

# Roadrunner Haiku Journal

May 2008 Issue VIII:2

"... while there may be eternal verities, one moment is not the same as another, as one era is not the same as another; there is progression. As a result, in order to properly articulate reality, the poet must necessarily inhabit the era, the contemporary zeitgeist. If "fashion" were not significant, one could simply curl up with Basho and never compose another poem. This idea seems decidedly contrary to his radical spirit. In each era there are new developments necessitating unique articulations that in turn serve to inform later generations."

-Richard Gilbert, *Poems of Consciousness*

**Jason Sanford Brown, Scott Metz and Richard Gilbert, Editors**

---

[☐ Gendai Haiku Translations](#)

[☐ Nets](#)

[☐ Poems](#)

[☐ The Scorpion Prize for Issue VII:4](#)

---

ISSN 1933-7337

Copyright © by *Roadrunner Haiku Journal*. All artwork and haiku, unless otherwise noted, are copyright by the indicated artists/writers. All rights revert to the authors and artists upon publication. The roadrunner logo and the scorpion images are by Scott Metz.

May 2008 Issue VIII:2

**Burning Hippo, Chuckling Beans & Dandy Dandelions,  
or,  
expanding upon by R. Gilbert and Itô Y.'s translation of 7 Nenten Ku**

**by robin d gill**

Tsubouchi Nenten's *ku* were first brought to my attention by Japanese *haiyû* (friends in haiku) reacting to the occasional odd *ku* I tossed into (I hate the English "submit") the haiku bbs's where we hang out. By odd, I mean *ku* with Chinese characters alone, including English words in Roman letters, invented words and wordplay, using commas or other punctuation marks, etc. Grateful to have a *senpai* (senior) in oddness and liking some of the examples given to prove it, I came to feel affection for the poet, though I never got around to reading enough of his poems to know if I liked his work taken as a whole.

Encountering the sampling by Gilbert and Itô (May 31, 2007) in [issue VII:4](#) (November 2007) of *Roadrunner*, I was unwise enough to express doubt (in a private note) about the worth of the translations, and was rightfully challenged for particulars. Unfortunately, the main problem was not so much what was written as what was *not*, and by *that* standard I have my doubts about the worth of *most* poetry in translation. In fact, excluding my books and Makoto Ueda's *Basho and His Interpreters*, I cannot think of a single book of translated haiku with enough information to ensure readers get as much out of the poems as native speakers of Japanese do. Gilbert and Itô included at least the average amount of explanation (in notes after all the translations) and I reacted only because Tsubouchi happened to be on my mind and much of his work is so puzzling even to Japanese that it seems particularly futile to introduce it without the full-bodied explanation I believe should be standard when translating all tiny poems between exotic tongues. Let us briefly examine the seven *ku* from their article, starting from the two most famous.

1. *tanpopo no popo no atari ga kaji desuyo*  
tanpopo no popo: / surrounding, burning! (trans. g+i)

As the translators explain, "*tanpopo* is dandelion," and taking the *popo* part as onomatopoeia is new, though the related *bôbô* can mean to burn fiercely and *poppo*, as an adverb mimics the popping and puffing of rising fire, steam or smoke, and, as a noun, is common chiltalk for a steam locomotive. The word sounds *puffy+round*, though dictionaries usually fail to note the visual component. You might note that in Japan, the steam trains are always drawn with a trail of little puffs of smoke (I have even seen those clouds used for holes in sound-boxes of bowed triangular harpsichords made by a train enthusiast!). I would probably have translated it with a cluster of two readings:

*the popo part  
of the tanpopo, that's  
a house-fire!*

*the white mane  
of your dandelion, that's  
a burning house!*

The emphatic "*desuyo*" at the end can be taken care of easily enough with a marked-case "that's." The "*atari*" is difficult. It can mean *surroundings*, or the general area where something is. My Japanese

friends think “surroundings” sounds right. I do not. I think it makes more sense as the latter, and English it as “part.” Also, we need to note that fire in English is just a fire, but in Japanese a “*kaji*” or “fire-thing” means a house-fire. In my salad days in Japan, I made the mistake of describing the *takibi* (little trash or dead-leaf fire) in front of my rented house as a *kaji* and the land-lady almost called the fire department. In my experience, house-fires are marked by white smoke because of the water used to try to put them out. And, after a bad *kaji*, some of the bones (?) of a house still stand. So, reading the *ku*, I immediately separated the white fluffy head as the *popo* from the stem, *tan*, (just in this poem: it does not normally mean *stem*) and recalled Shakespeare’s famous metaphor based on the life-cycle of the dandelion puff (“golden lads and girls must as chimney sweepers come to dust”). When the translators write “In the pun, *popo* can represent the circumference of the flower,” it would seem that they are thinking of the yellow flower, which I would argue is just not the case.

