Notes from the Gekan

The Journal of Japanese Form Poetry

volume 3, issue 3
December 2011

featuring:
haiku, tanka, haiga, haibun, linked forms & more.
Welcome to Notes from the Gean the journal of haiku, tanka, haiga, haibun, linked forms & more.

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Mission Statement:

We seek to encourage excellence, experimentation and education within haiku and its related genres. We believe this is best accomplished by example and not imitation. Our aim is for authenticity above all else. We therefore solicit your finest examples of haiku, tanka, haiga, haibun and renga/renku so that we may "hear" your voices speak.

The Editors

For updates and latest information on current and coming issues please visit our GEAN NEWS page.

For details on how to submit to Notes from the Gean please check our SUBMISSIONS page.

cover artwork Colin Stewart Jones

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in this issue
but not necessarily following this order

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We are pleased to open this issue with translations of 3 Basho haibun by Pulitzer Prize winner Franz Wright. His new collection of prose poems *Kindertotenwald* (Knopf) he believes to be his best book. Recently Poetry Magazine gave Mr. Wright the Barbara M. J. Wood Award for best poem or group of poems published in the magazine in the past year, a collection of 6 pieces from *Kindertotenwald*. A new manuscript, a combination of prose and verse poems called F, will appear from Knopf in 2013. And in 2015 yet another collection will appear from Knopf entitled *Changed*. Franz Wright is a great admirer of Japanese poetry. He has previously published a collection of translated haiku of Buson.

Also, in this issue we have the first ever haibun by internationally acclaimed poet Dorianne Laux. I came upon two poems by Dorianne, one a prose poem, the other free verse, that were published in a blog. In reading them I felt they could be reconstructed to create an excellent haibun. I worked with her on the editing and this is what resulted. Dorianne’s haibun will appear first, but so that writers can understand the process undertaken to transmute free verse poems into haibun, Dorianne’s haibun will be followed by the original poems as they appeared on the blog. Dorianne’s most recent book of poems is *The Book of Men*, W.W. Norton.

And of course, I believe the other haibun poets included, some well-known, some relatively new, offer a range of accomplished styles and thematic considerations.

Enjoy,

Richard Krawiec: Haibun Editor

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“I’ve loved the concept of the short poem since I began to write, and consider it the ultimate challenge for a lyric poet: to write with absolute simplicity and clarity and not to go past, say, twelve lines. A wonderful book of American poems, none of which is longer than twelve lines: Charles Wright’s *China Trace*, published in 1976. Wright may have had the shorter masterpieces by Du Fu and Li Bo, e.g. The ultimate short poem is one line long, and Charles Wright has one or two of those in his book. After that, it’s the haiku, as far as I know. There are a lot of misunderstandings regarding the haiku, the most common being that it is a “nature poem”, and while I am not at all sure I understand what people mean by nature poem, I think it is supposed to signify a poem that takes place far from urban scenes (one has only to think of Baudelaire, perhaps the greatest lyric poet in any language—he wrote primarily poems set in the big modern city—to debunk this theory), and always deals with the world outside and around us, excluding that other, so to speak equally infinite though invisible universe of feelings and thoughts within us. My idea is that the greatest haiku serve as a sort of bridge between the two worlds, a bridge or perhaps a kind spiritual equivalent of a mathematical formula, odd as that may sound. It seeks, in any event, to create new things or objects that did not exist before, Char’s “gift of the creature to the Creation.” In a great haiku, there is the sense that words have been used, paradoxically and mysteriously, to convey a wordless state of mind in which the walls between what we call outer and inner worlds dissolve and the two become indistinguishable, one; or to uncover startling and previously unsuspected connections between things which superficially appear to be very different. Basho, like Shakespeare (and writing about the same time) took a form of popular entertainment and raised it to the highest levels of art.

My father used to enjoy remarking that his friend Robert Bly’s main ambition in writing was to turn *the Iliad* into a haiku! There is a serious idea at the heart of this very funny thought. I think there are poems with three verses, a certain number of syllables, and so forth that has the same mass as a play like Lear, a novel like *The Sound and the Fury*, even an epic poem by Virgil or Dante.

There’s a quote by Charles Mingus, the great bebop bass player and composer, that I keep over my desk. Anybody can play weird, that’s easy. What’s hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple complicated is commonplace. Making the complicated simple—awesomely simple—that is creativity.”

Franz Wright, 2011
1.

for Sam Hamill

I am acquainted with a Kyoto monk by the name of Unchiku who once did a painting. Maybe it was a self-portrait, I don't know. It showed a monk with his face turned away. He asked me if I would write something on it, so I set down these words: You are more than sixty-years-old, and I am almost fifty. We are both shadows in a dream, the same dream, maybe. Then, as if talking in my sleep, I added my poem:

Turn and look back at me
I am so lonely
cold fall night
As the chill rain of early winter began falling desolately over everything, I sought warmth and company at a roadside inn. Allowed to dry my soaked clothes at the fire, I was further comforted for a time by the inn keeper who tactfully listened to me relate some of the troubles I encountered on the road. Suddenly it was evening—I sat down under a lamp, taking great care with them as I produced my ink and brushes, and began to write. Recognizing my work, he solemnly requested that I consider composing a poem in honor of our one brief meeting in this world:

At an inn I am asked for identification
traveller let that be my name
first winter rain
3.

Wherever I travel, wherever I happen to find myself, I am not from there. In fact, the whole world is just such a place to me. I have spent the past six or seven months on the road, a nocturnal traveller who has survived, so far, many devastating illnesses as I made my way onward. I found the more alien I came to seem to myself, the more I missed beloved faces, lifelong friends and aging students, until my steps were drawn irresistibly back toward the outskirts of Edo. And sure enough, day after day they appeared, coming to sit in the small hut of a poor man and talk to me. I had nothing to offer in return except my poem:

I am still alive but why
silvery grass that withers
at the touch of the snow

1690-1692

Franz Wright - USA
fog—
the rainforest disappears
one tree at a time

Liz Rule - Australia

no crackle
in the wet leaves
the movement of clouds

Annie Bachini - UK

beneath her voice a timbre of something crumbling

Johannes S. H. Bjerg - Denmark

silent night—
I swallow the entire future
of an apple tree

Johannes S. H. Bjerg - Denmark

easy rain
the soft sounds of insects
in the autumn air

Andy Burkhart - USA
twilight
just starting
the starling

John Hawk - USA

before sunrise
chickadees
and the trash truck

John Hawk - USA

slowly waking the turtle sunrise

John Hawk - USA

something invisible
sighs
over the pond

Beth McFarland - Germany

my church vanishes
in the shadows . . .
winter sunset.

Thomas Dougherty - USA
After a long day
we made loud, quick, strenuous
love in the dark
in the morning, we made
quiet, slow, eye-open love

Bruce England - Canada

Drinking
and writing haiku
in a circle
I woke up with drivel,
vomit and a hangover

Bruce England - Canada

Anything
can be the center of this world
like this cup of tea
I finish it
and toss it away

Bruce England - Canada
it’s raining again in time with the beats of my heart

Brendan Slater - England
No. 1

tendrils of ivy—
I think I'll paint
my mailbox blue  /ws

she moves the snake away
from the garden hose  /ma

an uninvited guest
is knocking
at the door  /ws

one last question
before the storm begins  /ma
drifting clouds
all day drinking
from one tall glass /ma

on a dare, naked,
into the lake /ws

train whistles—
I can't reveal
my true motivation /ma

the hobo's sign
etched in packed snow /ws
summer moon
coaxing from memory
the shape of her face /ws

a Cubist painting
hanging crooked /ma

only to discover
a stain
on his old school tie /ws

the flame shared
between pieces of kindling /ma
No. 4

heat wave
reading a classic novel
that bores me /ma

a little family
fashioned from clay /ws

this is the last time
I’ll give in to your request
for fried eggs /ma

she takes a drag
off my last Pall Mall /ws

Melissa Allen and William Sorlien - USA
Photography by William Sorlien
SECOND HAND COAT

We lay in his king-sized bed, me and the man I’d met hours before at the beach, the aria of my orgasm still echoing in the still summer air, disturbing the dust motes into pale paisley swirls that hung in bars of sunlight over the white sheets. Those were the days I believed I could love anyone, giving my body away like bread, my lips swollen from kissing.

