and even 10,000 stanzas. Each stanza was expected to make a complete poem in conjunction with the preceding stanza, and to make a different, separate poem with the following one. No three subsequent stanzas need, nor even should, make sense as a single unit:

The total effect can be described as plotless narrative, or narrative with many constantly shifting mini-plots . . . . The essential fact to understand is the inviolable principle that no stanza has a continuing semantic connection, as a discrete poetic unit, with anything other than its predecessor and successor. (Miner, JLP 5)

Linked-verse poems were a dominant genre in Japanese poetry for centuries. Among the finest and most influential renga poets were Sōgi (1421-1502), Shōhaku (1448-1528), and Sōchō (1448-1532). Under Sōgi's leadership these three collaborated on one of the best known renga, "Three Poets at Minase." Miner has translated this work, and as an example of the genre I provide the first eight stanzas. His technique of translation is to link each stanza by repeating it in connection with the preceding stanza and to make a different, separate poem with the following one.

Despite some snow
the base of hills spreads with haze
the twilight scene
(Sōgi)

Despite some snow
the base of hills spreads with haze
the twilight scene
where the waters flow afar
the village glows with sweet plum flowers
(Shōhaku)

Where the waters flow afar
the village glows with sweet plum flowers
in the river wind
a single stand of willow trees
shows spring color
(Sōchō)

In the river wind
a single stand of willow trees
shows spring color
daybreak comes on distinctly
with sounds of a punted boat
(Sōgi)

Daybreak comes on distinctly
with sounds of a punted boat
does not the moon
of a fog-enveloped night
stay yet in the sky (Shôhaku)

Does not the moon
of a fog-enveloped night
stay yet in the sky
as wide fields settle with the frost
autumn has approached its end (Sôchô)

As wide fields settle with the frost
autumn has approached its end
the insects cry out
but without regard for such desires
the grasses wither (Sôgi)

The insects cry out
but without regard for such desires
the grasses wither
as I come to the fence in visit
the once covered path is clear (Shôhaku)

As we can see, no plot is followed, and we note that the poem moves chronologically from early spring twilight to later spring, and then to daybreak in stanza four. The poem then switches to autumn--indicated traditionally by the moon--and night, and then to various times of day in the autumn. The poem continues such seemingly erratic movement for the next 92 stanzas. No logical or chronological sequence is followed. Though conforming to certain rules restricting the number of stanzas of one season that can be sequential, and restricting the frequency and placement of certain images, such as the moon and cherry blossoms, the order is essentially random. Every stanza but the first is written as a response to the preceding stanza. It is this immediate responsiveness, rather than a pre-arranged structure, that is of interest to the Japanese poets. As Miner explains:

[In Japanese] the essential character of extended literature is assumed to be responsive sequence. Matters such as being subject to an Elizabethan humor or ruling passion or idée fixe do not enter, and being subject to the many "because"s of plot matter even less. The consistency of human character lies in appropriate responsiveness rather than in a dramatic consistency. (JLP 7)

Nijô Yôshimoto (1320-88), who brought out the first important anthology of renga, thought that the spontaneous nature of renga was closely related to Buddhist philosophy, and he believed that the practice of renga could even lead to satori:

Would renga composition lead to Buddhist enlightenment?
Yôshimoto said yes, that was possible, because "in renga preceding and following thoughts are not connected. Also, the way that the rises and falls, depressing and delightful things, go on shifting from one side to the next, is no different from the way this world is.
While you're thinking it was yesterday, today also passes; while you're thinking it's spring, autumn comes; while you're thinking they're [cherry] blossoms, they shift to scarlet leaves--doesn't all this give you the idea that "blossoms scatter, leaves fall?" (Sato, One Hundred Frogs 45)

The first poet of a renga stanza, having no previous stanza to respond to, responds, at least in theory, to the circumstances of composition. "[He] must give reference to both the season and the environment in which composition is taking place. And . . . he must indicate the prevailing attitude of the poets on the occasion" (Carter 64). We can assume with near certainty, for example, that "Three Poets at Minase" was written, as the opening stanza indicates, in the twilight of a day in early spring.

The opening stanza of the sequence, known as the "hokku," was also the only stanza that needed to stand alone as a self-contained poetic unit. Furthermore, as we'll see later in an anecdote concerning Bashô and his disciple Kyorai, poets often knew well in advance that they would be called on to compose the opening stanza of a sequence. With reputations dependent on their spontaneity, poets were not above preparing a few particularly good stanzas ahead of time so as not to be caught abandoned by the Muses. Therefore, since the time of Sôgi these hokku have had at least a provisionally independent existence. Sôgi's last published collection, Uraba, was simply the hokku of his sequences--a prototypical haiku collection.

Renga was exclusively a poetry of the court, and its elaborate rules attempted to maintain elegance and decorum. After the formal sessions, however, poets would occasionally relax with sake and compose comic, often risqué verses. They found this freedom alluring, and some poets began to take these informal sessions seriously. Sôkan (1458-1546) published a collection of these vulgar linking stanzas under the title The Dog's Tsukuba Collection. Shortly afterwards Moritake (1477-1549) published Flying Plums: Thousand Pieces. The most famous poem in The Dog's Tsukuba Collection is:

upsetting, but funny too
even when my parent lay dying, I kept farting (trans. Sato)

Needless to say this verse scandalized the more dour Confucians of the time, with their reverence for filial piety. Another less ribald example is:

all his tender thoughts must lie in one hole
a rat carried off her love letter this evening (trans. Sato)

In these collections the two stanzas were dependent on each other. In both the previous verses the first line has the characteristics of a riddle--some seemingly inexplicable emotion or situation is presented: how can something be "upsetting, but funny," or how can his thoughts "lie in one hole?" The point of the "capping verse" is to resolve the riddle as cleverly as possible by describing a situation that could evoke the perplexing emotion.
These verses evolved in two directions. Teitoku (1570-1653), emphasized word play and puns in his stanzas and links. A collection of verses from this school, published by one of Teitoku's disciples, Matsue Shigeoryo (1602-80), was entitled The Puppy Collection, asserting its lineage with Sakan's Dog collection. One of Teitoku's poems in the collection, along with Donald Keene's discussion, illustrates some of the characteristics of the genre:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>neburasete</th>
<th>Let him lick them--</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yashinaitate yo</td>
<td>That's the way to bring him up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hana no ame</td>
<td>The flower sweets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This cryptic verse, presented to a man who had just had a child, depends for its effect on puns and allusions. It is typical of Teitoku at his best and worst. *Ame* means both "sweets" and "rain." *Hana no Am* is "rain on the flowers," recalling the line in the Nô play *Yuya* that calls rain the "parent" of the flowers; it also refers to the "rain of flowers" that fell when Shakyamuni Buddha was born. The verse is deliberately ambiguous, but the expanded meaning is something like:

"Raise your child by giving him sweets to lick, as the rain raises the flowers, your child born as Shakyamuni was, amidst a rain of flowers." (World 31)

Such poems seem reminiscent of the playful conceits of English metaphysical poetry. Though the example given by Keene is rather shallow, it does display the ability of this brief verse form to be densely packed with meaning.

Sôn (1604-82), in reaction to the superficiality of this approach, founded the Danrin school, which emphasized similarity of ideas in its linkage and spontaneity in its composition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thanks to my gazing</th>
<th>I got a pain from the blossoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the bone of my neck.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(trans. Keene)

Unlike the poems used to illustrate the Teitoku school, this poem, even in translation, needs no extensive gloss to be intelligible. In fact a characteristic of Teitoku's verse would be the near impossibility of its being translated. Sôn's Danrin style verse, on the other hand, may occasionally require explication, but it is usually far easier to translate.

Both of these styles contributed to the sudden flowering of the form under Bashô. The Teitoku school required precise craftsmanship and word selection; the Danrin school emphasized spontaneity, naturalness, and sincerity. Bashô sought to combine the two.

**Matsuo Bashô**

Matsuo Bashô, widely regarded not only as Japan's finest haiku poet but as one of Japan's greatest writers in any genre, was born in 1644 into a lower-level samurai family in the town of Ueno. By this time in Japanese history the title of samurai meant little, and his father had to work as a teacher of calligraphy. In 1656, young Bashô entered the service of Todo Yoshitado, a relative of the region's feudal lord and a boy only two years his senior. Though ostensibly Yoshitado's servant, Bashô's relationship with him seems to have been, as much as anything else, that of playmate. During this time Yoshitado and Bashô composed haikai poetry under the guidance of Kitamura Kigin, a well known poet of the Teitoku school. Keene gives an example of Bashô's poetry at this time, which he then briefly analyzes:

> Old-lady cherry blossoms--
> Have they flowered? A final
> Keepsake for old age.

The language of this verse . . . in the Teitoku vein, derives from a passage in the Nô play *Sanemori*. "Old-lady" cherry blossoms were so called because they bloomed when the tree was leafless, giving rise to the pun between 'ha-nashi,' "leafless" and 'ha-nashi,' "toothless." The verse indicates that Bashô, abreast of current fashions in haikai, borrowed phrases from the Nô plays with pedantic humor. He was still very far from being a master. (World 73-74)

Though Bashô quickly surpassed such poems, he still returned from time to time to the Teitoku style, showing that he did not consider it undignified. For example, in what is usually considered to be his finest work, The Narrow Road to the Deep North, the following poem occurs:

> Kisagata ya
> ame ni Seishi ga
> nebu no hana

Kisagata--
In the rain Seishi sleeping,
Mimosa blossoms.

As Keene explicates, when we read in the second and third lines "Seishi ga nebu," it means "Seishi sleeping." But "nebu" also means, by itself, "mimosa," so that the final line means "mimosa blossoms" (World 74). The one word serves two semantic functions in the poem. Because Japanese has a large number of homonyms, this sort of word play was common in the poetry of certain periods. Such words were termed kakekotoba or "pivot words."

Bashô's companion, Yoshitado, died in 1666. Heartbroken, Bashô resigned his position, and, at the age of 22, probably moved to Kyoto. Tradition has assumed that Bashô devoted his life to his art and that, though he never took Buddhist orders, he lived a devout and celibate life. Such, however, might not have been the case. Some evidence indicates he may have had a mistress and children. In any case, Bashô re-emerges to a more documented life in 1673, living in Edo as a poet of renga and a judge of haiku contests. In 1680, accompanied by neither a mistress nor children, if he ever had them, he moved into the first "Bashô hut" built for him by his disciples, taking his name from the bashô or banana tree planted outside. Though a seemingly casual method for him to acquire a poetic pseudonym, the name contains significant overtones. For example, Donald Keene remarks that the bashô tree "was prized for its broad green leaves that are easily torn by the slightest wind, a ready symbol for the sensitivities of the poet" (World 78). In his old age Bashô wrote a short essay on the tree discussing its significance for him:
The leaves of the Bashô tree are large enough to cover a harp. When they are wind-broken, they remind me of the injured tail of a phoenix, and when they are torn, they remind me of a green fan ripped by the wind. The tree does bear flowers, but unlike other flowers, there is nothing gay about them. The big trunk of the tree is untouched by the axe, for it is utterly useless as building wood. I love the tree, however, for its very uselessness. . . . I sit underneath it, and enjoy the wind and rain that blow against it. (Bashô 26)

This passage seems a direct allusion to the writings of the Taoist sage Chuang Tzu, who was an important influence on Bashô.

The bashô plant, and other plants as well, also served a more important function for Bashô. He often used plants as representations of the Buddhist attitude of gratefully accepting the conditions of the world, whatever those conditions may be. Though such a view is not entirely biologically accurate, Bashô felt that plants had no power to alter their environment; they simply had to endure the world as it saw fit to treat them. For Bashô, plants expressed the Buddhist ideal of simultaneous detachment from circumstances while at the same time managing to remain immersed in those circumstances. By doing so they fulfilled their destiny and thus attained a state of harmony with the cosmos.

As part of his attachment to this Taoist-Zen tradition, Bashô developed the idea of "furyu" or "transcendental or poetic eccentricity" (Sato, One Hundred Frogs 77). This notion, which entails a rejection of the accepted norms of behavior, is revealed in some of his poems. For example, in the following link the eccentricity lies in Bashô's refusal to stay up moon-viewing and to write the obligatory poem. To the following stanza by Yaba:

high above the paulonia tree the moon is clear

Bashô linked:

I closed the gate and went to bed, wordless, for the fun of it   (trans. Sato)

Though it receded as he matured, this eccentricity remained with him throughout his life, often manifesting itself in a sudden playfulness that caught others off-guard, coming, as it did, from the wise and ostensibly dignified poet.

Stemming from this philosophical disposition, one of the most common techniques used by Bashô was to bring together the small and transient elements of nature with nature's large and seemingly eternal aspects. One of Bashô's most famous poems illustrates this technique.

On a bare branch
A crow is perched--
Autumn evening.   (trans. Ueda)

Much can, and has, been said of this poem. It consists of a simple image which evokes the state of "sabi," which, translated means among other things, "lonely beauty"—an ideal for Bashô. The relative smallness of the crow on the branch is juxtaposed against the vastness of the darkening autumn sky. At the same time, the dark crow settling onto the withered branch mirrors in microcosm the dark evening settling over the withered autumn landscape. Though Ueda's translation, and most others, translate the Japanese word tomarikeri as "perched," as Stephen Kohl says, that verb is "more dynamic than perched. It is the active moment as the crow touches down on the dead branch" (Letter). The static copula "is" eliminates the sense of action. The poem should perhaps be better translated as:

on a bare branch
a crow alights--
autumn evening

Indeed, I like to picture the image at just that moment when the crow folds its wings in on itself after alighting on the branch. If we wish to read it more symbolically, the crow is a transient phenomenon manifesting itself against the eternal backdrop of the seasons.

The "crow" haiku represents the culmination of Bashô's experimental period in Danrin style poetry. In contrast to the Teitoku school, with its emphasis on verbal play in such characteristics as puns and pivot words, the Danrin style, as we've seen, emphasizes a relationship of meaning, either logically or imagistically. Makoto Ueda gives the following examples of several more of Bashô's poems in this style:

A wind from Mount Fuji
Resting on the fan,
My souvenir from Edo!

And, more seriously:

I fell a tree
And gaze at the cut end--
The moon of tonight.

Ueda discusses the second poem:

Here is a novel comparison of the round cut-end of a tree to the full moon, a comparison that produces surprise and humor. But the juxtaposition also yields a unique poetic atmosphere, for there seems to be something in common between the large full moon rising above the mountains and the freshly sawed section of a tree emitting a faint fragrance. They are both round, fresh-looking, and somehow suggestive of nature's hidden mystery. (Matsuo Bashô 42)

"Crow" also shows another feature of the Danrin style—disregard for rigid form. The syllabic count of the poem in Japanese is 5/9/5. While by modern standards Bashô was a fussy syllable counter, by the standards of his own day he was, during this phase at least, quite daring.

In the total objectivity of its presentation, "crow" represents a development of a more mature style, which was to culminate in Bashô's next phase. Shortly after composing "crow," Bashô began serious study under Zen Master Bucêô and even considered entering a monastery. During this period he wrote his most famous poem, in fact what is undoubtedly the most famous poem in Japanese literature:

A crow is perched
On a bare branch
And gaze at the cut end--
The moon of tonight.
The old pond;
A frog jumps in--
The sound of water.  (trans. Blyth)

At least two different accounts of the composition of this poem exist. One account emphasizes the aesthetic technique of Bashō, and the other emphasizes the Zen influence. Keene recounts the aesthetic version:

Bashō's disciple Kagami Shikō described in Kuzu no Matsubara (1692) the circumstances of composition of the verse:

"One day when the old gentleman of the Bashō-an was spending the spring in retirement north of Edo, the rain was gently falling, the cooing of the pigeons was deep-throated, and the cherry blossoms were slowly falling in the soft wind. It was just the kind of day when one most regrets the passing of the third month. The sound of frogs leaping into the water could frequently be heard, and the Master, moved by this remarkable beauty, wrote the second and third lines of a poem about the scene: 'A frog jumps in, / The sound of the water.' Kikaku, who was with him, suggested for the first line 'The yellow roses,' but the Master settled on 'The ancient pond.' " (World 88-89)

Keene expresses some doubt about the authenticity of this description of events, but the tale has been widely circulated.

D. T. Suzuki gives a different account of the genesis of this poem:

When Bashō was studying Zen under his master Bucchō, Bucchō one day paid him a visit and asked, "How are you getting on these days?"

Bashō said, "After the recent rain the moss has grown greener than ever."

Bucchō shot a second arrow to see the depth of Bashō's understanding of Zen, "What Buddhism is there even before the moss has grown greener?"

Bucchō the Zen master is not just talking about the recent rainfall and the green moss growing fresher; what he wants to know about is the cosmic landscape prior to the creation of all things. When is timeless time? Is it no more than an empty concept? If it is not, we must be able to describe it somehow for others. Bashō's answer was, "A frog jumps into the water, and hear the sound!" Bashō's answer at the time it was uttered did not have the first line, "the old pond," which, it is reported, he added later on to make a complete haiku of seventeen syllables. (Zen 239)

Suzuki cites no source for his tale, so its claim to veracity is at least as dubious as the claim of Keene's version. Nevertheless, Suzuki's story places the composition of "old pond" directly in the Zen tradition. His tale is remarkably similar to the tales given in many of the koans--non-logical riddles--used in Zen instruction. For example, in the Mumonkan, a collection of Zen koans, we find the following:

18. A monk asked Master Tozan, "What is Buddha?" Tozan said, "Three pounds of flax." (Shibayama 134)

21. A monk asked Unmon, "What is Buddha?" Unmon said, "A shit-stick!" [probably a stick used to remove feces from the public road]. (Shibayama 154)

37. A monk once asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the West?" [that is, "what is the meaning of Buddhism?"] Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the front garden." (Shibayama 259)

From the Zen perspective one could perhaps read every haiku as a response to the question "What is Buddha?"

Kyorai (1651-1704), one of Bashō's main disciples, saw in "old pond" an example of the same sort of juxtaposition we previously noticed in "crow," a technique that has ever since seemed to lie at the heart of many of the best haiku:

Kyorai was known especially for his espousal of Bashō's doctrine of fueki ryuko, which may be translated "permanence and change" or "unchanging and up-to-date." Bashō insisted that a worthwhile hokku must contain both elements: it had to have eternal validity and not be a mere flash of wit, but it must also be in tune with the moment and not a fossilized generalization. In other terms, a hokku had to be at once about the observed moment--the instant the horse eats the flower, or the frog splashes into the water, or the wind bends the bamboo--but also about the eternal element that was momentarily disturbed by the horse, frog, or gust of wind. The combination or juxtaposition of the two elements, one eternal and the other momentary, gives a tension to the verse, creating a field of tension between two electric poles that the spark of the reader's mind must leap across; the further the distance the poet can make the spark jump, the greater the effect of his poem. (Keene, World 136)

This combination of two disparate elements into a single image has remained one of the most frequent characteristics of haiku, and Bashō's "old pond," in as much as it has become a definitive example of the genre, is often cited as the final authority for this technique.

Two years after he wrote "old pond" Bashō's hut burned, and from this experience he seems to have developed a sense of eternal homelessness. Both his life in a hut and his subsequent life travelling have Buddhist overtones. For example, Taoist and Buddhist hermits have often lived in huts as a way to represent the impermanent nature of our lives. The flimsiness of the dwelling was indicative of the flimsiness of our current state of existence. Similarly, the life of a wanderer, which Bashō was soon to embark on, has important Buddhist connections, for we are, after all, merely sojourning in this present life. The stability of our home, our careers, our finances, even our sense of self, is an illusion screening from us the true nature of Buddhist reality-- impermanence (La Fleur, Karma 60-79).

Bashō's disciples built him a new hut the following year. In 1684 he went on the first of the journeys that were to become increasingly important in both his life and art. He recorded this trip in the poetic form known as haibun, or haiku prose, and published it as The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton. Ueda defines the haibun genre this way:

A haibun usually (though not necessarily) ends with a haiku. . . . A haibun has . . . the same sort of brevity and conciseness as a haiku. It is very short, in many cases between one hundred and fifty and two hundred and fifty words in Japanese. Because of this brevity, the writer is as concise as possible, avoiding unnecessary words.
Bashô never explains the meaning of his haiku; he just places it at the end of the haibun, usually without any connecting words. It is up to the reader to grasp the meaning of the prose, and then of the haiku, and to go on to discover the undercurrents of meaning common to both. Furthermore, by ending in a haiku the whole haibun leaves the reader with a feeling of incompleteness. This can be compared to the structure of many a haiku, where the third line is verbless and grammatically cut off from the first two lines. . . . The poet, especially in the haiku, often deliberately avoids the tone of finality that normally sounds in prose.

Another characteristic of the haibun is the extent of its dependence on imagery. . . . Abstract, general, conceptual words are shunned in favor of concrete visual images.

Lastly, we might mention the writer's detachment as a characteristic of haibun. No good haibun is an emotional outburst or logical persuasion. (Matsuo Bashô 122-23)

We might consider a haibun to be a prose poem, or a series of prose poems, usually ending with a haiku. Nearly all haibun, not only by Bashô, but by others as well, are written in either a travelogue form, if the poet is on the road, or in a diary form, if the poet is stationary. In either case, the passage of time and the flow of experiences are predominant themes in haibun.

In 1687 Bashô went on several trips that produced A Visit to Kashima Shrine, The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel, and A Visit to Sarashina Village, all important travel haibun. In the preface to Travel-Worn Satchel, Bashô expresses an important theoretical position:

Saigyô in traditional poetry, Sõgi in linked verse, Sesshû in painting, Rikyû in tea ceremony, and indeed all who have achieved real excellence in any art, possess one thing in common, that is, a mind to obey nature, to be one with nature, throughout the four seasons of the year. Whatever such a mind sees is a flower, and whatever such a mind dreams of is the moon. It is only a barbarous mind that sees other than the flower, merely an animal mind that dreams of other than the moon. The first lesson for the artist is, therefore, to learn how to overcome such barbarism and animality, to follow nature, to be one with nature. (Bashô 71-72)

The following year he returned to Edo from these trips.

On these journeys, as well as when he was home, Bashô supported himself in part by participating in haikai writing sessions. A typical haikai session might have gone as follows: Bashô would travel to the home of a disciple. As the leading poet, Bashô would serve as the master of the session. A scribe would be picked from among the other participants; usually the one with the best calligraphy would be chosen. Bashô, as the master, set the tone and poetic atmosphere, and he would be responsible for maintaining the quality of the work. The scribe would ensure that the poets adhered to the rules of composition and would recite the stanzas before setting them down. He would be seated on a cushion before a desk, while the master would usually sit to his right. The others sat on the floor. The master would usually compose the hokku, and the host the second stanza (Sato, One Hundred Frogs 88-89). Kyorai indicates Bashô's serious feelings about the circumstances of composition and the obligations of the poet when he records how he expected in advance that the hokku was to be yours. Moreover, when asked for the hokku, you should have promptly come up with one, forgetting about whether it was good or bad. How much time do we have in one night? If you had spent too much time on your hokku, the meeting this evening would have been ruined. That was tasteless of you. It was so disheartening that I did the hokku. At once Masahide added the wakiku [second stanza]. His was a fierce description of the sky, but the daisan [third stanza] you followed it with was so slack. All that was regrettable. (Sato, One Hundred Frogs 90)

Poor Kyorai. But thanks to his honesty in recounting the master's chastisement we learn something of the expectations of a haikai session. Perhaps most interesting for our analysis is Bashô's belief that one should prepare a few hokku ahead of time, though they should, we imagine, appear to be composed on the spot. One can imagine Bashô on his travels composing several hokku as he strolled the countryside in preparation for his arrival in the evening at a home where he would be expected to serve as the honored master at a session. And one can imagine the wonder of his hosts as this genius of the genre composed a marvelously appropriate hokku spontaneously before their very eyes.

In 1689 Bashô went on his most famous journey, to the remote northern part of Japan. This trip was written up as The Narrow Road to the Deep North, which is perhaps the finest example of the haibun genre. It also exemplifies an important characteristic of Bashô-style haiku—the principle of sabi. Ueda defines sabi as "the concept that one attains perfect spiritual serenity by immersing oneself in the ego-less, impersonal life of nature. The complete absorption of one's petty ego into the vast, powerful, magnificent universe" (Matsuo Bashô 30). This description of the term sabi could, it seems to me, just as aptly be applied to Emerson's experience recounted in Nature, when, on the bare common, all his "mean egotism" vanished, and he found himself "glad to the brink of fear" at discovering "the currents of the Universal Being" circulating through him (Works I: 11). Sabi is often translated as "sadness" or "loneliness," but it seems to me that this represents only the most superficial emotional response to the experience. I find that the emotional complexity of Emerson's phrase "glad to the brink of fear" captures the sabi feeling conveyed in many of Bashô's haiku of this period. To abandon one's sense of personal identity to absorption by an overwhelming natural world would be, even for a sage such as Bashô, a frightening experience, however religiously sanctified or metaphorically appropriate the gesture might be.

Upon his return from this trip, Bashô stayed in Kyoto at a location known as the Unreal Hut, during which time he wrote a prose poem about his experience there. He later spent several weeks in Saga, a Kyoto suburb, at the House of Fallen Persimmons, where he wrote a short haibun diary entitled Saga Diary. It was also during this time that the most representative collection of Bashô-style haikai was published, Monkeys' Cloak.

Bashô was not only a poet but a theorist, in fact he is probably among the most influential theorists of Japanese poetry. Though he did not compose any formal treatise on the subject, he did earn his living by teaching his art to others and by judging contests during which he would evaluate poems submitted for consideration. Many accounts remain of these sessions. His comment on the following pair of verses, recorded in The Extending Plain, is typical of his aesthetic judgment:

Brought by the wind  
And hanging on an icicle,  
A maple leaf (Itô)

Monkeys' Cloak 23 [second stanza].  His was a fierce description of the sky, but the daisan [third stanza] you followed it with was so slack. All that was regrettable. (Sato, One Hundred Frogs 90)

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Brought by the wind  
And hanging on an icicle,  
A maple leaf (Itô)
Closing the entrance
And suggesting a leisurely life within,
The icicles. (Kinpū)

Bashō's critical comment is that "A maple leaf hanging on an icicle is an exquisite scene that produces delicate, dry, sorrowful beauty. The second haiku, however, seems to be superior in sentiment as it shows the humble life of a leisurely man whose gate is kept closed by hanging icicles after the goose grass withered that blocked the doorway" (qtd. in Ueda, Matsuo Bashō 156).

As Ueda suggests, these types of comments by Bashō, as well as the evidence of his own haiku, show that, "Bashō prefers poems in which nature is seen as overpowering rather than beautiful" (Matsuo Bashō 156). Such an aesthetic preference is, it would seem, well suited to the attainment of his philosophical goal of sabi.

In another area of important theoretical concern, Bashō had much to say concerning the relationship between the subjective and objective in his art. As Ueda recounts:

It is of paramount importance to a poet . . . to catch the "soul" of his subject. He should not try to project his own emotion into the poem. He is a catalyst, a mere agent who leads an object to reveal its inner nature. In a famous passage on the poet's creative process, Dohō [another of Bashō's disciples] makes this point clear. "The Master said: 'Learn about a pine tree from a pine tree, and about a bamboo plant from a bamboo plant.' What he meant was that a poet should detach the mind from his own personal self. Nevertheless some poets interpret the word 'learn' in their own ways and never really 'learn.' For 'learn' means to enter into the object, perceive its delicate life and feel its feelings, whereupon a poem forms itself. A lucid description of the object is not enough; unless the poem contains feelings which have spontaneously emerged from the object, it will show the object and the poet's self as two separate entities, making it impossible to attain a true poetic sentiment. The poem will be artificial, for it is composed by the poet's personal self." (Matsuo Bashō 167-68)

In an essay detailing Bashō's poetics, Ueda discusses an aspect of Bashō's approach to composition that helps explain how Bashō put this theory into practice. Among Bashō's repertoire of poetic devices was one termed "hosomi" or "slenderness." The following haiku illustrates this technique:

I wonder whether
Seabirds too are asleep
On Lake Yogo tonight. (trans. Ueda)

In this poem, according to Ueda, "The poet buries himself in an external object with delicate sensitivity. . . . It is, as it were, an invisible vibration of the poet's heart in response to the smallest stimulus in nature" (Bashō and Poetics 426). Another poem illustrating hosomi is:

A salted sea-bream,
Showing its teeth, lies chilly
At the fish shop. (trans. Ueda)

In this poem Bashō identifies himself with the cold fish and feels the coldness himself. Ueda concludes that "hosomi, emphasizing the thin string which draws the poet into the heart of an object, again reiterates the basic premise of the haiku form. A haiku poet does not use nature images to express his emotions; he lets natural objects express their feelings" (Bashō and Poetics 427).

Such a sensibility is expressed in very similar imagery by Whitman in section 27 of Song of Myself:

Mine is no callous shell,
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.
(1: 38; 614-616)

And later, in section 33 of the poem, Whitman declares:

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person (1: 52; 844)

As both Bashō and Whitman seem to suggest, for them the poets' task is not so much to create a poem as to reveal the poem that is before them, latent in nature. Their self merges with the object, recognizes its true unity with it—that place where their soul and its are one—and the object speaks its poetic nature through them. As Emerson would phrase it, the poet receives from nature and imparts to the reader, the poet is a seer and a sayer, but not a maker. Kenneth Yasuda quotes the haiku scholar Otsuji [Seki Osuga] who remarks that, "When one reaches the state where he is unattached [to the self] and sings naturally, he can produce true haiku. The haiku composed under this condition transcends what we call the subjective or objective attitude" (13). Yasuda expresses this idea in his own metaphorical way. The haiku poet, he says, "is like a tuning fork placed before a vibrating one of the same frequency" (15).

In 1692 Bashō's poetry entered its final phase. He moved into the third Bashō hut, and the following year went into seclusion. When he emerged from his month-long isolation, he had developed a new style, which he termed "lightness." Ueda records Bashō's discussion of "lightness" as documented in the Autumn Night Critical Commentaries. The poem under discussion is by Itō Fugyoku:

A tonsured boy—
Bouncing off his head
The year's first hail.

A little boy is happily hopping around in the first hailstorm of the year, not minding the stinging blows on his shaven head. Bashō's remark, addressed to Fugyoku, was: "Poems of recent times look heavy because they make too much use of sentiment. To avoid this, I depend on scenery in most of my verses. In this respect I was very much impressed to read this kind of verse by you." These words remind us of a poem of his own which he said had "lightness":

Autumn Night Critical Commentaries
Under the trees
Soup, fish salad, and everywhere
Cherry blossoms.

In neither of these verses does the poet talk about his joy or sorrow, his love or hatred; it is an objective view, a scene of all-inclusive nature enveloping man and other things within itself.

According to Bashô's principle of "lightness" then, a poem should present a picture of life objectively in familiar words, avoiding intensely emotional expression. A poet should not pour his passions into his work; he should rather detach himself from the passion and submerge it within an objective scene. (Matsuo Bashô 160)

Again we see that Bashô sides with an "objective" approach to the composition of haiku. Such a program, however, raises the possibility that if a poem is too objective it will be flat and lifeless. As Ueda says, "The objective presentation of a familiar scene is not enough; it must be poetically suggestive. Here arises another of Bashô's critical principles, yojo, which might be literally translated as 'surplus meaning'" (Matsuo Bashô 161). For example, Ueda records Bashô's objection to a poem by Kakei:

Ivy leaves--
Every one of them fluttering
In the autumn wind.

According to Kyorai, Bashô's criticism of this poem was: "A haiku should not say everything, as this one does." Another such example is a haiku by Hafu which Bashô came upon in an anthology:

Could I but lie on my back
And grasp, branch by branch, the blossoms
Of the weeping cherry!

Bashô wondered why the compiler of the anthology had included such a verse. Kyorai volunteered to explain: "Doesn't it say everything that should be said about a weeping cherry tree in full bloom?" Bashô retorted: "Is there any good in saying everything?" Obviously he wanted the poet to suggest, and not to describe. If a verse says everything, it leaves no room for the reader's fancy; it does not induce him to undergo the experience himself. (Matsuo Bashô 162)

Though aging and settled into a new hut, Bashô remained restless. In the summer of 1694 he began another journey. He was taken ill in Osaka and died in the early autumn. On his deathbed he composed one of his most famous poems:

Stricken on a journey,
My dreams go wandering round
Withered fields. (trans. Keene)

In 1879, nearly 200 years after Bashô's death, the Ministry of Religious Instruction established Bashô "as a legitimate object of divine worship," and in 1885 the "Old Pond Church" was recognized as a religious body in the Shinto faith (Keene, Dawn 90). Keene recounts that up to the beginning of the twentieth century ceremonies were held to honor Bashô, though "less out of piety than out of the desire to reaffirm the special connections of a particular school with the great Master" (Dawn 89). A need to explicitly ally themselves with Bashô continues to persist among some haiku poets, even in the West. Although today, as we will see later, they are more likely to name a magazine Frogpond or Old Pond or Cicada, after a poem by Bashô, than to conduct ceremonies, the impulse is clearly the same.

Yosa Buson

Following the death of Bashô, the quality of haiku poetry began to deteriorate, and it was not until several generations later that haiku would again become a vital art. As Donald Keene summarizes the situation, "Bashô's followers . . . either reverted to the superficial humor of the Teitoku and Danrin schools, or else wrote verses of such utter simplicity and insignificance that they hardly merit the name of poetry" (World 337).

In general, poets in the countryside were more conservative, writing in a simple but bland style, unable to provide depth, or yojo, to their objective presentations. Their work shared affinities with the pre-Bashô Danrin school. Poets in the city, on the other hand, ever anxious to be up-to-date, wrote in a witty, intellectual style, which was, however, not so much avant-garde, as it pretended, but was instead reminiscent of the Teitoku school. As Bashô raised haiku above the original Danrin and Teitoku schools, so Buson was to elevate it above the neo-manifestations of these schools.

Buson was born near Osaka in 1716. Little is known of his life, but he seems to have been the son of a wealthy farmer and his housemaid. At an early age Buson was orphaned. He left home at 20 to learn painting and haiku. During his twenties he travelled and studied Chinese painting and literature. Buson was far better known in his own day as a painter than as a poet; he was a leading figure in the introduction to Japan of the Nanga or "Southern style" of Chinese painting (Zolbrod 46). He is perhaps best known today for his illustrated versions of several of Bashô's travel haibun.