*The popo is where the tanpopo  
is really burning!*

But, does that mean the translators are wrong? *No*. I polled three of my *haiyû*, one who edits a fine online weekly haiku magazine, one who hosts my favorite haiku bbs and one who writes many haiku I like and takes haiku very, very seriously, though she cannot help being funny. The serious funny one, who is the least intellectual of the three, and doubts Nenten’s *ku* are bonafide haiku, thinks of the flower. The intellectual and long-time haiku adept with the bbs she sees a winter field with the flowers of many dandelion bursting out *popo-popo* in clusters here and there. If that be the case, I can almost imagine an allusion to them growing on land with burnt down ruins beneath:

*Where the tanpopo grow, po!po! That’s  
the scene of the fire!*

Both of the above interpretations (which are probably not quite like what they become in my readings of them) are by women. I was relieved to learn, the editor, a man, saw what I did, the *wata*, i.e. the cotton-like round head of seeds. All three of my respondents told me that I was free to read it however I liked. Sooner or later I would like to do for this *ku* what I did with one by Buson, survey a hundred Japanese – or maybe two hundred, with a hundred haikuists and a hundred random subjects – to get an objective reading on what is going on in readers’ heads, which is to say how the haiku works, as opposed to how we think it works based on our own understanding. One man growing *senryu* in his garden so to speak, may end up doing this for me. In his fine blog, he writes of sending the following *ku* to the *Mainichi Shinbun* Bannô *Senryu* contest only to have it rejected.

たんぽぽにどこがぽぽかと聞いてみる 樽坊  
tanpopo ni doko ga popo ka to kiite-miru

I try asking  
a tanpopo just where  
its *popo* is.

Grammar favors this reading, but I cannot rule out another, allowing for the possibility of asking other people.

I try asking  
which part’s the *popo*  
of a tanpopo

This Keg-friar (as his pen-name Englishes) might have trouble asking Nenten, for he would only reply that it was wherever you wanted it to be. Like the author of “The Purple Cow,” Nenten even has what seems to be a follow-up *ku*:

たんぽぽのぽぽのその後は知りません 坪内稔典  
*tanpopo no popo no sonogo wa shirimasen nenten*

As to what follows  
the tanpopo's *popo*, that  
i do not know!

Perhaps I should add that his book with the *ku* was titled *popo no atari*, which we might title “Where the Popo Is” or “Somewhere ‘round the Popo” and the phrase has started to take on a life of its own in Japanese. (And now, just to get started on this one poem, I have already used up as much space as Gilbert and Itô did for all 7 *ku*! Is that good? Bad? I suspect most of you could do without my explanations and explorations. After all, my books sell dozens, while books with no explanations to speak of that hide what little information needed to grasp the poems in the back of their books – which I hate so much I would outlaw the practice if I could – sell thousands.)

2. *sangatsu no amanattô no ufufufufu*  
in march / amanatto: / u fu fu fu fu (trans. g+i)

I would add to the translators' notes on “sweet nattô” that the azuki beans are boiled and no longer seem like *nattô* (fermented soybeans) to me, but the point that needs to be brought out does not concern the detail. It is that this *ku* drives many Japanese crazy. Why? Mostly because it is not only read by Nenten fans but by practically everyone, as it got into a major junior-high school (中学校三年) textbook. Teachers are supposed to be having a hell of a time trying to explain it. Gilbert and Itô picture a group of older women eating the sweets together, explaining that *ufufufufu* is “a small laughing voice, made with a slightly opened mouth, that is, a kind of modest, small-voiced chuckle, and one imagines a hand placed at the level of the mouth, hiding it.” I might have imagined the same, for the type of restaurants selling that food caters to women and older ones tend to go for Japanese sweets more than younger ones, but the unintellectual *haiyu* mentioned already, who is female and in her fifties, claims that she takes the mimesis to mean that the poet, a male, is bubbling over gleefully, and cites a famous poem – maybe from an advertisement? – of a man opening a beer and going *ufufufufu*. That is to say, there is a bit of “hee, hee, hee!” in the *ufufufufu*. Nenten, himself, admitting to receiving question after question on the *ku*, wrote that he did not want to respond to questions about what of his feelings were expressed in the *ku*, for he thought it better for readers to enjoy the words themselves and to concentrate on the food itself rather than conjure up the image of a man with a blubbery belly and hair of salt and pepper 『坪内稔典の俳句の授業』坪内稔典著(黎明書房). Such words imply that the *ufufufu* was originally his.