We smoked a whole pack of cigarettes down to their white filters, crushing them into a saucer propped on a pillow between us. He told me his wife had recently died in this bed, suicide. I stared up at the nubbled ceiling, its white moonscape. The walls were whiter in squares where he’d taken pictures down, rice paper lampshades stacked in a corner near a small potted palm, a silver mister. He said he’d woken soaked in her blood.

the sun and stars still inside
she stood there
and wept

We were together, if you could call it “together”, for a few weeks. One night we stayed up late, ate pizza and watched Jay Leno. I smeared sauce on the bedspread and when I got up to clean it he said Don’t bother, I’ll use it for packing. Every day something would disappear, the clock from the kitchen, every white mug in the cupboard, a plaster cast of a someone’s left hand. Once he came over to meet my mother because she was from Maine and he’d grown up somewhere near there. He brought her the potted palm as a gift. They talked and flirted for hours while I did something else.

Toward the end he had a party, invited a bunch of his friends. He took my hand and pulled me into the bedroom. Someone in the living room turned the music down right in the middle of my notorious song. He kept saying Go on, It’s okay and I suddenly got it that he wanted them to hear it, that he’d set me up. I could never decide if that bothered me or not.

The last day he told me to open the closet. I looked in at her dresses, arrayed in color-coded rows, white silk blouses and black pencil skirts, sandals, then heels, then winter boots. He said Take anything you want. I settled on a coat, tan with tortoise-shell buttons, a creamy cashmere lining you could unzip and discard in spring. I was overwhelmed by his generosity. I kept saying Thank you, thank you as he led me to the door.

in the oldest church
windows broken
her bare feet on stones

Dorianne Laux - USA
And here are the original poems by Dorianne Laux:

SECOND HAND COAT

We lay in his king-sized bed, me and the man I’d met hours before at the beach, the aria of my orgasm still echoing in the still summer air, disturbing the dust motes into pale paisley swirls that hung in bars of sunlight over the white sheets. Those were the days I believed I could love anyone, giving my body away like bread, my lips swollen from kissing. He told me his wife had recently died in this bed, suicide. I didn’t look at him or touch his hand. I stared up at the nubbled ceiling, its white moonscape, and continued to breathe. There were boxes half-packed, the walls whiter in squares where he’d taken pictures down, rice paper lampshades stacked in a corner near a small potted palm, a silver mister. We smoked a whole pack of cigarettes down to their white filters, crushing them into a saucer propped on a pillow between us. He said he’d woken soaked in her blood. He was from somewhere back east. His name was Sellers McKee. We were together, if you could call it “together”, for a few weeks. One night we stayed up late, ate pizza and watched Jay Leno. I smeared sauce on the bedspread and when I got up to clean it he said Don’t bother, I’ll use it for packing. Later, we had a fight about whether the word decorative was pronounced dec-ra-tive or decor-a-tive. Every day something would disappear, the clock from the kitchen, every white mug in the cupboard, a plaster cast of a someone’s left hand. Once he came over to meet my mother because she was from Maine and he’d grown up somewhere near there. He brought her the potted palm as a gift. They talked and flirted for hours while I did something else. Toward the end he had a party, invited a bunch of his friends. He took my hand and pulled me into the bedroom. Someone in the living room turned the music down right in the middle of my notorious song. He kept saying Go on, It’s okay and I suddenly got it that he wanted them to hear it, that he’d set me up. I could never decide if that bothered me or not. The last day he told me to open the closet. I looked in at her dresses, arrayed in color-coded rows, white silk blouses and black pencil skirts, sandals, then heels, then winter boots. He said Take anything you want. I settled on a coat, tan with tortoise-shell buttons, a creamy cashmere lining you could unzip and discard in spring. I was overwhelmed by his generosity. I kept saying Thank you, thank you as he led me to the door. Then it was over, and for the next few weeks I went out with a garbage man who’d pick me up in a big white truck. His name was Sam, which I probably only remember because I sang it like a child’s song whenever he called. It’s Sam, I’d sing, Sam the garbage man, if he can’t do it no one can, and he’d say, deadpan, nothing in his voice at all, Yeah, yeah, darlin, it’s me.
FIRST LIGHT

Lightly, she had to touch him lightly, because he almost wasn’t there, that first boy who came to her beneath the drunken stars, clothes unwound like bandages revealing the flesh that glowed within like bread, salty clavicle, arched bone filled with marrow she sucked as her womb shook, the bellows of her breasts billowing, soft pillows he now pressed his tilted head against, his breath unspooling into the hollow of her throat, lifting the finest hairs at her neck’s nape. She stroked him then, like a horse, his long back, his darkling spine, and watched the grasses on the hills sway and ripple, listened to the loud crickets chip away the night. She had stepped into the oldest church, the windows broken, her bare feet on stones hauled up from the valley below thousands of years ago, the sun and stars still inside them, and she had stood there, a non-believer, and wept.
an iris
trapped in a vase
like love
there are things
we never wanted

H. Gene Murtha - USA

knapsack
and cane pole
I search
the pond’s edge
for an answer

H. Gene Murtha - USA

if I could let go
of everything I cherish
the winds
would surely carry me
away like a feather

Kala Ramesh - India
Editor, Which Kind Art Thou?

We are all editors. We labor over the right words we utter or write to others. We edit the photos taken on a trip, an office party, wedding or in the bedroom. We revise our appearance: the clothes we wear, our hair, the whiteness of our teeth. We redo the larger context in which we function, that is, the car we drive, the place in which we live, even the dog or cat we select as a pet. The only difference between everyone as editor and the editor of a journal or an anthology is that the latter selects and perhaps revises what another has done.

But this oversimplifies for there are editors-in-training, junior editors, copy editors, assistant editors, associate editors and editors-in-chief, and all have different roles in the judgment process.

Motivations For Becoming A Literary Editor

Why does a person decide to become an editor of someone else’s work? The most common motive is a love of writing dovetailing with the need for a job—the Honors English grad is lucky enough to get hired by a publisher of books, journals or popular magazines. Then he or she starts at the bottom as a junior editor and slowly works up to a higher rung. However, most individuals who end up as editors are unpaid. They make their incomes outside the publishing industry and become editors for a variety of other reasons.

A noble intent for becoming an editor is to gather and publish neglected or ignored writing into a book, journal or blog—to be a crusader or champion of the writing of others. A more common impetus is to launch what you think is a unique idea for a book or journal or blog, such as soliciting poems about rugby or fishing. Many editors take such a route to publish their own work. A closely allied aim is the promotion of a new literary sub-genre. You started writing sci-fi ghazals and now want to be seen as the founder of this spin-off. For many, there can be also a need for personal glory.

As A Crusader

My first stint as an editor was for the Canadian Haiku Anthology (Toronto: Three Trees Press, 1979). It was a huge job for a beginner—selecting 20 haiku by each of 20 prominent Canadian haiku poets. The anthology was a phenomenal success, especially for a novice compiler. I was interviewed on national CBC radio as well as on local Toronto stations. A sold-out launch was held at the Harbourfront Centre, the premiere literary venue in Canada. At last, the haiku was on its way to poetic respectability and finally the reading public would recognize that, in English, the haiku did not have to follow a 5-7-5 format and that the best poems had fewer than 17 syllables. Was I wrong!

The 600 copies of the anthology sold out in less than six weeks. A thousand more buyers were ready, but the publisher could not reprint because the plates had been lost (or so the story goes) and so was the opportunity to reach out to more people. Nevertheless, I’m not sure that an extra thousand copies would have made much difference. Today, the 5-7-5 idea of haiku is as strongly entrenched among educators and the media as it ever was.
Next came *Cicada Voices: Selected Haiku of Eric Amann* (Battle Ground, IN: High/Coo Press, 1983). One of the earliest haiku pioneers, Amann started in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s. He wrote in the form, about the form (*The Wordless Poem*) and edited two journals (*Haiku* and *Cicada*). I felt that Amann’s haiku should have a readership beyond journals and convinced him to let me edit a selected works. Upon his approval, I then persuaded Randy Brooks, editor of High/Coo Press (which morphed into his current Brooks Books) to publish it.

My third “noble” enterprise occurred in partnership with Randy Brooks. While in Japan, on a tour sponsored by the Japan-Foundation for about eight haiku poets from North America, we discussed the need for an anthology that focused on the best English-language haiku poets in the world, not just from the United States and Canada. This mammoth undertaking resulted in the landmark anthology, *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide* (Cullercoats, England/Oakville, ON: Iron Press/Mosaic Press, 2000). We decided not to include our haiku, a step rare in the haiku world, but one that should be followed more often.

**As An Assistant Editor**

My background as an editor also includes having been an assistant editor five times: as Poetry Editor for *Poetry Toronto* (1980-81) and as Children’s Book Reviewer (1982-85), as Poetry Reviews Editor (1985-86), and as Poetry Editor (1986-90)—all for *Cross-Canada Writers’ Quarterly*. Then, from 2000-08, I was a member of the editorial staff of Red Moon Press for its yearly anthology of the best haiku-related work in English. Clearly, I paid my dues by being part of editorial teams where individual egos have to be put aside.