Buson was fortunate in his study of haiku to have an excellent teacher, perhaps not easy to find during the decadent days of post-Bashô haiku. Buson later recalled his mentor, Hayano Hajin, instructing him in the art of haiku: "One night, sitting perfectly erect, he told me, 'In the art of haikai one should not necessarily follow the diction of one's teacher. A poem should be written suddenly, without consideration of before or after, changing and developing with the moment" (Keene, World 341). This spontaneous style of composition, with its emphasis on the present moment, seems akin to the philosophy of the Zen arts, even though Buson was a lay priest in the Pure-Land sect of Buddhism, a most un-Zenlike sect.

At the age of 35 Buson moved to Kyoto, where he spent most of his remaining years. He married when he was 45. Almost nothing is known about his wife, though it is known that they had a daughter, Kuno, who, following a short and difficult marriage, divorced and returned to her parents. Buson is often praised for his "objective" style, but a poem about a divorced woman, perhaps his daughter, reveals a more personal and compassionate side of him:
Though divorced, and as a result seriously stigmatized, this woman still takes part in the collective planting alongside the other women of the community, who, due to her shame, probably ignore her. In emulation of the cultured Chinese poets such as Wang Wei, Buson lived the life of a gentleman-farmer. He combined a highly literate and artistic life with the running of a small farm. Though never wealthy, and often near the brink of poverty, he seems to have lived a happy life. It was a lifestyle which his contemporary, Thomas Jefferson, would probably have admired. Buson died peacefully at home near the end of 1783.

As is frequently noted by critics, Buson's painter's eye is unmistakable in his haiku. Many of his poems reveal a profound sensitivity to subtle shades of color or to brilliantly tinted scenes:

Beautiful--
after the storm
red peppers

Additionally, he has a painter's awareness of perspective, and one often gets a sense of distance in his poetry that is rare in haiku. The center of interest in his poems often resides in the interplay between close and distant events, or between large and small objects. This technique is reminiscent of Bashô's juxtaposition of transient elements with permanent ones; however, while Bashô generally used it to evoke a philosophical insight, Buson usually employs the technique to generate a visual and aesthetic effect:

The heavy cart
rumbles and shudders
the peony

Water birds--
a lantern in the distance
the western capital

Fireworks in the distance
someone
lights a fire on the boat

Standing still--
from far off I hear them,
frogs

Blyth suggests that Buson has a "greediness" for color, so unlike the muted tones of Bashô:

Evening glories;
there should be also
one blooming yellow.  (trans. Blyth)

If so, he is also acutely aware of the loss of color:

I light a candle
the color fades
from the yellow chrysanthemums

The mountain darkens
the maple tree's crimson
is taken away

Buson's haiku, however, are not just visual. He has great perceptions of, and skill in rendering, both the sound and the feel of things. His poems evocative of the brief summer night or of intense summer heat are, so far as my reading extends at any rate, among the best poems in any language on this topic:

Summer river
how delightful to cross
with sandals in hand
Mosquitos drone
each time a flower of honeysuckle
falls

Not a leaf moves
dreadful
the summer forest

Though it may at first seem unlikely that the short genre would be capable of it, Buson also has many poems that narrate the briefest of stories:

They should have been killed
But became husband and wife,
And now change their clothes.  (trans. Keene)

Young lovers, previously caught engaged in some perfidy, and destined to die for their illicit love, have instead, through the intercession of some unknown person, been reprieved and banished. Though they can no longer wear the gorgeous clothes to which they have become accustomed, they happily change into plain garments for their new life together (Keene, World 346).

Masaoka Shiki, the founder of the first truly modern school of haiku, praised Buson above Bashô, and advocated a style similar to that of Buson's. He praised Buson for his aesthetic sense and for his portrayal of scenes without comment, unlike the seemingly spiritual overtones found in Bashô's most famous works. Donald Keene, however, believes that Shiki misrepresented Buson:

Masaoka Shiki, who interpreted Buson always as a poet of direct observation, falsified our image of Buson; direct observation was of less significance than the blending of literary tradition and the poet's private emotions, though Buson often used for his imagery some apparently impersonal perception. (World 350-351)

Buson seems modern to us, not because, as Shiki claims, he is so objective, but, according to Keene, for precisely the opposite reason: "It is precisely because Buson's poetry was so exclusively concerned with his private feelings, tastes, and perceptions that it strikes us as being modern; there is no barrier of time between him and us" (World 343).

I suspect Shiki stepped into the trap so readily strung to snare critics who insist on the comparison/contrast method--he distorted Buson into a mirror-image of Bashô, emphasizing those aspects of Buson's work that aided the contrasting effect he sought, and ignoring other aspects less amenable to his thesis. It could also be, of course, that Shiki and Keene disagree not so much on the difference between Bashô and Buson as they disagree on what constitutes "modern" poetry. For Keene "subjectivity" is modern, whereas for Shiki it is the "objectivity" in Buson that seems to make him a modern poet.

The following are some of Buson's more famous poems, as well as some of my favorites:

listless,
I burn some incense
this spring evening

this candle's flame
passed to another candle--
a spring evening

on the temple bell
settling to sleep
a butterfly

the red plum's
fallen petals
smoulder on the horse dung

as plum trees blossom
they buy sashes in their room--
the courtesans

the mason's chisel
cools
in the clear water

evening breeze--
water laps against
the legs of the blue heron
the peony sheds
upon each other
two or three petals

morning mist--
as if painted in a dream
people pass by

And his last poem, written on his death bed in the manner obligatory for a Japanese haiku poet:

towards the white plum tree
the faint light
of dawn

Buson has several poems that all begin with the same line, "tilling the field,"

... the man who asked directions
is gone from view

... my house still visible
as twilight lingers

... the unmoving cloud
no longer there

In these poems we see Buson's experience of complete engagement in his work. While tilling the field time passes unnoticed. Of course the act of tilling the field could be any creative or contemplative act. It is for Buson, perhaps, a form of meditation that combines both practical and spiritual engagement. Tilling has a special way of combining both of these aspects of experience. As the poet/farmer works his fields, he becomes so absorbed in his simple activity that he fails to notice the passage of time. Without actively seeking to, he transcends time by his perfect unification with his activity. He is not the poet watching himself scrape the ground, plant the seed, pull the weeds, and anticipating when he can return home for dinner. He is simply, for an ever-present moment, the eternal tiller, reminding us, perhaps, of Thoreau in his bean-field: "When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans..." (Walden 289; "The Bean-Field").

What Buson is telling us, it seems to me, is that this mundane act of tilling the field (or any other task for that matter) is, or at least could be, a significant spiritual activity; and had we the eyes to see we would recognize it as such. These poems also suggest Buson's awareness that the subject/object dichotomy that engages Shiki and Keene can be obliterated. When Buson is fully immersed in his tilling, he is not the subject, nor are the beans the object. As Thoreau suggests, it is no longer beans that Buson hoes, nor Buson who hoes beans, though Shiki and Keene can quibble about it if they like.

Oshima Ryôta and Tan Taigi

Two other poets active during Buson's time who deserve notice are Oshima Ryôta (1718-87) and Tan Taigi (1709-71). Keene suggests that before Shiki published his essay in the 1890's praising Buson, "most Japanese probably considered Ryôta to have been the outstanding poet of the haikai revival" (World 352). Ryôta has since faded from view. However one of the best translations in Henderson's collection is a poem by Ryôta:

All the rains of June:
and one evening, secretly,
through the pines, the moon. (trans. Henderson)

Ryôta also wrote what is probably my favorite haiku:

They spoke no word,
The host, the guest,
And the white chrysanthemum. (trans. Blyth)

Taigi was a pupil of Buson's and, according to Keene, ranks second to Buson among the poets of his day (World 353). Taigi had little influence during his own time, apparently living for years away from contact with other poets in what the Japanese euphemistically refer to as the licensed quarters (which we, with our own euphemism, would call the red-light district).

One of his better poems is:
The bridge has fallen,  
And people stand on the banks  
Under the summer moon.  
(trans. Keene)

He also wrote many haiku concerned with romance, a topic that until recently was rare and is still not widely accepted in haiku. Perhaps Taigi's choice of neighborhood contributed to this element in his poetry:

First love!  
They draw close to the lantern,  
Face next to face.  
(trans. Keene)

**Senryu**

Bashô gave haikai a degree of seriousness that it would have been impossible to foresee before his appearance, but a more comic style of haikai was still being written during Buson's day. After Bashô's death, one of his major disciples, Takarai Kikaku (1661-1707), moved back towards the more witty, superficial style of the Teitoku school. One development of this trend was a return to the sort of "verse capping" that had characterized pre-Bashô haikai. One poet would compose a stanza and others would "cap" it. For example:

I want to (kill him,) (cut it,)  
Yet I don't want to.

("To kill," and "to cut" are homonyms in Japanese.) Note that this stanza provides a sort of psychological riddle--why does the poet both want and not want to act? The other poets would need to decide what sort of situation could elicit this particular state. One poet responded, exploiting the meaning "to kill":

Catching the thief  
And looking at him,--  
My own son.

Or alternatively, another poet responded by exploiting the meaning "to cut":

Holding  
The clear moon,--  
Branches of cherry blossoms  
(Blyth, Senryu 49)

The first of these "capping" stanzas is clearly about humans and the second stanza seems to be about nature. However if we look closely we notice that the second stanza is also about human nature; it is the poet's quandary as to whether or not to cut the cherry branch blocking the moon that forms the center of interest. The only point to the moon and the cherry blossoms is the psychological response they provoke in the poet, a psychological response predetermined by the opening stanza to which the natural image is subservient. Without the opening stanza they present a hackneyed image that would not have been worth preserving.

In 1761 Karai Senryû (1718-90) published a collection in which the opening stanzas are clearly superfluous. For example:

that's understandable, that's understandable  
as if it were hot, a young girl holds a firefly  
(trans. Sato)

Eventually the opening verses were deemed completely unnecessary, and collections containing only the "capping" verses were published. What was eliminated by doing this was the overt expression of the emotional state, and what remained was the event that evoked the emotion or psychological insight.

Senryû was the most famous compiler of these verses. The verses were otherwise anonymous, with only the compiler's name attached to a collection. The compiler often took great editorial liberties in changing the poems submitted to him, without feeling the need for approval from the original author, so to a degree far greater than in similar sorts of collections published in the West the compiler was responsible for the poems presented. Eventually Senryû's name became attached to this sub-genre, and poems of this type have been known by the term "senryû" ever since.

Unlike more standard haiku, senryû usually reflect human life rather than the world of nature. This aspect is manifest formally by the frequent lack of seasonal reference. Many senryû also deal with a component of human nature avoided almost entirely by haiku--sex. They are frequently bawdy and often seem no more than dirty jokes. Also, most haiku contain a "cutting word" used to mark a break in the image. This break represents the point of juxtaposition of a two-part image. Senryû usually lack this structural feature and are far more likely to contain only one-part images or to be briefly narrative. In a sense they contain a juxtaposition between a psychological riddle--either overtly stated in the first two lines, or implicit if those lines have been deleted--and the event that could provoke it. Since haiku are not written in response to any previous stanza, the juxtaposition, if there is to be any, must occur within the three-line form.

Also, since haiku were originally written as the beginning of a sequence, they avoid a sense of closure and are both grammatically and emotionally an open form--the poem often does not seem completed with the last word. Senryû, on the other hand, have the sense of the finality of a proverb--all that can be said on the subject has been said. An indication of the importance of this aspect of senryû is the fact that Western writers of senryû are far more likely to rhyme their poems, signalling closure. Additionally, because they value cleverness, writers of senryû are far more likely to depend on their intellects. One can often respond to a senryû with "oh, I get it!" Such a response to a haiku is unlikely. In spite of these and many other distinguishing features--such as humor--there are many poems that it is impossible to label with certainty as either haiku or senryû. Keene warns us that "the differences between haikai and senryû should not be exaggerated" (World 527). Blyth concurs in this warning, informing us after citing a score of differences between them that, nevertheless, sometimes "senryû is indistinguishable from haiku" (Senryû 44).

Rather than considering senryû a distinct genre, I think it is both more useful and more accurate to consider it a type of haiku, a sub-genre. Throughout the history of the two forms there have been poems--often very good poems--with the characteristics of both. Indeed, it is arguable that the bulk of the "haiku" by one of the four major haiku poets, Issa, are in fact senryû.
Kobayashi Issa

The next haiku poet of importance after Buson, Kobayashi Issa, was born in a remote mountain village in 1763. His mother died when he was three, and this tragedy had a profound effect on his life and on his poetry. He was taken care of by a grandmother until, when Issa was eight-years-old, his father remarried. His step-mother seems to be an archetype straight out of Grimm's fairy tales. She removed him from school and made him work at home, beating him daily, so he reported in his later life. When a half-brother was born, Issa had to care for him, and his step-mother, as we know from Cinderella's tale, doted only on her own child to the neglect of Issa. Years later Issa wrote of her:

Somebody you do resemble--
The face, at least, is much the same
Death Adder! (trans. Mackenzie)

Life at home was so bad that Issa's father, ineffectual as Cinderella's, sent him away to Edo when he was only 12 or 13 to live on his own. Little is known of his life during this time. He seems to have had a variety of odd jobs, studied poetry, and absorbed the vibrant life of the growing city. When Issa was 28 his father died, willing Issa half of his estate. Issa returned home to claim his portion, but his conniving step-mother and half-brother prevented him from gaining his rightful property:

The place where I was born:
all I come to—all I touch--
blossoms of the thorn. (trans. Henderson)

Issa's half-brother, possibly in cahoots with local officials, managed to delay Issa's claim on his inheritance for many years, but finally relented. It is reported that Issa threatened an appeal to the Shogun, a "tremendous and desperate step" (Mackenzie 37). It is perhaps this bold appeal, as much as anything else, that won Issa his home.

Finally, at the age of 51, Issa had enough security to feel he could marry. With his first wife he fathered three sons and one daughter, all of whom died in infancy. In a diary he recorded one of his most famous poems following the death of one of his daughters:

The world of dew--
A world of dew it is indeed,
And yet, and yet . . . (trans. MacKenzie)

In this poem Issa expresses the inability of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of the impermanence of life to assuage his grief. This doctrine is frequently symbolized by a drop of dew vanishing in the morning. Famous as Issa's poem is, however, I do think this poem pushes the definition of haiku to its limits. It contains neither an image nor a sensation, but rather an emotional conflict with theology. We are not expected to envision the dewdrop, but to think about what it symbolizes.

Issa is best known for his poems concerning the small creatures of the world:

Lean frog
don't give up the fight!
Issa is here! (trans. Henderson)

Come with me,
Let's play together, swallow
Without a mother.

Hey! don't swat him!
The fly rubs his hands, rubs his feet
Begging for mercy. (trans. Keene)

As Keene says, these poems are the reason Issa remains very popular in Japan. Henderson sees this aspect of Issa's art as a very positive factor: "The boundless love attributed to Amida Buddha coalesced with his own tenderness toward all weak things--children and animals and insects. This was perhaps the best part of him . . ." (Introduction 133). However Keene questions their artistic merit:

His verses are an extraordinary mixture of every style--parodies of old poems, imitations of his predecessors, haikai that can hardly be distinguished from senryu, and poems sprinkled with slang, dialect words, and snatches from popular songs. . . . Most of these verses are hardly worth preserving. (World 366)

And again:

Issa's poetry is certainly appealing, but it is debatable whether or not his professions of solidarity with frogs, snails, and flies should be called haikai. They have almost no tension, make almost no demands on the reader; they are little more than epigrams, artfully conceived. (World 367)

Henderson points out that such charges were lobbed Issa's way even during his life, and he attempts to shield Issa against them:
Issa was . . . a rebel in the haiku world. His poems are—obviously—very different from any haiku that had been written before. In his own time he was actually driven out from his first position as a haiku teacher on account of his unconventionality, and even today there are those who claim that most of his work is not worthy of the name of haiku. (Introduction 137)

The difficulties in Issa's life never ended. His wife died. He remarried twice; the first remarriage was a disaster, ending quickly in divorce. He remarried a final time at the age of 62. Subsequently, his house burned to the ground. He died two years later, in 1827, too soon to ever see his daughter, who was born shortly after his death.

Masaoka Shiki

Between the time of Buson and the "modernization" of Japan in the Meiji period, with the exception of the problematic Issa, haiku once again deteriorated as a significant genre. Masaoka Shiki, however, revitalized haiku and brought it into the modern era. He also helped modernize tanka poetry and Japanese prose during his short life.

Shiki was born in 1867 in Matsuyama, a town that was later to develop into an important center for the literary revival movement he set in motion. In 1883 he moved to Tokyo, passed the preparatory school entrance exams, and began to study English. In 1888 he contracted tuberculosis but initially recovered. Two years later he entered the Japanese literature department at Tokyo University and began the serious study of haiku. He tried to record "real scenes" in his poetry but was unsuccessful until Bashô's Monkey's Cloak opened his eyes. This idea of recording actual scenes was to become an important aspect of his developing aesthetic.

Shiki withdrew from the university in 1892 without completing a degree and set out on the task of reforming haiku. His appointment as poetry editor of Nippon, Japan's major newspaper, greatly aided him in this task. Shiki decided that haiku was stifled by the inordinate worship of Bashô, so in 1893 he published a sharp critique of Bashô, a nearly blasphemous act (remember Bashô had been inducted into the Shinto pantheon of deities) for which some haiku poets even today do not forgive him. He argued that Buson, not Bashô, provided a model for modern haiku. Makaoto Ueda summarizes his position:

In his opinion Bashô's poetry was too passive in its implied attitude toward life and too biased against the bright colorful beauty of nature; timid and afraid of letting his imagination soar, the seventeenth-century poet always stayed within the realm of his actual experience. Bashô's verse also seemed lacking in complexity: he shied away from writing haiku on human life, which is complex, and preferred to compose poems on nature, which is simpler. In short, Shiki argued that Bashô's work was devoid of those qualities that form the crux of modern poetry—complexity, dynamic passion, soaring imagination. (Modern 6)

On the other hand,

Buson's poetry was colorful, magnificent, and exquisite; it was fanciful, exotic, and startling. It was complex yet concise, in some instances almost condensing a short story into seventeen syllables. Its scope was broad: it took its material not only from the poet's own life but also from the lives of others. . . . It was objective and picturesque; by presenting objects or scenes that excited emotion, it avoided describing the poet's emotion itself. (Modern 6-7)

Shiki saw haiku as an aesthetic rather than a spiritual endeavor. He made the claim, revolutionary in his day, that haiku was literature. As Ueda records it, Shiki claimed that, "Haiku is part of Literature. Literature is part of Art. Hence beauty is the ultimate value of Literature. The ultimate value of Literature is also the ultimate value of haiku" (Modern 7). This contorted bit of syllogistic reasoning rests on the assumption, among other things, that the goal of art is beauty—an assumption many in Shiki's audience may not have been willing to grant him. This assumption raises the question—of ancient lineage in both East and West—of whether art should manifest truth or beauty. For Bashô the answer was clearly truth. He, like Emerson, valued the veracity of the poet's report. For Shiki, and perhaps for Buson as well, however, the task of art was the expression of beauty. (Perhaps the counterpart in the American context to Bashô's relationship to Buson would be that of Emerson's to Poe.) Shiki's aesthetic, however, wherever else it might take him, was rooted in objective experience. Among the aspects of haiku composition Shiki repeatedly stressed was "that it must be grounded in reality" (Beichman 31). "Shiki made the observation of reality into a strict discipline, the most fundamental exercise in the poet's training" (Beichman 46). The term he developed for this concept, shasei, or "sketch from life," may have been borrowed from Western realism. Poets, however, could not simply sketch anything; they had to be selective. As Shiki explains, "realism means copying the subject as it is, but it necessarily involves a degree of selection and exclusion. . . . A writer sketching a landscape or an event should focus on its most beautiful or moving aspect" (Ueda, Modern 12).

What distinguishes the great poet from the mediocre one is precisely this aspect of selection. Perhaps an analogue can be found in photography. All of us can take snapshots. But even photos by people with great technical expertise will fail aesthetically if the photographer has no skill at selection. Though the medium is in one sense totally objective, nevertheless the subjective aspect of the photographer's personal vision and sensitivity determine the merit of the work.

Another criterion Shiki emphasized, however, was that "imagination was as important, or more so, than the faithful depiction of reality" (Beichman 31). In "A Sixfoot Sickbed" he describes this perspective:

I had a flowering branch placed by my pillow. As I faithfully sketch it, I feel I am gradually coming to understand the secrets of Creation.

One of the joys of sketching from life lies in pondering how to obtain a slightly darker red or a rather more yellowish one. When the gods first dyed the flowers did they too lose themselves in musing like this? (Beichman 48)

He has a haiku on this theme:

Chrysanthemums! True, yellow ones, white ones—but I want a red one too! (trans. Henderson)
Shiki's aesthetic principles seem contradictory—variously emphasizing either objective presentations of reality or, on the contrary, subjective creations of the imagination. Few poets are systematic theoreticians, and Shiki was no exception; a foolish search for consistency was not the hobgoblin of his mind. Ueda, however, grants Shiki a plausible method to this seeming madness:

Shiki's view of the relationship between poetry and external reality was, then, a flexible one. Although it may look self-contradictory, from a pedagogic viewpoint it is coherent. He stressed the value of realistic representation for beginners, but for more advanced students recommended selective realism and allowed expert poets considerable freedom to choose between extremes of direct observation and imaginative creation. (Modern 14-15)

If this is indeed Shiki's pedagogy, it is eminently practical. Far more so than in the Western tradition, the haiku poet was as much teacher as poet. Most haiku poets made their living teaching the art. Shiki's teaching method seems similar to that used by painting teachers. Students are first taught to sketch realistic scenes—they are taught to see—and only then does the teacher move them on to more abstract or imaginative works.

Eventually Shiki's vision became directed towards inner rather than outer reality. This may in part be due to his confinement during his later years, as his tuberculosis worsened: "At first, I copied nature objectively. Later I became fond of copying humanity objectively" (Ueda, Modern 18). Shiki's inner vision seems akin to Issa's perspective, though Issa was even more introverted than Shiki. Issa was popular, but he never developed an enduring school, so his introverted work was not influential. Shiki, however, was perhaps the first haiku poet to write a significant body of work focusing on his own psychological state who was also influential enough to cause that trend to continue in the work of others.

Even in these introverted poems, however, Shiki's method was objective. He did not attempt to tell the reader how he was feeling; he attempted to evoke such feelings in the reader. As we have seen with the other haiku poets, Shiki "tried to dispense with metaphor, simile, and other literary tropes. He wished to depict himself emotionally naked, yet he did so with a restraint and an objectivity that saves his work from vulgarity" (Beichman 73). Shiki depicted his inner state as precisely and objectively as Buson or Bashô depicted outer nature. His poems can perhaps be characterized as subjective in content but objective in manner. (Of course a Zen perspective would contend that such a division between the outer world and the inner self is illusory. The sense we have of the division is a consequence of our ego-selves' attempts to establish their independent identity in spite of their ultimate union with the external world.)

In addition to his critique of Bashô, Shiki further antagonized the traditionalists by declaring the death of renga. In this he was more the bearer of dismal tidings than the executioner, though in the minds of some critics he suffers the executioner's stigma. In fact, if the death of renga was at Shiki's hands, it was probably a mercy killing. As Higginson states, "by the time of Issa poets made their reputations almost entirely on the basis of their individual poems rather than their ability to orchestrate a renga" (Haiku 20).

Shiki felt that since renga depended on poets writing for one another, the poet was confined to what would work within the group setting, and so could not express his or her true feelings, hence renga, unlike haiku, was not literature. Shiki liberated the first stanza of a linked-verse and coined the term "haiku" to manifest the independence of the stanza, taking the term from hokku no haikai no renga which can be translated as the first three-line stanza of the hokku, or comic, form of renga.

As we have seen, the independence of the hokku had been established even in Bashô's time. Recall that Bashô criticized Kyorai for not composing several hokku prior to a haikai session in order to have one available when called upon. And many collections contained only the hokku stanza. The notion still lingered, however, that the hokku could begin a linked renga. Shiki declared its independence. Interestingly, however, he developed a new context for the hokku—the sequence. If his rationale for abandoning renga was that the group setting and the formal rules inhibited the poet's creativity, then the sequence allowed a poet to compose haiku as part of a larger literary work and yet avoid the restrictions of renga composition.

Much of Shiki's criticism of Bashô, as we have seen, is based on his assessment that haiku has as its goal an aesthetic rather than spiritual effect. However he recognized an important connection between his aesthetic goal and the spiritual one. As Beichman recounts it:

Shiki went on to say that some people believed that the poem recorded a Zen experience of satori. This, he felt, was unlikely, but he conceded that the practice of Zen and of the Bashô (or "as is") style had similar features; in both one must rid oneself of delusions, stop worrying about whether one was skilled or not, and empty one's mind. Then one could write a good poem, and this was how the "old pond" poem had been composed. Shiki concluded:

"... the sparrow's chirp, the crow's caw, the willow's green, the cherry blossom's pink, are the truth of the Zen master and the essence of Bashô's style. The 'old pond' poem truly describes as is'--the 'as is' became a poem." (Beichman 47)

In an essay on Bashô's "old pond" Shiki elaborated on this concept:

The meaning of this verse is just what is said; it has no other, no special meaning. But common-place haikai teachers speak as though this had an esoteric meaning, so deep that no ordinary man can understand it. This is deceiving people, making their main object of faith a secret. (Blyth, History 2: 46).

And further:

So, if you want to know the true value of this verse, you must know the history of haiku; it only means that he heard the sound of a frog jumping into an old pond—nothing should be added to that. If you add anything to it, it is not the real nature of the verse. Clearly and simply, not hiding, not covering; no thinking, no technique of words,--this is the characteristic of the verse. Nothing else. (47)

In 1895, against the advice of his friends, Shiki went to China as a war correspondent. As they had feared, his tuberculosis went from latent to acute, and he nearly died. He returned and convalesced in Matsuyama, staying with the novelist Sôseki, who was also a competent haiku poet. After he recovered in 1897, Shiki founded a magazine to further his ideas about haiku, calling it Hototogisu or Cuckoo. Mostly confined to his home, he conducted a lecture series on Buson and began the systematic modernization of tanka and prose. (For details on this see chapters 3 and 4 in Beichman.) During his last illness, which lead to his death in 1902, he wrote some of his best pieces, including Verse Record of My Peonies, A Drop of Ink, Stray Notes While Lying on My Back, and A Sixfoot Sickbed.

At a time when Japan was going through a major cultural upheaval, Shiki assured that, in spite of the influx of Western forms of writing, the haiku would persist into the twentieth century. Isaacson contends that "the continuance of haiku during the twentieth century is due solely to Shiki's efforts" (xii-xiii). Though this "solely" undoubtedly overstates the case, other critics concur on the importance of Shiki: "Through his unique combination of intimacy and
objectivity, artlessness and intensity, Shiki imbued the haiku with a new psychological complexity, and made it a poetic form that would survive into the modern period” (Beichman 73).

Ueda explains the nature of this new form:

All in all, then, a modern haiku conceived by Shiki could be described as follows. It is a poem written in roughly seventeen syllables and with a season word, as in former days. But otherwise it is entirely free of traditional rules, or of what the nineteenth-century masters had taught as unbreakable rules of composition. The poem is answerable only for the way in which the poet, as a free individual, sees beauty in nature or in human life. (Modern 8)

Shiki resides as the first poet in any collection of modern haiku. He was also an influential teacher, and though his life was short, his views have been modified and extended by diligent students, and students of students, throughout the twentieth century:

Hot spring in the mountains:
high above the naked bathers
the River of Heaven.

After the snake flees,
how quiet the forest is!
A lily flower.

Unceasingly
this stone on the summer moor
rests people.

After killing
a spider how lonely I feel
in the cold of night!

The wintry gust:
they have left a temple bell
by the roadside.

On a sandy beach
glassy chips sparkle
in the spring sunshine.  (trans. Ueda)

The following are a few selections of haiku from his haibun The Verse Record of My Peonies:

Here in tissue paper
Is the parcel of flowers:
The peonies.

Borne to me
On a jinrikisha, the peonies
Still swaying.

The gift brought me
Is peonies tended in a pot:
Just so my illness.

Glowing brightly,
A single flower of the peonies
Lights up the sickroom.

Critical now,
Bedridden with illness:
The peony flowers.
There is this silence  
About the sickbed as the petals  
Drop from the peonies!

Two flakes fall  
And the shape of the peonies  
Is wholly changed.

In three day's time  
The peony blossoms are ended:  
My record in verse.  
(trans. Miner)

Shiki's Disciples

Shiki's two most important followers were Kawahigashi Hekigodô (1873-1937) and Takahama Kyoshi (1874-1959). After Shiki's death Kyoshi took over the editorship of Cuckoo. He transformed it, however, into a magazine of fiction and for many years eliminated haiku. Hekigodô, on the other hand, extended Shiki's experiments with modern haiku and attracted many followers, as well as detractors, with his innovations. As Ueda recounts:

Of all his experiments the two most controversial were those on "haiku without a center of interest" and on haiku in vers libre. The idea of "haiku without a center of interest," which he began to advocate in 1910, was based on his belief that a poem should come as close as possible to its subject matter, which is part of life or nature. He thought that if the poet tried to create a center of interest in his poem he would inevitably have to distort his subject matter for the sake of that interest. "To do away with a center of interest and to discard the process of poeticizing reality would help the poet to approach things and phenomena in nature as close as he can without being sidetracked by man-made rules," insisted Hekigodô. (Modern 9)

Such an idea seems akin to Emerson's belief that the rules of poetry should not be allowed to hinder poets in their attempts to make a truthful report of their experiences. Though Hekigodô was willing to reject many of the norms of the genre, such as syllable count and center of interest, he still maintained the importance of the season-word. He defended it "by saying that every existence in the universe was integrated with the change of the seasons; in his opinion every poetic sentiment was imbedded in a season of the year" (Ueda, Modern 9).

Hekigodô eventually came to discard the term haiku for his works, preferring to call them simply "short poems." Keene summarized Hekigodô's position regarding "short poems" this way:

He declared that the "short poem" was based on momentary stimuli and impressions aroused by the poet's surroundings, and that the expression of his feelings had to be fresh, based on a sensitivity that was not hamstrung by tradition or conventionality. He rejected the fixed form of the haiku as a childish example of blind adherence to convention. (Dawn 112)

The following are a few examples of Hekigodô's work:

From a bathing tub  
I throw water into the lake-  
slight muddiness appears.

Startled  
I wake from a midday nap  
all alone.

Fallen off the eaves,  
a pile of snow blocks the street  
in a slum area.

After the riot  
an incomparably beautiful  
moonlit night.  
(trans. Ueda)

Kyoshi, while devoting himself to fiction, maintained his interest in haiku and eventually became appalled at the direction Hekigodô was leading the genre. In 1912 he put haiku back in Cuckoo. With a neo-classical attitude, he called for a return to the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern. "Haiku," he said, "is a type of literature in which form is a pre-determined factor" (Ueda, Modern 11). As Ueda says, Kyoshi "had no objection . . . to a poem written in vers libre or without a season word; he objected, however, if that poem was called a haiku" (Modern 11). This definitional debate has continued almost unabated until the present day. The following are a few of Kyoshi's poems:

Through the back gate  
of the house I am to rent  
chrysanthemums are seen.
A gold bug--
I hurl it into the darkness
and feel the depth of night.

A butterfly
in the cold: it flies in pursuit
of its own soul. (trans. Ueda)

Kyoshi's call to a neo-classical style was widely heeded. However his followers soon felt cramped by the extreme conservatism he preached. One of them, Mizuhara Shûôshi, broke with Kyoshi and founded his own magazine, *Staggerbush*. He sought to return haiku to an aesthetic sense. He made a "distinction between factual truth ('truth in nature') and imaginative truth ('truth in literature')" (Ueda, *Modern* 16). He thought the conservatives mistook the aim of haiku, which he, like Shiki before him, thought was to find literary truth. His work was extremely lyrical, and in this sense very modern; however his subject matter was often classical, and he used "no shocking language or imagery; his poetry always had quiet grace" (Ueda, *Modern* 17).

I close the gate
and sit alone with the stones
this beautiful night

As I look upward
mountain azaleas burn
above the lava.

A winter chrysanthemum
wears nothing--except its own
beams of light.

I wake from a dream
and am startled by the darkness:
evening in autumn. (trans. Ueda)

Three of Kyoshi's followers who rejected this new movement of Shûôshi's and maintained their traditionalism are sometimes called the "humanists": Nakamura Kusatao (1901-1983), Ishida Hakyô (1913-1969), and Katô Shûson (1905- ). Kusatao often wrote about the seemingly insignificant manifestations of humanity that are occasionally revealed amidst the degradation of the modern age, and some of his most memorable haiku concern the ravages of war:

the concrete left
in the fire's wake . . .
a ball bounces (trans. Higginson)

Kusatao also wrote what is perhaps, in the West at least, the most famous haiku on the atomic bombings:

Appearing as if
nothing had happened, the brightness
of the midday sun. (trans. Ueda)

This poem is a good example of the fact that haiku often depend on the reader's understanding of context. Had I not prefaced the poem with mention of the atomic bombing, it might have seemed to concern a quiet summer afternoon. This poem is also a good example, perhaps one of the best, of how the brief haiku form can, with a profound understatement, capture some of the most intense of human experiences. For me the poem expresses the numbing terror of the atomic blast as horrifically as any other work of literature I have read. In addition to horror, Kusatao can evoke many other emotions in his work:

to hold my wife
treading spring noon's
gravel going home (trans. Higginson)

An empty bottle
and an aged blind man
in the winter sunshine.

Ant in the nighttime:
the one that has lost its way
crawls in a circle. (trans. Ueda)
Like Kusatao, Katô Shûson also wrote poems on the war. The war experience, dreadful as it was, nevertheless had the effect of giving haiku poets an opportunity to demonstrate haiku's ability to remain a vital means for expressing the phenomena of life in the twentieth century:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the praying mantis} \\
\text{still raising his axes} \\
\text{all burnt up}
\end{align*}
\]

in the fire-depths
saw the way
a peony crumbles  \text{(trans. Higginson)}

William Higginson reads this last poem metaphorically: "While we may read it to mean that he saw a peony crumble in the depths of the fire, I suspect that 'the way a peony crumbles' is a metaphor for the way a frame building's walls buckle and then fall in a roaring fire . . ." (Handbook 39). My tendency in reading haiku, however, is to avoid a metaphoric interpretation unless the writer insists on it, and though Higginson's suggestion is possible, it is nevertheless true that peonies, as well as houses, burned in the fire-bombings.