I wondered if the sound was the bubbling in the pot, but my strict formalist *haiyû* thinks it represents nature in the early spring just starting to feel its oats. That sounds good to me. It also makes it *haiku*, though she does not think it a proper *haiku* as it is “subjective.” By *subjective*, she means that only the author has the information needed to know what his *ku* means, so that, by conventional standards, the *ku* is immature or unfinished. It is the type of thing young poets who fail to think of others tend to do. This criticism makes sense if one does not know that Nenten claims there is no right way to read his *ku*. Knowing his stated aim is to provide people with *haiku* to finish drawing and color in by themselves, it seems small. My friend wrote back to grant that he was “an adept in subjective *haiku*”(shukanteki *haiku no tatsujin*).

This has many implications for analyzing *haiku*. 1. Our evaluation of subjectiveness is itself subjective. 2. There is a difference between the unintended subjectivity of the beginner and the conscious or selective subjectivity of the experienced poet. 3. There are two types of subjectivity, the one expressed by the poet and the one not expressed by the poet, and the second variety, where the reader is the one whose subjectivity is desired, is very different from the traditional subjectivity

problem (much of which I have problems with, but that is another matter) in haiku.

3. *batta tobu ajia no sora no usumidori*

flying grasshopper asian sky a washed-out green (trans. g+i)

The original grammar is perfectly normal – nothing e.e. cummings-like in the least – and a prime example of what I have called (in six books so far, yet never to my knowledge, cited) “Japanese style,” for I know of no other literary tradition, and this goes back at least as far as the *Manyôshû* in Japan, with poems that are nothing but modified subjects. Had Nenten’s second possessive “no” been “ga” (a demonstrative that usually means “the” and sometimes is/are), the asian sky would probably be the subject, but, as is, it is more likely the pale green is. Either way, the grasshopper/s is/are not a possible subject. The translators knew something was up – they sensed the Japanese style was different from anything in English – and this is reflected by their use of a single line. A clearer rendition of the link of modifications would be “*Flying-grasshopper-asian-sky’s washed-out green.*” English, unfortunately, cannot link modifiers serially without hyphens. A possible compromise to take back a semblance of the original’s normality:

*Flying-grasshopper-asian-sky*

*A washed-out green*

There is a way to avoid hyphens and be natural in translation if one is not afraid of changing the order of the words to retain their flow.

*The pale green of this asian sky of flying grasshoppers.*

Unfortunately, this makes the *ku* entirely abstract, while there is a possibility the thought was a reverie arising from the poet’s absorption in the color of a single green grasshopper, which is to say from something concrete, material in the sense described by Alan Watts in *Does It Matter?*

*A grasshopper leaps –*

*The pale green of Asia’s sky.*

Readers of Japanese might also note that the previous poem was also Japanese-style and could have been translated “march’s sweet-natto’s *ufufufufu*.” I did not comment on the translators’ “in march,” for it seems the best Englishing because of something they neglected to mention: Tsubouchi did an *amanattô ku* for every month of the year! I must confess to having shared my formalist friend’s opinion of the *ufufufu ku* as lacking until I discovered there was a series. I do not find it a great series, but I still find the *ku* more satisfying knowing that it is part of such a series, why exactly I cannot say. It may have something to do with my love for collecting that I recently realized has much to do with an appreciation for hyper-short-form poetry (for a long discussion of this, read the part of the foreword found in the back of my most recent, and first xxx-rated book, *A Woman Without a Hole* – or, *Octopussy, Dry Kidney & Blue Spots* – yes, it has two completely different names).

4. *suichû no kaba ga moemasu botanyuki*

a wallowing hippo / burns — / snowflakes (trans. g+i)

We – meaning all translators but Hiroaki Sato with one line and Harold Stewart with two – seem to be hung up on three lines, though a double digit percent of haiku have only one clear caesura or equivalent pause. As the original’s seams fit a fairly common 12-5 pattern, the translators might better have parsed it that way

*A wallowing hippo burns –*

*Snowflakes.*

I capitalize, though Japanese has no cases for letters, because left-adjusted poems look better that way

in English and I fail to understand why poets no longer realize it. “Wallowing” is a beautiful word and keeps the poem together beautifully, but a friend, lucky enough to have seen just what Nenten describes, said the hippo, steaming so profusely it did indeed seem on fire, was *not* moving, but kept *very still* in the water while the snow floated down.