**As A Promoter**

In 1990, after a decade of giving many readings in the schools across Canada, I learned that most teachers have no idea about how to get students interested in poetry. So, I wrote an article about what I do, but needed two or three more to fill out a book-length publication that school libraries would buy. So, three other poets, also popular in the schools, agreed to contribute an essay about what they do. The result was the successful *The Universe Is One Poem* (Simon & Pierre, 1990 and 2007). The title is actually one of my published one-line poems that plays on words. After frowning for a while, students would eventually get the little joke—the syllable “uni” also means “one.”

In 1992, I was asked by Nelson (Canada) and Houghton-Mifflin (USA) to come up with an anthology of poems that would stimulate interest in poetry among grade-school students. As a result, I invited twenty poets who had published for children and gathered a variety of poems—rhymed, unrhymed, visual, long, short, etc. The resulting 1993 anthology *There Will Always Be A Sky* (the last stanza from one of my included poems) is still in use today.

**Guest Editor and Contest Judge**

A number of requests to guest edit a journal and judge poetry contests have come my way over the years. Such gigs are an honor and usually fun.

In 1988, Alexis Rotella, the editor of *Brussels Sprout*, asked me to edit issue 5:2. In 1995, Peter Mortimer to edit *Iron’s* book review section (#76).
As publisher of AHA Books, Jane Reichhold invited me to judge two tanka contests. The results were two booklets, *Tanka Splendor 1992* and *Tanka Splendor 1997* that included the 30-plus winners plus an intro as well as a tanka by me.

Two poetry contests with me as one of the judges involved Japan Air Lines: a 1987 haiku contest involving British Columbia school children and a 1990 haiku contest for children around the world for which I and thirteen other judges were flown to Japan for ten days. The majority of the time was taken up with sightseeing tours during the day and socializing far into the night. The final judging occurred in Osaka during its World’s Fair. One of the finalists was the Princess of Thailand and when her parents decided to attend the contest-ending banquet, I vividly recall watching the Kobe beef cooling on our plates while the late-arriving Royal parents were seated.

For the Haiku Society of America Henderson Awards, I was a judge twice, 1989 and 2007. Other judgships occurred for a Toronto public library contest for teens in 1992; for the British Haiku Society Museum of Haiku Literature Award in 1996; for the International People’s Haiku Contest in 1998. The year 2002 was particularly busy: for the World Haiku Club’s R.H. Blyth Award, for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists poetry contest, and for Haiku Canada’s Betty Drevniok Award. Oh yes, I also judged the haiku for the 2004 San Francisco Haiku, Senryu and Tanka Contest.

Since taking over as editor of *Frogpond: The Journal of the Haiku Society of America* in January, 2008, I have turned down several requests to be a judge for two reasons: to avoid conflict of interest and to avoid adding to my heavy workload with the journal.

**What Makes A Good Editor?**

When the Managing Editor of *Notes from the Gean*, Colin Stewart Jones asked me to write this article, it forced me to consider what makes a good editor. After all my experiences in various roles plus four years, so far, at the helm of *Frogpond*, I do have some clear ideas.

1. You cannot work alone and be successful. You need at least one other sensibility to help make decisions. This means that you must select co-editors with whom you can talk openly in a relaxed atmosphere.

   I accepted the editorship of *Frogpond* only after my wife, Anita Krumins, agreed to be my assistant editor. After the significant help she had given me with all my previous editing tasks, she finally decided to make it official.

2. Be open-minded to suggestions for improvement.

   Readers have made suggestions for changes to our *Frogpond* format and we have made many of them.

3. Don’t be afraid to rock the boat with your decisions.

   In almost each issue, we publish a radical departure from typical haiku, senryu, renga, rengay, haibun. This keeps *Frogpond* at the leading edge of the inevitable changes that occur in haiku and related forms with each generation of new writers.

4. Don’t publish your own work in the magazine you edit.
Anita and I do not publish our poems and articles in *Frogpond*. This view is contrary to that of most other editors, but we feel that this policy leaves more space for the work of others. Also, we feel that only someone outside our twosome will have the needed objectivity to select the best of our work. There are two exceptions to our rule, however. I do all the brief reviews. The sheer number of books submitted by publishers makes it impossible to find enough reviewers who can meet the deadline for each issue. The other exception is that we both contribute to the section “From the Editors” that appears on the last page.

4. Be firm about the need for accurate referencing in articles and reviews that you receive.

In the beginning, we used to get interesting articles, but often with no references or ones that were inconsistent. Now that most essayists know the score, they usually submit fully-noted work.

5. Remember that you are one of the gatekeepers for the history of the haiku and related forms in the English language.

This means that, for theoretical and/or historical articles, you must sometimes look beyond what the author has provided for the “Notes” and ask that a more thorough record be provided. We all have the tendency to believe that the history of haiku started when we became interested in the form. Consequently, I’ve read papers and heard talks given by poets who began writing haiku in the 1990s and who simply ignore relevant work from before that time. Often the outcome is repetition of ideas expressed decades earlier. An editor must develop a good sense of the history of the haiku in the English language so that he or she can make sure earlier work is recognized and credited. Only when this happens consistently will the haiku and related forms be taken seriously by academics who, in the end, are the true power brokers of literary history. We must provide them with an accurate historical record to ensure that our work not be dismissed as trivial.

5. Promote your publication as much as possible.

Editors owe it to their contributors and readers, as well as to themselves, to promote their publications. Without such efforts, a magazine will become lost in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Until Anita and I took over *Frogpond* in January 2008, it only had an ISSN number (used to identify magazines]. We felt that it need to be listed in places that gave it academic respectability; where teachers and students could find it for their research.

First, we applied to the Modern Language Association to have *Frogpond* listed in one of its indexes and were asked to supply a couple issues for evaluation. They passed the MLA test. Then we applied to the Humanities Index and had the same success. Now the journal is listed in the MLA International Bibliography and Humanities International Complete, two prestigious sources for literary research.

*George Swede - Canada*
Butter-fly
wrapping
me around
her little
finger

Ed Baker - USA
fallen leaf curls into its own
emptied self

haiga3 by Alegría Imperial

Alegría Imperial - Canada
half moon
a cooper knocks a stave
into a barrel

Michele L. Harvey - USA

spindrift . . .
the way dreams
take shape

Michele L. Harvey - USA

night rain
a train's whistle
lost inside

Ann Schwader - USA

windfall peaches
even this early light
not what it was

Ann Schwader - USA

in a maze
of poles and twine
young hops

Richard Tice - USA
frosty morning—
old smudge pot smoking
in the fruit orchard

Nancy Nitrio - USA

first cold breeze
a blue crab clings
to the rim

Bill Cooper - USA

a sliver of meat on the crab mallet crescent moon

Bill Cooper - USA

grey spray lashes her
grey rocks wearing her spare
edges away

Noel King - Ireland

foliage bursts
the rock of desire
—ants chasing each other

Noel King - Ireland
Ghost Stories: Solo Rengay

empty house
ghost stories seeping
into the walls

shadows shift
on yesterday’s paper

the dark places
between flashes
of a firefly

war vet whittles
on the back porch

ivy creeps
around the ankles
of a stone angel

iron birds etched
around the birdcage

Aubrie Cox - USA
from the east
the morning sun rises
to greet the day
I wake the snoring dog
laying hold of my dreams

Colin Stewart Jones - Scotland

autumn rain
gathering on the road
in pockets
we pool our resources
for papers and tobacco

Colin Stewart Jones - Scotland

a filament
bars the night entry
to my room
softly, softly the tapping
shadows on my window

Colin Stewart Jones - Scotland
The shadow of the night becomes a willow

Beate Conrad
nightfall . . .
this rain carries
me

Then, as quickly, trees drip coldness.

This night of rain passes into a day of stiffened joints. Ruby forces himself to get up to open the window. As he does, snarled traffic catches between echoes. The world, having been held back by the glass, pours in. Tightness of the clouds in his chest loosens into drowsiness as a breeze reaches him.