Ueda quotes Shûson's expression of his motives for writing haiku:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{As soon as we begin searching for truth and shake up our daily routine for that purpose, we discover an abysmal chasm lying under surface at an unexpected spot. I wanted to bring back my personal discoveries from those chasms. I wanted to uncover my true self, the self that had been stirring silently beneath the peace and conventionalities of my daily life.}  \\
\text{Modern 20)
\end{align*}
\]

This formulation, though with a more optimistic tone, could, it seems to me, easily have been uttered by Emerson or Thoreau. They, like he, reported on the discoveries found while searching for the true self that lurked beneath the conventionalities of life.

A few more poems by Shûson:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I grieve, and there comes} \\
\text{a shrike, with golden sunbeams} \\
\text{on its back.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I kill an ant} \\
\text{and realize my three children} \\
\text{have been watching.}
\end{align*}
\]

A pheasant, with eyes
defiantly glaring,
is being sold.

She was born a cat
and I was born a man--
we walk in the dew.

Springstorm--
a corpse courageously
leaves the hospital

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chestnut blossoms were fragrant} \\
\text{before I vomited blood--} \\
\text{and they are still.}  \text{ (trans. Ueda)}
\end{align*}
\]

The ambiguity in this last poem is interesting. On the one hand, nature does not share the poet's pain, and his feeling of lonely anguish may therefore be intensified. On the other hand, in spite of his illness and dejected state of mind, nature persists in its beauty, and the poet may find comfort in that fact. The most obvious implication, of course, is that nature remains itself regardless of our state of mind.

Ogiwara Seisensui

A principle poet in the more experimental school of Kawahigashi Hekigodô was Ogiwara Seisensui. Though one of Hekigodô's disciples, Seisensui differed with Hekigodô about the proper subject matter of haiku. He "argued for a haiku that would illustrate the subjective feelings of the writer rather than the objective world that caused the writer's feelings" (Higginson, Handbook 29). For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The Milky Way too} \\
\text{has become intense} \\
\text{we said and parted} \text{ (trans. Higginson)}
\end{align*}
\]
Seisensui is often called a symbolist:

He also differed from Hekigodô in that he approached free verse from a symbolist's, and not from a naturalist's, point of view. "A haiku begins with impressions and leans toward symbolism. It is a symbolist poem," he said. "To phrase it differently, a haiku emerges when a symbolic mood crystallizes into an expression-- when an impressionistic perception takes a poetic form through the process of symbolic purification." In brief, he stressed the role of the man who perceives rather than the role of the object which is perceived; he valued the private, mystic vision of the poet. (Ueda, Modern 10)

Extending this idea to form, he develops a theory similar in its own way to Emerson's of the "meter-making argument," though in Seisensui's case we might call it a "meter-making impression": "He stated that 'haiku is the poetry of impressions; there is a body rhythm in the natural impression. Haiku that is meant to transcribe this body meter of impressions should not be bound by a syllabically fixed form'" (Furuta xvii).

According to Ueda, Seisensui was one of the first Japanese to study modern linguistics, and this training gave him important insights into a haiku's structure. He recognized, for example, that haiku, unlike the sort of free-verse with which he was familiar, was not a closed but an open form, since, "the word ending haiku did not create a sense of finality" (Ueda, Modern Japanese Poets 329).

As an example of how a rigid syllabic structure forced the poet to falsify experience, Seisensui rather daringly used Bashô's "old pond":

The old pond:

a frog leaps in--

the water's sound.

Seisensui proposed to rewrite the poem in order to more directly express the experience Bashô had when he wrote it:

What motivated Bashô to write this haiku was the sound of a frog jumping in, and nothing else. That instant he was awakened to the fact that the common phenomenon of a frog jumping into the water was in truth not a common phenomenon at all. Therefore, if one were to give expression to that awakening the words

a frog leaps in--

the water's sound

would be sufficient. In point of fact, those were precisely the words that came out of Bashô's mouth at the time. But the words did not have the needed 17 syllables, so he felt there was something lacking. . . . Yet, if I may speak from my current standpoint, I would say the two-line version omitting "the old pond" expresses the poet's feeling better. Obviously Bashô held a conventional idea of form and felt that

a frog leaps in--

the water's sound

did not constitute a haiku. I contend that these two lines definitely form a haiku. (Ueda, Modern Japanese Poets 286)

As a correlate to this emphasis on the poet's actual experience and reaction, Seisensui took Hekigodô's revolution one step further and rejected the necessity of the season word. Though he firmly believed that haiku was concerned with nature, he did not think that nature need be restricted to those aspects that had traditionally been associated with various seasons. For example, had Bashô not experienced a frog--which happens to be a traditional season-word for spring--but some other creature with no such traditional seasonal association, should he have had to falsify his experience in order to conform to tradition? Seisensui would argue no.

Haiku that rejected both the season word and the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern (when they were called haiku at all, which, as we may recall, Kyoshi for one was unwilling to acknowledge) were called "free-style" or "free-meter" haiku. In response to arguments such as Kyoshi's, that poetry of this type was not haiku, however worthwhile it might be as poetry, Seisensui attempted to delineate the bounds between free-style haiku and free-verse poetry:

Seisensui distinguished free-style haiku from free verse on two main counts. The first was subject matter: free verse treats all kinds of subjects, but the matter of haiku is limited to nature; in particular, haiku expresses a special relationship with nature that developed in the course of the verse form's history. The second was treatment: free verse is linear and discursive in structure, tracing the course of a poet's mental experiences; on the other hand, haiku is centripetal, focusing an instantaneous, intuitive perception. (Ueda, Modern Japanese Poets 290)

Additionally, Seisensui felt that his poems expressed a spiritual attitude towards nature that was very similar to Bashô's, and so he wanted his poetry to be a part of the same tradition: "he wanted to call them haiku because he believed he was working within a poetic tradition initiated by Bashô and was changing it to fit a new age" (Ueda, Modern Japanese Poets 296).

Seisensui did indeed share a similar Zen attitude towards nature. In fact, so far as I know, he is the only haiku poet of stature to have attained the experience of satori (Ueda, Modern Japanese Poets 296). And he, like Bashô, saw haiku as a form of momentary enlightenment. In an essay entitled "Poetry of Enlightenment" he expresses his views on this matter:

We want to see nature within ourselves or, to put it differently, we want to contemplate nature from within. Instead of interpreting it by knowledge or appreciating it by aesthetic taste, we want to feel it instinctively with our entire being. We want to base our spiritual life on such an enlightenment. . . . If we take a wrong approach we will not be able to gain this kind of enlightenment, no matter how desperately we may try. We must live intensely with a humble heart, whereupon, like a divine revelation, it will show itself mysteriously but clearly in our mental mirror. It will be a valuable symbol.

We must not miss this flash of lightning. We must capture the sensation of this valuable instant. We must constantly strive to deepen our perception and gain a greater enlightenment by recording and expressing our feelings of these moments.
The haiku form is short, sharp, and intense because it aims to record the rare glowing moment at which our life radiates rays of light. It is very small and very large, mirroring what we are. (Ueda, *Modern Japanese Poets* 295)

Though he was in some ways a revolutionary, we can see from such a statement that Seisensui conceived of haiku essentially the way Bashô did.

As a theorist, Seisensui is one of the most important contributors to the development of modern haiku. Though he was not the poet Shiki was, his theory is more thorough, and he is more persuasive than Shiki in proposing that haiku can indeed function as a viable genre in the twentieth century. The following are a few examples of his work:

A morning
of babies crying,
of roosters crowing,
with all their might.

The load taken down,
a chilly horse!
It rains.

In Buddha
I believe:
wheat-ear's green
truth.

In the fog
for a friend to come out of the fog
I keep waiting.

Stones plumpness
turns into snow.

From the cage
fireflies
one by one
turn into stars.

a truck
loaded with steel:
trees along the street
about to bud (trans. Ueda)

Nakatsuka Ippekirô

If Seisensui felt the need to defend his free-style haiku as in fact a legitimate form of haiku, another member of the Hekigodô school, Ippekirô (1887-1946), did not. Like Seisensui, he rejected both the traditional form and the seasonal content of haiku. And though he called his poems haiku, he did not care if others concurred: "Some people call my poems haiku, some don't. As far as I am concerned, the name does not matter at all" (Furuta xix).

Ippekirô was opposed to the purely objective representation of nature, and was instead interested in haiku that manifested and communicated his own emotional response to nature:

In the essence of haiku, there should be a little bit more of something resounding from heart to heart. Haiku merely limited to sketching from nature is out of the question. A poem born of my own uncontrollable excitement, itself evoked by a thing or an event at a certain time in a certain place, and a poem that is nothing but my own whole body, such is my kind of haiku, the kind of haiku I thirst for. (Furuta xix)

Within what he himself considered to be an extreme position, however, we can sense Ippekirô's continuity with tradition. For example, his belief that haiku should be "evoked by a thing or an event at a certain time in a certain place" hearkens back to the time when haiku was the opening stanza for a linked verse and served to proclaim the "certain time and certain place" of the composition. Eventually Ippekirô retreated from some of his more extreme views and became more conservative: "His haiku style after 1925 became more and more spiritual and eventually turned to the classic tradition of Bashô's doctrine of **fueki ryuko** (something permanent as well as changing. . .)" (Furuta xix).

Of all of the modern Japanese haiku poets, he is my personal favorite, and I find it difficult to select only a few of his poems as examples of his work:

At the window side
I finger a rusted knife
pear blossoms are sad by day
A plover-crying night
the freezing hands
of a woman

The taste of water
at my home-place
a plover sings by day

I killed a snake
under the placid blue
of the sky

A few trees
in the withered field
a horse is gentle

Chrysanthemum
on this wintry night
as nothing whatsoever happens

A delight of plucking off
a dragonfly’s wings
the ground becomes silent

Penniless though I am
winter grass is
rather green

Saw a waterbird
I return
with a fleeting satisfaction

Grass is
lush
a cow is gone

A Thief Came
He must have jumped over the fence
he must have walked over
the withered grass for a while

A cricket
chirps
I drink a glass of water

A plum tree
has a few round fruits
it grows dark

The tea-plants are in bloom
a man who could be satisfied
only with this fact (trans. Furuta)
A rooster and I
walk
over the frozen earth (trans. Furuta)

Zen Eccentrics: Taneda Santōka and Ozaki Hōsai

Taneda Santōka (1882-1940) was a major contributor to Seisensui's school of haiku. Like Issa, he had a difficult childhood which continued to influence his adult life. His father was an alcoholic with a notoriously uncontrolled libido. When Santōka was 11, while his father was away with a mistress, his mother committed suicide by throwing herself down a well. He "never completely recovered from the shock of seeing his mother's lifeless body being lifted from the well. . . " (Stevens 10).

Santōka inherited his father's alcoholism, and the fact that the two of them opened a sake factory was a rather unfortuitous choice of careers. As the culmination of a gradually deteriorating emotional state, Santōka attempted suicide in 1924 by sitting on a railroad track. The train screeched to a halt and his life was spared. He was taken to a nearby Zen temple where he remained until he was ordained a monk the next year. Rather than spend his life in the temple, however, he chose to practice his Zen by roaming the countryside. During much of his adult life Santōka wandered with nothing but the clothes on his back and a begging bowl in his hand. This sort of Zen eccentricity, though not typical, had a long and honored tradition; even Bashō practiced it to an extent.

Santōka carried a notebook in which he would compose his haiku. Haiku was for him an important part of his Zen, and his style is the epitome of Zen aesthetics: "Haiku for Santōka was written Zen--spontaneous, sharp, clear simple, direct. There must be nothing extra, no artifice, no straining" (Stevens 24-25). Santōka, echoing Bashō, expressed his view of haiku this way:

Real haiku is the soul of poetry. Anything that is not actually present in one's heart is not haiku. The moon glows, flowers bloom, insects cry, water flows. There is no place we cannot find flowers or think of the moon. This is the essence of haiku. Go beyond the restrictions of your era, forget about purpose or meaning, separate yourself from historical limitations--there you'll find the essence of true art, religion, and science. (Stevens 25)

For Santōka haiku was a means of directly looking at what was directly in front of him at the present moment: "Truth is seeing the new in the ordinary. Settle in this world. There are hidden treasures in the present moment" (Stevens 27). And again:

I do not believe in a future world. I deny the past. I believe entirely in the present. We must employ our whole body and soul in this eternal moment. I believe in the universal spirit, but the spirit of any particular man I reject. Each creature comes from the Whole, and goes back to it. (Blyth, History 2: 175)

Such an attitude recalls the sense of sacred immanence, the conception of self, the rejection of the past, and the belief in the mythic present found in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

As we can imagine, Santōka paid no attention to formalist rules or to the inclusion of the season word. Haiku was not an art but a spiritual activity. "Creating haiku was his samadhi, a transcendent state of total absorption in his surroundings" (Stevens 25). One can imagine that with such a view of haiku, Santōka was perhaps more interested in the act of composition than he was in whether anyone read his work. He would give his poems to Seisensui for publication, but he also seems to have felt at times, as Bashō did as well, that his attachment to haiku was a hindrance to his Zen practice: "Occasionally he felt too attached to his journals; then he would burn them or throw them away" (Stevens 19).

Santōka never overcame his alcoholism, and many of his haiku concern his love of sake. Since he wrote of those things he experienced during his wanderings, he has many poems on roadside weeds, his begging bowl, and rain. Because of the excellent collection of his poems translated into English by John Stevens and published as Mountain Tasting: Zen Haiku by Santōka, Santōka is perhaps better known and more influential in the West than any haiku poet since Shiki. The following are a few poems from Stevens' collection:

Wet with morning dew,
I go in the direction I want.

Silently, I put on
Today's straw sandals.

My begging bowl
Accepts the fallen leaves.

Hailstones, too,
Enter my begging bowl.

Slightly tipsy;
The leaves fall
One by one.

Urinating
I look down
On the sleeping village.
(Spring planting:)
Farmers and oxen
Both covered with sweat.

When I die:
Weeds, falling rain.  (trans. Stevens)

Another Zen beggar poet of the Seisensui school was Ozaki Hōsai (1885-1926). At the age of 38 Hōsai left his wife, children, and a good job to live alone, begging and doing odd jobs at various temples. Like Santōka, he too suffered from alcoholism. It should be no surprise to note that Hōsai paid no attention to the traditional formal rules of haiku. Though Ueda suggests that his poems were direct observations, “without moral implications” (Modern Japanese Haiku 10), it is easy enough to read a concern with spiritual issues, especially the problem of death, in his work. For instance, his poem about the crematorium chimney,

At a crematorium
I look high up
toward the chimney’s
immensity.

could, imagistically, be about the chimney at any factory; his choice of the crematorium is probably the result of more than a chance observation. Shortly after settling into a hut in 1926 he developed tuberculosis and died. The following are a sample of his poems:

the misstruck nail
bent its neck  (trans. Higginson)

Trying to cast away
a slanderous heart
I shell beans.

To the back of a tombstone
I go round.

An ailing person
watches
a flower
being cut.  (trans. Ueda)

All day long
I don’t say a word:
A butterfly casts its shadow.  (trans. Keene)

Concluding Remarks

Where it seemed most relevant in the preceding discussion I have attempted to point out connections between the poetic theory of Japanese haiku poets and the theory of the American transcendentalists. Those traits that seem most closely to correlate include: 1) a belief in the interfusion of the self with external nature, seeking to resolve the subject/object dichotomy and to return us to an awareness of the true self that we share with all other things; 2) an understanding that in order to achieve such an interfusion we need to efface the ego-self and to reject preconceptions and received beliefs; 3) a recognition that for most of us such an interfusion occurs in fragmentary moments of perception; 4) an awareness that the present moment, and the present place, are the right time and the right place to achieve such a perception. Though some haiku poets emphasized the “subjective” side of the experience, and others the “objective,” it seems to me that they did so ultimately not to promote the superiority of one aspect over the other, but rather in order to attain a balance between the two. Those poets who promoted “objectivity” did so because they felt the subjectivity of the ego-self had become too prominent. Those poets who promoted “subjectivity” did so because they felt the subjective experience of the self was being neglected. Buddhism proposes that the universe is neither entirely mind nor entirely matter, neither subjective nor objective, but rather a mutual arising and interpenetration of the two. Haiku can be seen as an attempt to maintain a balance between these two sides of phenomena. Because humans tend to view the world from their own subjective viewpoint, haiku, as well as Zen, has, as a counter gesture, emphasized the “objective” approach. This is especially true of haiku in the West, since most Western haiku poets have felt that their own tradition was entirely too ego-oriented and subjective.

I would like to turn next to an examination of how haiku has developed in North America, and how some of these characteristics of the genre have evolved and become incorporated into the tradition of North American poetry.
CHAPTER V

NORTH AMERICAN HAIKU

Moderns, Beats, and Others

The influence of haiku on the development of modern English language poetry has been fairly well documented. During the years just preceding the First World War the Poet's Club, including T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint and, most notably, Ezra Pound, was holding regular meetings in London in order to explore new forms of poetry. In his "History of Imagism," F. S. Flint acknowledged the influence of haiku on these writers: "We proposed at times to replace [conventional verse] by pure vers libre; by the Japanese tanka and haiku" (qtd. in Miner, "Pound" 573). (Rather ironically, as we have seen, haiku poets in Japan at this same time were revitalizing haiku by replacing their conventional form with something they termed vers libre haiku.) What these Western poets seem to have found appealing about haiku was the conciseness and suggestiveness of its imagery and its lack of overt commentary or explicit logic.

If most students and scholars of American literature know of any one haiku written by an American, it is likely to be Ezra Pound's "hokku-like" poem "In a Station of the Metro":

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals, on a wet, black bough.

In explaining how he came to write such a poem, Pound recalled two Japanese haiku with which he had recently become acquainted:

The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:
A butterfly.
(Anonymous Japanese Naval Officer)

The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:
(are like) plum-blossoms. (88-89)
(Unattributed by Pound but composed by Moritake)

Pound declared that "in a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (89). Though Pound was apparently unfamiliar with Japanese theory of haiku composition, such a statement is similar to Bashô's idea of hokomi. It also indicates that in some respects Pound's theory of imagism is related to the sort of poetry advocated by Emerson and Whitman, poetry that records the moment when the barriers between the self and the external world are transcended, though for Pound such a moment was aesthetically rather than spiritually charged.

Hyatt Waggoner chooses to emphasize the difference rather than the similarity between Pound's theory and the similar theory of poetry as expressed by Emerson, Whitman, and the Japanese haiku poets:

The haiku in its mature form after Bashô, rests upon and implies Zen Buddhism. Its images are not conceived as presenting a "complex," in Pound's . . . sense, in which a "thing" external to the self starts an involuntary "chain" of subjective associations. Instead, the "things" cease to be objects out there and become a part of the self--as in Whitman at his best, as in Emerson by intention--until the distinction between thing and self disappears and a sense of the unity of all being comes in its place. (350)

John Gage suggests that the objectivity of imagism was a rhetorical strategy designed to more effectively recreate for the reader the subjectivity of the poet's experience. If the imagist poem is, as Pound says, one in which the poet "is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" then, Gage says,

the poetry of the image was an adoption of the outward point of view . . . in order that it might faithfully record this instant of transformation to the inward. Imagism was quite clearly a poetry of the self, but of the self through things rather than through concepts. It was meant to deal, in other words, with the way in which the mind subjectifies reality, and it sought to do so by maintaining a strictly objective point of view in the treatment of subjective experience. (133)

Since the imagist poets did not share the Emersonian and Buddhist idea of the one self unifying all separate ego selves, I think this assessment is accurate and illustrative of one of the differences between imagism and haiku. In general the Emersonian poet and the haiku poet are interested in describing how the ego self (the poet) is related to and often unified with the one self (as manifest primarily in nature). On the other hand, the imagist poet is interested in describing how the mind of the poet's ego self can use natural images to describe itself.

Based in part on his experience with haiku, Pound developed his idea of super-position, in which "one idea is set on top of another" (89). After his acquisition of the Chinese manuscripts of Ernest Fenellosa, Pound transformed this super-pository technique into the ideogramatic method, which enabled him to compose longer poems based on this principle, including that longest of modern poems, The Cantos.

Two other major poets of the modern period who have written poetry similar to haiku are Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. Neither of these poets, however, acknowledges much awareness of haiku. The fact that these poets wrote remarkably haiku-like poems with little or no direct knowledge of haiku lends some credence to my earlier suggestion that, given the tendencies of transcendentalism, American poets were likely develop a form of poetry akin to haiku regardless of whether or not American poets were directly influenced by the genre.

J. Hillis Miller's exploration of the work of these two poets touches on several areas that link their work to haiku, though he never mentions haiku and doesn't seem to be aware of the connection between the poetic theories of these American modernists and the Japanese haiku poets. Using Wallace Stevens' phrase "barefoot into reality" from the poem "Large Red Man Reading," Miller remarks:
To walk barefoot into reality means abandoning the independence of the ego. Instead of making everything an object for the self, the mind must efface itself before reality, or plunge into the density of an exterior world, dispersing itself in a milieu which exceeds it and which it has not made. The effacement of the ego before reality means abandoning the will to power over things. This is the most difficult of acts for a modern man to perform. It goes counter to all the penchants of our culture. (7-8)

Miller goes on to describe a new spiritual force in modernist poetry in a way that indicates a metaphysical similarity between these modernist poets and both Buddhism and the immanentist aspects of the Emmanietian tradition:

If any spiritual power can exist for the new poetry it must be an immanent presence. There can be for many writers no return to the traditional conception of God as the highest existence, creator of all other existences, transcending his creation as well as dwelling within it. If there is to be a God in the new world it must be a presence within things and not beyond them. The new poets have at the farthest limit of their experience caught a glimpse of a fugitive presence, something shared by all things in the fact that they are. (9-10)

Miller suggests further connections between modernist poetry and the Edenic-Zen tradition. After redefining the phrase "immediate idea" to mean "direct sense image," Miller explains Stevens' use of the imagination:

Imagination is ultimately the power of decreation, the power to burn to ash everything not the immediate idea [direct sense image] of the thing. When this is successful imagination and reality become one, and for a moment the world is seen as it appeared to Adam before he began naming it. (249)

Stevens' poem "Sunday Morning" can be seen in part as an elaboration of a metaphysics of divine immanence quite similar to the metaphysics of Buddhism and transcendentalism:

What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul. (sec. 2; 17-30)

Stevens' extremely haiku-like poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" can be seen in part as a more concrete manifestation of the metaphysical theory described in "Sunday Morning":

I.
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

XII.
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII.
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

In his discussion of William Carlos Williams, Miller indicates that Williams shared with even greater certainty this metaphysical position elaborated by Stevens: 'The celebrated slogan, 'No ideas but in things,' is a shorthand expression of the identification of mind and universe presupposed in Williams' work" (291). Miller claims that in his poetry Williams "establishes a self beyond personality, a self coextensive with the universe. Words, things, people, and God vanish as separate entities and everything becomes a unit" (291). With his poetry based on a metaphysical premise so similar to the premise of haiku it is not surprising that Williams composed such a remarkably haiku-like poem as "The Red Wheelbarrow":

so much depends
upon
a red
wheelbarrow
glazed with rain
Though writing very haiku-like poetry, neither Stevens nor Williams were more than cursorily familiar with the Japanese haiku tradition. During the early decades of the twentieth century little material had been published in the West on haiku. The end of the Second World War, however, provoked an outpouring of interest in Japanese culture.

Immediately after the dust had settled from the war, several of the most important books yet to be written in English on haiku were published. The first volume of R. H. Blyth's four-volume *Haiku* appeared in 1949. Blyth's conception of haiku as primarily a Zen art has remained influential, though controversial. *A Pepper Pod* was published in 1947 and *The Japanese Haiku* in 1957. Blyth's work in particular emphasized the Zen elements in haiku. Additionally, D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts were publishing books on Zen that included discussions of haiku as a Zen art form. Therefore, unlike the previous period of interest in haiku at the beginning of the century, the poets of the fifties were fully aware of the spiritual context of the genre. Indeed most of the poets who wrote haiku in the fifties did so precisely because they saw it as a Zen art.

Many of the poets of the Beat school, most notably Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Snyder, tried their hand at the form. Of these Kerouac was the most successful. In an interview in *The Paris Review* in 1966 Allen Ginsberg commented on Kerouac's facility with the form. Kerouac, he says,

> has the one sign of being a great poet, which is he's the only one in the United States who knows how to write haikus. [sic: the Beats pluralized the word haiku.] The only one who's written any good haikus. And everybody's been writing haikus. There are all these dry haikus written by people who think for weeks trying to write a haiku, and finally come up with some dull little thing or something. Whereas Kerouac thinks in haiku, every time he writes anything--talks that way and thinks that way. So it's just natural for him. It's something Snyder noticed. Snyder has to labor for years in a Zen monastery to produce one haiku about shitting off a log! And actually does get one or two good ones. Snyder was always astounded by Kerouac's facility . . . at noticing winter flies dying of old age in his medicine chest. (52-53)

Ginsberg's last statement is a reference to what is regarded as one of Kerouac's finest haiku:

> In my medicine cabinet,  
> the winter fly  
> has died of old age.

This poem typifies some of the best of American haiku. It records a specific moment, that is, when the poet slides the medicine cabinet door open and discovers the dead fly. In it's melancholy tone regarding the passage of time, it evokes the trait of *sabi*, so important to Japanese haiku. By placing the fly in the medicine cabinet, the poem also links the poet's self to the fly's being in a manner reminiscent of Bashô's *hosomi*; the medicine cabinet suggests the poet's own mortality shared with the fly. The sliding medicine cabinet momentarily eliminates the distinction between subject and object, an effect further compounded if one imagines a mirror on the front of the cabinet door whereby the poet's reflected image is replaced by an image of the deceased fly.

For Kerouac, *sabi* was the primary emotion of haiku. This suggests why his linkage of haiku with the blues in such works as "Blues and Haikus" is so effective. The blues, like *sabi*, evoke an existential loneliness.

In the most in-depth study to date of Kerouac's haiku, Barbara Ungar suggests possible reasons for Kerouac's interest in Buddhism and haiku: "His Buddhism was largely an attempt to come to peace with the life described in his prose: his haiku express his attempts to transcend it." Unfortunately, as Ungar suggests, "they were not enough. Kerouac turned more and more to drinking" (22). She later concludes that:

> His haiku were meant to express that part of him which wanted to escape that age, which wanted to find release from the eternal coming and going in some kind of Buddhist repose. His haiku describe the rare moments when Kerouac found inner peace, when he stopped running long enough to look and feel deeply the nature of this tragic, fleeting world. But his peace never lasted, his enlightenment never came, and haiku remained a secondary art form to him. (32)

In spite of Ginsberg's claim that Kerouac composed haiku spontaneously, Kerouac actually seems to have spent a great deal of effort on his haiku. As Kerouac himself told the *Paris Review*:

> Haiku is best reworked and revised. I know, I tried. It has to be completely economical, no foliage and flowers and language rhythm, it has to be a simple little picture in three little lines. At least that's the way the old masters did it, spending months on three little lines and coming up say, with:

> In the abandoned boat  
> the hail  
> bounces about.

> That's Shiki. (65)

Ginsberg seems to have preferred the image of Kerouac spontaneously writing his poems, but Kerouac realized that though spontaneity has its place in haiku, so does discipline.

Kerouac included 29 haiku in his *Scattered Poems*. Among the best are:
Birds singing
in the dark
--Rainy dawn.

Evening coming--
the office girl
Unloosing her scarf.

Useless, useless,
the heavy rain
Driving into the sea.

Probably no major American poet has been more influenced by Asian poetics in general, and haiku in particular, than Gary Snyder. Occasional haiku can be found scattered throughout his work, but his most sustained selection is the "Hitch Haiku" sequence in *The Back Country*, a book that opens with an epigram from Bashō. The first poem in the sequence, and one of his best, suggests some of the features of his haiku:

They didn't hire him
so he ate his lunch alone:
the noon whistle

Like Kerouac's "medicine cabinet," this poem contains a precise moment: when the worker's lunch whistle sounds. It also evokes *sabi* in the loneliness of the unemployed worker whose economic poverty is compounded by the social poverty of his isolation from the comaraderie of lunching with his fellow workers. Snyder's own experience as a laborer (he's usually not recognized as one of America's great working class poets) contributes a distinctive effect to the poem and also illustrates the idea that haiku moments can be discovered in any aspect of life's experiences, if we are alert enough. Although Snyder has published only a few haiku, many of his poems, in the direct presentation of images, in the juxtaposition of image components, in the concision of his language, and in his avoidance of subjective terms, reveals the influence of Chinese Taoist and Japanese Zen poetry, including haiku.

About the same time that Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Snyder were experimenting with haiku in the United States, another American writer, Richard Wright, was writing haiku in France during the last years of his life. Wright is almost exclusively known as a novelist who wrote a few poems. It is less well known that during the last few years of his life he wrote more than 4,000 haiku. While sick and bed-ridden in Paris in 1959, Wright obtained a copy of R. H. Blyth's recently published four-volume *Haiku* and, according to Michel Fabré, "discovered in it something he had been unconsciously seeking to ease his mind" (Fabré 158).

Wright wrote to Margrit de Sablonier that "During my illness I experimented with the Japanese form of poetry called haiku; I wrote some 4,000 of them and am now sifting them to see if they are any good" (Fabré 159). Wright arranged his poems seasonally, no doubt under the influence of Blyth's arrangement in his collection. He continued working on his haiku throughout 1960 and by November had prepared 800 of them for publication in a volume entitled *This Other World*.

The title of the collection provides a clue to Wright's attitude towards his haiku. For most of his life Wright was involved in radical politics, promoting socialist and Black liberationist causes. Most of his published work reveals this aspect of his personality. This engagement with struggle, however, may not have permitted him to develop other aspects of his personality and writing talents. Robert Tener comments on this:

For Wright, the act of writing haiku must have been equivalent to finding a new, powerful way to express what he had felt and yearned for all his life, a belief in the unity and harmony of all things, the sense that man and nature are one and that the point of knowledge is to abolish the division between them. In studying haiku, he surely must have identified those yearnings with some of the Taoist and Zen ideas that permeate the works of the great haiku writers. (273-74)

Since Blyth's collection is introduced with a lengthy discussion of the role of Taoist and Zen philosophies in haiku, it is certain Wright would have been aware of these aspects of the genre.

Some of Wright's best published haiku from the *Richard Wright Reader* include:

The spring lingers on
In the scent of a damp log
Rotten in the sun.

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

I am nobody
A red sinking sun
Took my name away.

Just enough of rain
To bring the smell of silk
From the umbrellas.
In the falling snow
A laughing boy holds out his palms
Until they are white.

In addition to these writers, many other well known poets have written at least a few haiku or haiku related poems. Among the most notable include John Ashberry's in *A Wave* (1981), and W. S. Merwin in *Finding the Islands* (1982).

In a study of the transition from modern poetry to contemporary poetry, James Breslin analyzes 5 major schools: the Beats (Ferlinghetti, Whalen, Snyder, Ginsberg, Wakowski, Kerouac), the Confessional school (Lowell, Berryman, Snodgrass, Sexton, Plath), the Black Mountain/projective verse (Olson, Creeley, Duncan, Levertov), the Deep Image (Bly, Wright, Simpson, Stafford), and the New York School (O'Hara, Ashberry, Koch). He summarizes the shared traits of these diverse schools that sounds a statement of haiku aesthetics: These schools, he says, share "A poetic imagination willing to acknowledge an immediate external reality that remains stubbornly other. So poetry came to ground itself in a sharply observed physical present. . . . Poetic authority was located not in the cultural tradition but in the literal culture of a physical moment. . . ."

Not surprisingly, a large number of current poets who are not haiku poets (Bly, Snyder, Ginsberg, Merwin, Ashberry, Hass), have nevertheless written some haiku, or haiku-like poems, and have made serious study of the Japanese haiku tradition while apparently remaining largely ignorant of the work of the majority of North American haiku poets.

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Haiku Magazines and the Evolution of North American Haiku

Though many poets who established their reputations in other genres have written haiku, haiku composition and the development of a North American version of the genre have largely been the tasks of unknown writers publishing in obscure literary magazines. Whether or not haiku in North America would become a legitimate art was largely dependent on the talents of the poets submitting to these magazines and on the wisdom of the editors in developing appropriate criteria for the selection of poems for publication.

One of the first questions the editors of these haiku publications had to answer was which of the many submissions that tumbled from their mailboxes ought to be published in a magazine of haiku—that is, what constitutes a worthwhile haiku written in English in North America during the late twentieth century anyhow? This question has yet to be answered to everyone's satisfaction, but a study of the tentative gropings toward an answer can help us understand what answers are plausible, and perhaps even more usefully, why no definitive answer may be possible, or even desirable.

In 1963 the first literary magazine devoted solely to English language haiku, *American Haiku*, began publishing under the editorship of James Bull and Donald Eulert. Almost immediately the question emerged of what a magazine so titled ought to publish. Although the work in its first issues was quite free-form (Higginson, *Haiku* 66-67), when the editorship was turned over to Clement Hoyt it began to publish almost exclusively haiku in the 5-7-5 form. As Hoyt says, "I was rejecting everything sent to me" (145). Hoyt felt that most of the poems he initially received were not haiku because they failed to approximate the 5-7-5 form. After berating poets to that effect, he says, he was suddenly inundated with "mordantly rigid" 5-7-5 verses that resembled haiku only in form (145). Hoyt finally devised the following definition of haiku to explain to poets who were submitting to his magazine what he was seeking:

A haiku is a poem having a quality of "openness" from beginning to end that contains a seasonal inference, its content restricted to any one of five areas—grace or universal (not personal), solitariness, the universally subjective, an easy austerity or elegance (not beauty); the poem's content balance maintained by two significantly differing images, that evoke intuitively (not intellectually) an aesthetic effect beyond poem and poet; the content balance reflected structurally by the balance of seventeen syllables in three lines of five, seven and five syllables respectively or their equivalents in line durations (time qualities) as read or spoken. (149)

In the early sixties almost the only haiku known in the West were the classical works by, or modelled after, the haiku of Bashō and Buson, so it is natural that Hoyt's definition describes such haiku reasonably well. It is worth noting, however, that although the Beat poets of a few years before had been influenced by the same traditional Japanese haiku, they did not feel it necessary to conform to the classical norm of the genre in either structure or content, but instead sought to embody what they saw as its spontaneous or playful insights. In spite of the fact that these early practitioners in the West wrote haiku more in line with modern rather Japanese than with classical haiku, the need for a "work movement" as it was carried forth in the little magazines was to consider specific form and content as necessary, albeit insufficient, characteristics of the genre.