*In the water*

*A hippopotamus burns*

*Peony snow*

I was tempted to make it “a water-logged hippo,” to avoid that damn “in the,” but that would mean the hippo was completely out of the water and the Japanese *suichû no*, or “water-within’s” usually means “underwater.” As Gilbert and Itô explain in a note, the snowflakes in question are fluffy clusters of flakes called “peony snow.” I would prefer that the expression be Englished, but that would have meant an explanation right after the poem rather than in the notes, and, it would seem that the establishment of poetry prefers poetry to be surrounded in nothing but blank space to keep it sacred or something (yes, I think the establishment needs to loosen up and admit more diverse ways to present poetry). The falling peony snow seem a cross between huge white ashes and cotton balls.

*Huge snowflakes*

*A hippo is burning*

*underwater*

The hippo is in the water with its head and, possibly, part of his back out, but the “underwater” helps preserve the surreal feeling of the *ku*. As the “peony” (*botan*) most commonly describes delicious sweetrice cakes (*botan mochi*), “huge” might be replaced with “luscious.” When I first read Nenten’s poem, I must admit that I pictured the hippo completely underwater with some bubbles rising and steam coming from the water surface. But that would make the hippo *boil* rather than burn (*moemasu*), so I had to give it up. I also imagined the scene as a *cremation*. Why? Because a translator friend once told me that she once imagined people became hippopotamuses when they died because the word for a casket, (*shi*)*kabane*, sounded like a hippo/*kaba* sleeping/*ne*.

Despite the above, this hippo *ku* is one of the less subjective of Nenten’s *ku*. The only thing that might strike a traditionalist as odd is the ending of the verb, which is a polite conversational style rather than the special abbreviated one usually found in haiku. Interestingly, it serves to emphasize the observation in the same way a caesura particle added to the usual shortened verb might (eg. *moe-keri*), and does so far more naturally with the same total length. If everyone used such language in haiku, it might seem prosaic and less emphatic; but, as it is rare in haiku, it stands out and seems more poetic than the specialized poetic language!

5. *sakura chiru anata mo kaba ni narinasai*

cherry blossoms fall — / you too must become / a hippo (trans. g+y)

Three of the seven *ku* chosen by Gilbert and Itô concern hippo. That is definitely representative of Nenten’s poems, for he wrote scores of *kaba ku*. My formalist friend finds this particular *ku* not just subjective but silly for no one can figure out what sort of hipposity the poet would have us assume. But, subjective or not, there is objective proof that people find *something* in it, for it is popular. Personally, I like it because I recall a hippo who kept his or her mouth wide open minutes, or even hours at a time (it only closed it briefly when the food thrown in it amounted to so many pounds), so I can imagine telling people to open their mouths and wait for the petals to fall in. But, for most people, I would bet it means either lying down under the trees and dozing to be covered with petals or wallowing in the same. What makes the *ku* so attractive to the ears, however, is the command, a type of imperative I have never seen in any other *ku* and I have read hundreds of thousands of them! As with the burning hippo *ku*, it takes advantage of a commonly used Japanese verb-ending, and even more effectively, for

*nasai* is at the end. Nenten demonstrates that haiku, with its all too routinized endings (in Japanese, not English, which rarely ends in a verb), should make more use of normal Japanese. The same can be said of the *desuyo* (the *yo* an enthusiastic way to express something that sounds emphatic to a friend and pushy to someone not expecting it) in the dandelion *ku*. In other words, there are aspects of Nenten's bold style that can invigorate rather than weaken traditional haiku.

6. *haru o neru yabure kabure no yô ni kaba*

in the spring — / lying down desperate, as / a hippo (trans. g+i)

The enjambment in the translation is not half so awkward as in the original, for, *if* a human metaphor is implied, “*yô ni*” should come *after* the *kaba*, or hippo, rather than *before*. The spring+o+sleep means to *sleep out/through/off/away* the spring. The adverb *yabure-kabure* infuriates some Japanese readers (and me), for it is hard to imagine what the poet means. I might have guessed,