Pale gray slumber on a window made of whispers.

gnarled tree—
the Bushtits' flutters
cling to clouds

Louis Osofsky - USA
roadside apple—
in the small bite marks
smaller ants

Vida - USA

a cold night
the snowman just visible
with his scarf

Bruce Ross - USA

typhoon:
city hanging
upon the waters

Keith Simmonds - Trinidad & Tobago

twilight
the space between
stepping stones

K. Bennett - USA

crossing ferry—
the sea gently moving
into my past

Shalini Sunkuru – India
winter garden
my father's books
mixed in with mine

Cara Holman - USA

snowshoe hare
his footsteps
too big to fill

Cara Holman - USA

stopping to see
the shape of a snowflake

Joan McNerney - USA

cracked chestnuts
new colour
on my lips

Urszula Wielanowska - Poland

snowstorm outside
the cafe window
no two faces alike

Lucas Stensland - USA
The cusp

Last light. Through the kitchen window flashes of red. I put the ladle down. Tiptoe out. The buck and doe raise their heads. Their breaths stream in speech bubbles. They hold my gaze. The doe noses persimmons in the grass. He nudges her. Side by side they jump into the darkening thicket. A smell hangs in the air.

for a moment . . .
holding the full moon
antlers of a buck

Sonam Chhoki – The Kingdom of Bhutan
Johannes S. H. Bjerg – Denmark
"Paris Changed: On the 50th Anniversary of Hemingway's Death"

hunting
before the war—
wilderness quiet

an ambulance
rolls through his dreams
a world of hurt

the moon
keeps setting
a soldier's carriage

oryx head
mounted on the wall—
without sentiment

old
in my hands
and in the sea

I purchase a
Bar Hemingway t-shirt
Paris changed

Lucas Stensland - USA
first snow
still we find
the gaps

haiku: alegría imperial
images: eleanor angeles

Alegría Imperial & Eleanor Angeles - Canada
it is said
that every snowflake
is unique
yet from this window
all I see is snow

Kirsty Karkow - USA

who could drive by
this wayside sculptor's work?
a fuel can,
tin bowls and some pipe
create a bulldog . . . with a chain

Kirsty Karkow - USA

someone
has written my name
in this book
several times, as though
they secretly loved me

Ruth Holzer - USA
outside:
a war, inside:
a death,
and you want me
to choose . . .

Kirsten Cliff - New Zealand

on the cd player
Time to Say Goodbye
in the midday heat
cremating the man
I wish would burn in hell

Viollette Rose-Jones - Australia

he tells me
she's younger, prettier
under the old lemon tree
the bitter smell
of rotted fruit

Viollette Rose-Jones - Australia
Irish Twins

We share an attic room. In the corner is an old double bed that smells and sags on one side. My side. Late at night I hear my heart beat. Loud. So loud he he will hear it. He will think my heart is calling him and come up the attic stairs. His footsteps are heavy. He smells of old spice and cherry tobacco. My eyes shut tight. I know he is here. I feel his weight. Never on my side. Always on the side where she sleeps. When the bed-springs sing their sad song I fly away. Up to the ceiling. My sister is already there. Together we hold hands. Looking down we see our bodies. We are not moving. We are as still as the dead.

attic rain
the backyard swing
off-kilter

Roberta Beary - USA
Three Dumpings

Spellcheck snoops into my scribbling and insists on ‘dumpling’ in the title. But what does it know about love lost? My lover’s last text message was: “It was her phone number in your favorites list that cemented it for me.”

William James’ pithy: “Hogamous, higamous, man is polygamous; higamous, hogamous, woman monogamous,” was of no help when I sent it to her so that she could better understand men. In retrospect, were we to believe that affairs of the heart are as black and white, as male and female, as yin and yang, as James suggests, we men would be out hunting, warring, pillaging and womanizing while our women remained happily nested at home, sewing, cooking and raising children.

Spellcheck, ever the perfectionist, has just rejected both “higamous” and “hogamous.” Perhaps it doesn’t want me lamenting love’s wounds on the Internet. Is this because it’s not manly for the wannabe writer, the fool for love, to admit that he was dumped not once, not twice, but three times by this same woman for reasons incomprehensible to him?

Done in by our differences and technology, I’m heading for the local gin joint, The Casablanca, for a bit of gambo, a place where Rick knows how to deal with dames and Sam knows how to sing to them.

cold sheets
her dumpling stew moldering
In the fridge

Ray Rasmussen - Canada
sheeting rain
the mallard pair
face apart

Aron Rothstein - USA

half-finished crossword
the orange tabby stretches
in a ray of sun

Aron Rothstein - USA

do\s coo at dawn—
turned my way
her sleeping private face

Aron Rothstein - USA

autumn breeze
escorted to the mailbox
by an acorn

Robyn Hood Black - USA

same blue
as ten years ago
empty sky

Robyn Hood Black - USA
over Ypres
a wind turbine turns,
cemetery after cemetery

Timothy Collinson - UK

Flanders rain;
gentle snores of my battlefield
room-mate

Timothy Collinson - UK

cold wind
behind the cry of geese
thistledown

Magdalena Banaszkiewicz - Poland

a biker—
fall leaves follow
into the bank

Dennis Holmes - USA

pizzicato . . .
the fall
of autumn rain

Dennis Holmes - USA
filleting it—
the trout's eyes
are shocked to hell

William Ramsey - USA

dragged from a culvert
Gadhafi's eyes—
the wandering

William Ramsey - USA

trapped against the pane
bee's anger
fills the room

John McDonald - Scotland

made from oceans
our snowman—
the full moon has him leaning

John McDonald - Scotland

flickering match—
prostitute's face
a momentary brightness

John McDonald - Scotland
crossing
the peaceful fields
high tension lines

Ernest Wit - Poland

Saturday morning
party of dead beetles
in an empty bottle

Ernest Wit - Poland

vine-covered window . . .
I wrestle with the thought
of going back home

Chen-ou Liu – Canada

red light—
the driver of a hearse
smiles at me

Chen-ou Liu – Canada

ancient ritual
1,000,000 hits
on YouTube

Alan S. Bridges - USA
on the plaza
before the concert begins
rain showers
and a sprinkle of twigs
dropped by nesting crows

Neal Whitman - USA

an old man sits
on an overturned pail
roses on his lap
snapping thorns off long stems
with only one hand

Wende DuFlon - USA

the silence
of the freight train
cutting
the fresh snow
at dawn

Christina Nguyen - USA
she listens at the door
the rumble of a storm
inside

Diane Mayr – USA
On the edge
hiking break
at the ruined church
a little sky
filled with scents
of fresh felled timber
through the gallery
whispers ... the splash of red
blurred her make-up
after the quarrel
unexpected finds
near the river flood plain
the campfire
gone out
two falling stars
snow drops
or butterflies
every place
every season
is perfect

- for Kris Lindbeck

Christina Nguyen - USA

putting a brush
into paint & paint
unto canvas
i express my feelings
in variations of blue

Pamela A. Babusci - USA

crushing
red lotus roots
into pulp
the more i gave
the more he took

Pamela A. Babusci - USA
a leaf falls
to the woodland ground
love's end

Dietmar Tauchner - Austria

at the end of my efforts
wildflowers

Dietmar Tauchner - Austria

sunday morning on the road only the sun

Dietmar Tauchner - Austria

last night's sunset still inside the orange tulip

Patricia Nelson - USA

plum tree
only
when it blooms

Alegria Imperial - Canada
swallows and minarets
shooting through the sky
in Sarajevo

Abraham Freddy Ben-Arroyo - Israel

a lizard baking
on the patio sundial
sol y sombra

Virginie Colline - France

mexican oleanders i give up

Aditya Bahl - India

after the wildfire
a haze of green
across the prairie

Christina Nguyen - USA

locust clouds
a silent kaleidoscope
swallows blue skies

Barbara A Taylor - Australia
48th birthday
the neon buddha
thinks of angels

Michael Dylan Welch - USA
discovering the afterlife the neon buddha

Michael Dylan Welch
riding a unicorn in his dream the neon buddha

Michael Dylan Welch

Michael Dylan Welch - USA
bowling night the neon buddha strikes again

Michael Dylan Welch

Michael Dylan Welch - USA
the apparition of his face in a cloud neon buddha

Michael Dylan Welch
Colin: Hi Michael, and welcome to the pages of Notes from the Gean. You have been interviewed quite a few times so I will endeavour not to go over previously covered ground. But I did notice from a previous interview that you quoted William Blake. I was recently reading Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience again and noticed these three lines from Blake’s poem “The Blossom”:

. . . Pretty Robin!
Under leaves so green,
A happy blossom

Would you regard this as a haiku, and if so, could you tell us why? And if not, could you tell us why not?