Perhaps an additional influence on this tendency was the fact that although R. H. Blyth's recently published two-volume *History of Haiku* (1962) contained some of the first readily accessible examples of haiku by modern Japanese poets to be translated into English, his disparaging attitude toward these poets probably mitigated against acceptance of their innovations by poets in the West. One suspects that many of the haiku written in Japan during the 20th century would have failed to gain a sympathetic reading at *American Haiku*. I can imagine that translations of haiku by Santōka or Ippekirô would have been summarily returned by Hoyt to their authors with a rejection slip reading, "Sorry, not haiku." I don't wish to be harsh on the efforts of Hoyt and others, however. The perspective granted by a quarter of a century of hindsight can magnify their weaknesses, and they did in fact publish many excellent poems in *American Haiku*, including pioneering works by O. Southard (often under the pseudonyms Mabellson Norway or O. Mabson), Robert Spiess, and Nicholas Virgilio.

O. Southard was extremely active during the sixties and early seventies. He stopped writing haiku in the late seventies and is apparently no longer an active poet. Many of his poems were eventually collected and published by American Haiku Press in 1967 as *Marsh Grasses*. His work was influential on many poets during the early years of haiku in America. His poems conform perfectly to Hoyt's definition and are typical of some of the better examples of the genre at that time: they are 5-7-5 in structure; they contain a break across which two images are juxtaposed; the relation between these two images is usually recognized intuitively rather than intellectually-- that is, the relationship is non-metaphoric; they are concerned almost exclusively with nature in a manner conforming to Hoyt's five areas. More in tune with the Buson than the Bashō tradition, his haiku are often very "poetic" in their diction and frequently inverted syntax. Unfortunately, his conformity to the 5-7-5 pattern forces him at times to pad his poems, as a line such as "and there in the greying east" in one of the following poems indicates:

A pattern of rain...
The lily-pad undulates
on widening rings.
Deep chanting of frogs...  
In among dark lily-pads  
a twinkle of stars.

Snow no longer falls;  
left in the sky, this morning--  
a scatter of stars.

Westward bends the grass--  
and there in the greying east  
the tip of the moon.

The old rooster crows--  
out of the mist come the rocks  
and the twisted pine.

Though some of his poems have been read symbolically (e.g., Tico), Southard expresses a disdain for symbolic readings. In a letter to Helen Chenoweth published in Haiku West in July 1971 he says, "The words of poetry mean things. But for me poetic symbols are merely verbal; the things meant do not mean other things. In the glare of academic symbolism, the subtle inner light that a verse may throw is surely lost . . ." (7). In this statement we can detect Southard's immanentist poetics. Like Thoreau's speculation in A Week that "Nature, rightly read, [is] that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely," Southard implies that nature, both in its own domain as well as in his haiku, is the source of its own significance. Another poet whose work is typical of the best haiku in the early magazines is Robert Spiess. Spiess' haiku were eventually collected and published as The Heron's Legs in 1966 and The Turtle's Ears in 1971. Spiess' simple nature haiku merge the Japanese tradition with the landscape of his Wisconsin wetlands. Like Southard, he conforms to the classical norm in his 5-7-5 pattern, his juxtaposition of images, his objectivity, and his concern with nature. His diction is usually less "poetic" than Southard's. In The Turtle's Ears he acknowledged his indebtedness to the transcendentalist tradition in American literature by beginning the book with a quotation from the eminently quotable Thoreau: "In relation to the river, I find my natural rights least infringed on."

The following are a few of the best poems from The Turtle's Ears:

Blue jays in the pines;  
the northern river's ledges  
cased with melting ice

A great blue heron--  
the river's other bank  
white with trillium

Muttering thunder . . .  
the bottom of the river  
scattered with clams

In 1972 Spiess published a collection that has been relatively neglected but which I think will be seen as increasingly important in years to come--Five Caribbean Haibun. This set of haibun recounts a vacation stay on five different Caribbean islands. Few good haibun have been written in North America, and these remain among the best of that small lot. In this book, as in The Turtle's Ears, Spiess connects himself to transcendentalism by interspersing numerous quotations from Thoreau's writings among his own descriptions.

Not only does Spiess share with Thoreau a love of boating and excursions, but his attitude towards the creative process is similar. Beginning in the late seventies, Spiess has published in Modern Haiku a series of comments on haiku entitled "Speculations." Many of these comments echo, and a fair number even quote from, the transcendentalists. For example:

99. The haiku poet has no interest in seeing how a stream is something else than flowing water, or a deer other than its deer-nature. Rather, the poet wants to non-intellectually apperceive how they are even thus much. (Prompted in part by a passage of Thoreau's.)

141. Haiku poets can appreciate Emerson's insight: "The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common."

159. Haiku return us from our too sickly abstractions to the original concrete.

217. Thoreau's words in his Journal (December 5, 1856) might well apply to the haiku poet: "My themes shall not be far-fetched. I will tell of homely every-day phenomena and adventures."

226. To a considerable extent these words of Thoreau have relevance for the haiku poet: "It is only necessary to behold the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance. . . . To perceive freshly, with fresh senses, is to be inspired.
Haiku poets should give full consideration to Thoreau's observation: "How much is written about Nature as somebody has portrayed her, how little about Nature as she is, and chiefly concerns us."

He also has several "speculations" directly related to the Edenic aspect of American literature, for example:

Haiku allow us to perceive that a new world is born afresh at every instant. With each haiku moment the poet (and reader) is Adam become aware of the manifestations of creation for the very first time and giving names to them.

Spiess eventually collected, edited, and augmented these "speculations" and in 1988 issued New and Selected Speculations on Haiku.

In 1982 Spiess published The Shape of the Water, a collection of haiku and other poems that further recount his canoeing explorations of Wisconsin's rivers. This collection was followed in 1986 by The Bold Silverfish and Tall River Junction. Though issued in one volume, these are in fact two separate works. The Bold Silverfish is again haiku, but Tall River Junction is a series of rhymed senryu character sketches in the spirit of Clement Hoyt's County Seat and in the same tradition as Masters' Spoon River Anthology or some of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poems:

Calvin Thomas, Barber

"... and just a smidgen
off the top?" ... while splitting hairs
about religion

Marcella McDermott, Beautician

The present shall pass,
and you can see it going
--in the looking glass

In these poems Spiess captures the essence of the senryu tradition— wryly witty comments on human nature, a nature that we might infer is not so different in twentieth-century Wisconsin from what it was in eighteenth-century Edo. As we would suspect of a writer in the more classical mode, the distinction between Spiess' haiku and his senryu is always clear. His use of rhyme emphasizes both the cleverness and the closed nature of the senryu genre.

Another poet whose work appeared in the early editions of American Haiku was Nicholas Virgilio. Several of Virgilio's early poems were extremely influential, in particular this one, written in 1962 and called by Cor van den Heuvel "one of the most praised and discussed haiku written in this country" (qtd. in Avery):

Lily:
out of the water . . .
out of itself.

Unlike most of Virgilio's haiku this one is not in the 5-7-5 form. Both this free form and its simplicity account for some of its influence. Its relatively overt nature mysticism is also no doubt a factor in its popularity. Furthermore, perhaps as clearly as any poem can, this one illustrates the immanentist character of the natural world as seen in haiku. In this haiku the lily is revealed as a self-defining, self-sanctifying blossom. As Alison Kirby Record indicates, however, this poem is "basically an intellectualized elaboration about the lily" rather than an objective evocation of the lily itself" (99).

Virgilio professes the ideal that "I like to think I'm a grown-up child who survived my education and can still view the world with relatively uncorrupted eyes" (Avery). And similarly, he feels he is like "the baby that comes out of the belly and looks around, soaking everything in. Now. Recording everything with no thought. Now. Now" (Petsonk). This ideal is reminiscent of the Edenic-Zen conjunction of the transcendentalists. In spite of this ideal, however, Virgilio is far from so innocent, and his vision of the world was indelibly tainted by the death of his brother in the Vietnam War. Following that tragedy his poems took on a distinctly somber, elegiac tone:

In memory of Lawrence J. Virgilio

deep in rank grass
through a bullet-riddled helmet:
an unknown flower
telegram in hand,
the shadow of the marine
darkens our screen door

At its best this elegiac tendency can be very moving. One of my favorites of his is:

into the blinding sun . . .
the funeral procession's
glaring headlights

Even his poems not overtly concerned with death reverberate with mysteriously haunting overtones:

autumn twilight:
the wreath on the door
lifts in the wind
Virgilio lived in Camden, New Jersey and was founder and resident poet for many years at the Walt Whitman International Poetry Center. He is pictured on the cover of his *Selected Haiku* peering into Whitman's mausoleum. All of this has naturally led to comparisons of his work to Whitman's. Such comparisons, though in my opinion somewhat misleading, are not entirely spurious. Like Whitman, Virgilio has a deep empathy for the lives of others, especially for the lives of society's outcasts:

raising their voices
discussing Reaganomics:
hookers on the bus

between tricks knitting booties

Unlike Whitman, however, Virgilio, at least in his haiku if not in his life, seems to succumb to the "usual mistake" Whitman warned against, the great danger facing the hyper-sensitive person, despair. While Whitman could look on death and find it "different from what anyone supposed, and luckier" (1: 8; 130), Virgilio seems always entranced by its finality. Whitman can convincingly transcend his little dyings and troop forth from them replenished; I'm not sure the same can be said of Virgilio:

the sack of kittens
sinking in the icy creek
increases the cold

In his introduction to Virgilio's *Selected Haiku*, Rod Willmot asserts that, "In Nick Virgilio's poems I hear the same 'barbaric yawp' that Whitman sounded over the rooftops of the world" (10). I think, however, that such a "yawp" emanates not so audibly from Virgilio's poems as it does from his life. Virgilio was an iconoclast. Much of his adult life was spent caring for his bed-ridden mother, living off meager social security checks, and banging out haiku in his basement on an antique typewriter. He describes himself as "one of these guys outside the system, . . . Threadbare clothes, scuffling for work" (Petsonk). Virgilio probably committed his life as fully to the writing of haiku as has any other poet in North America. And thanks in part to reviews of his *Selected Haiku* on National Public Radio, he is probably the best known North American haiku poet. Like Whitman, he was a tireless advocate for his own poetry, and could be found in the public parks of Camden reading to an audience of two or three people (Avery). Nevertheless, Virgilio himself disdained comparison with Whitman. He told a reporter for New Jersey Magazine, "don't compare me with Whitman. I couldn't even shine his shoes. The man was a visionary" (Avery).

Nick Virgilio died on January 3, 1989. Although his influence on the haiku community waned in the later years of his life, I suspect that the republication of *Selected Haiku* will go a long way to establishing his reputation as an important figure in the history of haiku--and of poetry--in America. Though his haiku are generally traditional in form ("lily" and "between tricks" are obvious exceptions), their content is often innovative, and Virgilio's most important contribution to haiku in America may well have been his participation in the expansion of the haiku domain beyond the objectively described natural world.

After launching the careers of these important poets, as well as others, *American Haiku* folded shop in 1968, having published 10 issues.

Not all activity connected with haiku in the early sixties was centered around *American Haiku*. In 1964, the year following the first publication of *American Haiku*, Japan Air Lines sponsored a contest for American haiku poets. More than 41,000 poems were submitted. The winning poem was by J. W. Hackett:

A bitter morning:
Sparrows sitting together
Without any necks.

Hackett's poems were subsequently collected in four volumes and published in 1968 by Japan Publications as *Haiku Poetry*. These volumes were reissued with additional poems in 1983 by Kodansha Publications as *The Zen Haiku and Other Zen Poems of J. W. Hackett*.

In the preface to his first edition Hackett states:

Of all poetry, haiku is the one which best holds a mirror up to nature. It can reveal, with seeming artlessness, the significance of the commonplace. Haiku does not seek to captivate with art, but to stimulate writer and reader alike to the natural wonders which surround us. Ultimately however, haiku do more than reflect the world as it is; they lead us to discover our essential identity with all things.

If this statement doesn't reveal his sense of connection to the transcendentalist tradition, his dedication of the book to, among others, "those kindred spirits Thoreau and Bashô," should make that link clear.

In spite of his awareness of the tradition, however, and in spite of the prominently displayed praise of his work on the book's cover by such notables as Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, R. H. Blyth, Harold Henderson, Thomas Merton, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Jack Kerouac, the quality of his poems is generally mediocre:

This giant redwood
curved through centuries, and then
grew true to the sun.

My bird just listens
to most music, but whistles
and sings with Mozart.

Even his best known poems are rather unsatisfying. For example:
Searching on the wind,  
the hawk's cry  
is the shape of its beak.

This poem seems to rely for its effect largely on a metaphoric linking of the shape of the beak and the sound of the cry. And one wonders if the cry is in fact searching on the wind.  

His tendency to moralize is also intrusive, as in:

In this empty web,  
left by a will to be free:  
a pair of small wings.

How much better this poem would be without the second line.  

Though the "hawk's cry" is an exception, most of Hackett's haiku, like those of Southard, Spiess, and Virgilio, are written in the classic 5-7-5 pattern and, like the haiku of Southard and Spiess, his are concerned almost exclusively with nature.  

In addition to American Haiku another early magazine was Haiku Highlights, begun in 1965 by Jean Calkins. This magazine published many other short forms of poetry as well as haiku. In 1972 Haiku Highlights changed both its name and its editor, and became Dragonfly, published in Portland, Oregon by Lorraine Ellis Harr. Like Hoyt, Harr found herself the recipient of many submissions that she felt were not haiku. Consequently, she published a list in the first issue she edited, which she later sent out as an informational rejection slip, describing not what haiku is, but, reminiscent of Pound's stance when he published "Some Don'ts for an Imagist," what it isn't.  

Such a list was, not surprisingly, not always well received when it arrived with a rejection notice, and the "Isn'ts" have been ridiculed by some poets as authoritarian and restrictive. Harr defends her "Isn'ts," and laments the "no-hold-barred, anything-goes kind of free verse [that] has been called a liberation of haiku, but . . . seems more of a refusal to honor the past, or give credit to the influences which shaped haiku in the land of its birth" ("Dragonfly" 41). Though Harr admits that haiku need not conform rigidly to the 5-7-5 form, most of the work published in Dragonfly approximates this pattern.  

As an adjunct to Dragonfly, Harr established the Western World Haiku Society in 1974 as a forum for poets who shared her relatively conservative attitude toward haiku. Harr gave up editorship of Dragonfly in 1985, turning it over to the joint editorship of Richard Tice and Jack Lyon.  

Interest in English language haiku has by no means been confined to the United States. In 1967 Eric Amann started Haiku, published in Toronto (later renamed Haiku Magazine when its editorship was transferred to William Higginson in New Jersey). Amann stressed the Zen influence on haiku. He articulated his philosophy and aesthetics in an influential analysis of haiku, The Wordless Poem: A Study of Zen in Haiku. In this book Amann argues that:  

Unlike most other types of poetry, haiku is not concerned with expressing Truth or Beauty or any other type of idea, concept or symbol; it has no deep or esoteric meaning; it deals entirely with the here-and-now, with nature, with intuition arising from immediate sense experience, with the ordinary sights and sounds of this world. (3)  

He continues by suggesting that such a poetry puts a burden on the reader that we in the West are not used to hefting:  

The problem for the Western reader, therefore, is not to find the hidden meaning, the "symbolic significance" of a haiku, for there is none, but to re-convert the images of a haiku into his own intuitions. . . . We must empty our minds of all pre-conceived ideas and re-experience what the poet saw or heard or felt. (3)  

Amann concludes that:  

A haiku is more than a "form" of poetry. . . . A haiku is . . . a manifestation of Zen and hence the expression of a particular state of consciousness. . . . Each haiku is like the reply of a Zen master to a beginner's question about the meaning of life. And the answers . . . are everywhere. (3-4)  

Amann identifies several characteristics of haiku that reflect this Zen consciousness, the most important for him is "wordlessness," by which he means haiku "that appear totally without contrivance, effortless and artless as nature herself" (6). He justifies this technique by arguing that the whole purpose of "wordlessness" and "direct pointing" as it is found in haiku and Zen  

is to avoid . . . confusion between words and realities and the consequent illusion of the separateness of things. Like the Buddha, who gave the first example of "wordless poetry" when one day he astonished his disciples by holding up a flower without uttering a single word, so the haiku poet holds up something for the reader without a single unnecessary word, without comment, without explanation, without placing any obstacles between the reader and thing itself. (8)  

Such a conception seems similar to that expressed by Thoreau at the opening of the "Sounds" chapter of Walden where he warns that "while we are confined to books . . . we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor . . ." (243). Amman seems to be suggesting that haiku as exhibited in the Zen school attempts to be a poetry which, to the maximum degree possible, minimizes this danger. From the Zen perspective, the reason haiku should be "wordless" is because its goal is to convey as directly as possible the poet's insight into and sensations of the world. This goal is expressed by Amann as "suchness." As he suggests, such a goal is difficult for the Western poet to achieve:  

For the Western poet writing haiku, this need to show things "just as they are," to keep the mind like "an unclouded mirror" presents many difficulties, mainly because our customary Western poetic process demands the exact opposite. In the West the original poetic experience plus the poet's intellectual and emotional reactions equal the finished poem. But in haiku the original experience minus the poet's personal reaction equals the finished haiku. (12)  

In order for haiku poets to write such a poetry, Amann argues that they should avoid simile, metaphor, personification, and symbolism, since all of these tropes exist in the poet's imagination rather than in the natural world (13).
The poet's search for the "suchness" of things can also determine what is appropriate subject matter for haiku. The haiku poet, Amann, suggests, should not search out the rare or sublime, but rather seek the "apparently trivial, the most ordinary, everyday moments of life" (16). He argues that "The haiku poet does not seek out the rare and precious moments of life, he does not go in pursuit of the True and Beautiful, he does not discover God in a grain of sand, but looks at the grain of sand itself for its own sake" (17). As would be characteristic of the Zen approach, Amann here seems to be expressing the notion of haiku as a poetics of immanence; the grain of sand is not precious because an external God is embodied in it, but because it is unto itself a precious object.

Amann also discusses the importance of the season-word in haiku, which he suggest is a kind of "poetic shorthand" that helps to create a seasonal mood as a "background feeling against which the other parts of the haiku are set ..." (22). He recognizes, however, that for many people living in the West, "the seasons themselves have lost all relationship to our lives" (23). Therefore, though Amann sees the season-word as a valuable component of haiku, he does not consider its use essential.

An additional aspect of haiku Amann considers is its "selflessness." The poet achieves this selfless state by as completely an effacement of the personal ego as possible. This idea is actually an outgrowth of "suchness," in as much as it is the way by which the "suchness" of the world is experienced by the poet and then communicated in the haiku.

Amann then discusses the concept of "oneness." Curiously, his idea of oneness is not that the poet becomes "one" with the objects of the world, for he considers this idea under "selflessness." Rather, he suggests that the poet's task is to reveal the way various things of the world share a "oneness" with one another. In this regard he sees the frequently employed haiku technique of juxtaposition as a means for the poet to intuitively reveal to the reader the insight that "all things are one." To explain this he provides several examples of haiku that he believes exemplify this trait:

Railroad tracks, 
and a flight of geese above them 
in the moonlit night . . . 

A lonely 
 railway station: 
 lotus-flowers in bloom . . .  

Eventide:
spikes of rhubarb 
and a whistling train! 

Sound of a rat 
on the dishes:
Ah, the cold! 

Amann suggests that in its defiance of logical connections between the juxtaposed images haiku resembles a koan:

The "explanation" lies in a deeper level of consciousness than the logical mind. It lies at a level where the discriminatory influences of our minds have ceased to function and things are perceived in their totality, where railroad tracks and wild geese, rhubarb and train-whistles, rats and cold strike a common chord and are part of the same continuum. (32)

Amann concludes his discussion with an analysis of form in haiku. Though he accepts the authority of Bashô in matters of haiku philosophy, he is less willing to do so on matters of form. He suggests, as have many others, that 17 syllables of Japanese are not equivalent to 17 syllables of English, and therefore a 17 syllable poem in English will be proportionally longer than a 17 syllable poem in Japanese. He proposes that an English-language haiku should be shorter than 17 syllables and suggests that English haiku, in addition to the usual three-line form, can be written as one-liners, two-liners, four-liners, or concrete poems. The pages of Amann's Haiku and Higginson's Haiku Magazine contained poems in all of these forms, giving the magazines their reputations for promoting an avant-garde approach to the genre. And, though the three-line form remains the norm, haiku poets continue to explore variations. (Hiroaki Sato, Clarence Matsuo-Allard, and Marlene Mountain, for example, have been particularly vocal in promoting a one-line form of haiku, which they believe is closer to the original Japanese form than the more usual three-line versions.)

An outstanding haiku that exemplifies the best of the innovative features of Haiku and Haiku Magazine is one by Jack Cain:

an empty elevator opens closes

This poem appeared in Haiku Magazine in 1969. In its simplicity, in its free-verse form, and in its treatment of a particularly modern subject, this poem expresses the potential of haiku to reveal the mystery of a moment of twentieth-century life keenly perceived. Few haiku in the West have captured so well Bashô's ideal of mysterious loneliness, sabi, yet this poem violates nearly every prescription for haiku given by Hoyt and Bull, and might well have been rejected had it been submitted to their publications. With their emphasis on Zen content and experimental form, Haiku and Haiku Magazine have had an important and enduring influence on the composition of haiku in the West. Many of the best poets writing today began to explore their understanding and practice of haiku in the pages of those magazines.

From 1977 to 1981 Amann returned to editing and published Cicada, a journal that again specialized in haiku that was experimental in form and that embodied the characteristics he emphasized in The Wordless Poem. Also in 1977, Amann was instrumental in founding the Haiku Society of Canada, which is still an active organization.

But returning to developments in the mid-sixties, another magazine that appeared in 1967 was Haiku West, edited out of New York by Leroy Kanterman. This magazine helped spur the formation the following year of the Haiku Society of America, under the guidance of Harold Henderson. The monthly meetings of the Society became an important forum for discussion of haiku: "In its early years such poets as Nicholas A. Virgilio, Elizabeth Searle Lamb, L. A. Davidson, Virginia Brady Young, Alan Pizzarellee, Anita Virgil and [William Higginson] shared our poems and our thoughts on haiku at the Society's monthly meetings" (Higginson, Handbook 69). Cor van den Heuvel was soon to begin attending meetings as well.
The Haiku Society has probably been the single most important institution fostering haiku in America. Prompted by the Society's discussions of haiku, several members, frustrated with the antiquated understanding of what haiku was, decided to establish a modern definition of the genre that would be widely accepted. In 1973 Harold Henderson, Anita Virgil, and William Higginson proposed a definition that has become widely accepted in most dictionaries and encyclopedias, and even more importantly, has become the accepted definition of most practicing haiku poets. As published in Cor van den Heuvel's 1974 edition of The Haiku Anthology the definition reads:

HAIKU

(1) An unrhymed Japanese poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived, in which Nature is linked to human nature. It usually consists of 17 kata (Japanese sound-symbols).

(2) A foreign adaptation of (1). It is usually written in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. (249)

This definition has been very influential, especially the idea of "a moment keenly perceived," and poets have used this aspect of the definition to justify even the most experimental work.

In 1969 Kay Titus Mormino began publication of Modern Haiku. This magazine quickly staked out the middle ground between highly experimental and conservative poets. In an early debate conducted on its pages, James Bull's attempt to impose a conservative definition of haiku was countered by Michael McClintock. In an article entitled "Maturity of Form," Bull invokes Bashô as the final word on haiku form, explaining to experimental poets that "If anything, the master handed them final authority for 5-7-5" (26). He then shows how two early haiku poets in America, James Hackett and Nicholas Virgilio, both increased the percentage of 5-7-5 haiku as their writing progressed, and by implication, matured.

Michael McClintock responded to Bull in an essay entitled "The Tyranny of Form" by arguing that "Literary history has shown nothing more emphatically over the centuries since Aristotle's Poetics than the fact that no art can long survive, or long subserve, any 'final authority' regarding questions of form" (28). And he concludes:

If then, a haiku poem is naturally composed, is not whittled one way or padded-up the other, but says what it has to say, points and does no more, and in doing this becomes a poem of 17 syllables arranged in a 5-7-5 pattern, then we must applaud. But if at the same time we have a haiku also produced in this fashion, but which does not fall into this pattern, and becomes another, who are we to say that one pattern over another makes a poem? It is always the pattern and the substance, always the form and the content, which must work together and make the poem. . . . (29)

This debate is basically the same one waged between Kyoshi and Hekigodô 60 years earlier—that is, is haiku strictly a classical genre, in which case a fixed form could be a necessary component of a definition, or is it a genre that is more flexible and can be adapted to modern poetic practice? It seems remarkable to me that American poets would feel the need to engage in the same debate. Not only have many modern Japanese poets decided that the 5-7-5 pattern is not fundamental to haiku, but a significant part of our own tradition since at least the time of Emerson has considered the "form" of poetry to be organic. As I suggested earlier discussing Seisensui, Emerson's phrase "a meter-making argument" can easily be adapted to haiku as "a form generating sensation."

Furthermore, the 5-7-5 structure in Japanese haiku is in some ways almost accidental. History created it, in that nearly all Japanese poetry was written in some variant of the 5-7 pattern. Haiku poets simply adopted the traditional patterns to their new genre. The classical form has more to do with the peculiarities of the Japanese language and the history of Japanese literature than with any inherent necessity arising from the poetic or philosophic motive of haiku itself. Perhaps an historical parallel can be seen in the transformation of the sonnet form when it was adapted into English. In the Italian of Petrarch the sonnet was composed of only four rhymes arranged in an octave and a sestet: (ababab cdcdcd). Such a pattern was appropriate to the Italian language, with its numerous rhyming words, but would have been nearly impossible to reproduce in English, as some of Sidney's efforts in "Astrophel and Stella" amply demonstrate. In order to make the genre vital in the English language, poets added more rhymes, so that by Shakespeare's time he could call a poem a "sonnet" that contained seven rhymes arranged in three quatrains and a concluding couplet (abab cdcd ef gg).

It seems to me that those who share Bull's conservative position are condemning haiku to an irrelevant position in contemporary literature. What haiku has to offer the contemporary poet is not a "form." Poets aren't interested in haiku because they have been searching for a poetry written in a 5-7-5 pattern; rather, they are interested in haiku because it provides a particular way of seeing the world, and of recreating that vision in poetry.

Fortunately the editors of Modern Haiku wanted haiku to be a vital art form and not a relic of classical times, and they therefore rejected Bull's conservative position. Over the years Modern Haiku has grown to become the most important publication in the haiku community. By maintaining its position between the more conservative and the more experimental publications, Modern Haiku has served as a stabilizing and legitimating force, one that takes haiku seriously as a flexible and lively genre capable of producing work of the highest literary quality.

Under the direction of Robert Spiess, who took over the editorship in 1977, Modern Haiku has also become the primary forum for discussion of theory and for the review of new work. As an example of the sort of theoretical discussion found in Modern Haiku we can look at a series of articles written by Spiess just prior to his becoming editor dealing with what he saw as some of the "problem areas" in haiku.

In an early essay in this series he considers the difficulty haiku poets have in describing commonplace experiences in a way that engages the reader's attention. Similar to the problem Shiki saw with the "sketch from life," Spiess sees that American haiku poets have had difficulty writing about seemingly trivial occurrences in a way that did not contribute to their seeming triviality. As he says, "haikists generally agree that the concern of haiku should be with the ordinary,--with the humbler, particular and concrete objects and usual affairs of the immediate world around us" ("Problem of the Ordinary" 16). However he cautions:

Haikists need to be selective in the determination of the "haiku significance" of their work. Haiku ought to be capable of engendering participatory appreciation and creative completion in their readers, who in turn should be co-poets with the writer. Readers should be given the opportunity to experience the "commonplace" with new insight or from a fresh angle of perception-feeling and with depths or resonances of associations. (16)

Yet Spiess is careful not to advocate an abandonment of the "ordinary" experience as the subject of haiku: "But this is not to imply that haiku should be 'novelesque' . . . It is meant to indicate that haiku should lead us from our possible non-perception and non-experience of certain common objects and events to genuinely felt relations with specific haiku moments" (16).

In a later article, "The Problem of the Expression of Suchness in Haiku," Spiess attempts to counter the minimalist approach to haiku that takes haiku's "wordlessness" almost too literally: "A haiku, though austere or economical, must nevertheless be composed of enough elements and verbal substance..."
to allow poetry and esthetics to perform their intuitive functions" (26). Spiess is particularly disturbed by the tendency of poets to compose haiku that contain no internal juxtaposition, and hence lack tension:

A certain tension, correspondence, comparison, etc., is required in haiku in order that suchness can realize its full nature or potential. A thing as it is can not have haiku significance by itself, standing alone. In order to be recognized as an entity any individual thing requires something else, another thing, with which it can be contrasted, compared, or seen against, or with which a tension can be established. Some sort of polarity is required. (26)

Interestingly, Spiess unknowingly counters Seisensui's proposal made decades earlier (but so far as I am aware unavailable at the time in English and unknown to Spiess) that single-image haiku might at times serve as a more exact means to represent the poet's experience. Spiess uses Bashô's "crow" as his example:

The type of haiku written by the advocates of the mini-haiku can be illustrated by the following example:

On a withered bough
a crow is perching. (26)

If we recall, Bashô actually wrote:

on a withered bough
a crow is perched [alights]--
Autumn evening

Spiess argues that the second image--"autumn evening"--is necessary to the poem. We may remember that Seisensui suggested that in Bashô's "old pond" the corresponding line "The old pond" was superfluous and a falsification of Bashô's experience. Spiess counters the minimalists, and by implication Seisensui, and defends his own position by arguing that, "in order for a haiku to be created, the image needs another image or element against which it can be compared. As it now stands there is no true ellipsis, no gap between polarities across which a spark can jump and the feeling-mind make an intuitive leap" (26-27). And he concludes that:

Although some may argue that a mini-haiku is more subtle because it supposedly leaves more to the imagination, I believe that it requires conscious imagination to complete the mini-haiku. This conscious imagination is really intellectual; it requires thought and even a mode of analysis. The fully developed haiku appeals more immediately to the subliminal, intuitive aspects of a person--especially if more than one sense-perception is involved. Genuine delicacy, nuances, and overtones do not arise from vagueness or partial intuitions, but from clear and precisely delineated images. (28)

In a subsequent article Spiess considers the "Now-Moment" in haiku, which, he argues "is of deep importance for English language haikuists. . ." ("A Few Notes" (38). He connects this emphasis on the Now-Moment directly with Buddhism:

One of the earliest records of a direct comment on the Now-Moment is that of Gautama Buddha (563-483 BC) who sorrowed for those who permitted the Now-Moment to pass by without its being seized, and in one of his discourses it was his express tuition to his followers: "Do not lose the moment." (38)

Spiess extends this discussion in his next article by considering the problem caused by the difference between the poet's actual experience of the Now-Moment and the poet's subsequent recreation of that moment as a work of art. He begins by reinforcing the significance of the Now-Moment of perception:

Regardless of whatever psychological or metaphysical, antecedental state is necessary or desirable in the haikuish, we may take the genesis of a haiku, in its purest condition, to be that wordless feeling-perception experienced by a haikuish in a Now-Moment of Awareness. Although this feeling-perception comes into existence as a result of or concurrently with a sense image, the image is actually not consciously recognized as such during the first fraction of the instant; there is only pure feeling that is so deeply subjective that it can not be transmitted as it now exists. ("Problem of Craftsmanship" 7)

But he then suggests that the poet's task has only begun with the attainment of this moment of perception:

Haiku romanticists notwithstanding, there is no "law" that asserts or even implies that all the words that first occur to a haikuish after a Now-Moment event-experience will necessarily be the "right" words for the haiku, that there always and invariably is an automatic or mystical correspondence between the haiku-moment and the initial words that come to the haikuish. . . . Consideration must be given to whether certain poetic or esthetic techniques of the language will enhance or hinder the ability of the haiku to transmit or re-create the desired feeling sense-experience or image. (8)

He concludes, however, that the difference between the poet's experience and the recreation of that experience in the poem must appear seamless: "No matter how much work and effort are put into a haiku, the final version must sound perfectly natural and spontaneous" (9).

Spiess advocates a concealed craft that is reminiscent of Bashô's composition of the "old pond." Though according to the tale of the poem's genesis, Bashô pondered for a long while considering what first line to add to his "a frog jumps in / the sound of water," his selection of "The old pond" was a choice of such utter obviously and simplicity that it concealed the effort Bashô made in its selection.

In a later article in this series, "The Problem of the Basis of Freedom in Haiku," Spiess analyzes attempts by poets to "liberate" haiku from any conventional features. Their program to free haiku, he argues, is as restricting in its own way as are the conventions from which these poets are rebelling, and therefore in their attempt to write unencumbered haiku they encumber themselves. Spiess argues that if it is true that, "the intuitive, non-intellectual and wordless metaphysical state of being of the haiku poet during the now-moment of awareness must needs find its best expression through the uniquely esthetic mode of verbalization characteristic of the haiku" (25), then it seems likewise true that:
In order for these exemplary haiku to come into existence, the metaphysical state of the haiku poet must be totally free—the poet cannot be bound by preconceptions, ideas or desires. The poet cannot have a desire to be "free" of so-called "haiku restraints," or wish to "liberate" the haiku—for this very desire or wish is in itself an impediment and limitation to full freedom to be aware of and to best express the haiku moment. (25)

This seeming paradox is similar to that confronting practitioners of Zen. As I understand it, the greatest obstacle to the Zen practitioner's attainment of satori is precisely the desire to attain it (perhaps even the notion that there is anything to be attained at all). Spiess' emphasis on the Now-Moment of perception links his theory with that expressed by Henderson, Virgil, and van den Heuvel in their definition of haiku as a record of "a moment keenly perceived."

Under Spiess' guidance Modern Haiku continues to thrive, and if anything the magazine is making an ever more important contribution to the development of haiku as the years go by.

In addition to these magazines, a number of other periodicals have made important contributions to the genre. From 1976 to 1982 Randy and Shirley Brooks published High Coo. They also initiated a series of small pamphlets, and this series continues to publish the work of some of the better haiku poets. Perhaps their most important contribution has been the publication of bibliographies of haiku books and articles under the title Haiku Review. Editions of the Review have appeared in 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1987. In addition to the bibliographic entries, the issues of the Review have also contained book reviews and theoretical articles. The Brookses have also recently begun publication of a small and very select journal, MAVFLY.

The Haiku Society of America, feeling the need for an organ to keep all of its growing membership in touch, began publication of Frogpond in 1978. This magazine has expanded well beyond its role as an in-house publication and publishes a wide variety of haiku from around the United States and Canada.