*Sleeping the spring*  
*in utter abandon, call me*  
*Potomus!*

But there are better ways to express that, as there are also better ways to express Gilbert and Itô's “desperate,” which might be closer to the author's intent which he never likes to share. Note that as awkward as the original's grammar is, the most likely reading gives us no explicit metaphor. The “as” (*yô ni*), from an odd distance, probably modifies the “sleep,” i.e., “as if desperate” rather than an unmentioned subject. In other words, the hippo in the original is the subject (This has not yet been bounced off my *haiyû*, but I feel fairly confident about it):

*Sleeping out spring*  
*The picture of desperation*  
*Hippopotamus!*

I guess the odd syntax may have been to use the hippo, or *kaba* as a psychological mimesis for the hippo's plopping down and flopping about or maybe just lying vacantly – I just can't tell. I do not call the hippo *hippo* here, but *potamus* or his full name because the word “hippo,” even if it is heard in hypnosis, does not have the right sound for lying down. A *kaba* is closer to a *potamus* than to a *hippo*. A good example of a noun-subject used as subtle mimesis is found among Issa's peony (botan) *ku*. One of my favorites praises the peony for sitting down, unlike the prosperity god dancers who went door-to-door doing a wild dance trying to milk poor people for money. To English the ending more clearly than in the original, it sits down with a *potan*. (*fukusuke ga chanto suwatte botan kana*). In a case like this *yabure-kabure* sleep, where we have no idea what is going on, I would go with multiple translations until I got the author to weigh in. I need to know at least whether the hippo is dead to the world or fitfully sleeping. Or, seeing as the poet does not like to discuss what he means, I would probably cut the *ku* and use another of the scores of hippo-*ku* Nenten wrote, instead.

7. *harukaze ni haha shinu ryûkakusan ga chiri*

to the spring wind / mother dead, herbal medicine / scatters (trans. g+y)

Nenten's score of hippo, month by month sweet-beans and attention to the sound of words as subjects in themselves puts him somewhere between haiku and the children's poems of Tanikawa Shuntaro; but, he also writes many *ku* anyone will admit to be haiku. This one, my formalist friend grudgingly approved of. I find Gilbert and Itô's “to” a poetic choice but, myself, would not have chosen to translate the *ku* to begin with because, in English, the mother cannot die *in/with/to/by* the wind while the medicine scatters *in/with/to/by* it, as in the Japanese. We just do not have the proper spread of connotations in a single preposition. One solution would be this:

*The spring wind*  
*Mother dies her dragon-horn dust scattering.*

Unfortunately, this makes the wind's presence too strong. The original could use, but does not have a comma (though Nenten uses them sometimes) as "mother dies" seems to run directly into the dragon-horn-powder. I would have liked to have grilled my haiyû about this oddness and may if or when I rewrite this for a book. About that dragon-horn. I know exotification is bad but the name of that traditional Chinese medicine, in my opinion, gives the *ku* just enough color to save it from being humdrum. In the original, the enjambed medicine name flows directly into the "scatter." If I were to use three lines, it would have been "a spring wind / mother dies / her dragon horn dust scatters." But, following the natural break of the Japanese, which comes just before the Dragon horn, and considering that both pre and post-positions link both ways, I think this might do:

*Mother dies in the spring wind*  
*Her dragon horn dust scattering*

There are many more possibilities, but on final thought, there is one reason I have come to like Gilbert & Itô's translation (though I would give the name of the medicine) with its "to the spring wind," more each time I read it: I can imagine their translation (and, to a lesser degree the original) repeated on an endless loop. With the computer, this sort of thing will become easy (it already is for some of us) and might even be aimed at. *Mobius ku*. I would not be surprised to hear someone is already doing them.

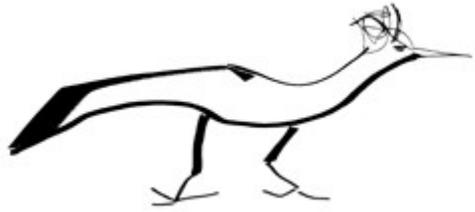
One more thing about Nenten. He is commodore (?) of a haiku group, whose name (船団) might be Englished as *Flotilla*, and while the fulsome praise by follower-types turns me off – I just do not like "sensei-this-and-that-ism – most of what he teaches agrees with my *haikai* sensibilities. He has good things to say for Teitoku, as the neglected father of haiku, which is to say that he defends word-play and other humor in the face of the more-serious-than-thou crowd (See my defense of Teitoku in the animal year chapter of *The Fifth Season*). He also points out what might be called relativity in haiku by introducing the range of interpretation of famous haiku most Japanese (wrongly) think they know (You can grasp what I mean by reading Ueda's *Bashô and His Interpreters*. No, Ueda has never recommended *my* books as far as I know.). I cannot say if Nenten is a good haiku poet, however, for I have not read enough of his work or spent enough time with it to make up my mind.