Michael: These lines appreciate nature and colour, which are clear haiku sensitivities, but no, I wouldn’t consider this a haiku. Aside from whether haiku was intended, I would say that “pretty” and “happy” demonstrate too much authorial intrusion. These words are a little too sappy for haiku, too, to my tastes. Even the word “so” speaks too much of the author. The right touch of subjectivity in contemporary English-language haiku can work well (one needs to control it, not avoid it entirely), but for the most part I think the author should get out of the way. Let the poem imply its meaning, not hit you over the noggin with it. Furthermore, the last line here may not be describing a blossom but interpreting the robin as if it were a blossom. The metaphor points at the author (“this is what I think of the image”) rather than letting a carefully chosen image or experience do its own talking. It’s the difference between the first and second parts of Robert Frost’s “Dust of Snow” poem (even though it’s a poem I like very much). Explicit metaphors and similes succeed only rarely in haiku because they are detours to the image, or substitutes for it, and not the image itself. In attempting to be postmodern or post-whatever, some poets treat haiku as if it celebrates the poet. They’re welcome to do so. But for my money it seems vital for haiku to celebrate the experience, not the experiencer. Of course, such an assertion begs for its opposite—for some haiku poet out there to turn all Whitmanesque in celebrating himself, which I think we already see with some gendai haiku. However, haiku poems succeed best, I think, if they trust the image (read Robert Hass’s “Images” essay), and juxtapose images carefully to create implied emotion by what is left out. I like to refer to this space as the “vacuum” in haiku. In The Book of Tea, though not speaking of haiku, Kakuzo Okakura said “In leaving something unsaid the beholder is given a chance to complete the idea and thus a great masterpiece irresistibly rivets your attention until you seem to become actually a part of
it. A vacuum is there for you to enter and fill up to the full measure of your aesthetic emotion.” If a haiku doesn’t create some sort of vacuum by what is left out, what is there to draw the reader in?

Kerouac, as you know, said haiku should be as simple as porridge. Blake was inclined to dish out a more elaborate banquet, but you can’t dine on filet mignon at every meal. One wonders, though, if Blake would have been attracted to haiku if he had known about it. It can be inspiring to find haiku-like nuggets in the full range of Western writing. I think of Ian Marshall’s retelling of Walden by extracting “haiku” from its richly descriptive nature passages, and the many examples of Western haiku sensitivities that R. H. Blyth cites in his books on haiku. Blake’s transcendental abstractions and extended metaphors may well have prevented him from writing haiku with any kind of consistency, though, despite how effective those techniques proved to be for his own stripe of poetry. But perhaps Blake would have surprised us, the way Richard Wright did with his haiku. If only more mainstream poets would surprise us!

**Colin**: I am Scottish, Michael, so I’d have to disagree that porridge is a simple dish (you’d be surprised what we can do with oatmeal), but your reply raises many interesting points which I hope to return to later. I have noticed that there is an increased incidence of English-language haiku being published that combine a natural image with a “thought” of the author, so I wonder, what is the right amount of subjectivity and how can a writer remain truly objective in any piece of writing if they make conscious decisions as to what remains unsaid, to provide the vacuum?

**Michael**: Kerouac didn’t say porridge is simple; rather, he said that haiku should be as simple as porridge, which is quite different. Feel free to take up the distinction with him! Actually, I take his point to be that haiku should be ordinary, commonplace, direct, unencumbered, daily, and immediate—as ordinary a staple as porridge is at breakfast, irrespective of how simple porridge might or might not be. If haiku makes the ordinary extraordinary, it presumably starts with the ordinary.

Yes, I too have smelled that recent uptick of haiku that combine an image with a “thought” of the author. In fact, it’s already become a bit of haiku cliché. Pick your image and then add “so much / still to say” or “all the words / we never said” or a hundred variations. At the recent Seabeck Haiku Getaway, where John Stevenson was our featured guest, he and I had a conversation about this very topic. When I mentioned to John how I was a bit weary of this sort of formula in haiku, he immediately concurred and said he was glad it wasn’t just him who felt that way. Still, the right touch of subjectivity can be wonderful in haiku, provided that at least some part of the poem offers a clear and objective sensory image. John himself is masterful at doing this, although I’d be hard-pressed to describe why his approach succeeds where other attempts don’t. Somehow he adds just the right subjective seasoning. Take a look at the following pair of poems by John, both from his most recent book, *Live Again*:

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my doctor
  takes off his glasses . . .
cold for May

  someone must be first
to turn away—
  moon viewing
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The first poem is all image, all objective description. But what implications! We can imagine all sorts of sobering diagnoses that would cause John’s doctor to remove his glasses. It doesn’t take a genius to realize that the doctor is about to say something serious, but it does take a sensitive poet to stop there, to dwell in that weighty moment. But what really makes the poem fly is the unexpected shift in the third line. The unusual coldness for May tells us all we need to know about the seriousness of the diagnosis. Perhaps this third line is slightly subjective, requiring comparative knowledge on the poet’s part to know that this May is colder than usual, but it works perfectly well given the intensity of the image that precedes it.

In contrast, the second poem adds a deliberately stronger touch of subjectivity. The poet is thinking about an idea while viewing the moon. The poem is overtly self-conscious, even if only slightly. Yet still something is implied—the moon’s extreme beauty that makes it hard for anyone to turn away. That’s the trick, I think. Even when the poet uses subjectivity, the poem must still leave something unsaid, something that creates that vacuum in the poem to draw the reader in.

I already mentioned Robert Frost’s “Dust of Snow” poem, but I might as well quote it so we can look more closely at its objective/subjective split. I recall Virginia Brady Young pointing out this aspect of the poem about twenty years ago.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

The first half is essentially objective (except perhaps for “The way”), and the second half is subjective and intellectualized, offering explanation, rumination, conclusion. Nothing wrong with this, of course, but it does show the difference between the objective description that is highly prized in haiku and the subjective interpretation that is so common in mainstream Western poetry. But the subjective is very difficult to handle well in haiku. In my haiku workshops, I used to preach the gospel that haiku had to be objective. These days, though, I’ve been saying that objectivity and subjectivity are aspects to control in one’s haiku, not that one should eliminate subjectivity. Nevertheless, haiku beginners often have a hard time understanding the difference between objectivity and subjectivity in writing, not just in haiku. It clearly takes practice to understand, and experience to control.

In the context of Robert Frost’s poem, I can’t help but think of a Shiki poem, here in a translation by Stephen Addiss, from *Haiku: An Anthology of Japanese Poems* (Shambhala, 2009):

On the mandarin duck’s wings
a dust of snow—
such stillness!

The word “such” is a touch of subjectivity, but just right, at least in this translation. But what makes that subjectivity succeed is the strength of the objective description that fills the bulk of the poem.
That’s a priority worth remembering for all haiku, especially amid the growing influence of the gendai tradition—that we should balance any subjectivity with a preponderance of objective imagery, and avoid formula.

One additional thought is regarding this question of whether a writer can remain truly objective in any piece of writing. Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that the choice of words used can be objective if the poet wishes, and has the experience to control his or words as desired. But on the metalevel, perhaps all haiku are subjective, in that the poet chose to write about this rather than that. This subjectivity shouldn’t be confused with the reader’s subjective interpretation, where the reader brings his or her emotional context into play in the act of completing each poem. As Charles Olson famously said, “the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy discharge.” That energy, for haiku, centers on implied emotion, and it begins with the image. As I say in my workshops, don’t write about your feelings in haiku. Instead, write about what caused your feelings. That makes all the difference.

It has often been said that photographs are “objective,” but there again, which way is the camera pointing, and why? In haiku, choosing what to write about is where the voice of the poet, and what he or she thinks is worth writing about, begins to shine through. But in the poem itself, it’s still useful to learn to control the subjective and objective.

Colin: Going back to Frost’s “Dust of Snow” and the inferences we may take from it, may I ask, in what way has poetry changed the way you view the world; and do you think haiku, in particular, is capable of changing the heart of even the most cynical critic by elevating ordinary moments from day-to-day life into something special?

Michael: I definitely feel more in touch with nature and the seasons—noticing more seasonal phenomena now than I used to before I wrote haiku. I can celebrate them more now, whether in haiku or just in personal awareness. So I’m grateful to haiku for this improved discernment and mindfulness. Beyond that, sometimes I fear that the transcendent effect I get from reading some haiku has left me, or doesn’t happen as often as it used to, but I still value—and seek—that feeling of having the top of your head blow off, or feeling cracked open. Haiku can do that. It has also helped me learn the difference between observation and inference, as well as the value of objectivity and subjectivity in poetry, and how to tell the difference—and to know when to use and appreciate touches of subjectivity in haiku.