A number of small presses either specialize in haiku books, or at least make the publication of haiku collections a substantial part of their work. Among the most important of these recently active are Rod Willmot's Burnt Lake Press, The North Carolina Haiku Society Press, William Higginson's From Here Press, AHA Press, Juniper Press, Sparrow Press, and Merging Media. Additionally, many poets self-publish their work. Though I doubt an accurate count would be possible, it seems certain that at least several thousand haiku books have been published in the United States and Canada since the 1950's.

During a quarter century of concerted development, haiku poets in North America have gradually adapted the genre to their own needs as poets. To a certain extent these changes have been the result of the modernization of the genre, and some of these alterations have paralleled similar changes in Japan. For example, as in modern Japanese haiku, the form has shortened. In adapting haiku to the English language, poets have experimented with various forms of punctuation, but the tendency in recent years has been to reduce the use of punctuation to the point where many poets use none at all.

The content of haiku has also expanded beyond a narrowly defined natural world to include all of the aspects of modern civilization, as well as aspects of human relationships, including sexuality. Poets have gradually come to see that aspects of the modern landscape could be written about in haiku. In the early years even the best poets all too often wrote about only those aspects of our landscape that were also a part of the Japanese landscape: scarecrows and frogs, cherry blossoms and crows. It seemed as though they saw only those things in America that the Japanese poets saw in Japan. Their poetry was often derivative in content, and the reader has no sense that the poets actually looked with an original eye at the landscape around themselves. However the best of these poets have come to see the uniqueness of their own continent, and to embody that uniqueness in their haiku. In a recent article, Canadian poet and critic Rod Willmot summarized the development of North American haiku. He applauds the emphasis poets have placed on the "haiku moment" rather than on formal traits as the distinguishing feature of the genre:

Because we accord it much more importance than any formal descriptions of haiku, we became accustomed to testing the authenticity of a haiku by the purity and intensity of the "haiku moment" it conveyed, rather than by its adherence to formal characteristics, such as syllable count, season word and so on. This gave us an immediate freedom from Japanese clothing, which would have suffocated us and falsified our writing. ("View" 50)

Perhaps the brief history of haiku in North America can be divided into four stages: 1) A period of study, which began in the early to mid-1950's with the publication of the works of Blyth, Yasuda, Henderson, and Suzuki. To a certain extent this period has continued until today. 2) A period of imitation, which we can see in the early magazines such as American Haiku and in the efforts of Bull and Hoyt to establish a classical form of haiku. (The Beats somewhat abbreviated these first two periods.) 3) A period of experimentation, which would be characteristic of the haiku of the Beat poets and of the work appearing in haiku magazines such as Aman's Haiku and Cicada. 4) A period of rejection of the experiments that have failed and an assimilation of those that have succeeded. I would suggest that the development of haiku in North America is currently in this period of sorting out the failed from the successful experiments. An example of what is occurring during this sorting out period can be seen in the current debate over the inclusion of human relationships as appropriate topics for haiku, and the corollary debate over the distinction between haiku and senryu.

Haiku and/or Senryu

While most of the more pressing theoretical issues in the development of an American haiku seem to have been settled, to the extent such things can be, one issue has emerged in recent years as the subject of acrimonious debate: the distinction between haiku and senryu. As haiku poets have expanded their subject matter to include human relationships, a number of critics and poets have questioned whether such poems should not be considered senryu rather than haiku.

As an example of the sort of debate that is occurring, we can briefly consider the arguments concerning the anthology Erotic Haiku, edited and published by Rod Willmot in 1983. Willmot argues that in this anthology he sought haiku that "presented an erotic moment with all the purity and intensity of any other haiku moment" ("View" 51). In a review of this collection, William Higginson challenges Willmot's contention that none of the poems in the collection are senryu:

The introduction's suggestion that none of the poems here are senryu is followed in the body of the book by two of the purest—and most delightful—senryu I've read:

in the porch shadow
she brushes her long hair
hearing the stranger (Proxade Davis)
At dawn remembering her bad grammar  
(George Swede)

And Cor van den Heuvel provides a subtle poem that may be read either as haiku or senryu, take your pick:

spring sunlight  
through the young leaves  
my neighbor's wife ("Joy" 40)

Even when making a strong claim for the distinction between haiku and senryu, however, Higginson's comment that van den Heuvel's poem can be read as either type indicates his awareness that the distinction is not always clear.

In the second edition of his Haiku Anthology, Cor van den Heuvel himself advocates a clear distinction between the two forms, though he makes no separation of them in his arrangement of poems in the book and no effort to identify which of the poems in the collection are haiku and which are senryu. He justifies this decision on aesthetic grounds: "I have not tried to separate the senryu from the haiku in this book. Not because of the slight difficulty in deciding which is which, for a few do overlap, but because an interesting variety, contrast, and resonance can result from their juxtaposition" (14).

He acknowledges that since publication of the first edition in 1973 "sex, love, and the whole range of human emotions and relationships have now become fairly common themes" (13). He goes on to suggest, however, that although Rod Willmot calls most of these poems "psychological haiku," and those specifically about sex "erotic haiku," van den Heuvel believes that "Serious senryu" would be more accurate . . . for most of them. Instead of recreating a moment of awareness in which human nature is related to nature, they give us a moment of awareness about one's own inner feelings or one's relationships with other human beings. (13)

As this statement suggests, van den Heuvel has removed humor as an important aspect of a definition of senryu. The original (1973) Haiku Society of America definition of senryu reads in part:

(1) A Japanese poem structurally similar to the Japanese haiku, but primarily concerned with human nature. It is usually humorous or satiric. (van den Heuvel, Haiku Anthology, 1st ed. 250)

The "usually" in this definition is somewhat evasive, but perhaps it accurately reflects the amorphous nature of the genre. In a revised definition for the second edition of The Haiku Anthology, van den Heuvel decides that senryu need not be even "usually" humorous:

Senryu
(1) A Japanese poem with the same form as the haiku but concerned with human nature and human relationships. It is usually humorous or satiric.

(2) An adaptation in English of (1) with the same form as the English language haiku. English language senryu can be serious, humorous, or a mixture of both (emphasis added). (357)

By removing humor as an essential or even "usual" trait of senryu, van den Heuvel makes room to include a wide variety of human-centered poems, such as those in Willmot's Erotic Haiku, as "serious" senryu.

Willmot, however, proposes a more metaphysical rationale for considering the poems in his Erotic Haiku to be haiku rather than senryu:

Arguing that any percept is potentially a worthy subject for a haiku, I pointed out that it is possible for us to perceive phenomena within our own minds, such as our emotions, and that when we do so with the intensity of haiku-perception, that percept suddenly stands in relation to the perceiver exactly as Cosmos stands in relation to Man. My own anger or confusion or desire can also be Cosmos. Going further, I suggested that perceptions that occur in emotionally embroiling contexts—those involving ourselves and intimate friends and relations—are likely to be far more intense and authentic than those that come when we are merely detached observers. ("View" 51)

Willmot here seems to be suggesting that human nature and the human mind should not be seen as separate from the natural world, which is encompassed by his term "Cosmos," but as specific expressions of the totality of nature. Even the term "human nature" itself implies that human nature is a sub-category of the natural world, rather than a distinct field of existence. To some extent, whether one sees a poem as a haiku or as a senryu depends on whether one sees human nature as a sub-category of nature (or, as Willmot calls it "Cosmos") or as a distinct and separate aspect of reality.

Alan Pizzarelli countered Willmot and others who share Willmot's position by advocating a marked distinction between haiku and senryu. In an influential article entitled "Modern Senryu," Pizzarelli relates the following exchange with Harold Henderson in order to illustrate his position:

In 1972 the following poem of mine was published in the Haiku Society minutes:

the fat lady  
bends over the tomatoes  
a full moon

Upon reading this poem, Henderson pointed out that this poem was, in fact, a senryu since its thrust and emphasis was the woman's behind in addition to the juxtaposition of the lady's roundness and the full moon. (5)

Fair enough as far as it goes, but for some reason Pizzarelli fails to mention that this poem is humorous--with its pun on "moon"--and that this humor may well be one of the reasons it can be considered a senryu, not solely because its emphasis is on an aspect of human nature.
After explaining that senryu is concerned with human nature, Pizzarelli's first example of a "fine old senryu" is:

The bird set free,
overjoyed,
collides with a tree.  (anon.)

Read literally, as one generally reads a haiku, this poem would seem to be about the natural world, in which case it would be a haiku, but as Anita Virgil observes, "this poem was written at the time when Bashô's followers were running amok and not producing good poetry" (Letter 7 Jan. 90); therefore, its focus would seem to be on the danger of poets--metaphorically transformed into birds-- forsaking the disciplines of the haiku genre. Still this danger is expressed in a humorous fashion and so seems to reveal what is a distinguishing characteristic of senryu, not simply its content, but also its humor. Pizzarelli goes on to suggest that:

Today, when we hear of such terms as "political haiku," "spiritual haiku," or "psychological haiku" and "metaphysical haiku," we need only return to R. H. Blyth's books on the subject of senryu to find the prime examples of what is being called haiku today. For example:

Losing his job
He tries reading
Marx.  (Sazanka)

Indeed this poem is about human nature, but what distinguishes it from at least some of the poems Willmot calls "psychological haiku" is, again, its humor. As further examples of contemporary senryu in English, Pizzarelli provides:

Trying to forget him
stabbing
the potatoes   (Rotella)

unhappy wife
I pedal my bike
through puddles   (Swede)

he leans on the gate going staying    (Mountain)

After the child's
funeral--
ake eating   (Virgil)

Missing a kick
at the icebox door
it closed anyway    (Kerouac)  (6)

Rod Willmot responded to Pizzarelli by suggesting that:

The essence of senryu is its wit, its humor. Even when a senryu and a haiku deal with the same topic, they are distinguishable by the fact that one has nothing but its wit while the other has all the depth of poetry. The distinguishing feature is not the topic of the poem but its treatment.  ("Wild Horses" 31)

Willmot objects to van den Heuvel's use of the term "serious senryu": "The phrase 'serious senryu' is a contradiction in terms..." (31). One reason Willmot holds to his position so stridently is because he considers senryu to be a disparaging term and believes they are nothing but clever witticisms with no artistic merit; "You must understand that we North American poets are very serious; we don't have much interest in senryu" (qtd. in Virgil, "Horse Sense" 26).

Anita Virgil, one of the authors of the original Haiku Society of America's definitions of haiku and senryu, enters the fray with an article entitled "Horse Sense" in which she sides with Pizzarelli against the position supported by Willmot:

Contrary to what Willmot has been saying, the new direction North American haiku poets of the 1970's and 1980's are leaning toward is the senryu, 17th century in origin, but a more comfortable genre for the forthright expression of human emotions, behavior and the human condition.  (26)

Virgil continues:

Lately, Willmot has tried to convince poets that the haiku can be the catch-all for most intensely felt emotions/experiences of a poet. It can't. In poem after poem one discerns that the haiku presents, with studied detachment, man's interrelatedness with Nature, with the tangible world outside himself. That focus serves the haiku well. But the focus on self and human foibles is the dominant thrust of the senryu.  (27)
Virgil's mention of "human foibles" seems an off-handed reference to the humorous aspect of senryu, but to explicitly identify humor as a distinguishing characteristic of senryu would partially undermine her argument, which is based solely on the priority of "topic" over "treatment," so she avoids direct mention of it. Willmot introduces a similar obscurity when he supports the precedence of "treatment" over "topic" rather than recognizing that both may constitute necessary elements of a definition.

It seems to me that any definition of senryu—even English language senryu—needs to include consideration of both its human focus and its humor. The journal *Modern Haiku* contains in each issue a separate section intitiled "Senryu." The poems in this section, such as the following examples, are without exception about the "topic" of human nature "treated" comically:

"How's my driving?"
on the truck
in the ditch  (Rob Simbeck)

Grandpa:
his puzzled hellos
on the answering machine  (Gina Robinson)

coffee creamers
in her breast pockets
--truck stop  (Carol Montgomery)

This distinction between "topic" and "treatment" suggests a possible resolution to the debate. I would like to propose the following schema. As the dimensions of the debate as expressed by these writers suggest, "topic" can be divided into "nature" and "human," and "treatment" can be divided into "comic" and "serious." Putting these together we can construct the following diagram:

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<tr>
<th>Topic:</th>
<th>Nature</th>
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<td>Treatment:</td>
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<td>Senryu</td>
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Haiku, we might say, are (almost) always about nature and (almost) always serious. Senryu are (almost) always about humans and (almost) always comic. They usually employ poetic devices such as rhyme, personification, and word play that are eschewed by haiku. "Psychological haiku" or "serious senryu" share the topic of "humans" with senryu and the treatment of "serious" with haiku. While not precisely haiku, these poems are also not precisely senryu, and their unique status should be recognized.

In the category "haiku" I would place most classical haiku such as Bashô's "crow" or "old pond." I would consider this category to be paradigmatic since it represents the most widely established definition, since most of the finest and most influential poems have been written in this manner, and since it is what most people think of when they think of haiku. If we expand the term "nature" to include the products of human industry, but not humans ourselves, that is, anything that is "other than ourselves," we could place such poems as Cain's "empty elevator" in this category as well.

In the category "psychological haiku" or "serious senryu" I would place most of the poems under dispute, such as the examples given by Pizzarelli of poems by Rotella, Swede, Mountain, and Virgil. I suppose they could be called either "serious senryu" or "psychological haiku" with equal validity. Though I do not share Willmot's conviction that senryu cannot be poems of substantial merit, and hence do not share his aversion to the designation, I would still advocate the use of his term "psychological haiku" for these poems rather than van den Heuvel's "serious senryu." For one thing, haiku is much more familiar term than senryu. Why add obfuscation to an already misunderstood subject? Van den Heuvel would not have entitled his collection *The Senryu Anthology*, even if the majority of its poems were determined to be senryu, because few readers or potential purchasers would have known what such a book contained. Furthermore, since I suggest that "haiku" is the paradigmatic form, other forms are in a sense variations of that category. Finally, since human nature is indeed, it seems to me, an aspect of the larger natural world, human-centered poems can be considered as specialized forms of nature poems.

In the category "senryu" I would place poems such as Pizzarelli's example by Szanka, "losing his job" and Kerouac's "missing a kick," as well as the poems in Spiess' *Tall River Junction*. These are also the traditionally recognized forms of senryu in Japanese and the sort of poems that one find in the "Senryu" section of *Modern Haiku*. Additionally, I think that Higginson is correct that some of the poems in *Erotic Haiku*, such as those he lists--Davis's "in the porch shadow" and Swede's "At dawn"--are in fact senryu, although most of the poems in that collection are not.

I am well aware that the boundaries between these categories is not firm. It is often difficult to tell whether a poem is primarily concerned with nature or with humans, or whether it is humorous or serious, and some humor can be very serious indeed. Many of us may chuckle at Rotella's

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Trying to forget him
stabbing
the potatoes
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...but the poem is far from comical. The closer we look at the firm lines dividing these categories, the hazier the distinctions become. As one's perspective on the poem shifts, so might its designation. On one reading the poem seems a haiku; later, one notices a different interpretation, and the poem seems a senryu. Not to worry. This ambiguity, this openness to multiple interpretations, far from being troubling, may well be one of the more compelling and creative aspects of these genres.
CHAPTER VI

CONTEMPORARY HAIKU POETS

Introduction

I would now like to analyze the work of some of the best haiku poets writing in the United States and Canada. I have chosen to consider the work of John Wills, Cor van den Heuvel, Gary Hotham, Anita Virgil, Lee J. Richmond, Raymond Roseliep, Alexis Rotella, George Swede, Marlene Mountain, and Bob Boldman. All of these poets, with the exception of Richmond, have been active in the haiku community as it is manifest in the haiku magazines in which their work regularly appears, and all except Richmond have been included in the second edition of van den Heuvel's *Haiku Anthology*. Richmond preferred that his work be read in bulk and generally did not submit to the haiku magazines, therefore his work is almost unknown even in the small world of haiku enthusiasts (Letter).

In the following discussion I make the distinction between "wordless" haiku and "language-centered" haiku. Leroy Gorman seems to have been the first critic to apply the term "language-centered" to haiku ("Beyond"). Gorman uses this term to refer primarily to haiku that make use of the techniques of concrete poetry, such as unconventional letter or word arrangements and that minimizes or abandons the referential nature of language. I would like to expand the definition, however, to refer to any haiku that depends on characteristics of language other than its referentiality. So, for example, Bashô-style haiku would be "wordless" since in his poems we are primarily interested in what the words signify rather than in any visual or aural features of the words themselves; whereas many of the poems of the Teitoku school would be "language-centered" since they depend on puns, rhythmic patterns, metaphors, and other tropes.

As I have pursued this study I have become aware that many other poets are equally worthy of consideration and could just as well have been included in this study. I have some regret about leaving several other poets out of consideration, but time and space limitations preclude their inclusion. I am quite convinced, however, that the work of these ten poets is representative, if not inclusive, of the best haiku that has been written in recent decades.

John Wills

John Wills was born in 1921 in Los Angeles. His family subsequently moved to St. Louis, where he was raised. He received an MA degree from the University of Chicago and a PhD from Washington University in St. Louis. For many years he taught English literature at universities in the midwest and south and published critical articles on Conrad, Eliot, and other modern writers.

Wills first encountered haiku in 1968, not from reading Japanese haiku, which has been the usual source of initial exposure to the genre for American poets, but from reading a haiku by Nicholas Virgilio (van den Heuvel, "Introduction" 16):

bass
picking bugs
off the moon

Impressed with this poem, he decided to begin writing haiku himself. This poem's influence on Wills is ironic, for it is very atypical of the sort of haiku composed by Virgilio, most of which closely approximate the 5-7-5 pattern and are usually concerned with feelings of loss and death. In both form and content the poem is more like the work Wills himself was to do than like the majority of Virgilio's poems.

Within a year Wills was publishing his own chap-books, five of which came out in rapid succession: *Weathervanes* (1969), *Back Country* (1969), *River* (1970), *The Young Leaves* (1970) and *Cornstubble* (1971). As Cor van den Heuvel says, "These were to play an important part in the development of haiku in this country--helping to destroy the mythic rule of the 5-7-5, and showing that haiku could in a modern age still create a oneness with nature and do so in a fresh, vital way" ("Introduction" 17).

During this period Wills was so involved with haiku that he obtained a research grant enabling him to take time off from teaching to spend the summer of 1970 studying haiku in Matsuyama, Japan, the region where both Buson and Shiki had lived. In an interview with Michael McClintock he stated that these two poets had been the most important influences on his own haiku ("Conversation" 3).

Wills' clear, visual, aesthetic imagery is indeed similar to Buson's. For example:

the moon at dawn
lily pads blow white
in a sudden breeze

Some of his poems even seem variations on a theme previously attempted by Buson. For example, Wills'

the forest stands
so straight and tall
at noon

seems related to Buson's

Not a leaf moves
dreadful
the summer forest.

While Wills acknowledges his debt to the Japanese tradition, he has not felt bound by it. As he told McClintock, "well, we have and still do learn from the Japanese, of course, and from Western literature, too. But we must after that write our own poetry, there's no other way" ("Conversation" 8).
In his first three books Wills managed to write his own poetry very well, but in his later books, *The Young Leaves* and *Cornstubble*, he seems to have suffered from the most frequent problem of the objective sketch-from-life style of haiku, the problem warned about by both Shiki and Spiess--stale images. In a review of *Cornstubble*, McClintock connects Wills' haiku to the sketch-from-life style of Buson and Shiki, but laments Wills' seeming loss of original insight. In McClintock's opinion these poems are "too objective" and "too lacking in humanity" to be interesting haiku (45). Wills' inability to select just the right image in these haiku, images that would resonate with the reader, is not surprising given that he had published more than 500 haiku in three years.

As an example of the sort of poor haiku Wills was writing, and how he managed to overcome this difficulty, we can look at a poem he read at a reading in New York in 1973 sponsored by the Haiku Society of America:

The ancient beech . . .
all day I hang around
and write bad haiku

This poem is a particularly fine example of its subject. Wills was astute enough to realize that he could do much better with this poem, and he continued to work at it. As van den Heuvel says, "Wills would continue to go to that old beech to 'learn about' a beech until sometime later [he] discovered the essence in his own response to it:

looking deeper
and deeper into it
the great beech" ("Introduction" 6)

This poem is a good example of his ability to find the essence of his subject, not by referring it to some outside source of meaning, nor by imposing his own emotional response, but by "looking deeper and deeper into it." The focus has also shifted from the subjectivity of the poet's frustration at his inept haiku to the objectivity of the depth of the beech tree's leaves and branches. In reference to this poem, van den Heuvel connects Wills' approach to that of Bashô:

"Bashô . . . once said, 'haiku is simply what is happening in this place at this moment.' John Wills has discovered what this really means and how to put it into practice" ("Introduction" 7).

Upon his return from Japan, Wills and his wife, Marlene, (later Marlène Mountain) moved to a farm in Tennessee, naming it "Sweetwater." In August 1973 Wills quit his job teaching at East Tennessee State University to try to live off the land with Marlene and their 3-year-old son. He stayed at the farm until 1978, when their marriage ended in divorce. Marlène remained at the farm while Wills moved to Florida in search of work. Though life at the farm was in some ways a disappointing experience, his time there gave him great opportunity to write, and he managed to overcome the difficulties that stifled his first work in *The Young Leaves* and *Cornstubble*. Cor van den Heuvel summarizes the poetic results of Wills' time at Sweetwater:

During the seven years John Wills lived at Sweetwater, he harvested a crop of haiku that places him in the forefront of English-language haiku poets. The sheer volume of high quality haiku--haiku of surpassing depth and craftsmanship--that have come from his pen make him probably the most accomplished writer of haiku ever seen anywhere outside of Japan. In their realization of the "suchness" of a rock or a stream, of a bird or a tree, of a snowfall or a crawfish, in their creating a feeling of oneness with, or love of, the things of earth, the haiku of John Wills continue the profound insight-into-nature traditions of the Japanese haiku, while also earning themselves a place on the same shelf with the classics of American nature writing. ("Introduction" 2)

Some of the poems he wrote at Sweetwater rank among his--or anyone's--best:

boulders
just beneath the boat
it's dawn

beyond the porch
the summer night leaning out
a moment

During the mid-1970's a number of poets had been experimenting with one-line haiku, including Wills' wife, Marlene. At her suggestion he tried his hand at composing poems in the one-line form, some of which were published in 1980 as *Up a Distant Ridge*. Cor van den Heuvel favorably compares a one-line poem from *Up a Distant Ridge* with an earlier haiku on a similar theme from *Back Country*:

The hills
release the summer clouds
one . . . by one . . . by one . . .

the sun lights up a distant ridge another

Van den Heuvel suggests that the one-line poem shows an "advance . . . in simplicity and depth" ("Introduction" 12). When revising his earlier work for inclusion in *Reed Shadows* (1987), however, Wills rewrote all but two of the one-liners as three-line poems. In addition to the "distant ridge," the other poem he retained in a one-line form is:

dusk from rock to rock to rock a waterthrush

Since both these poems describe movement that is essentially horizontal, this form is particularly fitting, though van den Heuvel would prefer to see "waterthrush" written in three lines.
dusk
from rock to rock
a waterthrush

because, as he says,

Being able to consider each element for itself on a line, and yet having them united together into one whole, by the grouping, gives us their uniqueness and oneness both at the same time, which to me is more pleasing. ("Introduction" 13)

In these one-line haiku Wills maintains the break between the images, a frequent structural feature in haiku, by leaving a few additional spaces after the words "ridge" and "dusk." Even in these experimental forms, this common aspect of haiku—juxtaposition—is maintained, and the poems are not simply prose statements.

Though Wills uses traditional literary devices sparingly, one simple device he uses fairly often—extremely often considering how few words he has to work with—is repetition. Several of his poems already cited make use of repetition: "the beech," "summer clouds," and "waterthrush." And though no word is repeated in "distant ridge," the important word "another" creates a repetition of images. A few further examples of repetition include:

sparrows
in the stubblefield move farther
and farther off

water slides
within the water
down the broken rocks

rock by rock
i cross the stream
the summer moon

water pools
among the rocks then pools
and pools again

from branch
to branch the clatter
of an oak leaf

In all of these haiku, Wills' use of repetition, much like his use of the one-line technique, serves to accentuate the sense of motion conveyed by the meaning of the words.

In the introduction to The Young Leaves, Wills lists five principles he believes are important to the Japanese poets and which he attempts to incorporate in his own haiku: "wordlessness," "objectivity," "selflessness," "simplicity," and "oneness." I interpret the notion of wordlessness to mean, not a lack of words, but a manner of using words that does not draw attention to the words themselves but only to that of which they are signs.

In a review of River, Eric Amann, author of The Wordless Poem, comments on this wordless aspect of Wills' work:

His concern is not to impress the reader with verbal brilliance, flashes of ornament and metaphor and far-fetched conceits. Instead, he seeks to express that particular state of consciousness which Bashô, through his studies of Zen, came to regard as the core of the haiku experience. (11)

And Amann concludes, "Here, in these 'wordless poems' the haiku of John Wills reaches a perfection seldom achieved by Western haiku poets who usually lose the experience in a welter of words. Here the poet is merely a mirror. Words become almost superfluous" (42).

As Amann suggests, Will's haiku contain few tropes, though some rare examples can be found:

first light
between the snow and snow
the pencilled woods

in the upstairs room
of the abandoned house
a doll moongazing

touch of dawn
the snail withdraws
its horns
Wills' objectivity, selflessness, and wordlessness are apparent not only in the relative lack of tropes in his haiku but also in the almost total (though not complete) absence of didactic statement and emotional terms, the presence of which represent the poet's intrusion into the external world. Wills' state of mind is rarely apparent in his haiku. Rather, our attention is focussed on the things the poet has seen, not on the poet.

Wills' haiku are all profoundly simple, and his avoidance of most traditional poetic devices leads to his suggestion that the poems contain no hidden meaning. "Nothing's hidden," he says. Using Zen terminology, he describes his haiku as a sort of "open barrier":

Not a new kind of logic or belief but a way of awareness, or seeing, wakefulness. . . . Like Zen I suppose, haiku teaches us to look at what is before our eyes, to hear, to smell—all of those things that are plainly before us, in plain sight, now and forever . . . awake. ("Conversation" 7)

This emphasis on the need for "wakefulness" should remind us of Thoreau, who permeates Walden with images of morning and waking that seem to parallel the Buddhist attitude toward our perception of reality. A good example of Wills' objective--wakeful--style is:

hermit thrush
at twilight pebbles
in the stream

Wills' other prescription for haiku, that of "oneness," is probably the most difficult to achieve. One way haiku poets have attempted to achieve oneness, especially between people and nature, is to have their characters or themselves enact gestures in unison with the natural world. For example, in Japanese poetry we find:

They spoke no word,
The host, the guest, And the white chrysanthemum. (Ryôta)

A rooster and I walk over the frozen earth (Ippekirô)

(Spring planting) Farmers and oxen Both covered with sweat (Santôka)

In Wills' work we find examples such as:

the breeze and i making our way through the grasses

the branch and i come down the cove together

And more subtly:

before the window she loosens her hair an evening of spring

the hill girl pushes the snow aside young scallions

The gestures of the people in these haiku are in perfect harmony--are at one with--the natural world.

The most common way "oneness" is achieved in haiku, however, is not by an indication of the poet's or any other human's presence, as in the previous examples, but by the total effacement of the poet from the poem. Because this method is the least obvious, it is also, perhaps, the most successful. In poems of this type, oneness is achieved by an interfusion of the poet and the natural world, the subject and the object, in such a way that any apparent barriers between them fall away. Wills discusses how to achieve what he terms "depth" in haiku that bears on this matter:

Sometimes depth is achieved almost entirely through the intensity of the poet's emotions—that is, through his utter (if momentary) absorption in some aspect of the world around him. . . . To write or even to comprehend such poetry as this is to achieve satori.
As a rule, depth in haiku... carries us beyond the world of the logical into the realm of the metaphysical. That is not to say we need sail beyond the galaxies. Like Bashô, we can delve within: strike deep, unearth the Truth in the here and now. Inside nature, yes, but chiefly inside ourselves. ("Depth" 1-2)

Wills' emphasis on this momentary absorption, perhaps not even a "moment keenly perceived" so much as a "moment keenly experienced" links his theory not only with that of Bashô, but similarly with Emerson's "brief moments" that contain more authority than all other moments of life.

In his interview with McClintock, Wills expresses a sense of his bond with the Taoists of China that bears closely upon his concern for attaining oneness in his haiku: "I suppose I am something of an old hoary Taoist. I've never felt closer to anyone than to Wang Wei and his friends, Po Chu-yi, Wei Ying-wu, Tao Yuan-ing, Su T'ung-po, to name only a few" ("Conversation" 6). A brief consideration of one of these poets, Wang Wei, might illuminate Wills' interest in their work. In the introduction to a collection of poems by Wang Wei, Hiding the Universe, Wai-lip Yim characterizes Wang Wei's poetry and philosophy in a manner that shows the connection between the effacement of the poet's ego-self and the attainment of oneness in Wills' haiku.

According to Wai-lip Yim, "Wang Wei is Nature [Phenomenon] as it is: no trace of conceptualization" (v). And again:

In Wang Wei, the scenery speaks and acts. The poet has become, even before the act of composition, Phenomenon itself and can allow the things in it to emerge as they are without being contaminated by intellectuality. The poet does not step in; he views things as things view themselves. (vi)

And finally:

Wang Wei's poetry is doubtlessly bound up with the Taoist... emphasis on pure experience--experience in which we have no interference of intellectual knowledge... Pure experience means to receive the immediate presentation of things; intellectual interference necessarily distorts Phenomenon. A poet of pure experience takes it for granted that every form of existence in Phenomenon is right in its place--none is superior to the other--and needs no human justification (such as naming, imparting meaning and ordering) for its being such. The poet seeks to identify himself with Phenomenon, which, in the Taoist view, is the totality of the spontaneity of all forms of existence, by merging with it. (ix)

A brief poem of Wang Wei's illustrates the practice of this theory:

**Bird-Singing Stream**

Man at leisure. Cassia flowers fall.  
Quiet night. Spring mountain is empty.  
Moon rises. Startles--a mountain bird.  
It sings at times in the spring stream. (81)

Like Wang Wei's poems, Wills' haiku can be considered about as much a poetry of "pure experience" as it is possible to conceive of and still have it be a poetry at all. The next stage would be the poet's utter absorption in Phenomenon, and silence.

Another technique Wills uses that may be considered in connection with oneness is his use of what we might term a "pivot-phrase," which causes the reader to be aware of a characteristic shared by both of the juxtaposed elements of the poem. Because Wills uses neither punctuation nor capitalization in his haiku (a trend that is becoming more frequent among North American haiku poets), he is able to generate ambiguity. This lack of linguistic markers is not only noticeable at the beginning and end of the poem, where the lack serves to emphasize the "open" nature of haiku, but more importantly, in the middle, where we would customarily expect punctuation to mark the break between the juxtaposed images. When a caesura occurs in his poems, it is either at the end of a line, unmarked by punctuation, or if it occurs within a line, it is indicated by a few blank spaces between the words, a technique he employed to mark the caesura in his one-line haiku. The following two poems exemplify each of these types:

river in the summer dusk  
a few white stones

river  just at twilight moving off  
in rain

Wills uses the ambiguity created by the lack of punctuation to advantage. In many of his poems it is impossible for the reader to determine where the pause should occur. The traditional haiku technique is to place the caesura at the end of either the first or second line, as in these two famous haiku by Bashô:

The old pond;  
A frog jumps in--  
The sound of the water.

On a withered branch  
A crow is perched:  
An autumn evening.  (trans. Blyth)

In Japanese this break is indicated by a "cutting word," which has an untranslatable meaning but which can be most closely approximated in English by a mark of punctuation, usually either a dash or a colon. In Wills' haiku, when this break occurs at the end of a line, it is unmarked. Sometimes its placement is obvious:
winter drizzle
the gate to the meadow
locked
cold morning
a flock of crows settle
in distant trees

In neither of these poems is the reader likely to be unaware of the pause at the end of the first lines. In other poems, however, the location of the break is uncertain:

one cricket alive
in the winter field
the warmth

mantis
on the pampas grass
hawk shadow

In both of these poems the middle line functions rather like a "pivot-word" in Japanese poetry; it can, and should, be read as forming a semantic unit both with what precedes and what follows. The winter field, for example, is potentially the location of both the cricket and the warmth:

one cricket alive in the winter field--
the warmth

as well as:

one cricket alive--
in the winter field the warmth

The pivot phrase in this poem, "in the winter field," serves to unite--to demonstrate the oneness of--the cricket's lingering aliveness and the lingering warmth. The interdependence of the cricket and the warmth is conveyed by their semantic interdependence on the line "in the winter field," which identifies the locale of their mutual existence.

As I hope my examples have illustrated, Wills' haiku all give the impression that they are records of actual experiences. They reveal experiences which, when recreated in his poems, enable us to catch an insightful glimpse into the immanent commonality we share with the common things of the natural world. His haiku are a fine expression of a synthesis of the American pastoral-Edenic impulse, Chinese Taoist philosophy, and the Japanese haiku tradition. Wandering the Appalachian woodlands of East Tennessee with notebook in hand, recording impressions, he recalls Thoreau, but his choice of haiku as the vehicle to share his impressions bonds him with the Japanese haiku poets, and with the Chinese Taoists before them.

Cor van den Heuvel

The haiku of Cor van den Heuvel are similar in many ways to the haiku of John Wills. Like Wills, Van den Heuvel is interested in making us perpetually aware of the significance of the common elements of our lives and he has become increasingly interested in experiencing and expressing moments of oneness with the natural world. His haiku often differ from those of Wills in their subject matter since Van den Heuvel lives in New York City and his haiku, especially the early ones, reflect that environment.

Cor van den Heuvel was born in 1931 in Biddeford, Maine. He received an English BA from the University of New Hampshire and an MA from New York University. After a brief trip in 1958 to San Francisco's North Beach, the center for Zen and haiku activities in America at that time, van den Heuvel returned to Maine and began writing haiku. He read Blyth, Henderson, and Yasuda and felt that "haiku seemed to hold the key to what I was looking for in poetry. They were able to create, with more depth and immediacy than I'd ever found before, that miracle of incarnation where words become an ontological presence offering a glimpse of the infinite" (Haiku Anthology, first ed. 271). He has lived in New York since 1961. Though best known as the editor of both the first (1974) and second (1986) editions of The Haiku Anthology, which are undoubtedly the most important collections of American haiku, he is also an excellent poet himself.