Question for readers: Do I ruin haiku by explaining too much? I ask because *The Fifth Season*, first book of my 10 vol. *saijiki*, the only lengthy introduction of the New Year season ever published, came out about a year ago, and sold only 6 copies to date. My second most recent book *Cherry Blossom Epiphany* did only a little better with 16 copies. As I do not write for the hell of it, my haiku series is, until I get support, suspended.

Finally, I owe an apology to *Simply Haiku* for writing this, as I have neglected my HIC (Haiku In Context) column. I had not planned this article and only wrote it because I made the mistake of commenting about the translations and felt I had no choice. Now, back to *Han-chan, The Cat Who Thought Too Much* and *A Dolphin in the Woods*. After eating lunch.

2008, January 12

robin d. gill  
author-publisher  
paraverse press  
<http://www.paraverse.org>



# Roadrunner Haiku Journal

May 2008 Issue VIII:2

**Haiku/Senryu**

---

empty rooms—  
a raven bursts  
from the sun

**Carolyn Hall**

broken chords  
from the carousel—  
a whale off course

amber waves  
a tall man demonstrates  
the dream

**Peggy Willis Lyles**

winter  
sun  
striping  
one  
skyscraper  
hiding  
another

on screens overlooking  
the Shinjuku station concourse  
seals slithering across a floor

spring sunshine  
wrapped in cellophane  
the suction pads of squid

dusk by the light of an acetylene torch, its bearer unseen

under closed circuit  
surveillance

old snow

on an island  
in the pond

**Philip Rowland**

first day of spring grey matter clouds

winter night settles into a predicted low

thought I was going somewhere March wind

**John Stevenson**

far below emerald water I peddle my bike

**Elizabeth Crocket**

winter moon the ticking clock in my teeth

this hand inside my head grasping at water

**Dana Duclou**

From my skull  
The nubs of antlers grow  
In the snow

The day is done  
I pat a tree trunk  
and continue on

Through the corridors  
Of my mind my father strides  
Across the divide

With your heart  
Read the world:  
Look, the rocks are soft

Releasing myself  
From a lifetime of pain  
How bright the pines seem

**Jack Galmitz**

a friend's death  
in the peach  
a bug disappears

yes, slug,  
each of us  
a bag of juices

winter blues  
    too much earnestness  
in my prayer

**William Ramsey**

light bulb goes dead suddenlywearealltouching

new recruit  
green as the cornfield  
under his nails

**Chad Lee Robinson**

The universe,  
the metropolis,  
muted by a nipple

At the urinal  
I throw out the voice  
I've invented

Like the womb the way you swim with me

**Paul Pfleuger, Jr.**

dawn mist pebbles stand their ground

thru mist a leak of rhododendron green

invited in the fog of morning all it holds within

**marlene mountain**

empty church  
richness in the flutter  
of sparrow wings

full moon her dress on the floor empty

**Rafal Zabratynski**

stand at  
river

till you're  
river's

standing  
form

jonquils  
& violets

have you

in common

petals  
sitting down  
together

brick wall  
out of the wind  
weeping cherry

daily  
more

wild  
flowers  
&

scraps  
of my  
roof

plastic  
storm  
windows

taken  
down

now  
no more  
ghosts

**john martone**

from the car  
bark inching  
toward long good earth

how many skies  
we have not  
found ourselves whole

**Meg Pokrass**

winter  
thunder  
your rhythm  
then  
mine

sun  
sunset  
dusk  
stars  
wasting the whole damn day  
thinking  
of  
you

**Lee Gurga**

Tibetan bell  
with a wooden stick  
I circle Aum

breast feeding . . .  
was the fragrance of champa  
also born of a dream?

**Kala Ramesh**

cherry blossoms  
I tell my lover  
a pink lie

**Rob Scott**

returning bones  
a stone unwinds  
in the breeze

hungover - ignoble  
Jerusalem - cactus  
pissing - the cats

waning gibbous  
the increasing density  
of fall

unable to find  
the cry of the nextdoor boy  
spring rain

**Richard Gilbert**

crease of sunset the past tense of peony

**Laryalee Fraser**

her going in her coming the rain before it falls

breath in fog the lingering absence of her voice

**Jim Kacian**

late sunflower a black hole

**Helen Buckingham**

morning after  
the wild deer turn back  
into collies

**Roberta Beary**

Copyright © 2004-2008 by Roadrunner Haiku Journal. All rights revert to the authors upon publication.