Haiku has also changed the way I view the world by helping me notice not only its many details more closely, seasonal and otherwise, like when the first plum blossoms appear, but to notice myself more closely—to notice how I feel in reaction to something. In other words, haiku has helped me be not only more aware but more self-aware. I hope this is true for others, too. Often the juxtaposition in haiku can arise by paying close attention to one’s feelings—not to report those feelings in haiku, but to celebrate or honour what caused those feelings. We already know how haiku helps people notice the world more closely, but the next step is also to notice yourself more closely. And to notice more closely how you and the world interact. I suppose for some people haiku makes them more environmental, and that’s a noble cause, but this poetry hasn’t turned me into a tree-hugger (I wish ski areas could expand and open more terrain for skiers and snowboarders to enjoy, for example, if done responsibly), but this poetry has turned me into more of a tree-lover. Not just trees, of course, but all of nature, and the human place as part of it.
Some while ago I wrote an essay titled “The Seed of Wonder: An Antidote to Haiku Inflation” (online at [http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/the-seed-of-wonder](http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/the-seed-of-wonder)), and I have to remind myself from time to time what it says, which is to cultivate a sense of wonder so that we can always see the world freshly, with a child’s eyes, as if to ask ourselves, what if the experience I’m having right now was not going to happen again for another hundred years? This seems to be a valuable life lesson, and it extends to relationships with friends and loved ones, not just to nature and possessions and experiences. If that’s a lesson learned, then I have haiku to thank for it.

But still, not everyone is wired for haiku, whether to read or write it, and it simply won’t change everyone’s world. I wish haiku weren’t as marginalized as it often is, but I think those of us who write haiku have two responsibilities in response to marginalization. First, to the extent that haiku poets themselves have put haiku into a ghetto (rather than believing that others, such as teachers or scholars or other poets have put us there), then it’s up to us to get ourselves out. We need to be more a part of the larger poetry scene, even if it’s a struggle. If what we’re offering isn’t of interest, we have to listen to that and know when to cut our losses, but I do think we can make haiku more attractive to a broader poetry audience, without compromise, whether by educating readers more deeply on what to expect or by showcasing higher-quality poems. Innovation for its own sake isn’t necessarily the answer (after all, as creative as experiments are, they often fail, or have limited value—or, as Jane Hirshfield has said, don’t just make it new, make it yours). But if we can reach for higher standards in our poetry—and our criticism of this poetry—haiku will be better off. When poet Dana Gioia (who later became chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, appointed by President Bush) was a guest speaker the 30th anniversary retreat that I organized for the Haiku Society of America, he said that haiku badly needed higher levels of criticism—not to be critical or dismissive, but to more deeply understand and analyze this art, and to share that deep understanding more broadly, more proudly, and more assertively. He made these remarks in 1998, and I still think it’s true. We need to get ourselves out of the haiku ghetto, and showcase our best haiku writers and their best poetry in non-haiku settings.

Second, even while seeking to improve the public’s understanding of haiku, I think we as a community also need to accept a certain degree of marginalization, and thus be content to till our field as best we can. I’m a nondrinker, so I have no personal experience with Alcoholics Anonymous, but when I was writing my “Haikuholics Anonymous” paper (see [http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/haikuholics-anonymous](http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/haikuholics-anonymous)), I learned something that has always stuck with me. My understanding is that AA has a policy of avoiding proselytization, seeking instead to promote itself by attraction. The net benefit is that those who express their attraction by attending their meetings tend to be more deeply motivated to address their needs. Imagine if haiku societies had ten million dollars to blow on publicizing haiku. That would seem grand, but we’d probably end up selling our sizzle mostly to fly-by-nighters, people with a passing interest who respond to an advertising campaign rather than having a deeper, self-motivated interest in haiku poetry. Haiku Society of America or British Haiku Society membership numbers could increase ten-fold, but then those numbers would die back just as quickly. So there’s value in attraction rather than mindless promotion.

On the other hand, haiku suffers from deep public misunderstandings. The idea of calling anything in 5-7-5 syllables a haiku is rightly referred to as an urban myth, in English and many other languages. I think it would be worthwhile to correct those misunderstandings in a much more public way, but at some point we need to stop beating a drum and remember when to rely on the AA publicity model of attraction rather than proselytization. Fortunately, the current information on the Wikipedia article
on haiku, among other changes, is actually having a positive and slowly transformative effect on the public understanding of haiku, but it still has a long way to go.

On the WomPo (women’s poetry) online discussion forum, I recall well-known formalist poet Annie Finch once saying that “Haiku poets are touchy.” I’ve referred to this before, and I think it’s something we need to know better about ourselves. We’re often insular and defensive about our art, and snippy about this definition or that, splitting hairs over details without realizing who they might matter to. To outside viewers, this behaviour is not exactly a display of maturity, let alone a come-hither overture. As Emerson said, “Who you are speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you’re saying.” There’s infighting in all sorts of poetry, but I think haiku poets exude a particular brand of it that helps to keep haiku in a ghetto. Like I said, it’s haiku poets, not others, who have primarily put themselves—and this poetry—in a ghetto. The common misunderstandings of haiku are only part of the story.

I mention all of this because haiku images have a great power to them, and we should not underestimate them. The wider poetic audience is already attracted to haiku—both Japanese translations and English originals (as Bill Higginson has written, “haiku is mainstream”). In 2008, the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival in Vancouver, British Columbia, erected a haiku stone with all of the winners of the 2006, 2007, and 2008 Haiku Invitational awards that I co-judged. It’s wonderful to visit the stone in VanDusen Gardens in Vancouver and just eavesdrop on people commenting on the poems. Sure, you’ll hear the occasional question about 5-7-5, but most of the time that’s not an issue. People laugh or smile or nod their heads. They photograph poems they like the most. They say “I’ve seen that” or “That’s happened to me too.” They are clearly and immediately touched by the poems, even if (surely) many of them have never written a haiku in their lives. This is gratifying to see.

Indeed, the public and larger poetry community already likes haiku (however they perceive it), but it is often, I believe, less attracted by some aspects of the haiku community. Your question was whether haiku can change the heart of even the most cynical critic. Well, yes and no. The poetry can, no doubt about it. But there’s more to the equation. We need to do a better job of making ourselves as poets change the hearts of critics. As you say, by elevating ordinary moments from day-to-day life into something extraordinary, haiku does have that power. But sometimes the poets themselves—we as the haiku community—get in the way.

Colin: So taking what you have just said as a given, do you think the online haiku community, and I use the term community in the loosest possible sense, has helped or hindered the development of haiku?

Michael: I suspect that the only way to answer this question is to say both. The haiku community, in its broadest sense, would be anyone who writes haiku, or anyone who thinks they do, whether online or off. So some folks definitely have helped, as demonstrated by the informative definition of haiku on Wikipedia, and the increasing number of worthwhile haiku-related blogs and websites (I’ve recently tried to contribute my own, at www.graceguts.com). But of course others have hindered haiku’s development, as shown by the steady continuance of pseudo-haiku books from major publishers (and their editors who see them as money-makers, or what the public expects, regardless of literary value or correctness). Another significant change in recent years has been the growth of print-on-demand outfits like iUniverse, CreateSpace, and Lulu—and there are many more. These services have been used by excellent haiku poets to produce wonderful books, but they have also
been used by an alarming number of people who are clueless about haiku with any kind of literary intention—even while they think they’re writing haiku. This is an elitist comment, obviously, but there’s every good reason to call a spade a spade. I do believe anyone interested in literary haiku isn’t going to be confused and think this pseudo-drivel is literary, but it’s the general public that will still get harmed, because a new influx of haiku-related books on eReaders such as Kindle and Nook, plus print-on-demand books, simply perpetuates the myths of haiku in English.

The good news, if haiku poets will get more thoroughly on board, is that they can use the same tools to send a different message. Recently Jane Hirshfield told me that her Kindle eBook, titled *The Heart of Haiku*, was the number-one bestselling “Kindle Single” in Amazon’s history (a Kindle Single is a less expensive and shorter sort of eBook, in this case an extended essay, in electronic form). There are even good haiku-related apps for the iPhone and iPad (I have a tanka-related app based on the translation of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* that Emiko Miyashita and I did for PIE Books in Tokyo in 2008, complete with photos, music, a game, and male and female voices reading each of the book’s one hundred poems). The Haiku Foundation has released a haiku app, too, although I haven’t seen it yet. The computer game, “Haiku Journey,” that I edited in 2006 for NStorm/Hot Lava Games (now MumboJumbo) also hopefully combats misunderstandings of haiku, with its database of 540 haiku by 45 poets used in gameplay, together with nearly a dozen screens of information about haiku and its history and aesthetics that gameplayers can read as they advance to different levels. Yet the pseudo-haiku apps and perhaps computer games are already out there too. People will do what they do, of course, so I’m sure we’ll continue to have a mix of literary and pseudo haiku wherever we turn.