In 1972, while Anita Virgil was helping prepare the Haiku Society of America's definition of haiku, van den Heuvel wrote her a letter concerning the proposed phrase "moment keenly perceived," in which he reveals a great deal about his own attitude towards haiku. He had originally favored the phrase "moment of keen perception" but came to realize the importance of the fine distinction between the two phrases:

It hit me...that there was a fine distinction here between a subjective and objective definition of haiku. Of course--"moment of keen perception" is what happens in the observer's mind, that's not what is recorded in haiku!...What has to be recorded is what is perceived, not the perception--which is in the mind of the poet. The reader, too, will (hopefully) have a mind to receive/perceive what the poet has perceived (this time in words)--so what goes on in the poet's mind does not need to be recorded. ...
Van den Heuvel is struggling here with an attempt to balance the subjective and objective aspects of haiku in a definition that gives primacy to objectivity but that also recognizes the importance of the subjectivity of both the poet and the reader. His phrase "the mind is in the thing, the thing is in the mind" is reminiscent of Bashô's term hosomi or "slenderess" that describes a state of the mutual interpenetration of the seemingly exclusive objective and subjective worlds. Van den Heuvel emphasizes, however, that the poem should contain only the objective aspect.

For van den Heuvel a haiku should record a movement that goes from objective nature into the poet's mind, then a transformation into words that reflect the objectivity of nature as precisely as possible, and finally a transfer into the reader's mind:

Nature --> Poet's Mind --> Words --> Reader's Mind

This contrasts with a more symbolic alternative vision of poetry as a movement outward from the poet's subjective mind onto objective nature, then a translation into words that are read by a subjective reader:

Poet's Mind --> Nature --> Words --> Reader's Mind

Van den Heuvel is interested in the veracity of the poet's account of nature, of the world "out there," not in an expression of the imaginative creativity of the poet's mind. This "moment keenly perceived," a moment in which the human and natural world interpenetrate, has remained for van den Heuvel the essential aspect of haiku. In a 1987 article in The New York Times Book Review he defined haiku this way:

A haiku is a short poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived in which nature is linked to human nature. . . . The poem is refined into a touchstone of suggestiveness. In the mind of an aware reader it opens again into an image that is immediate and palpable, and pulsing with that delight of the senses that carries a conviction of one's unity with all of existence. . . . (1)

Van den Heuvel gives to haiku the metaphysical task of revealing the moment when the poet becomes fleetingly aware of his or her oneness with all of existence. An essential condition for haiku to perform this task is the ability of language to effectively communicate the poet's experience to the reader. Van den Heuvel seems to possess such a faith. He has proposed that in his haiku he is looking for the moment "when words become the things they describe" (Letter). This faith in the communicative efficacy of words is an essential prerequisite for his use of the "wordless" technique. Were he to lack this faith in language's correspondence to reality he would need to rely on other more elaborate techniques to recreate his insights.

Of course even when words become the things they describe, this condition is not sufficient for the creation of a good haiku. The poet still has the task of selection: "The things have to be capable of giving that insight into the heart of existence which we experience only during those 'timeless moments'" (Letter). Van den Heuvel proposes, however, as would be consistent with a Buddhist or an immanentist philosophy, that perhaps selection is not ultimately so important. All the poet need do is be perceptive of literally anything: "But perhaps all things have this capability--and so that would be all of it: words into things. All that is needed is a beholder who can KEENLY PERCEIVE" (Letter).

Van den Heuvel's belief that all aspects of existence have the potential to reveal the "heart of existence" reflects the common metaphysical position of Zen-oriented haiku. Though this position has a certain metaphysical validity in both the Zen and immanentist traditions, its sincere practice is no guarantee that good haiku will result. Such a proposal moves dangerously close to the belief that the poet need only realistically describe any occurrence to create a successful haiku. Though van den Heuvel ponders the possibility that all things have the capability to give us such insights, he realizes that even a keenly perceptive poet must still recreate those moments for a reader, so he has developed several techniques to enable himself to perform this task.

In the early seventies van den Heuvel came in contact with the newly-formed Haiku Society of America. Anita Virgil was immediately impressed with his work. In a review of van den Heuvel's early books Virgil notes the "peculiar aura of surrealism that distinguishes van den Heuvel's work," and commented on his ability to transform "some of the most innocuous material" (41). Van den Heuvel uses this "surreal" technique to enable us to see the most commonplace objects from a strangely original angle, an angle from whose peculiar perspective he attempts to jar us into an experience of insight into the nature of existence.

His technique is similar to that advocated by Thoreau and endorsed by Spiess in his "Speculation 226" previously considered:

To a considerable extent these words of Thoreau have relevance for the haiku poet: "It is only necessary to behold the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance. . . . To perceive freshy, with fresh senses, is to be inspired.

Van den Heuvel allows us to view the world a hair's breadth aside from our usual perspective and makes us see anew the common things of our lives. In order to provide the reader with this original perspective, van den Heuvel employs a variety of techniques, including the incongruous juxtaposition of images, a peculiar selection of material, and most frequently and importantly, an evocation of particular lighting effects.

A haiku that exemplifies the technique of incongruous juxtaposition, in fact so incongruously that one doubts its reality, is the following:

an empty wheelchair
rolls
in from the waves

I suppose it is possible van den Heuvel witnessed such a sight, but the perspective is more than just a hair's breadth off the beaten path, and the image therefore seems highly improbable.

A more successful technique van den Heuvel employs is the selection of an unusual but commonplace subject for his poems. For example, in the following he has chosen a subject of which we are all aware and with which we all live, but which lies hidden and therefore never attracts our attention (unless it fails to function properly):

in the water-tank dark
behind the toilet
a slime coated copper ball floats
Van den Heuvel draws our attention to similarly common yet overlooked subjects in the following haiku, but in these cases he shines a light on his subject to focus our attention on it:

in the hotel lobby
the bare bulb of a floor lamp
shines down on its distant base

through the small holes
in the mailbox
sunlight on a blue stamp

This use of various light and shadow effects is one of the most frequent characteristics of van den Heuvel's haiku and is in large measure responsible for the creation of the surreal effect Virgil described.

Sometimes, however, rather than shining a light on his subject, he describes only the shadow of his subject:

the shadow
of the light chain
swings slowly

And sometimes he withdraws light from his subject:

autumn twilight--
in the closed barbershop
the mirrors darken

Though van den Heuvel does not always make use of lighting effects, most of his best poems do. His use of light serves a deeper significance than to create a purely aesthetic effect. For example, the title poem to *The Window*-'Washer's Pail*, which can be read as two connected haiku, shows how van den Heuvel uses light to reveal the deep significance of the most ordinary objects:

high above the city
dawn flares from a window-washer's pail

above the clear water
still in shadow
the sunlight just touches
a floating sponge

Light serves a metaphysical function in other poems as well:

dawn
among rocks
lights water

in the buried skull
trickling water lights
luminous fragments

the geese have gone--
in the chilly twilight
empty milkweed pods

It seems to me that in van den Heuvel's haiku darkness functions as the embodiment of a mystery unseen, perhaps the hidden source of that oneness van den Heuvel seeks to describe. On the other hand, the light that shines in his haiku expresses the revelation of the immanent presence of that otherwise concealed mystery. When the poet who keenly perceives intrudes into the darkness, as in the following poem, light is evoked:

the sun goes down
my shovel strikes a spark
from the dark earth

In a 1988 haibun, van den Heuvel gives us some insight into the significance the inner light of things has for him:

The Sign

On a clear autumn day, alone by a small woods-encircled lake set in a high hollow between two peaks of the Catskill Mountains, I was looking for a sign, for some kind of tangible proof that the mystery I sometimes glimpse in the world of nature is not just something my mind puts there. Partly influenced by the little I knew of Zen and of American Indian vision quests, I had been praying, meditating, and fasting for several days--not for enlightenment or a vision, but for a sign I could reach out and touch, something "really" there.
There had been moments during my wanderings in the mountains when I thought I saw a flicker of the infinite in the shadows of a pine branch, or sensed the fluttering of the eternal in the cool spruce-scented air of a sunlit ridge—but there had been nothing of which I could say: this is happening as a sign for me, because I am here and asking for it. I was still looking.

After exploring around the lake for some hours, I was about to leave. Standing on a small grassy knoll at the edge, I gazed out over the quiet waters. Far beyond a rocky shelf of hemlocks at the other end—where a stream wound into the shadows and off a hidden ledge—the sun was nearing the mountain-ringed horizon. I raised my hand and said "Peace" to it all.

At the word, a small, bright light appeared over the lake—moving toward me through the air. It gradually took the shape of a large milkweed seed. Lit by the sun, yet seeming to shine from within, it rose from eye level and passed directly over my head, its white, tentacle-like hairs swaying slowly in the currents of air that carried it up over the trees and out of sight towards the top of Plattekill Mountain.

Thinking this was the answer to my prayers, I said a silent thanks to whatever had sent it, and started along the trail to my campsite on the other side of the mountain. As I turned the first bend and lost sight of the lake, the cry of a large bird came from somewhere near the summit. Just once. The sun was going down now as I hurried through the forest, and it began to get dark as I came around to the mountain's shadow side.

A movement off to the right caught my eye. Two large grey wings rose a few feet above the forest floor, quickly glided deeper into the woods, and dropped down out of sight. Leaving the trail I looked into the wooded ravine where the bird had vanished and even went down into it for about thirty or forty feet, but there was no sign of anything in the gathering darkness. Going back toward the trail, I started to step over a fallen log lying where the wings had first appeared. Something white was fluttering on it. A large milkweed seed glowed in the twilight, its feelers waving gently in the breeze. I didn't touch it, but it was still with me as I headed down the trail with the coming night.

starlight in an empty milkweed pod

Van den Heuvel seems unsure about the source of this "sign." In as much as it functions as a sign of something else—some extra-mundane spiritual force—he is expressing a transcendental poetics. His sense that something sent the sign in response to his request for it is similarly transcendent. But the fact that the sign is a common milkweed seed evokes a possible immanentist interpretation. His identification of his search as a desire for proof of a mystery glimpsed in the world of nature reinforces this immanentist interpretation. As in so many of his haiku, this piece is permeated with images of darkness in juxtaposition with images of a light emerging from within that darkness.

This haibun may represent a possible new direction for van den Heuvel. As early as Water in a Stone Depression he had been interested in developing a longer form to provide a context for his haiku. That book, he says,

was written with the belief that the "ontological thrust," or sense of immediacy of a "timeless moment"—that "essence of a moment keenly perceived"—could be recorded in some instances with more accuracy by using more words than one uses in "traditional" haiku. I still believe this is possible. There are some "moments" that just cannot be re-presented in a few words—but can be with a few more. In this kind of (longer) ontological poem, the earlier lines set the scene more explicitly than the usual haiku can—the actual "moment" will come with the final lines. (Letter)

Van den Heuvel's desire to create a context for his haiku is consistent with historical aspects of the genre. Japanese poets developed haibun partly as a way to develop a context in which to present the haiku moment. Van den Heuvel may find the haibun genre similarly useful.

Operating in the opposite direction, van den Heuvel included a poem in The Window-Washer's Pail that has elicited considerable discussion, especially since van den Heuvel clearly chose to label it as a haiku by including it in both editions of his Haiku Anthology. The haiku is simply one word on an otherwise blank page:

tundra

In her semiotic analysis of haiku, Yoriko Yamada-Bochynk suggests that "tundra" might "be more appropriately categorized as 'concrete poetry'" (427). She argues that the poem derives its effect from the juxtaposition of the single word with the empty white space around it. Certainly van den Heuvel's presentation of "tundra" alone on an otherwise empty page in both The Window-Washer's Pail and The Haiku Anthology might suggest that he agrees that the white space is an essential part of the poem. However all of the poems in The Window-Washer's Pail, and many poems in The Haiku Anthology, are printed one to a page, so we can't be certain that he considers the white space an essential aspect of the work. If the blank page is an essential component of the text, as Yamada-Bochynk suggests, then I would agree that "tundra" is in fact a concrete poem. It could be, however, that the word "tundra" is not so much juxtaposed to the space around it as it is to our expectations that more words will follow this single word. The single word is juxtaposed against our unfulfilled expectation that a poem should contain more than one word. In this case I would suggest that this poem is indeed a haiku, and an effective one at that, given that the tundra is a landscape that defies our expectations of what a landscape ought to contain.

In a consideration of this poem, Larry Gates suggests that "tundra" works because it is different. He concludes that "a whole book full of one-word poems would be a travesty" (19). I think he is correct if we read "tundra" as a haiku rather than as a concrete poem, since what makes the poem work as a haiku is our surprise at the emptiness and the silence that follows the word. The poem violates our expectations, and it is from this violation that it derives its effect. Were it placed in a book called One-Word Poems we would be prepared for it, and its effect would, perhaps, be lost.

Which ever way we conceive of "tundra," however, it represents another attempt by van den Heuvel to alter our perspective of the world in order that we may see it anew. "Tundra" is easy to dismiss, but if we allow it to work in our minds, we may discover something about the tundra-ness of the tundra that would be obscured in a longer poem.

Van den Heuvel's attempts to witness and recreate fleeting glimpse of the mystery in nature connects his work directly with the Emersonian tradition. We can assume that for van den Heuvel, as well as for Emerson, "there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences."
Gary Hotham

The poetic technique of Gary Hotham's haiku is similar to the technique used by John Wills and Cor van den Heuvel. They all write in a plain, wordless style about the common aspects of life. As Hotham says of his work, "I don't like too much trickery, fanciness, wit, word play in haiku. I don't think it necessary and in my own mind [I believe it] will detract from what the haiku is all about—seizing that moment in time or state of being in all its power" (Letter 17 May 1990). The moments Hotham describes, however, differ from the moments described by Wills and van den Heuvel. While Wills and van den Heuvel both seek to experience and express a moment of oneness with the natural world, Hotham seems to suggest that such a quest is hopeless. Hotham's haiku usually express moments when his separation from nature is made apparent. Though nature is not excluded from Hotham's haiku, when it appears it is nearly always in juxtaposition with a domestic scene.

Gary Hotham was born in 1950 in Presque Isle, Maine. He attended the University of Maine and Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and currently lives in Laurel, Maryland. He has published seven small press chap-books: Without the Mountains (1976), The Fern's Underside (1977), Off and on Rain (1978), Against the Linoleum (1979), This Space Blank (1984), Pulling Out the Bent Nail (1988), and As Far as the Light Goes (1990).

One of Hotham's best known haiku, and my personal favorite of his, is the title poem from Against the Linoleum:

distant thunder--
the dog's toenails click
against the linoleum

In his essay "The Problem of the Ordinary in Haiku," Robert Spiess cites this haiku as an exemplary expression of "both insight into common haiku moments and the creative expression of these intuitions." And he continues:

In this haiku Gary Hotham invites us to identify with the nature of thunder and with dog nature through an unusually fresh combination of object-events. We begin our associations with the thunder in perhaps a somewhat unformed or nebulous manner as we half attentively hear its distant, low rumble. But immediately the real nature of thunder is impressed upon us by the sound of the dog's toenails. Actually, the dog perceives the thunder's nature more quickly and thoroughly than we do and transmits this to us through the click of his toenails as he heads for a place of security from the sound of thunder that he knows will soon increase. The sharp click of the dog's toenails contrasts with the low sound of the thunder and creates a certain tension that permeates us in such a way that we have a non-intellectual, "gut feeling-understanding" of thunder. (16)

When I first read this haiku I had not thought of the dog as fleeing the thunder; I had not seen it as a cause/effect relation, but rather as a juxtaposition of two unrelated and distinct sounds: one a distant, sonorous, and profound rumbling and the other a nearby and trivial clicking. Read as Spiess reads it, this poem can be seen as one of the few examples of a haiku expressing humor in nature. We chuckle at the dog's fear. It is possible to argue, though, that it is the domestication of the dog that causes its fear, so the humor in the poem is the result of the dog's ambiguous position between wild nature and domestication. The dog's domestication causes the thunderous expression of nature to seem threatening.

This poem is a good example of many of Hotham's techniques. Structurally it consists of the juxtaposition across a caesura of two images. Part of the orginality of the poem lies in the fact that the images are sound images rather than visual ones. Though we probably visualize the dog crossing the floor, the poet gives us only the sound. As is characteristic of Hotham, the images are described purely "objectively." He provides us with no information as to how he feels about the scene or as to how we should feel. This poem is also a good example of Hotham's juxtaposition of the natural world with the domestic one. Is it too much to suggest that the wholly natural world of the thunder is brought together with the wholly artificial and human world of the linoleum floor through the mediation of the dog? As a domesticated wild thing, the dog is the perfect mediator for this juxtaposition.

We can find many other examples of poems by Hotham that similarly link the human world with the natural world:

loud wind--
the bed unmade
all day

the library book
overdue--
slow falling snow

stalled car.
foot tracks being filled
with snow

sundown:
the chip in the soup bowl
before me
In a discussion of "library book," Cor van den Heuvel commented on the fact that "the strange congruence one feels in this juxtaposition of a book with a natural phenomenon is hard to explain" ("Concision" 1). The "strangeness" cited by van den Heuvel is a frequent feature of Hotham's haiku. Hotham manages to evoke through perfectly objective means an alteration in the reader's state of mind. Frequently this state of mind is one of melancholy, a strange loneliness, or what Bashõ might have termed sabi. Many of the previously cited poems evoke such a state. A few other examples include:

winter morning darkness
a hard boiled egg
on the whole plate

waiting room quiet
an apple core
in the ashtray

home early--
your empty coat hanger
in the closet

on the ceiling
a large leak stain--
Autumn coolness

coffee
in a paper cup--
a long way from home

up late--
the furnace comes on
by itself

This last poem seems reminiscent of Cain's "empty elevator." Both poems draw our attention to a moment when the world created by human industry goes about its own separate life, without need of our attention. Cain's elevator is an "empty" one; Hotham's furnace comes on "by itself." Even in the world we have created for ourselves moments occur in which we seem to have no part. The "otherness" of our own creations creates a sense of sabi, a weird loneliness among even the most familiar objects.

This feeling of loneliness, of separation, is typical of Hotham's haiku. Wills' sense of oneness, van den Heuvel's sense of a mysterious presence in nature of which he is a part, do not seem to be shared by Hotham. The melancholy in Hotham's haiku is created by this sense of oneness denied. In many of Hotham's haiku this lack of oneness between the poet and nature is revealed by his establishment of a distance between himself and nature, or by his expression of dissatisfaction with his experiences in nature. The most frequent and obvious distancing device he uses is to put fog between himself and the rest of nature:

fog.
sitting here
without the mountains

morning fog
not seeing far
the fern's underside

wild geese--
the clouds too low
to see them
Even in more pleasant weather, Hotham's primary experience with nature is one of his separation from it:

  afternoon warm wind
  things remain
to tell the distance

The rain that appears in so many of Hotham's haiku, especially in *Off and On Rain*, functions like the fog to create distance between him and his experience of nature, and it also serves to make what experience he does have unpleasant. Hotham suggests that the rain and the fog are "a phenomena that causes [him] to focus in on something else. Like a magnifying glass or a microscope" (Letter 17 May 1990). While they do serve this purpose, it seems that what they often focus his attention on is a sense of alienation from or discomfort with nature.

  spring rain
  the mountain
  further away

  no place
  to hide my hands--
  the rain begins

  tired out
  by a cold rain--
  the frayed cuff shows

  a place
  to go back to--
  Autumn rain

  off and on rain--
  the long way
  home

  far from home
  getting near
  these mountains

These last three haiku are particularly interesting in that they juxtapose "home"--a desirable place, with nature--an undesirable place. When we recall that both Wills and van den Heuvel (and most other haiku poets for that matter) seek out nature for their most fulfilling experiences, the contrast with Hotham becomes striking. Unlike most haiku poets Hotham enters nature reluctantly:

  outside the door
  daylight
  waits

This poem provides no indication that Hotham is anxious to walk out the door himself.

In another poem contrasting home with nature, the manifestation of nature Hotham encounters is dirty and unpleasant:

  late at night
  the last town before home--
  patches of dirty snow

One suspects Hotham is intent on his journey home and has no desire to linger among the patches of dirty snow. Even those aspects of nature that ought to be most satisfying are likely to be found wanting when encountered in a Hotham haiku:

  wild strawberries
  not ripe enough--
  more wind

Hotham's frequent use of rain to express his isolation from nature is particularly apparent when contrasted with the way in which both Thoreau and Santōka evoke the same image to create the opposite impression. For example, in the "Solitude" chapter of *Walden* Thoreau discusses how he overcame the loneliness precipitated by his isolation in the woods:

  I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thought prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the
very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a village, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again. (263-264)

Santōka, under considerably less comfortable circumstances than Thoreau experienced, wrote haiku which expressed a similar bond with the rain:

Hailstones, too,
Enter my begging bowl.

Rain falls;
    I walk in my home town,
Barefoot.

The thistles--
    Bright and fresh,
Just after the morning rain.

Rain falls silently;
I scoop up the water.

The rain-filled bucket
Brimming with beautiful water.

When I die:
Weeds, falling rain. (trans. Stevens)

Hotham is not totally alienated from existence, however. If he can't find companionship in nature, he can find it in human relationships, especially in his relationship with his wife. Hotham's frequent expressions of conjugal solidarity in the face of an alien nature is reminiscent of Arnold's "Dover Beach":

each lull
in the winter wind
you and I

snow now rain--
your picture
by mine

spring wind
my wife drinks from a cup
we've always had

sun & moon
in the same sky
the small hand of my wife

night comes--
picking up your shoes
still warm

all evening
sharing the rain
with my wife
my wife's cough
louder than the snowstorm
outside

In many of these poems the focus is neither wholly on the natural world, nor wholly on his wife, but on the contrast between the intimacy and fragility of their bond and the omnipresent indifference of nature.

In a letter to Hazel B. Durnell quoted in her study of Japanese influence in American poetry, Hotham writes: "My main concern in writing a haiku is in establishing that moment in time or brief state of being which is what I consider the essence of the haiku as it has come from the Japanese" (182). A particularly effective technique Hotham uses to express such a "moment" is his description of a sound that takes only a moment to occur:

never
having been here before
the bed creaks

And perhaps his best use of this technique can be found in a sound that isn't quite heard:

setting the cup down carefully
everyone else
having gone to bed

When Hotham's poems fail, it is usually because they fall victim to that nemesis of the plain style of composition--plainness. They lack the depth or complexity needed to evoke any response:

backwater
stillness
here

its way
downhill
spring water

I must admit, however, that I originally felt most of the poems in *Pulling Out The Bent Nail* suffered from a similar weakness. On reading through the book numerous times I have changed my opinion. Hotham's chosen technique relies upon the reader to invest considerable attention to the mundane things of the poem, and when the reader fails to do so the poem appears absolutely lifeless. Poems such as the following are daring in their plainness, and risk the reader's total indifference:

breath marks
on the window pane--
Sunday morning

noon rain--
two hamburgers
to go

music two centuries old--
the color flows
out of the teabag

(I would like to suggest, however, that the last poem would be better if the precise music were named. I suspect that many readers will respond as I did and try to imagine what the music might have been--which piece by Mozart? which piece by Haydn? who was composing 200 years ago anyway?--rather than ponder the relationship between the steeping teabag and the music, which seems more central to the poem.)

Hotham disclaims any Zen influence on his haiku: "Don't look for Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern religion in my haiku--if you find any it's only because you put it there!" (Letter). Based on my reading of his poems I would have to agree. In particular his distancing from nature, the lack of oneness between himself and the natural world, seems to run counter to the Zen attitude. The fact that his failure to achieve "oneness" leaves him saddened, however, would seem to indicate his recognition that it would be a desirable, though unattainable, state. Hotham's haiku lament the isolation of the self from nature, and he turns to human relationships as the only potential source of the oneness by which he can restrain his melancholy from transforming into despair.

Anita Virgil

Anita Virgil's haiku employ the wordless style, but they tend more towards symbolism than the work of Wills, Hotham, or van den Heuvel. Her subject matter is primarily concerned with domestic life or with the sort of nature that one could find in a city park. She generally avoids, however, haiku concerned with human relationships, a subject she considers to be the exclusive province of senryu. Perhaps because of her art training, she, like that other poet-painter Buson, is very conscious of the visual aspects of haiku, and often emphasizes light and color. Though she implies a belief in the oneness of
existence, she seems more concerned with the aesthetic effects that can be created from such a metaphysical condition than with the spiritual recreation of those states of at-onement.

Anita Virgil was born in Baltimore in 1931. She received formal training in art at the High School of Music and Art in New York and at New York University and the City College of New York. Though for many years a resident of Montclair, New Jersey, she now resides in Virginia. In the first edition of van den Heuvel's Haiku Anthology she reports that her "acquaintance with haiku came accidentally":

A three-line poem published by Haiku Highlights in 1968... drew comment from William J. Higginson. A correspondence resulted from this which led me to the works of R. H. Blyth, Harold G. Henderson, and to Eric Amann... I saw the haiku as a logical extension of all I had known and preferred: a poem that is spare and existential, the particular and the whole implied by it, Nature in its broadest sense—the nature of all things of this world: their unique identity and yet their sameness, their evanescence and their eternal quality. (272)

As an important influence on her she cites Nicholas Virgilio's "lily." She credits this poem as being "the single greatest direction for me, way back in 1968" (Letter 5 Aug. 88).

In 1970, as part of her criteria for judging haiku contests, she developed a nine-point Guide to Haiku. This guide consists of a series of questions she asks of herself when judging a haiku, and which she suggests poets ask of themselves while composing:

1. Is it one particular event in the present?
2. Is it a moment in which the poet views with fresh insight or awareness some common occurrence that points up the interrelatedness of man and nature?
3. Is it objectively presented? Does it allow the reader to experience the emotion, or does it tell the reader (it should not) what to feel?
4. Does it avoid simile, metaphor, personification, cliches?
5. Does each word serve a vital function in re-creating the poet's moment of deep response? Have the selection of words, the order in which they are placed, their sound, their tempo, captured the quality of the experience?
6. If the poem allows for more than one interpretation (through choice of words or punctuation or line breaks), does this add to or detract from the poem?
7. Has it growth potential? Does it convey more emotion than is experienced at the first reading?
8. What is the value of what the poem conveys?
9. Is this one of the few poems that can be said to have universal significance?

In this series of questions she outlines most of the characteristics of the classical haiku tradition—objective, non-intellectualized recreation of a moment of interrelation between the poet and nature. Contrary to the classical tradition, however, Virgil strongly rejects the need for a haiku to contain a particular form, and the absence from her list of a question regarding form is significant.

It might prove worthwhile to briefly analyze one of her best haiku in the light of the "Guide":

a phoebe's cry...
the blue shadows
on the dinner plates

1) This haiku does represent a particular event in the present—the moment the phoebe cries. The phoebe is a particularly good bird to use in this case, since, like the chickadee, killdeer and whippoorwill, it is one of those birds whose name is an attempt to recreate the sound of its voice. Hence, when we say the name, we experience an approximation of the sound the poet heard. I would quibble, however, with her choice of the word "cry," which implies a sound much harsher than the voice of a phoebe.
2) The poem is a fresh perception of a relatively common occurrence, and that occurrence does interrelate the natural world (the phoebe) with the human world (the poet's domestic scene).
3) Virgil does not tell us how to feel, nor even how she felt, but simply selects elements to objectively recreate the experience for the reader.
4) The haiku contains neither simile, metaphor, personification, nor cliché.
5) The haiku uses no superfluous words. (Though as I've said the choice of "cry" seems slightly inaccurate.) I was also originally disturbed by the plurality of "shadows" and "plates" and wondered if a single shadow on a single plate might not make a more effective poem. After envisioning both options, however, I agree with her selection. She is not seated before her own empty plate but rather walking around the table laying out plates for her family. The intrusion of the phoebe's cry into this scene of a domestic task is effective.
6) The poem does not seem to allow for other than very slight variations in interpretation.
7) As I've read the poem many times I've gradually sensed the way in which the selected elements exemplify and help to generate an awareness of a larger context. The dinner plates set the time of day. Shadows would only fall across the plates if the sun were low in the sky. The phoebe's cry emerges from the evening that surrounds the domestic situation. The poet is setting plates on the table when suddenly she is interrupted by the phoebe. What is the source of the connection she feels between the shadows and the phoebe's voice? These sorts of ideas and questions emerging from the poem indicate that it does indeed contain growth potential.
8) The value of the moment is difficult to quantify but seems substantial to me.
9) This poem may even be one of those few to possess universal significance, though such a determination is even less amenable of quantification than its "value."

Virgil was an important poet in the development of haiku during the seventies, with her work appearing frequently in Amann's Haiku and Cicada, and Higginson's Haiku Magazine. In 1973 she served as the president of the Haiku Society of America, and it was during this time that she worked with Harold Henderson and William Higginson to establish the widely recognized definition for haiku in America. During the mid-seventies Virgil seems to have become incommensurate with the pace of the development of haiku. In a 1986 letter to van den Heuvel she acknowledges her retreat from haiku because she had become distressed with "the quantity of inferior work that kept getting churned into print until I could stand no more of it..."
Although Virgil advocates a very objective haiku, she is careful to distinguish between the subjective experience of the poet and the objective expression of that experience in the poem. She has elaborated on her sense of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity:

Essentially, a haiku is the re-creation of a moment "in which the vast is perceived in one thing" (Blyth, Haiku, III, p. 13). Imperative is that it concern itself objectively with the experience that stirred the poet's mind. Only in this way can the reader be allowed to respond emotionally to the poem. To this end the poet remains outside the haiku, but it should not be forgotten that it is his vision, his selection and rejection and handling of the material that can bring to these words new significance. All artists have used the same subject matter-but a face by Rembrandt is not a face by Utamaro, nor is it a face by Goya or Lautrec or Chagall or Giotto. ("Transition")

Virgil realizes the possible paradox in this interplay between the subjective and objective, for why, if they are both "objectively" presented, is a face painted by one artist different from the face painted by another? In as much as no two people's experience of the world is ever identical, objective reality can never be perceived other than subjectively.

As a way to unify these tendencies, Virgil advocates haiku that contain symbolic or "surplus meaning" (Letter 10 Mar. 90). In a letter to Cor van den Heuvel (1972) she approvingly cites the following quotation from Engelberg's introduction to The Symbolist Poem:

The more we know about the apple, the less we know about it as an object in itself. One may, however, be able to split up this knowledge of the apple into an infinite number of perspectives from which to know it, with each perspective representing a shift in orientation toward the apple. Hence man and his object are separated and may be seen as two elusive forces, shifting positions in a sort of constant and dynamic dance within time and space. (31)

This quotation reveals why she would respond so favorably to a poem such as Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (Letter 5 Aug. 88). In Stevens' poem each way of looking at the blackbird provides a different physical or psychological view of the bird. No single perspective can capture the reality of the blackbird, and no numbers of perspectives exhausts its potential.

Although Virgil concurs with Engelberg that "Man and his object are separated," she recognizes the possibility that the object, when seen from the proper perspective or in the appropriate context, may reverberate in such a manner as to elicit a sympathetic vibration in the poet. She elaborates on this notion in an essay entitled "The Poem Wherein":

We are fooling ourselves if we deny symbolism is a part of haiku. We can't ignore that a poet, taking special notice of any occurrence outside himself, does so because of the personal meaning (symbolic meaning--perhaps Blyth's "mysterious reason") it calls forth. . . . The idea of the thing itself being depicted is all well and good. But what becomes of that thing once elicited is dependent upon the private symbolism of the individual poet. . . . I believe there is symbolism in varying degrees of obviousness in all haiku. (37)

Virgil seems to be searching for a way to achieve a state of "oneness" with the natural world, not through the process of the effacement of the ego, but a face by Rembrandt is not a face by Utamaro, nor is it a face by Goya or Lautrec or Chagall or Giotto. ("Transition")

As this passage makes explicit, Virgil is more interested in our knowing ourselves through our responses to the things of the world than in our knowing the things of the world themselves. (Although we might also argue that this ability of the things of the world to teach us something about ourselves implies a level of shared characteristics --a "correspondence," as Emerson would phrase it-- between the self and nature.)

In a discussion of symbolism in regard to one of her better known haiku she acknowledges the poem's concealed subjectivity:

the swan's head
turns away from sunset
to his dark side

. . . one evening those swans in the empty park in the glow of sundown made it happen. The occurrence was merely a gesture: one swan tucked its head among its feathers.

Why was this act a poem for me? At that point, I had no idea. I just knew inside that I was deeply stirred, that something was grand and eloquent and beautiful--and somehow sad. ("awareness" 62)

Following the initial experience, Virgil spent several weeks working on the poem before coming up with the phrase "turns away" to express precisely what she felt—that the "poem renounces conventional beauty." Such a conclusion really tells us nothing about the nature of the swan, whose gesture is neither a renunciation nor an acceptance of conventional beauty, but the conclusion does tell us a great deal about Virgil's sense of aesthetics.

Though Virgil may seem to reject conventional beauty, she is still aware of the subtle interplay of light and color that makes up the world around us. Many of her haiku express moments when she becomes aware of color or light:

red flipped out
chicken lung
in a cold white sink
Emerging hot and rosy
from their skins--
beets!

over & over
my silver needle catches
the morning sun

not seeing
the room is white
until that red apple

She is also acutely aware of the absence of light or the presence of shadows, as in "pheobe's cry" or in the following:

Quiet afternoon:
water shadows
on the pine bark

Both of these poems also juxtapose a sound effect (the cry of the phoebe and the quiet of the afternoon) with a visual effect (blue shadows and water shadows). This mixing of senses is reminiscent of the synesthetic effects that are common in traditional symbolist poetry.

In a 1972 letter to van den Heuvel, she explains the artistic basis of the "quiet afternoon" haiku as taught to a group of art students in a lesson on the use of "negative space":

I would set up a still life of simple objects . . . and they were given charcoal and told to accurately block in (no lines used, only areas of dark) NOT the objects themselves, but the intervals between the objects. This is why (and how) "quiet afternoon" was written without ever mentioning what the poem was about:

that lovely light!