**Roadrunner  
Haiku Journal**

THE SONNETS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Jen Bervin

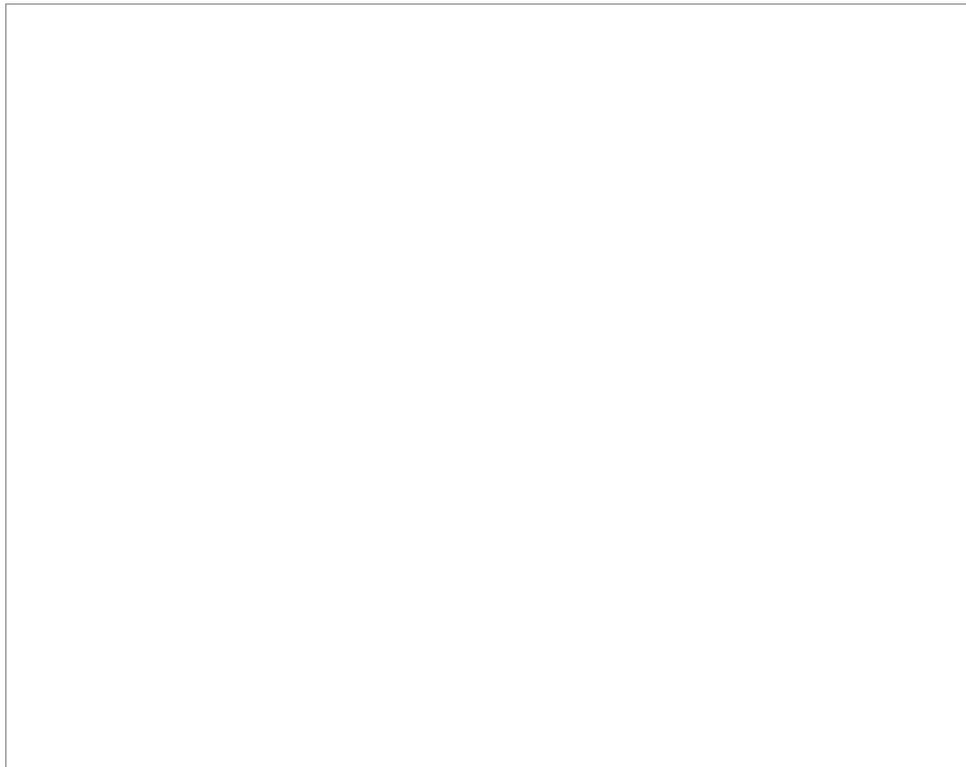
2

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,  
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,  
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,  
Will be a tattered weed, of small worth held:  
Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies,  
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,  
To say within thine own deep sunken eyes,  
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.  
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,  
If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine  
Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,'  
Proving his beauty by succession thine.  
    This were to be new made when thou art old,  
    And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

28

How can I then return in happy plight  
That am debarred the benefit of rest?  
When day's oppression is not eased by night,  
But day by night and night by day oppressed.  
And each (though enemies to either's reign,  
Do in consent shake hands to torture me,  
The one by toil, the other to complain  
How far I toil, still farther off from thee?  
I tell the day to please him thou art bright,  
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven;  
So flatter I the swart-complexioned night,  
When sparkling stars twire not thou gild'st the even.  
    But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,  
    And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.

How like a winter hath my absence been  
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!  
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen—  
What old December's bareness everywhere!  
And yet this time removed was summer's time,  
The teeming autumn big with rich increase,  
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,  
Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease:  
Yet this abundant issue seemed to me  
But hope of orphans, and unfathered fruit;  
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,  
And thou away, **the very birds are mute;**  
    **Or, if they sing,** 'tis with so dull a cheer,  
    That **leaves look pale,** dreading the winter's near.



In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,  
 For they in thee a **thousand** errors note;  
 But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,  
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.  
 Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted,  
 Nor **tender** feeling to base touches prone,  
 Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited  
 To any sensual feast with thee alone.  
 But my five wits, nor my five senses can  
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,  
 Who **leaves unswayed the likeness** of a man,  
 Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be.  
 Only my plague thus far I count my gain,  
 That she that makes me sin awards me pain.