The phrase “the development of haiku” also begs the question—does it need developing? Well, yes and no. I’m sure a lot of folks who go a long way down a misguided path would love to know a better route. The rest won’t care, but perhaps we do have some responsibility to help those who do care. And there’s no use, if we can help it, in letting teachers and curriculum guides continue to misinform children and older students. For established poets, though, haiku doesn’t need developing. It speaks to them already, they know the books and journals and the haiku canon. They write to please themselves and fellow haiku writers, if not others. So for them, the question may be irrelevant. But for the general public, including English teachers and even most poetry teachers (sad to say), haiku information still needs improvement—vastly so. For haiku educators, this means publishing articles about haiku in mainstream teaching and poetry journals, and not confining themselves to the haiku ghetto. This means sharing haiku in other fresh ways or in new journals ways than just publishing them for ourselves.

Some people won’t listen, though. A couple of years ago I gave a haiku workshop where this became abundantly clear—even with someone who had paid well to attend my workshop and supposedly was interested in learning. When the subject of form came up, as it always does, I referred to 5-7-5 as an urban myth for haiku in English. One woman objected by saying that 5-7-5 was the most important part, the very thing that defines haiku, and here I was destroying it, so she thought. Not only that, she said she had been writing haiku, perfectly 5-7-5, nearly every day, for thirty-five years straight. She had gone so far down that path that the merest suggestion of another approach to consider was too much of an upheaval. Of course, 5-7-5 isn’t really the problem. The problem is that a 5-7-5 structure is typically *all* that many people know of haiku, as was the case here. What I was teaching about primarily objective sensory imagery, season words, and a two-part juxtapositional structure that implied feeling, well, all of that was too much of an upheaval. I don’t think I changed her mind, alas, but it’s for folks like her that we need to broadcast a more informed notion of haiku farther and wider than we have before. The earlier we can reach people in their lives, if they take any
haiku path at all, the less likely that they’ll go down such a path. We shouldn’t keep the better path just to ourselves. The majority of people still won’t care (“the poor will always be with us,” as they say), but improved haiku education will be worthwhile for that minority that does care but simply hadn’t heard any better.

A key aspect of your question is whether the online haiku community has helped or hindered haiku. The democracy of the Internet has allowed haiku fiefdoms to arise online, and there are certain publications, blogs, or websites where the editors or writers confuse their own noise with whether anyone is really listening. Oh sure, they may get thousands of hits, but that isn’t the point. It’s too easy on the Internet for the blind to lead the blind. For the most part, the online haiku community is making good impacts. However, because so much of the Internet is unedited, or self-edited, and too often irresponsible or half-baked, the burden of filtering has shifted strongly from publishers onto readers, and those who read and research haiku online need to be extra vigilant in their assessment of what they read. The Internet has brought about a wonderful increase in interconnection among informed and enthusiastic poets, bringing many fine writers out of the woodwork. But it has also given a louder voice to misinformation as well, and seemingly more of it than ever before. We know that misinformation always existed, but now the Internet makes it so much easier for every Tom, Dick, and Harriet to parade his or her haiku and haiku theories much more publicly all over the world, no matter how misguided. Caveat emptor!

Lest we get too far away from the aesthetics and beauty of haiku, I’d like to quote the poem “Mindful” by Mary Oliver, from her book Why I Wake Early (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004). This, to me, is the mind—and mindfulness—of the haiku poet.

Every day
    I see or I hear
        something
        that more or less
    kills me
        with delight,
        that leaves me
        like a needle
    in the haystack
        of light.
            It is what I was born for—
                to look, to listen,
    to lose myself
        inside this soft world—
            to instruct myself
                over and over
    in joy,
        and acclamation.
            Nor am I talking
                about the exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean’s shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

Colin: May I ask, Michael, how you maintain your motivation and could you allow us a glimpse into your current projects and anything that you may have planned for the future?

Michael: I suppose motivation comes from ideas, at least for me. I’ve written about 2,000 neon buddha poems and they deserve to be a book, I think, or maybe two or three. So that’s a project I’m thinking about. Some of the poems play with idioms or puns, and those could work well together. Others are more surreal or serious. Does it work better to separate or integrate such variety? I wrestle with that and other questions. I’m way overdue for a book of my haiku, too (I don’t consider my neon buddha poems to be haiku). I would really like to return to submitting my haiku and longer poems more regularly for publication (I’ve been on an extended lull for more than a year, mostly on account of directing the Haiku North America conference and more recently the annual Seabeck Haiku Getaway for the Haiku Northwest group). At least I’m managing to write a lot of poetry, perhaps more prolifically than ever, but I also need to spend time catching up with my notebooks.

Perhaps an explanation of my writing and publishing process is of interest. I carry a notebook with me most of the time, and jot a majority of my haiku into it (although my neon buddha poems have often been typed directly into the computer). I’ll dip into my current haiku notebook for special purposes before the notebook is finished, or to pick poems to share at the monthly Haiku Northwest meetings we have in the Seattle area, but usually I don’t try to publish anything from each notebook until the entire notebook is finished. At present, though, I’m several notebooks behind. Each notebook has between 400 and 500 haiku in it, and I’m at least seven notebooks behind. The largest one has at least 1,000 haiku in it, another 800, each poem unique, since I work out each haiku in my head extensively before I write it down. If the average is 500 poems per notebook, that’s at least 3,500 haiku, senryu, and tanka I need to sort through, not even counting my half-full current notebook. Sorting through them means to reread each poem, perhaps revising it, and deciding if I might want to publish it. Then it means writing it out on an index card, together with the date and location of composition (and any revisions). I like the index cards because they are easy to sort when sequencing them, or for the purposes of deciding which journals or contests I might submit them to. I’ve been
using this index-card process since 1989, before I had a computer, but I’m finding it increasingly
difficult to put my finger on certain poems, despite having everything alphabetized in various index-
card boxes. How much easier it would be to search a database electronically to find, for example, a
poem on a particular theme or season. So that’s another project—to put all my thousands of published
haiku and senryu and tanka into a database, not to mention other haiku that happen not to have been
published yet. I might not bother with more that I’ve tried to get published, without success, never
mind many more that never made it out of my notebooks onto index cards.

I suppose it’s not only ideas that serve as motivation, but also opportunities. In addition to a few
exciting projects that I won’t mention yet, I continue to give attention to the following poetry and
writing activities, in no particular order:

1 National Haiku Writing Month, or NaHaiWriMo. I started this in October of 2010, and created a
Facebook page and a website for it, derived from National Novel Writing Month (I finished my first
novel for NaNoWriMo in November of 2010). I chose February as the month for NaHaiWriMo
because I liked the idea of associating the shortest month with the world’s shortest genre of poetry.
The Facebook page typically has more than 6,000 views, postings, and comments each week, which
continues to amaze me (there are more than 650 active monthly users now). I provided daily writing
prompts that first month, which helped to galvanize and focus the group, I think. Thanks to the
writing prompts, a thriving community has emerged. When February ended, everyone liked the
prompts so much that I’ve continued with the prompts ever since—so every month has turned out to
be National Haiku Writing Month! And participants have come from every corner of the world, so
it’s really International Haiku Writing Year. But InHaiWriYe is even more difficult to say, so I’ll
continue to make each February the main focus. Until then, I’ve been arranging for a guest prompter
each month, and the group has been fortunate to have the following people help out so far: Alan
Summers, Melissa Allen, Cara Holman, Paul David Mean, Susan Delphine Delaney, Terri Hale
French, Johnny Baranski, Pris Campbell, Carlos Colón, and Stella Pierides. You can visit the
NaHaiWriMo website at http://sites.google.com/site/nahaiwrimo/home.