In some of her haiku we experience even more directly the removal of light in a manner similar to van den Heuvel's later efforts in Dark:

the quiet woods
last light staying
darkness
twilight
taking
the trees

In addition to haiku that create a "moment" by the sudden appearance or removal of light and color, she also writes many haiku that recreate a moment by describing a physical movement:

low tide:
all the people
stoop

trickling
over the dam--
summer's end

a white bird
running on the shade
of the zebra's legs

in the damp spring evening
blackbirds
changing trees

Virgil occasionally experiments with the placement of words in order to more accurately recreate the precise movement she has witnessed:

walking the snow-crust
not sinking
sinking
One poem of hers makes use of such a placement of words to create, not a sense of movement, but a sense of stillness:

mullein
with nothing around it
but the air

In an interesting one-line poem she has managed to make nearly every word function as a pivot-word:

twilightblue&palegreenleaves
everywhere
centofwatermelons

This experiment works nicely in a poem that attempts to convey a sense of the poet's confusion at the overwhelming presence of light and color and leaves and scents. Our indecision of which grammatical combination to choose matches the poet's indecision about which phenomenon to experience.

Though Virgil is willing to experiment with these sorts of effects, her experimentation is always secondary to the felt experience of the poem. These devices are not the primary focus of our attention, rather, they function as aids to our appreciation of the poet's experience with the world, not of her experience with language. The linguistic devices in her haiku are vehicles rather than cargo.

Lee J. Richmond

Lee J. Richmond's haiku are virtually unknown even in the small community of haiku poets. He is the only poet I am analyzing whose work does not appear in van den Heuvel's Haiku Anthology, though I think the quality of his work is comparable to that of the best poets van den Heuvel does include.

Richmond was born in Washington, Pennsylvania during the Second World War. He graduated from Washington and Jefferson College and received a Ph.D. in American literature from Syracuse. He taught American literature for many years at St. John's University, New York as a specialist in Dickinson, Poe, and film studies. Additionally, he worked on several literary journals and co-edited Notes on Modern American Literature. Richmond died in August 1990 at the age of 54.


Many of Richmond's haiku are so reminiscent of the work of the Japanese poets that they almost seem as though they could be translations from Japanese. Because the world revealed in his haiku is so small—tending flowers at the bedside, sweeping the floor, swatting a fly—he presents few distinctly American images. On the other hand, his insight into this narrow world is so intense and personal that the poems always seem the work of an original poet, and seem far less derivative than many haiku by other American poets with more identifiably American subjects.

Richmond did write a few poems, including unfortunately the first haiku in Fireflies, that seem too derivative and inauthentic, even if the experience actually occurred to the poet:

Straw sandals:
forgotten,
they fill with cherry-flowers

Richmond defends this poem by stating that "the first haiku in Fireflies is placed there for several reasons, one of which may be called 'structural'--to contrast the passivity of the occasion with the end poem [This autumn morning/cast-off husk of cicada/is lifting itself up], where the shell or sensibility is in activity, as if to fight against blankness, the voids, abysses" (Letter 20 Jan. 90). While this is a persuasive explanation, I find that as the first poem in a generally very authentic collection, the poem's seeming derivative use of Japanese images may dissuade readers from recognizing the originality of many of the subsequent poems. If we read on in the collection, however, we are quickly rewarded with an excellent and original composition more typical of his work:

Winter thunder.
There in the shaving glass
razor waits poised

Many of Richmond's haiku concern bouts with illness, and are reminiscent of the poems Shiki composed in his later years, such as those in "A Verse Record of My Peonies." Indeed Richmond acknowledges his debt to the Japanese haiku poets, especially Shiki and some other of the more modern poets, by incorporating translations of their haiku into his own collections. Richmond has also sub-titled several of his books "free-meter haiku." This phrase was used by some of the modern Japanese haiku poets, most notably Ippekirô, but so far as I am aware it has not been used by American haiku poets other than Richmond to designate their style of haiku. It might be a useful term to distinguish between haiku that conforms to the classical 5-7-5 pattern and haiku that does not.

The subjective nature of his haiku is most apparent in those poems in which his state of illness is mirrored back to him by the natural world:

This sickness,
the dark insistence of spring
today

Chest pains,
sound of someone breaking
plum tree branches

The firefly
it too may burn itself away
in a cage
Against my back
stethoscope, how dark it sounds
the autumn wind

For the sick man
all of sky and earth is loud
an autumn cicada

My cough
in the garden every leaf
in disarray

It seems possible, however, and perhaps more accurate, to argue that in these poems Richmond has not so much projected his own inner condition onto nature as he has selected those elements in nature that correspond to his own inner state. We can find other poems, however, where the imprint of the poet on the natural world is even more obvious:

The sick man walking
to the doctor’s, embosses
the mud of spring

In an analysis Richmond prepared for the Annual Conference for Poetry Therapy at the University of Alabama Medical Center in April of 1988, he discussed the relationship between the poet's physical or psychological condition and the poems the poet creates.

One may attempt the utmost objectivity in the realm of fictive chimeras, but something of his or her beingness remains, whether the finished work was abreactional or not. . . . Especially in literature that concerns illness, do we recognize the symbiotic connectedness of biography and production.

As an example of the link between biography and art Richmond uses a haiku by the Japanese poet, Otsuji (1881-1920):

For me, as well:
convalescing,
how cold the chrysanthemums' smell!

Of this poem, Richmond says that "the chill suggestively rendered here goes from plant to person, a convalescent figure for whom the heady smell of chrysanthemum vexes as the sick man registers (this is implied as a trope) bodily coldness." I think Richmond obscures his true subjectivity here. It seems to me that the chill moves from poet to plant, rather than the other way around. This poem is therefore a good example of a haiku in which the poet's inner state is projected onto the external world. In this haiku the correlation between Otsuji's state of mind and the chrysanthemum is expressed by the use of synesthesia. Richmond makes occasional use of this device as well:

Holed up in these rooms
standing red before me
 cicada's first scream

Richmond claims that nearly half of the 5,000 haiku he has composed reveal "the marked relatedness" between the mind of the poet and the external world. As an example of this relatedness he provides:

For the sick man
all of sky and earth is loud
an autumn cicada

In this poem he states that:

[I have] intended a low-keyed personal sensation or psychological reaction--despite the force of the muscular adjective "loud"--by inventing a natural referent--the cicada's shrill cry. How does one tell his physician of pain? One does it often by use of words such as like or as, or by other figurative means. The sharp pitch of the sick man in fevers and chills is abbreviated above to "all of sky and earth."

It seems obvious from these claims that Richmond is more interested in telling us what is occurring in his own psyche than he is in telling us what is occurring in the external world. The patient who tells the doctor that his or her pain is like the cry of a cicada is not providing the doctor with information about the nature of the cicada. In this haiku Richmond often uses nature to symbolically express the state of his psyche.

I am willing to acknowledge that in some of his poems a firm division between the outer and inner world may be illusory. In these poems Richmond juxtaposes, to the point of fusion, two aspects of nature, his own emotional, psychological, human nature and the nature of the external world. Sometimes that juxtaposition is imbalanced and functions metaphorically, with the external world subservient to the poet's internal world:

Without a place to die,
crouches where he pleases:
winter fly
It is difficult to read such a poem as other than an allegory for the poet's emotional condition. At other times, however, the two realms seem to hang in a delicate balance:

Waking in the night
I hear the snow:
winter seclusion

Nobody's to blame,
the autumn roses thrown away
black

In the preface to his Fireflies: Selected Haiku: 1975-1985, Richmond states the influence of Blyth's discussion of sabi on his work, and he connects sabi with the detachment his personal self feels from the natural world:

Especially influential is Mr. Blyth's meaning of sabi, which I presume to refer to that kind of beauty connected with loneliness; he means, I interpret, not something which is morbid or pessimistic, but something related to the detachment in a cosmic sense which resides in all things--distant or close. It is not the need to be with and to talk with someone, nor is it feeling forsaken or alone. Sabi is a quiet force, a force bound to the phenomenal world, but a force which simultaneously manifests how detached each of us is from any phenomenon outside the self. Mutability might be its most visible show. (xi-xii)

As an example of a poem exemplifying sabi in his own work he gives:

Winter seclusion
sweeping husks of winter flies
onto snow

The detachment from the world that Richmond sees as the condition of the self is a detachment that is shared by other living things--such as flies--hence the condition of detachment provides a level on which, paradoxically, the poet achieves oneness with the natural world.

Sick and feverish
light of the fireflies
it too goes out

Sleeping late
face to face for a long time,
fly and I

Though he shares Hotham's sense of detachment, Richmond, unlike Hotham, seems to feel a kinship with nature based on this shared state of aloneness.

Richmond was uncomfortable with a metaphoric reading of his haiku. In his preface to Fireflies he argues that the "fusion of fragmented reality with the poet's mind at a critical moment of perception" is not metaphorical because "no figurative equation need be fretted over" (vii). He makes this point in a discussion of a haiku by Shiki:

From the point of his brush
it flowers:
morning-glory

In this poem, he says, "Shiki . . . unerringly makes a super-positioning of things in a manner that defies conventional figurativeness. Only the literal-minded will seek figure of speech" (viii-ix). This view seems to conflict with his consideration of a patient's use of metaphor as a means for the patient to explain a subjective sensation to a physician. In other words, Richmond seems to distinguish between the symbolic presentation of a subjective state as an objective image--such as in "for the sick man"--and the metaphoric linking of two objective images--as in Shiki's "from the point of his brush."

In spite of his clearly stated opposition to metaphor, however, (viii-ix). This view seems to conflict with his consideration of a patient's use of metaphor as a means for the patient to explain a subjective sensation to a physician. In other words, Richmond seems to distinguish between the symbolic presentation of a subjective state as an objective image--such as in "for the sick man"--and the metaphoric linking of two objective images--as in Shiki's "from the point of his brush."

In spite of his clearly stated opposition to metaphor, however, Richmond does make occasional use of metaphorical devices, even overt simile, in his haiku:

The rainy season,
bloating like tangled fish
white roses

Throughout his haiku Richmond presents numerous subtle permutations on a consistent theme--the loneliness of the self in a mutable universe--and he does so with a consistent tone--melancholy.

Because of the interrelationship among his poems, he doesn't send separate haiku out for publication in magazines, believing his work is "best read in bulk." As he says, "a large number of the haiku read in sequence reveals style, patterns of imagery, ideas, etc. So that I've chosen to publish in books where I can present the reader with many, many haiku on page after page" (Letter 28 Nov. 88). This tendency has cost Richmond even the small amount of recognition many other poets have gained in the isolated world of haiku. But it also signals an artistic integrity that in the long run benefitted both his own development as a poet as well as the long-term vitality of haiku in North America.
Raymond Roseliep

The North American haiku poets so far considered have primarily made use of a "wordless," plain style. They have tended to accept the ability of ordinary language to recreate their experiences; and they have tended to be interested in the poet's role as a reporter of experiences rather than as a creator of them. Other haiku poets, however, have been less certain of the ability of common speech to communicate their experiences, and they have therefore exploited the characteristically more poetic elements of language. Also, rather than conceiving of the poet in the prophetic role of receiver and imparter of experience, they are more likely to celebrate the creative powers of the poet. One of the first significant exponents of this language-centered approach to haiku in the West was Raymond Roseliep. For Roseliep, "Poetry is creating. It is man and woman playing the God role" (qtd. in Eulberg, "Poet" 103).

Raymond Roseliep was born in 1917 near Dubuque, Iowa. He attended Columbia Academy (later Loras College) in Dubuque. He subsequently entered the Theological College at Catholic University of America and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1943. Roseliep was for many years a well known "Catholic poet," writing theological verse for various Catholic publications. He taught in the English Department at Loras College from 1946 through 1966. During this time he received an MA from the Catholic University of America in 1948 and a PhD from Notre Dame in 1954. In the summer of 1964 he served as Poet-in-residence at Georgetown University (Eulberg, "Poet" 100-101).

As Roseliep recounts in a letter published as an essay in the haiku magazine Bonsai, he discovered haiku in 1963 and immediately began reading as many haiku and as much critical commentary on the genre as he could find ("This Haiku" 11). Roseliep tried his hand at the genre, and haiku began to appear with increasing frequency among the other poems in his books, The Small Rain (1963) and Love Makes the Air Light (1965).

In 1976 Roseliep became the chaplain at the Holy Family Hall for the Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque. In that same year he published his first book consisting entirely of haiku, Flute Over Walden, a collection of poems that Roseliep had been publishing in the Thoreau Quarterly Journal. During the mid-seventies the Journal included a section of haiku entitled "Thoreauhaiku," which were, I'm afraid, of rather sporadic quality, doing little justice to either Thoreau or haiku. In his introduction to Flute Over Walden, Roseliep explains his sense of the relationship between his haiku and the Japanese haiku tradition:

Bowing past the non-transferable oriental spirit and idiom, I court the Western spirit and tap American word-hoard. If indeed my Western imagination travels beyond sacred sanct bounds of Eastern haiku and senryu disciples, I trust Thoreau's frog and mine are not distinctly related to Bashô's. (8)

In this collection Roseliep adheres stringently to the 5-7-5 form. But as his comment about travelling beyond the "sacrosanct bounds" of haiku indicates, he makes use of many poetic devices not normally found in haiku. Unfortunately his use of these devices in this book leads to a combination of abstract concepts and metaphorical clichés that result in poems far removed from either good haiku or good Western poetry:

Concord visitors
don't drink the wine of morning air
break the bread of words


In these collections Roseliep consciously and systematically violates nearly all the established "rules" of haiku as the genre has developed since Bashô. On a superficial reading this makes his work appear avant-garde; in fact, however, he has reintroduced into haiku many of the pre-Bashô techniques used by poets of the Danrin and Teitoku schools. These schools emphasized puns, metaphors, and other tropes, as well as the full linguistic and allusive qualities of Japanese language and literature. Roseliep sought to do the same for English language haiku.

In his letter to Bonsai in 1976 Roseliep explained the rationale for his efforts at transforming the genre. He begins by stating his agreement with one of the dominant objectives of traditional haiku, affirming thereby his membership in a haiku tradition. He asserts his belief that "in haiku it is the affinity between the world of physical nature and the world of human nature that concerns us, and we focus our images there" (12). He goes on to elaborate this connection to the haiku tradition:

Our writers must point out the unity underlying all things:
presenting two apparently disparate images and showing how they "unite." We allow the tramp and the butterfly to become brothers under a common sun; we motion the reader into an intuitive rather than an intellectual perception of reality . . . (19)

Roseliep does not believe, however, that Western haiku poets should be confined by what he considers to be Japanese methods to achieve this objective. The first alteration he proposes in order to make his haiku more Western is the introduction of "our Christian God into haiku . . . since to most people living in our country he's more familiar than the beloved Buddha, and it's the spirit of man in America, the spirit of his universe, the spirit of his informing Alpha-Omega that our poets normally probe and reveal" (13).

As I've attempted to suggest at some lengths in earlier chapters, however, I think Roseliep's assessment of the relationship between American poetry and the Christian conception of God is inaccurate. That relationship has been at least as much one of antagonism as it has been one of familiarity. Many of the most important American poets, from Emerson to Williams to Snyder, have been drawn toward an understanding of the universe more in line with Buddhist than with Christian theology. Roseliep's proposal to replace Buddha with Christ is far more than a simple replacement of an Eastern image with a Western one in order to Americanize his haiku. It is of a different order altogether than the replacement of say, a cherry tree with a crabapple. His proposal may well represent a fundamental change in the nature of the metaphorical basis for the poetics of haiku. I suspect that Roseliep's adoption of the language-centered style and his use of poetic techniques usually avoided by haiku poets is closely related to his belief in a hierarchically structured transcendental Christian faith that believes in the separate identity of each personal soul and in the complete "otherness" of the deity. His celebration of the individual creativity of the poet might be an indication of this changing poetics.
A good haiku to consider in this light is one in which Roseliep expresses a sense of "oneness," but in a manner that seems more Judeo-Christian than Buddhist:

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downpour:
my "I-Thou"
T-shirt
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In an article in *Modern Haiku* Roseliep discussed what he was seeking in this poem:

Elemental rain, whose existence issues from the Supreme Spirit, becomes more mine as it soaks through shirt and skin, pressing those two words onto and into me. A simple happening, and again a unity in our complex universe becomes visible and felt: the identifying of man-with-nature-with Deity. (Spiess, Roseliep 35)