From the book

**NETS**  
**by Jen Bervin**

130 pages

ISBN: 0-9727684-3-2

Publisher: Ugly Duckling Presse

Orders: [www.uglyducklingpresse.org](http://www.uglyducklingpresse.org)

Publication Date: 2004, Second Printing 2005, Third Printing 2006

\$10.00

Poet and visual artist Jen Bervin's books include *The Desert* (Granary Books 2008), *A Non- Breaking Space* (Ugly Duckling Presse 2005), *Nets* (UDP 2004), *Under What Is Not Under* (Potes & Poets 2001), and numerous artist books on view at [www.jenbervin.com](http://www.jenbervin.com). *Nets* is in its fourth printing and is available from UDP: <http://www.uglyducklingpresse.org/>.

# Roadrunner Haiku Journal

May 2008 Issue VIII:2



Many of the haiku I most admire elude all my attempts at finding meaning; they simply are, and mirror the truth that I too simply am and don't require the reinforcement of story, philosophy, memory or concept to exist. Nonetheless, I recognize in myself what I might call a narrative impulse, and I find that many haiku, some I like very much, appeal to this impulse. But those that feel most alive, most startling, most mind/heart opening, do something different. They approach the experience of

consciousness itself, of the *awareness* of consciousness. Increasingly (at least as I experience them), each of the five poems I wish to honor (the last will be my choice for the Scorpion Prize), challenges the narrative impulse. They also challenge other notions of what a haiku may be.

### **back of the house your voice lights a candle**

From Gregory Hopkin's poem one could easily create a world. It powerfully and skillfully draws the reader in, invites the imagination, and tweaks it with a surprise, requiring our sense-making apparatus to pause for a moment. The narrative impulse is forced to give way, pleasurably, disjunctively, to a more lyrical impulse in which pure feeling resides and can rest.

While I believe that Hopkin's poem could have been written as a two or three liner, I don't think that's the case with this one by Carolyn Hall:

### **white wind the eyes of the dead seal missing**

The sound of it, the alternating long and short vowels, and the rhythm (propelled by two initial stressed syllables) are experienced in a rush, sweeping us up into feeling, into a place that does not find "white wind" puzzling, but absolutely right. The poem is grounded in the author's experience (it may have been a dream) of finding a dead seal, an image the world has provided her. "White wind" is the response of her soul, whose imagination, like that of the world, is not arbitrary, and has nothing to do with fantasy.

### **birds wait on my thoughts to disappear into seeds**

This poem by marlene mountain is, for me, more challenging. (I am not equating more challenging with better). What is it grounded in? I can make *sense* of it, I can imagine that the author is planning her garden, that thoughts are pre-cursors to buying seeds and planting them, and from there, with a child-like hop, I can imagine that birds are waiting for her to get on with it. That's my story, and it's fun, but I think it does some disservice to the poem, which seems to want to slip into another dimension. It moves closer to the enactment of consciousness itself.

### **green for a few words gray green**

Yikes, John Stevenson, where are we? Readers, I think, are likely not used to this kind of writing from this author, and yet, I would characterize it as very much the same, in one way, as other things he has written: it's appeal is to the mind as well as to the senses, and if one is looking for juxtaposition, that might be a place to start. I think, on the surface, the immediate appeal for me is in the sound: if you speak it in a low voice, which will emphasize the way it makes your mouth feel as well as the way your ears hear, it can be experienced as a kind of sonic arc, lifting, dipping and lifting again. It gives one the affect of a smile. I suppose one could say that the poem is "about" how subtle changes in feeling and

perception can occur in the span of a few words, or a thought. It is a poem that seems to have been lifted from a stream of consciousness, a sleek fish raised, bending in the air, its colors revealed in sunlight. It is not a poem one could easily pin a story on.

The Scorpion Prize, which has passed through and been blessed by the hands of the above notables, finally comes to rest in Paul Pfleuger, Jr.'s possession.

**A darkness so deep  
I am surrounded  
by gold beetles**

We have experiences which in no way relate to the senses, which come, seemingly from nowhere: they are not memories, they are not projections. They are not even imagined, and yet how to convey them except by image, and therefore by approximation? Though some readers (and perhaps the author himself) will have other associations with “gold beetles”, in this poem I feel Paul Pfleuger has come pretty close to conveying the consciousness of ecstasy. I applaud him, Gregory Hopkins, Carolyn Hall, marlene mountain, and John Stevenson for challenging the often pinched notions of what haiku and poetry may be, and I applaud *Roadrunner* for promoting and encouraging the challenge.

Peter Yovu

Copyright © 2004-2008 by Roadrunner Haiku Journal. All rights revert to the authors upon publication.