In this poem we see similarities as well as differences between Roseliep's poetics and the more traditional Zen-inspired efforts of haiku poets to achieve a sense of oneness. The distinction becomes more apparent when we compare his poem to other efforts haiku poets have made to express the experience of oneness:

```
A rooster and I
walk
over the frozen earth

the breeze and i
make our way
through the grasses

pig and i spring rain
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These poems are at once more subtle and, I would argue, more effective than Roseliep's. Roseliep's t-shirt, certainly a clever device for introducing the I-Thou concept into his poem, has nevertheless done just that, introduced a concept. The other poems express an experience of oneness rather than a concept of it. This very conceptualization undermines the poet's rhetorical strategy to provide us with a recreation of his experience of oneness. In a discussion of Roseliep's haiku, Robert Spiess suggests that in the poem we sense something like Meister Eckhart's claim that "he neither gave to God nor received anything from him, for he and God were a unit, that is, pure unity" (qtd. in Spiess, Roseliep 35). It seems to me, however, that Meister Eckhart specifically disavows the very I-Thou distinction established by Roseliep. Unlike Eckhart, who "neither gave to God nor received anything from him," Roseliep receives the elemental rain, as he says, from the "Supreme Spirit." Furthermore, the I-Thou distinction expresses the very essence of the dualistic thinking Zen attempts to overcome. Though structured similarly to Roseliep's poem, the haiku by Ippekirô, Wills, and Mountain recreate an experience of "oneness" in which the distinction between I and Thou is erased, perhaps even shown to have been illusory; Roseliep subsumes the I-Thou distinction beneath a larger presence, but the distinction remains.

After his consideration of oneness, Roseliep goes on to challenge the "haiku purists" who deride the use of poetic techniques such as personification, hyperbole, and metaphor in haiku:

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Haiku purists who object to those three figures of speech, along with others like simile and symbol, would have us believe the objection is an absolute rule. It never has been. All these devices can be found scattered discreetly throughout classical Japanese haiku. (14)
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Rosaliep is correct that these devices have been used throughout the history of Japanese haiku. He fails to mention, however, that since Bashô's revolution, which substantially subordinated the use of these devices to a more wordless style, their use has indeed been "discreet." Roseliep continues:

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So I encourage a masterful if somewhat thrifty use of figurative language, which contributes color, emotion, and tangibility to enhance rather than destroy things-as-things, the "oneing" or coupling of man with the universe. Metaphor I especially promote because it is the imagination's pet tool. To deny the poet either that tool or his creative mind in haiku is to reduce him to mere poetaster. (14)
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His suggestion that metaphor and other expressions of the poet's imagination serve to enhance the sense of oneness between humans and nature runs counter to most other haiku theorists. I would suggest that, if anything, poems such as the following tell us more about the creativity of Raymond Roseliep than they do about the ostensible thing-as-thing reality of the subjects of the poems:

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unlocking dawn
and dream:
what a key a bird is

dandelion gold
off in fleece
to redeem itself
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Other examples of Roseliep's haiku can be found in which, in my opinion, his use of poetic devices and conceptualizations serves to obscure the experience recreated in the poem:
not winding the heart
nor minding
the mind

the Mass priest
holds up bread
the still point

the banker
cancels
a moth

The Morning-Glory
takes in
the world
from the heart out

funnels
our day
into itself

closes
on its own
inner light

long after
the diesel horn
the horned owl

I find myself in agreement with Chuck Brickley, who, in reference to this last poem, suggests, that these sorts of devices "usurp actual experience as plausible grounds for the poem's inspiration" (33).

In spite of my disagreement with Roseliep's theories, I still find that many of his haiku are very good. Had he not composed a substantial number of excellent haiku, his innovative theories would probably not have received a favorable reception among so many poets. The quality of his best haiku requires that his innovations be considered seriously, even if subsequently rejected.

Many of his more wordless haiku express the essence of the poem's subject through the identification of characteristic gestures. These haiku come across as being far more fully realized moments than his language-centered efforts:

the sailor
peeling potatoes
around himself

the black hen
eating outside
her shadow

buttoning his fly
the boy with honeysuckle
clenched in his mouth

he removes his glove
to point out
Orion

campfire extinguished,
the woman washing dishes
in a pan of stars

Raymond Roseliep died on December 5, 1983. His bold experimentation, with its occasional excesses and sporadic but important successes, has been very influential on a number of younger haiku poets. I fear, however, that poets such as Roseliep who seek to Westernize haiku by the wholesale introduction of Western poetic techniques into their poems run the risk of turning haiku into just a short Western-style poem, and hence of eliminating any justification the genre has for a distinct and continued existence.
Alexis Rotella

One poet who has been influenced by the innovations Raymond Roseliep popularized is Alexis Rotella. In a talk she presented to the Haiku Society of America in 1985 Rotella acknowledged her debt to Roseliep:

Roseliep, for me, was a pathfinder. I admit, he left a lot of garbage behind but I still believe he was a twentieth-century pathfinder who cleared away a lot of dead wood for many of us. For me, Raymond killed a lot of stereotypes. His energy gave me the courage to write in my own voice, to be more courageous . . . ("Oneness")

Rotella began writing haiku during the early eighties and quickly gained the respect of other haiku poets.

Alexis Rotella was born in 1947 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She received a philosophy BA at Drew University and subsequently earned a PhD in clinical hypnotherapy. She currently resides in New Jersey, where she is an interfaith minister and healer. Rotella served as President of the Haiku Society of America in 1985. She has been the editor of *Frogpond*, and was the founding editor of *Brussels Sprout*. In addition to fulfilling these duties she has published numerous haiku books: *Clouds in My Teacup* (1983), *Tuning the Lily* (1983), *Harvesting Stars* (1983), *On a White Bud* (1983), *After an Affair* (1984), *Rearranging Light* (1985), *Looking the Circle* (1985), *Middle City* (1986), and *Anthophorics of Bells* (1987). Her haiku appear regularly in most of the haiku magazines. She has also published several articles on haiku for non-literary publications.

Many of Rotella's haiku fall into the controversial category of "psychological haiku," which some poets and critics prefer to call senryu. Since her poems concerning human relationships are rarely humorous, I think the term "psychological haiku" is more appropriate. Rod Willmot, who popularized the term "psychological haiku," suggests in his introduction to *On a White Bud*, that in Rotella's work "the full intensity of haiku perception is turned upon the human condition" (6). As this statement suggests, most of her poems are concerned with human relations rather than with nature, and even her nature haiku, as Willmot indicates, show "the formerly 'pure' world of Nature . . . imprinted with a human presence" (6). As a particularly vivid example of this presence Willmot cites the title poem to *On a White Bud*:

Vase of peonies:
on a white bud
lipstick print

Other critics concur with Willmot. Marlene Mountain, for example, in a review of Rotella's *On a White Bud* and *After an Affair*, observes that Rotella is at the forefront of a trend in haiku composition in which "no longer are [haiku poets] mere observers of phenomena, we are the phenomena" (346). According to a conservative definition of haiku, however, most of Rotella's poems would be considered senryu rather than haiku.

Rotella has marshalled a vociferous opposition to objectively rendered "nature sketches." Nature scenes," she says, "make nice pictures but make lousy haiku" ("Haiku's Cardinal Sins" 19a). In a provocatively titled essay "Haiku's Cardinal Sins" or Bashô is Dead" she argues that far too many haiku poets churn out stale imitations of the haiku masters, with no original vision or voice of their own. Though at first glance her position is seemingly at odds with the haiku tradition, she is in fact advocating the sort of primary and original relation to the universe celebrated by Emerson and sought by haiku poets such as Bashô. In the essay she complains that, "Most of the haiku I read are imitations of the Old Masters. Bashô, Buson and Issa had their own voices. Instead of looking back to Japanese haiku as our only inspiration, it's time to look where the great masters looked--AT NATURE and BEHIND NATURE" (19a).

In such a comment we find a lament on the condition of contemporary haiku almost identical to Emerson's lament at the beginning of Nature on the imitative state of literature in his own day. And her solution is in part similar to Emerson's--experience life directly, not through the experiences of others. Furthermore, she wants the poet to function not as a distant observer of nature, but as an engaged presence. Rotella finds this easier to do with her relationship to other humans than with her relationship to non-human nature. She has written few poems solely about nature, and in these nature poems she usually fails to create a sense of an original vision. For example:

At the edge
of the inkstone
butterfly fanning

Perhaps Rotella actually witnessed this scene, but the haiku seems imitative of Japanese poems and hence lacks authenticity.

Rotella's haiku about people, however, are often fully realized. These haiku are rarely about people separate from herself; more often they concern people with whom she has some relationships--friends, family, lovers. Her perspective in these poems is not from the detached and often cynical position of a senryu poet but rather from the engaged and sympathetic position of a haiku poet.

Typical of her work are haiku that combine people and their personal relationships with nature. In some of these haiku, especially in these two memorable examples, she takes the emotion she feels towards another person and directs it against the natural world:

asparagus    I bite off their heads

Trying to forget him
stabbing
the potatoes

Sometimes, though more rarely, Rotella uses what would technically be called pathetic fallacy to suggest that nature actively empathizes with her emotional state. (Though it is also possible to read the tightening rose petals in the following poem as a symbolic euphemism for the physical sensation of the poet's declining sexual desire.)

During our argument
a pink rose
tightens its petals
She does not feel that the (em)pathy between herself and the rose is in fact a fallacy because, she says, "as a student and practitioner of the healing arts, the one thing I rely on is the one energy that connects us all." And, she continues, "I have experienced . . . from the time I was a little girl, that [nature] does empathize with me, understands me, that the flowers, in their own 'language' do speak to me, and always have" (Letter). Perhaps if we consider the "pathetic fallacy" in the light of Bashô's critical term "hosomi," in which, as Makoto Ueda says, the poet's heart vibrates "in response to the smallest stimulus in nature" (Bashô and Poetics 426), we might find that the pathetic fallacy is a sort of reverse "hosomi," in which nature vibrates in response to the human heart.

In many of Rotella's haiku the interaction between humans and nature serves to reveal some personal characteristic or emotional circumstance of the human subject:

Family reunion:
Grandma takes the hailstone
from the freezer

Starry night:
I enter
your mirror

Not knowing
how to greet him--
it starts to rain

Graveside:
grandson blowing
dandelion

With wine glasses
we stand and talk
into the rhododendrons

This connection between human relations and nature is also apparent in what is probably her best haiku:

Late August
I bring him the garden
in my skirt

Rotella has also written many haiku into which external nature does not enter at all. These are the sorts of poems most likely to be called senryu by those who believe haiku must concern itself with nature. But since these poems are not humorous, I prefer the designation psychological haiku rather than senryu. These poems usually consist of a statement that reveals a subjective emotional state juxtaposed with the objective record of a gesture:

Just friends:
he watches my gauze dress
blowing on the line

Not yet lovers
we drink
from the same cup

You bring me tea
as if everything
were perfect

Discussing divorce
he strokes
the lace tablecloth

In addition to challenging the norms for appropriate haiku content, Rotella joins with Roseliep in challenging the notion that haiku should not contain literary devices. She suggests that a study of the history of haiku shows "that techniques such as metaphor, poetics, imagination, personification, statements of excitement, prose sentences and allusions are valid devices which have been used for centuries by haiku writers" ("Validity" 40). In spite of her allowance of these devices, however, Rotella's own use of them is sparing. Sometimes she makes use of word-play, as in these examples from After an Affair:

Wild touch-me-nots:
you never
touch me
The peace-lily opens:
still this rift
between us

These poems seem like rather-too-obvious plays on words, but Rotella explains them in a more personal way:

Wild touch-me-nots are dynamic flowers. You touch them and they explode in your hand and send a shiver through the body, similar to an orgasm. At the time [the poem was written], there was no touching in my life on any physical level and when I had the experience of the wild touch-me-nots near a childhood swamp burst in my hand, I also experienced the deep loneliness of a celibate life. Of never being touched. Likewise, with the peace lily. Have you ever seen a peace lily? They have white pods and protruding from their center is a thick phallic like stamen that cuts through the air with, what seems to me, precision. It also divides the pod in half, showing separation. The separation between people--how rifts become rigid. And how very sad noncommunication can be, especially when one tries and tries, like the stamen cutting the air, to cut through the thickness of disagreement. (Letter)

In a talk presented to the Haiku Society of America in 1985, Rotella analyzed the concept of oneness so important to haiku poets. In this discussion she presents a theory describing the unification of separate ego selves within an encompassing "One Self" in a manner that, in spite of its New Age idiom, is remarkably similar to Emerson's analysis in "The Over-Soul" and "Circles," as well as to Whitman's expressions of the idea in "Song of Myself." Rotella proposes that within the "One Self" or "One Ego," which she represents diagrammatically by a large circle, are many smaller selves, which she represents by small circles labeled "little egos (us)." "Within the self," she explains, "we are receiving stations as well as transmitters." (Emerson, I suppose, might have considered the role of the poet to be like that of a relay station, receiving and imparting signals, rather than like that of a transmitter, generating its own signals.) Her discussion is primarily concerned with the way in which the little ego selves are connected with one another: "Like it or not," she says, "we're all connected to each other." She also acknowledges that nature is likewise a part of the One Self. "You're also connected with every single thing that exists, not just individual persons. You're connected to every rock, every leaf, every flower," Rotella's haiku, however, like the bulk of her discussion of oneness, are concerned more with the experience of oneness between people than with the experience between humans and nature.

Rotella again echoes Emerson in her consideration of the "All-Seeing Eye." After describing her concept of this eye (making use of the Masonic eye represented on the U.S. dollar hovering atop the pyramid on the Great Seal of the United States) Rotella asks the audience to "Imagine yourself living right in the center of [the] eyeball. Imagine that first diagram of the One Self, the one including all the little circles, as having its being within the pupil of the All-Seeing Eye." What she is asking her audience to do is to imagine themselves in the same position Emerson experienced when he felt himself transformed into a "transparent eyeball":

Standing on the bare ground,--my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.

(Works 1: 15-16)

It is from such a perspective, Rotella believes, that the best haiku are written.

Based on this metaphysical premise, Rotella next identifies four levels of haiku. The first consists of "nature sketches." "Within this first range," she says, "lie those who are happy making picture post cards and writing nature sketches." These are poets who simply record the illusory separateness of natural objects, but who have no insight into the shared oneness of existence. Interestingly, she doesn't seem to think this is a problem with what might be termed "people sketches," though it seems obvious that haiku about people could be as superficial as ones about nature. Her dislike of the conventional haiku nature poems leads her to focus on these sorts of poems as the least worthwhile.

The second level she calls "scratching the surface." This is the level at which "the person desirous of penetrating illusion is going to start to focus. . . . The beginning haiku writer lands here because he or she has begun to see beyond the picture-postcard stage. It's also where most people stay." In this level, she believes, poets "can experiment a lot with various poetic techniques . . . ." (Letter).

Better poets, however, move on to the third stage, the level of "good to excellent quality haiku." This is the level, she suggests, "where the serious haiku student eventually lands."

Within this range are all kinds of possibilities for experimentation. . . . This area houses those writers who really care about their art form. You've got your Cor van den Heuvels here, your Nick Virgilios, your Raymond Rosleeps, etc. . . . Haiku poets in the third level are always "on," they're always looking, they spend more time awake than asleep.

Poets who have achieved this level are attuned to the oneness of existence, but they must still struggle to maintain that awareness and to recount it in their poems.

If these poets are particularly persistent and successful they arrive at the fourth level, where they may find themselves the recipients of "gift haiku." These haiku arrive, according to Rotella, because:

Sometimes we push so hard through new atmospheres of consciousness that we suddenly pierce through an area that's not controlled by gravity. Haiku start coming to the poet as if they had wings. These are what I call the "gift haiku," haiku that seem to write themselves. These are the miracle haiku. The classics. Virgilios's "lily" is a miracle, in my opinion. So is Basho's "old-pond" haiku. If you work long enough in the top third-level, the miracle will manifest. It's similar to meditating. If you do your mantra faithfully and follow your breath for 10 years, a new space eventually opens.

These gift haiku, Rotella seems to be suggesting, arrive to poets when they intuitively break through, if ever momentarily, into a complete oneness with existence. These gift haiku represent, we might say, the most keenly perceived moments of all.

For Rotella the process of composing a top-level haiku is a process of purification. Such a purification is similar to the Zen effort to return the mind to its beginning state or to the transcendentalist poet's effort to return to the Edenic condition. As she says, "The purer the haiku, the closer one gets in consciousness to the [All-Seeing Eye, One Self]" and hence the more likely one is to receive "gift haiku." Rotella provides several examples of poems that she believes represent the attainment of such a state:
The mountain ant
stands out clear
on the white peony

(Shiki)

A lonely
railway station:
lotus flowers bloom

(Shiki)

Rotella concludes this part of her discussion with the statement that, "in the most powerful haiku, the small ego or personal I blends with the All-Seeing Eye or No-Thing." As an example of such a poem she provides:

Autumn evening:
a crow perched
on a withered bough.

(Bashō)

I have a difficult time reconciling Rotella's discussion of the process by which one attains oneness in haiku with her earlier acceptance of the use of poetic devices. She suggests that poetic techniques "might appear in a gift haiku" (Letter) so she does not completely exclude them from use in top quality haiku, but her acceptance of these devices seems to me to be at odds with her idea of haiku as the culmination of a process of purification whose fulfillment is the blending of the personal ego into the One Self. Few poets who have set such a goal for their poetry, whether Emerson, Whitman, Bashō, or Snyder, make use of the sort of poetic devices she supports. All of the examples of "gift haiku" she provides are simple, wordless poems that make no use of poetic devices, and I wonder if other poems employing poetic tropes would be considered "gift" haiku. The intrusion of the logical mind that seems inherent in the use of tropes would seem to mitigate against their occurrence in such "gift" haiku.

In Rotella's haiku, moments of oneness suggestive of "gift" haiku are more likely to come in relationship to other people than in relationship to nature, but when they do come, they are not records of the poet's creative imagination at work, but, as in the best haiku, records of her direct felt experience.

George Swede

Another poet who has written predominately psychological haiku is George Swede. Swede has also experimented with many haiku-like poems that attempt to give the reader an experience of the now-moment through language-centered techniques.

George Swede was born in Riga, Latvia in 1940 but was raised in Vancouver, BC. He currently resides in Toronto and teaches child psychology at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. Swede has published fiction books for children and collections of non-haiku poetry. His published collections of haiku are: Endless Jigsaw (1978), A Snowman, Headless (1979). Far as the Eye Can See (1979), This Morning's Mockingbird (1980), Eye to Eye With a Frog (1981), All of Her Shadows (1982), Frozen Breaths (1983), and Multiple Personality (1987). Swede has also published experimental haiku-inspired collections that include Flaking Paint (1983), Bifids (1984), and The Space Between (1986). He found that his children enjoyed his haiku so much he decided to publish three collections of haiku and other short poems in editions especially designed for children: Tick Bird (1983), Time is Flies (1984), and High Wire Spider (1986). Swede has also edited Canadian Haiku Anthology (1979) and Cicada Voices: Selected Haiku of Eric Amann (1981).

In 1981 Swede compiled a collection of his essays on haiku and published them as The Modern English Haiku. In the first essay in this book he recounts his introduction to the haiku genre:

I began to study the haiku in 1976. Until then it was for me (and, unfortunately, still is for most poets) a sort of "instant poetry"--three-liners written by either those too lazy to work at the craft or by serious writers needing a break from the labors of making "real" poems. What dramatically changed my view of haiku was a copy of Makoto Ueda's Modern Japanese Haiku sent to me by a book review editor. (6)

The fact that Swede's first exposure to the genre was through a collection of modern works accounts in part, perhaps, for his non-traditional approach to composition.

In his collection of essays Swede identifies what he considers to be the five essential rules of haiku:

1. The haiku must be brief (when read aloud, one breath length long).
2. The haiku must express a sense of awe (or transcendental insight).
3. The haiku must involve some aspect of nature (other than human nature).
4. The haiku must possess sense images (not generalizations).
5. The haiku must be written in the present tense. (30)

According to these rules, it would appear that Swede distinguishes between haiku and senryū based on content. I am unaware if his opinion on that distinction has changed since these essays were published, but if it hasn't then he must consider many of his own poems to be senryū rather than haiku. For example, based on Swede's definition of haiku the following poem would probably be a senryū, though I would consider it to be a psychological haiku:

The hum of the fan
cigarette smoke streams
through our silence

Swede's haiku can rather readily be arranged into four categories: (1) paradigmatic haiku, (2) psychological haiku, (3) senryū, and (4) experimental forms, which include several types, most notably binary haiku and jigsaw haiku. Even in his paradigmatic haiku, Swede almost always includes some human presence. Often, even when a human is not the subject of the haiku, a human presence is indicated either by an item created by humans or implied by the overall context of the poem:
Polar bear cage
icicles growing between
the bars

Empty egg carton fills with snow

Dominion Day:
after all the fireworks, the stars
still there

Ice fishing:
stuck to the bottom of the pail--
the pickerel's eye

More frequently however, Swede indicates his own presence overtly in the poem:

Deep snow
following in my footsteps
winter twilight

Spring: inside me falls a thin rain

Dropping stone after stone
into the lake--I keep reappearing

Over the tundra
millions of stars--I don't feel the cold

River at twilight:
I watch the darkness flow into my eye

In a review of Swede's *Endless Jigsaw*, Robert Spiess has commented on the frequent use of personal pronouns, and hence of the overt presence of the author, in Swede's haiku. He defends Swede's use of the personal pronoun by suggesting that, "readers will find that George Swede nonetheless does not intrude himself into the haiku--rather, that each of us naturally relates with the personal pronouns and feels herself or himself in the event-experience depicted" (52). Such a view conforms nicely to the Emerson-Whitman conception of the self. Whitman, for example, when read superficially, seems to write constantly and arrogantly about himself. But even a cursory understanding of his conception of the self makes it clear that, as he says in the first section of *Song of Myself*, "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." Similarly, then, according to Spiess, Swede's use of the first person is not intended to convey the presence of a unique personality but rather the presence of an observer who reports observations to us that we could have witnessed ourselves had we been in the same location.

The haiku for which Swede is best known are those that juxtapose human relationships, usually his own, with nature in a manner quite similar to that used by Alexis Rotella:

Unhappy wife
I pedal my bike through puddles

After the abortion she weeds the garden

Cold dawn rain:
I turn to touch my wife

Night begins to gather between her breasts

In this vein Swede has written two excellent erotic haiku that suggest a state of oneness between humans and nature. In these poems he integrates humans engaged in sexual activity into the natural environment. In the first poem nature enters the poet's home and harmonizes with his love-making:
Mingling
with the bird songs--
our dawn cries

In the second example two lovers have entered nature. From the perspective of the poet as *voyeur* they blend almost imperceptibly into the landscape:

Almost unseen
among the tangled driftwood
naked lovers

These poems create an experience in which human sexuality appears as yet one other manifestation of nature and lend credence to the view that erotic haiku are as much about "nature" as are haiku about more usually recognized elements of the natural world.

Another erotic haiku of Swede's I find interesting is one remarkably similar to a haiku by Bob Boldman. Boldman's poem, published in 1981, is

myst,
panties on the line

Swede's poem, also from 1981, is

Panties on the clothesline  lingering myst

Both of these haiku were included in Willmot's *Erotic Haiku*. I am unaware which poem was written first, or if either poet was aware of the other's composition. It seems odd that both poets would independently associate myst with panties; the relationship is not immediately obvious. Swede, however, has two other haiku that may help to clarify for us his sense of that relationship. One of his binary haiku indicates his erotic associations with the word "myst":

myst  semen

Furthermore, in a series concerning his loneliness while he is apart from his wife for a few weeks, Swede recently published a remarkably forthright haiku that, by way of contrast, indicates his association between sexual fulfillment and myst:

Behind the barn
small dust clouds
from my sperm

When placed together these poems suggest that Swede equates myst with sexual fulfillment, while he equates dryness and dust with unfulfilled sexual longing. These poems evoke, without any direct allusion, primal images of sexuality, fertility, rain, and drought. The semen raising clouds of dust from the ground is a powerful image of sexual sterility. Conversely, the myst lingering around the panties, and the sexual excitement the panties arouse in the poet combine to create an image of sexual fecundity and fulfillment. These poems, as well as Rotella's

Late August
I bring him the garden
in my skirt

indicate the possibility of haiku that take advantage of Western fertility myth archetypes without ever directly alluding to other literary or mythic material. The myths are given an immediate and present manifestation.

In addition to these poems that combine human relationships and emotions with nature, Swede has many haiku that exclude external nature entirely and consist solely of the record of a personal relationship or of a psychological state:

One by one to the floor   all of her shadows

Leaving my loneliness   inside her

Staring
back up--the open eyes
of the suicide

Mental hospital  my shadow stays outside

Perhaps this last haiku is as exemplary of a psychological haiku as any poem could be.

Swede has also written a number of poems that could be accounted pure senryu, since they represent human nature-- sometimes his own--in a satiric, ironic, or humorous fashion:

Stung by a bee--
I want to blame
my wife
My wife and I fight over how to stop our sons from fighting.

The following senryu is reminiscent of Issa's complaint against his wicked step-mother:

In the meadow among stinging nettles—I think of my former wife.

And, with a more gentle humor:

In the Dinosaur Wing the three retired schoolteachers stick close together.

In addition to these rather traditional haiku and senryu, Swede has explored the possibilities of two variations on the standard haiku form: binary haiku and jigsaw haiku. Both of these experiments are attempts to refine the haiku moment down to its most precise point. In binary haiku Swede does this simply by juxtaposing two words. In collaboration with Eric Amann and Leroy Gorman, Swede produced a volume consisting entirely of binary haiku entitled *The Space Between*. Swede's contributions to the volume include:

- firefly violin
- stars crickets
- fever ants

Leroy Gorman explained the theory behind such poems. In binary haiku, he proposes, "the haiku moment is distilled to two words or images. . . . The binary provides a reach of space between the two words, where images suggested are free to interact and evoke the haiku response on numerous levels" ("Into the Postmodern" 21).

Wally Swist, however, in a review of *The Space Between*, questions Gorman's unequivocal praise of binary haiku:

But the question is: does this experimentation work? . . . Those who inspect the binary haiku of *The Space Between* will either come to think of these experiments as coherent and successful haiku or as abstract attempts somehow incomplete and too cerebral. (52)

Swist's questioning tone implies his doubt of the effectiveness of binary haiku, but he doesn't take a definite stand. My position is firmer. I think binary haiku fail because they focus our attention on the words rather than on the things the words signify. In an afterword to *The Space Between*, the poets explain that they "entered into an exploration of the possibility of haiku being reduced to two words, whereby bringing haiku ever closer to its wordless nature." Based on my interpretation of the term "wordless poem," however, I would have to disagree. With so little context in which their references can be visualized, the words of a binary haiku lose their referential nature. Our attention is thereby drawn less to what they signify and more to their status as linguistic markers on a page. In the ideal haiku-as-wordless-poem, the language functions as a transparent vessel for the objects named. Binary haiku, however, increase the reader's awareness that the haiku consists of words rather than images.

Furthermore, I think these poems fail to unite the words, or the images designated by the words, into a unified poem. The words as separate entities juxtapose with one another; they do not create a unified image. Binary haiku do not provide the reader with enough information for the reader to recreate a moment of perception, therefore they tend to be primarily intellectual exercises rather than the recreation of felt experiences.

In a related attempt to recreate a precise moment of awareness, Swede has experimented with what he calls the jigsaw form of haiku. In these poems the letters of a one-line haiku are rearranged so that their sequence remains the same but the spacing between the words is altered. Swede's book *Flaking Paint* consists primarily of jigsaw haiku:

- des ert crow ded wi thsp ace
- do oru nope nfor yea rsth eke yb end s

The jigsaw form forces the reader to piece the words back together. Once the reader begins to gain a sense of the meaning of the words, the words all tend to become understandable at once, and the reader experiences a moment of awareness that correlates, in theory, to the momentary experience of the poet that is recreated in the work. As Gorman explains, "Swede takes a perfectly workable one-liner and draws the words apart into various components. When the reader's mind rejoins the words, an easily accessible haiku moment is realized . . . " ("Into the Postmodern" 21-22).

In a review of *Flaking Paint*, however, Scott Montgomery questions the success of this approach:

In general, Swede has adopted the jigsaw form of one-line haiku and used it with constant but rather arbitrary energy. The poems he chooses to break up are not any more deserving of this form than are others, except that some . . . need this distraction to divert notice from their deeper insufficiencies. (36)

Montgomery's criticism is well taken. If one reworks Swede's jigsaw haiku into a standard one-line format one finds rather unexceptional haiku:
I can see no compelling reason why these poems benefit from a jigsaw format. The desert poem, especially, with its evocation of space, seems unsuited to a jigsaw presentation.

Both the binary haiku and the jigsaw haiku are experiments that were worth making, but they are experiments that, to this point at least, have failed to produce results worth preserving. In spite of his many experiments with form, Swede's most important contributions to the development of North American haiku have been in the many excellent erotic and psychological poems he has produced.

Marlene Mountain

Haiku didn't stop with Bashô--it began!
--Marlene Mountain, "The Plight of the Haiku Public"

Quite likely the most innovative haiku poet currently writing is Marlene Mountain; consequently, and not surprisingly, she is also among the most controversial. Mountain has experimented with a variety of language-centered effects as well as with non-linguistic techniques. Furthermore, she has introduced political concerns into her haiku, especially feminist and environmentalist issues.

Marlene Mountain was born in 1939 in Ada, Oklahoma. She received a BFA in painting at the University of Oklahoma and an MA in painting from the University of North Dakota. She began writing haiku in 1968. Mountain moved with her husband, John Wills, and their son to the east Tennessee farm "Sweetwater." (Many of her early poems were published under the name Marlene Wills.) Following their divorce Mountain remained at Sweetwater, where she still resides, working on the farm, writing, and operating a small art gallery.

Her first book of haiku, The Old Tin Roof (1976), is a mixture of conventional haiku and experiments with concrete and language-centered poems. Some of the more traditional haiku in the volume include:

bull tongue plow . . .
edge of its blade
in the morning dew

grandmother's old quilt
a spot of blood
that won't wash out

Even in these conventional haiku, however, Mountain's growing irreverence for the haiku tradition occasionally manifests itself:

old pond
summer morning dream
toenail clipping

Mountain was one of the first North American poets to explore the potential of one-line haiku, a form that has become common but that was extremely rare when she began composing them. The Old Tin Roof contains a number of one-line haiku:

at dusk hot water from the hose
pig and i spring rain

Perhaps due to her artistic training and ongoing work as a painter, Mountain has experimented with the visual aspects of haiku. These sorts of poems have been variously called "visual haiku," "dadaku," "eye-ku," or her preferred term, with a marvelous pun, "unaloud haiku." Not only can these poems not be read aloud, since they are dependent on purely visual techniques, but in their defiance of haiku conventions they are "unallowed" membership in the canon of haiku. In their most simple, perhaps most simplistic form, these poems consist of an arrangement of words to imitate the motion described in the poem, a sort of "visual onomotopoeia" (Gorman, "Into the Postmodern" 20):

rain
dr p
o

An interesting variation on the sort of jigsaw effect attempted by George Swede is a poem in which Mountain has left out all of the vowels in an effort to convey a particular impression of the subject:
because they depend on their visual appearance for their primary effect, cannot
useful distinction can be made between haiku, or any poem for that matter, that can, without any loss of effect, be read aloud, and concrete poems that,
paintings do not rely on the visual presentation to achieve their effect. They can be reprinted in a different context and still remain effe
paintings have always had a separate in
always been seen as primarily visual media that incorporate haiku into their design. So far as I am aware, however, the haiku incorporated into haiku
process of linguistic signification. Though haiku have at times been incorporated into visual

Nick Avis outlined many similarities between haiku and concrete poetry:

Given the fact that Bashô's "crow" is exemplary of the traditional haiku against which Mountain is rebelling, this poem can be read as her comment on the
need for haiku to leave its conventional confines. Leroy Gorman argues that this poem represents a very successful innovation in haiku:

The concept of a single word (in this case "crow") interacting with a non-literal medium (a rectangle) is unnerving in suggestion. The word "crow" becomes the thing itself (a crow in flight), while the geometric shape of rectangle becomes undone as sign, or at least is
moved into new subtlety, so that we are unsure what to visualize and, consequently, are forced to enter and co-create along with the
poet. . . . So successful . . . is the suggestive power in "crow leaving a rectangle" that it is the finest haiku to date which stands with one
foot in the word and the other beyond. ("Into the Postmodern" 21)

I agree that "crow leaving a rectangle" is an effective concrete poem, but I question the use of the term haiku to designate it. In a recent analysis
Nick Avis outlined many similarities between haiku and concrete poetry:

There are a number of significant similarities between concrete poems and haiku, or at least in the aims of their practitioners. Concrete
poets tend to prefer nouns and verbs in that order. (It is true of course that haiku poets, the Japanese more so than the English speaking
writers, try to avoid verbs.) There is a sense of play in their work. They seek an economy of language in order to minimize the
imposition on the reader and to maximize the reader's participation. Their poems tend to be objective hence, if to be interpreted at all,
they must be interpreted subjectively. Also, concrete poems are not commentaries, judgements, or ideas but a thing in itself and
nothing more. . . . A concrete poem is also an attempt at the fusion of form and content especially in the purer examples since there is
nothing beyond form. Finally, and this is perhaps the most significant and the most contentious similarity, concrete poems usually have
a distinct 'moment of realization' about them which, under the right circumstance, can be a haiku or a haiku-like moment. Despite all
their other similarities it is this one which must surely determine whether or not a given concrete poem can be considered a haiku. (30)

Apparently unpersuaded by his own argument, however, Avis concludes that:

By their very nature they [concrete haiku] are intended to be seen differently. Consequently some will see them as haiku and others
will not. Hence to say that they are haiku is a mistake, and also limits them. It would be more appropriate to say that for the right
reader in the right frame of mind they are capable of evoking a haiku moment. (31)

I accept the plausibility of Avis' compromise view, but still find the relationship of concrete poetry to haiku problematic. Though most concrete
poems are short and objective, and though they do attempt, sometimes successfully, to recreate a moment keenly perceived that provides the reader with
increased insight into nature, (for example I hear the sound of a cricket better in "krik'it" than in many other more conventional haiku that attempt to capture
the essence of that sound); nevertheless, the manner in which concrete poems achieve their effect is so different from the manner in which haiku work that I
do not feel they can properly be considered haiku.

I suppose it is so obvious as to be taken for granted (always a danger to be guarded against) that haiku is a literary genre that operates through a
process of linguistic signification. Though haiku have at times been incorporated into visual media such as paintings or ink-sketches, these combinations have
always been seen as primarily visual media that incorporate haiku into their design. So far as I am aware, however, the haiku incorporated into haiku
paintings have always had a separate integrity that has been independent of their incorporation into a painting (see Zolbrod). The haiku in these haiku-
paintings do not rely on the visual presentation to achieve their effect. They can be reprinted in a different context and still remain effective poems. Perhaps a
useful distinction can be made between haiku, or any poem for that matter, that can, without any loss of effect, be read aloud, and concrete poems that,
because they depend on their visual appearance for their primary effect, cannot be read aloud. (See studies of concrete poetry by Wildman and Solt.)
If haiku poets continue to explore concrete techniques, and if their efforts are effective, it might prove useful to designate a sub-genre as "concrete haiku." But so far few poets have attempted the form and the results have been mixed at best. As the situation now stands I feel safe in suggesting that if a poem is "unaloud" (that is, cannot be spoken) then it is indeed an "unallowed" form of haiku, though it may be an excellent concrete poem.

As unconventional as many of Mountain's early efforts were her later work has to become even more so. Her innovations in The Old Tin Roof and Moment/Moment Moments were primarily technical. The content of such poems as "rain drop," "krik'it," and "crow leaving a rectangle" is extremely conventional. All of this was to change. "In August 1977," Mountain says, "I experienced a spiritual/mental/ emotional explosion--more a rebirthing--in which whatever concerns I had about 'form' simply disappeared, and at the same time I began questioning my attitudes and limitations regarding 'content'" ("New Haiku" 28).

Following this rebirth, Mountain wanted to include all her new social and political interests in her haiku. But she found herself confronted with a dilemma, "here I was," she says, "in haiku":

Haiku with all its "dos and don'ts." It seemed a stumbling block to expression of all these "new" revelations about life. Often I would say that I've got to get out of haiku altogether; it's just too restrictive. But I was pulled by haiku; it had become such a meaningful experience for me. Yet there was also another pull that said haiku Can. It can encompass full realism, the rawness of everything that is life. ("Will I Ever")

Among the changes Mountain made was to look anew at what it would mean for haiku to be nature poetry in an age when nature was under constant and catastrophic assault from humans. (In such a context even an innocent image such as Rotella's lipstick prints on a peony petal can evoke overtones of environmental destruction. The transition from lipstick on a petal to oil on a beach is not a difficult one to make.) In an impassioned justification of the new content in her haiku, Mountain answers critics who have questioned whether ecological concerns belong in haiku:

Like it or not, if we are honest, we cannot say "rain" without being aware of acid rain; "tree" without being aware of deforestation; "haze" without pollution; "sea" without oil spills and toxic waste dumping; "insects" without insecticides; "water" without shortage and contamination; "land" without erosion and dangerous chemicals in our food supply; "river" without factory waste and plastic jugs; "air" without ozone depletion and nuclear energy leaks; "climate" without the greenhouse effect; "animals" without extinction and loss of natural habitat; "life" itself without the threat of nuclear war. ("Haiku and Nature" 59)

In theory I think Mountain is correct--haiku need not, in fact should not, be an escapist medium--however in practice her haiku about ecological damage contain too much didactic comment and hence are usually not very effective as haiku. Although Mountain acknowledges that haiku are about "moments keenly perceived," and although she legitimately chastizes haiku poets for restricting the sort of moments they are willing to perceive when she comments that "the haiku I see being written are about some 'moments keenly perceived'; i.e., the pleasant ones" ("The New Haiku" 28), her ecological haiku far too often consist of ideas proposed rather than moments actually perceived:

acid rain less and less i am at one with nature

Such poems are overly didactic and tell the reader what the poet thought rather than recreate a moment of perception for the reader.

Good political haiku can be written. Santôka, for example, wrote a number of haiku expressing his despair at the Japanese war in Manchuria:

Young men march away--
The mountain greenness
Is at its peak.

We move silently
In the cold rain
Carrying the white boxes in front. (trans. Stevens)

Penny Harter responded to the TV program "The Day After" with a series of haiku on nuclear war:

blood
in the lap
of her white dress

tonight's wind
without
the barking dog

Such poems indicate that the haiku genre is capable of creating politically charged moments of perception. But to do so these poems must still be fully realized presentations of moments keenly perceived, not thoughts about such moments.

Mountain has also introduced feminist concerns into her haiku, and has sought to encourage women to write haiku that were more obviously composed from a woman's perspective:

For years I've watched, hoped, longed to see women create haiku from experiences which are unique to ourselves as women (searching even deeper than what is unique to ourselves as "persons"). Experiences which celebrate or "confess" or proclaim or express womanness. I'm rarely gratified--and I'm truly puzzled why women aren't as "womanal" as they could be. ("An Appreciation" 32)

She points to haiku such as the following by Ruth Yarrow as examples of the direction she would like to see women take in their haiku:
warm rain before dawn
my milk flows into her
unseen

As with so many other haiku poets, Mountain's varied interests come together in her consideration of the concept of "oneness." However she gives this idea a distinctly feminist perspective, suggesting that the pursuit of oneness with nature is strictly a male endeavor, and that women, in a sense, have never lost their connection to the natural world:

It is not impossible that oneness did exist at some time in the universe. . . . If oneness has existed, it existed before the male rebellion. All "pursuits" of oneness since than have been self-deceptive pursuits--perhaps from an honest and deep longing to belong again, but nonetheless, deception--because under/within patriarchy, oneness can not exist. Indeed, oneness is not something to be found . . . it must already exist. And, exist for all. ("out in/ah")

This position seems paradoxical. On the one hand she proposes that oneness existed in a feminist Edenic time, "before the male rebellion," but is no longer retrievable. On the other hand, she suggests that oneness "already exists for all," but our patriarchal society denies us access to it. In this last statement Mountain echoes the position of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as the position of the Zen tradition in her proposal that "oneness . . . must already exist. And exist for all." Her primary difference from these male writers lies in her identification of patriarchy as the force preventing our attainment of oneness. Hence, though disparaging the quest for oneness, since "it is primarily men who search for this 'lost' oneness," Mountain actually seems to accept oneness as an ideal. For her, however, a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of oneness includes the abolition of patriarchy, which she sees as an otherwise insurmountable barrier.

In order to get the complex material that interests her into haiku, Mountain has experimented with long one-line haiku sequences. In the second edition of The Haiku Anthology Cor van den Heuvel echoes many critics who suggest that these poems are not in fact haiku:

These are not sequences of haiku or senryu--very few of the lines could stand alone as poems--but taken in context they give the kinds of effects those genres do. Their roots are haiku and senryu but they are something new, and until they were written there was nothing in English quite like them. (334)

Among the sequences van den Heuvel reprinted in his anthology is the following erotic sequence by Mountain:

your hand on me you read about yourself in a poem we share a gin shoes touching you harden march blows through the partly opened window one stick we float in and out of love high giggling about giggling between orgasms i come to know your fingers morning we wash ourselves onto each other
after you've gone you reappear in the sound of rain

Mountain has also published more politically oriented one-line sequences, such as these examples from Pissed Off Poems and Cross Words:

i grow older radioactive wastes live 250 centuries old pond a frog rises belly up year ends another 96 billion lbs of hazardous waste universe love it or leave it

Ocassionally she employs repetition to create an incantatory effect:

spring morning a chemical spill summer afternoon a chemical spill autumn evening a chemical spill winter night a chemical spill

I agree with van den Heuvel's claim that these are related to the haiku tradition, but are not themselves haiku. I disagree, however, that these sequences have no precedent in English. They seem closely related to, among other predecessors, the catalogue technique of Whitman, the superposatory technique of Pound, and the elliptical constructions of Ginsberg.

Mountain sees herself as standing outside any tradition, "personally, I have no tradition and don't want one. . . ." ("New Haiku" 30). Her frequent parody of traditional haiku, however, would indicate that she is more assimilated than she admits, albeit as a disruptive force, into the haiku tradition. Parody doesn't, indeed can't, ignore its target; it must acknowledge it. More significantly, her desire to evade traditional preconceptions of haiku relates her in a fundamental way to the Edenic-Zen search for an original relation to the universe: "But I decided quite some time ago not to read further about haiku of the past--enough is enough--and have, in fact, spent the last several years trying to become re/ignorant about it all" ("belly up"). In her rebellion against received tradition, either the patriarchal tradition or the haiku tradition, Mountain is reenacting a contemporary feminist and ecological version of the gesture initiated in American literature by Emerson.

long time in coming haiku mine not theirs
Bob Boldman

write / haiku like your edges are disappearing...

--Bob Boldman

The last poet whose work I'd like to examine is Bob Boldman. In his haiku Boldman is not an objective reporter of phenomenon, nor is he a subjective responder, rather, in his haiku he attempts, more than any other poet I am aware of, to eliminate any distinction between himself and the external world of phenomena. Bob Boldman was born in 1950 near Dayton, Ohio where he still lives. He studied fine arts at Wright State University. According to the biographical statement on his first collection, Walking with the River, Boldman began studying Taoism at an early age, and was soon introduced to Zen: "Through the practice of Zen, Bob discovered the art of haiku."

In an article in Wind Chimes, Boldman recounts in colorful detail his introduction to the haiku genre:

Frog, splash!, jumps in, was how I was introduced to this small, exacting art. What did I think? "A dog pisses on a hydrant, splash!, so what?" This art is not easily appreciated. It certainly is not instantly appreciated.

My Zen compatriots loved to read and recite these little splashes from the Orient. I remained unmoved, unmoving, and uninterested in moving.

It was much, much later when I picked up a copy of The North American Haiku Anthology... I was astonished. I've never been moved by an art like I was moved. ("This Small Art" 18)

This tale makes clear that Boldman did not find the traditional Japanese haiku particularly interesting, hence it is not surprising that his own work bears little resemblance to classical Japanese models.

In addition to Walking with the River (1980), Boldman has published My Lord's Necklace (1982), a collection of non-haiku poems, and three other haiku books, Eating a Melon: 88 Zen Haiku (1982), Wind in the Chimes (1983), and Heart and Bones (1985). Boldman is one of the most self-consciously Zen-inspired haiku poets in North America. In an interview published in Wind Chimes, Boldman discussed his understanding of the relationship between haiku and Zen:

You name a quality of haiku and I'll name a quality of Zen that fits it. The most important thing is that they view the events of man and woman as inseparable from nature. Mankind is not separate from the scheme of things. The haiku writer doesn't search for his insights; he just waits. They appear. What he writes is natural and true. There is no pretension. The haiku writer realizes that any one moment is an expression of all eternity. ("Few Questions" 23)

Boldman's haiku describe his experience of himself as inseparable from nature. Rod Willmot proposes that such a perspective causes Boldman's haiku to seem disorienting to the reader: "Boldman stands as close to the world as he can, with sometimes hallucinatory results. Boldman's specialty is the discovery of otherness, the strange internal suchness things reveal when we cease to observe them from a sane and comfortable distance" (Review 31). As Willmot suggests, Boldman's haiku often have a surreal quality, but that quality is evoked not, as in van den Heuvel's haiku, by an unusual external perspective but rather by Boldman's effort to provide an internal perspective. In a poem published in Modern Haiku, Boldman expresses in greater detail his sense of haiku composition as a process of eliminating barriers between himself and nature:

A Page from Bob Boldman's Journal

late night,,, writing haiku notes, pointing
at the oneness, leaving the stars
touched,, haiku is not to be tasted
like poetry, it is to be eaten
i sleep on the floor, wind tonight
haiku is the art of watching
piece of moon drifting, ripe melons,
one can't visit the emptiness,
one can only enter selfless
haiku is,
watching without the watcher,
noticing without taking notes,
well, maybe 3 lines,
there are no explanations to anything,
don't pretend to give them, write
haiku like your edges are disappearing,,,
oneness is not printing nature-prints,
haiku is insight, sight inside,
from the emptiness out,,, view the world, right one

haiku

This piece reveals Boldman's belief that in order to write haiku the poet must dissolve the barrier between the ego self and the natural world. His effort is to eliminate the edges between himself and nature, to view nature, as it were, from the inside.

As an introduction to Eating a Melon, Boldman retells a Zen parable that further elaborates on this idea:

Ken-O and his disciple Menzan were eating a melon together. Suddenly the master asked, "Tell me, where does all this sweetness come from?"
"Why," Menzan quickly swallowed and answered, "it's a product of cause and effect."
"Bah!, That's cold logic!"
"Well," Menzan said, "from where then?"
"From the very 'where' itself, that's where."

Boldman's haiku are attempts, by various means, to recreate for us the "very 'where' itself." His most characteristic haiku recreate moments in which the poet's ego boundary seems suffused with nature. He expresses this state in several ways. In some of Boldman's haiku the poet's mind and the external world interpenetrate:

walking with the river
the water does my thinking

the plants in the yard
tonight I find them
entering my dreams

the round
luminous moon
fits in my head

In other haiku this process is carried further, and Boldman seems to look out from within nature itself:

in the moonlight
the sea
rolling under my eyelids

shutting my eye
one star
caught

this emptiness
and my eyes
in the distant stars

These poems make use of the same eye imagery utilized by both Emerson and Rotella in order to express the same state they described in which the poet merges with the rest of nature.

In a poem Whitman would have enjoyed, we find Boldman eliminating the physical barrier between himself and nature and preparing, we assume, to immerse himself physically into the flux of reality:

facing the sea
I undress

Sometimes, rather than being absorbed by nature, the poet's self is eliminated in its own reverse act of absorbing nature:

drinking the sky
I'm
emptied

In a related approach, Boldman has written haiku in which the poet becomes momentarily so involved in his activity that his ego-self vanishes. These poems are reminiscent of Buson's series on "tilling the field":

swatting the fly
at that moment the man is empty

Finally, we find some poems in which the poet expresses his literal transformation into nature:

my hands
becoming
crocus blossoms

In all of these sorts of poems Boldman has carried the poet's ego suffusion into nature about as far as it can be carried and still have him remain a poet, or still have a poem left to recount the experience. Beyond this level the poet and poetry, it would seem, are silent.

Boldman does not seem satisfied with the effectiveness of these wordless style poems. Perhaps he doubts the ability of language alone to convey his experience to the reader. In order to more effectively achieve the effect he is seeking, he has experimented with several language-centered or visual techniques, such as the following:
frozen/ to the stream/ my face

Boldman has also explored the possibility of a variation on the jigsaw form employed by Swede. In Boldman's version of this technique, however, the entire haiku is written in one line with no spacing between the words. Boldman seems to use this technique for the same reason Swede does, to condense the reader's understanding of the haiku into a moment:

incandescent rain
why the lilies whiten

In a review of Walking with the River Chuck Brickley calls these sorts of haiku "koan-poems." "In lieu of the flower held up in silence," Brickley argues, "Boldman occasionally employs 'concrete' techniques to illustrate a point, or to express the futility of words." Brickley, however, feels that these techniques are ineffective because "they usually serve to dilute the poetic experience." As an example of such a poem he provides the following, and then comments:

in the skull of a rabbit
blades of grass

These are the celebrated aspects of Zen teachings, tricks masters play to liberate their students' minds. While Boldman deftly adapts these techniques in his poems, does he convey a familiarity with their goals? Does one feel in his writings a sense of day-to-day life, an intimacy with the way things actually are? (47)

I tend to agree with Brickley. These concrete devices, by forcing the reader to examine the poem as a poem, seem to distance the reader from the actual experience that the poem attempts to recreate. Occasionally, however, Boldman's use of concrete techniques is quite effective, as in the following playful haiku:

kissing o
they let go o
of the ball ns

This poem works, I think, in part because it is a fine haiku in its own right, even without the typographical trick. The floating "o's" add a dimension to the haiku, but they do not constitute its sole merit. As a contrast we can compare Mountain's dropping "o" in:

dr p
o

In Mountain's poem the descending "o" is the poem. In Boldman's poem the rising "o's" add to the poem's suggestiveness, but the haiku functions perfectly well without them.

Boldman doesn't need to resort to visual effects. His best haiku are also his simplest, such as the following, in which he joins himself with the earth through the simple act of pulling a turnip. As he tugs at the turnip, the turnip tugs at the earth, and the three become one:

pulling the turnip
from the earth
it holds on

In the best of his haiku Boldman fulfills his desire to recreate for the reader an experience in which the poet, and hence the reader, recognize that beyond the superficial level of the ego self they share a deeper level of at-onement with the universe. In this endeavor he evokes not only his essential oneness with the universe, but also his essential oneness with both the Japanese haiku tradition and the American poetic tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

Conclusion

At this time it is impossible to develop anything like a definitive analysis of the haiku form in North America. The genre continues to evolve; new books of substantial merit appear almost monthly. A definitive study will need to wait until the genre is fully defined, and wholly moribund, which I hope will not be for many years to come.

In addition to the poets and trends I have analyzed, many other aspects of haiku and haiku-related poetry deserve study. Many poets have been exploring the potential of longer forms, such as sequences, linked-verse, and haibun. In particular studies could be made of Rod Willmot's efforts with the sequence, and Hiroaki Sato's contributions to linked-verse. Furthermore, I would predict that the haibun form will come to play an increasingly important role in the writings of North American haiku poets. Currently few poets who write good haiku can also manage to write quality prose. However it seems to me that haibun, with its roots in the travel-narrative and the diary, is a particularly appropriate aspect of the haiku tradition to be further developed in North America, where we have our own long tradition in the travel-narrative and diary forms.

Other areas of study that might prove worthwhile would be to compare haiku poets to other modern and contemporary poets. For example, I suspect that it would be found that contemporary haiku fulfills the aesthetic theory of the imagists better than imagist poetry itself does. Another fruitful area of study might be to compare the haiku of established poets, such as Snyder, Merwin, or Ashberry, with the haiku of the little-known poets of the haiku community. Similarly, current trends in literary theory might find haiku a fruitful field for analysis. In particular reader-response and deconstructive theories
might be appropriate. Considering the emerging role of women in the composition of haiku, as well as the fact that issues of subjectivity and objectivity are prevalent both in haiku and in feminist critical theory, a gender-oriented analysis of haiku might be particularly revealing.

In this study I hope to have shown that haiku poetry being written in North America in the latter half of the twentieth century is a thriving literary genre worthy of these sorts of scholarly analysis.

Shiki has a haiku that I find appropriate as I conclude. According to R. H. Blyth in Volume four of his Haiku, Shiki, while selecting poems for publication in one of his journals, had "promised himself two persimmons when he has finished perusing what looks like about three thousand haiku. They are a kind of reward, which spurs him on to finish his labor" (134):

Examining
Three thousand haiku:
Two persimmons.


--- *This Space Blank*. Juniper Ser. 16. La Crosse, WI: Juniper, 1984.