2. Facebook. I really think Facebook can revolutionize haiku, if it isn’t already doing so, certainly in
the connections between haiku poets. The NaHaiWriMo page on Facebook has taught me that.
People are also sharing their haiku on their own Facebook pages, and perhaps reaching more readers
than they would with a small haiku journal, even though the poems quickly disappear from view.
Same with Twitter, which has invited many millions of people into the compressed brevity of haiku.
On my own Facebook page, I’ve also enjoyed posting hopefully witty haiku cartoons, called “The
Simpsons Do Haiku,” with jokes or comments that I’ve written to go with cartoon images from the
Simpsons TV show (considered fair use because it’s a parody). I’ve posted maybe eighty such
cartoons, and have at least a hundred more to go, some of which focus on NaHaiWriMo, some on the
neon buddha, but mostly just poke fun at haiku, the haiku community, and the haiku life—or me.
This sort of sharing is bringing haiku poets together from around the world, which is remarkable. All
the poems people shared on NaHaiWriMo, by the way, prompted a useful discussion on whether
such poems would be considered published. Frogpond reconsidered its policy and no longer considers
such postings to be published, even when posted to public Facebook forums with hundreds of
members. This policy matches what HaijinX does, although certain other journals don’t agree. The
fact is that the poems cycle out of view quickly enough each day that you can easily miss poems, and
they’re not (yet?) searchable the way websites and blogs are, so they’re much more ephemeral than
blog and website postings. Considering these poems as unpublished is a good change, I think. It’s
equivalent to sharing one’s haiku in a haiku workshop at a library or a friend’s living room, so why
not consider such work unpublished?
3. **Graceguts.** Speaking of cyberspace (does anyone use that term anymore?), I’ve really enjoyed working on my [www.graceguts.com](http://www.graceguts.com) website, which is now just over two years old. The name is derived from an E. E. Cummings poem (for years I’ve been a contributing editor to *Spring: The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society*), and features selections of my published haiku, senryu, tanka, essays, reviews, reports, photographs, collaborations, sequences, haibun, haiga, interviews, and more. The Essays page, for example, currently has more than 100 essays, divided into such categories as “Learning Haiku” and “Studying Haiku” as well sections focusing on tanka, rengay, and book prefaces and introductions. I have many more essays and especially book reviews to add, some of which I will have to type up because I no longer have them in electronic form, or never did. The Rengay section of the site is, I believe, the largest single online repository of information about rengay (essays and worksheets) and sample rengay (for one, two, three, and six writers). My website also has some fun things like Digressions and Lagniappes, plus other content such as Poems by Others, Quotations (relating to haiku and longer poetry), and information about Press Here, my small press that has published at least one or two haiku books every year or two since 1989, including all of the Haiku North America conference anthologies. The entire site is an ongoing labour of love. I’ve been getting great feedback on it, and site visitors have steadily increased each year, which is gratifying.

4. **Essays.** My Graceguts website features many published essays, but I have at least as many more that remain unpublished, covering such topics as the relationship between humour and haiku, *tensaku* (haiku revision), favourite haiku commentaries, the common aesthetics of haiku and tea ceremony, E. E. Cummings, the varieties and lengths of haiku moments, punctuation in haiku, differences between Japanese and Western haiku culture and communities, teaching haiku, and *dèjà-ku* (my term for haiku that bring to mind other haiku, ranging from parody and allusion to cryptomnesia and plagiarism). The longest of these various projects (mostly finished) is a memoir I’ve written about Jerry Kilbridge, complete with numerous poems and reminiscences from many people who knew him. He was not only a wonderful poet and dear friend, but also amazingly skilled at connecting and inspiring people. In the year ahead, I deeply hope to push some of these projects out the door!

5. **Haiku Northwest.** I continue to be active with the Seattle-area haiku group. I manage the group’s website at [http://sites.google.com/site/haikunorthwest/](http://sites.google.com/site/haikunorthwest/), attend the monthly meetings, and direct the group’s annual Seabeck Haiku Getaway, which I started in 2008. The Seabeck retreat is a long weekend of haiku sharing, writing, and camaraderie, all very participatory, with a featured guest (before John Stevenson in 2011, we had Charles Trumbull, Penny Harter, and Emiko Miyashita). It takes a lot of work, and I’m very grateful that Tanya McDonald helps so much with it—it wouldn’t be possible without her (and she’s a wonderful haiku poet, too). Washington State has the highest per capita number of members in the Haiku Society of America of all of the society’s regions, so we’re fortunate to have so much haiku activity in this area, with six active groups in and around Seattle, plus a Japanese-language haiku group. The area is very haiku friendly, too (among mainstream poets and beyond). Must be something about our close proximity to mountains, forests, the ocean, and Native American influences—or maybe it’s the rain!

6. **American Sentences.** In addition to my neon buddha poems, which have given me a real burst of creativity, in recent years I’ve also found a new outlet in writing “American Sentences.” This is Allen Ginsberg’s name for a seventeen-syllable “sentence” as an Americanized variation of haiku. He wished to distinguish it from haiku, and ignored the haiku traditions of season word, cutting word, and sensory imagery, but did retain the here-and-now self-revelation that’s common to the genre—to the point of brutal honesty (some of Ginsberg’s American Sentences are surprisingly raw). My own use of the form has been more for humour than self-revelation, though. I usually record daft things
my wife and kids have said over the last few years (my wife’s native language is Japanese, so that helps, and kids, of course, always say the darnedest things). They’re not all direct quotes (although some are), but slightly massaged to fit the form. Here are three examples, from my wife, my son, and my daughter, respectively:

“I’m exhausted honey. I’m so tired, I can’t tolerate my exhaust.”

“Hey, Daddy, look what I got for my birthday—it’s an armadildo!”

“We’re going to Japan, Daddy, but don’t worry, they have a toilet.”

I would recommend that more haiku poets embrace this tradition as well as haiku, as it provides an outlet for short poetry or observations and witticisms that aren’t necessarily haiku. I’ve got a few hundred of these, and they’re crying out to be a book, too. Not haiku in the slightest, of course. Here’s one more, not inspired by anyone in my family:

Dyslexic bank robber’s note to the teller says “I have a gnu.”

7. **American Haiku Archives.** I continue to be involved with the American Haiku Archives advisory board, and am webmaster for the website at [http://www.americanhaikuarchives.org/](http://www.americanhaikuarchives.org/), working with Randy Brooks and Garry Gay. We appoint a new honourary curator each year, as we have done each year since the archive was founded in 1996 (Jerry Ball is the current curator, and Gary Snyder preceded him). We’ve had recent challenges dealing with duplicate books, funding, staffing, and cataloguing, but we are making headway.

8. **Haiku Society of America.** Duties as first vice president of the Haiku Society of America keep me busy too, at least in fits and starts. I believe the HSA, at least in North America, is the best thing going for anyone interested in haiku, especially for its journal and newsletter, and new initiatives such as its email Bulletin, Facebook page, website, and contests. I highly recommend that anyone who enjoys English-language haiku should join.

9. **Haiku North America.** Now that the 2011 Seattle HNA conference is in the history books, I can rest a little easier. It takes a tremendous amount of effort to direct these events, and it couldn’t have happened without the great team of volunteers we had in the Seattle area. As a director of the parent nonprofit organization that sponsors these conferences, I continue to be involved in the long-range planning of future conferences, and also have a task on my plate to finish writing a detailed guidebook on how to run these conferences, and to expand and maintain the HNA website. I’m really looking forward to the next HNA conference, which will be held in the Los Angeles area in the summer of 2013, directed by Deborah P Kolodji and Naia. They’ve got some great things up their sleeves—everyone should come!

10. **Haiku Event Photos.** Speaking of haiku events, something that I’ve really enjoyed in recent years is documenting haiku activities with lots of photos. Wish I’d started this habit sooner, but it’s much easier now with digital cameras than it used to be, especially sharing such pictures. I’ve assembled an extensive collection of haiku event photographs on Picasa, including Haiku North America events. Take a look at [http://picasaweb.google.com/MichaeDylanWelch](http://picasaweb.google.com/MichaeDylanWelch) (I have about fifty different albums on the site). Events I’ve documented include special Haiku Northwest meetings, Gabriola haiku weekends in British Columbia, Haiku Society of America meetings, and more. People have repeatedly told me how much they enjoy these pictures, giving them a means to attend from afar, so I hope to
keep doing this as much as I can, although it takes a lot of work to select and upload the photos and to write all the captions.

11. **Photo Haiga.** Another photography-related distraction is that I’ve recently created a few hundred photo haiga, although I’ve hardly shared or published any of them so far. I’d like to do a lot more. I’m in great awe of folks like Ron Moss and Jim Swift and others who have created such wonderful photo haiga. It’s one thing for haiku writers to use whatever amateur photos they take, but Ron and Jim begin with exemplary photographs, as does Ray Rasmussen. I’m not a painter or visual artist, so I don’t do traditional haiga, with proper calligraphy, but I’m drawn to the possibilities of photo haiga. Most of mine have focused on blurred lights and neon buddha poems, most often with the photo coming first, but I’d like to explore less abstract photos and regular haiku in addition to my neon buddhas. I really need to clone myself.

12. **Haiku Handouts.** Once or twice a year I create a new trifold flyer as a handout to give out at haiku events. I’ve collected many of them at [http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/trifolds](http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/trifolds), where anyone can view or download them. They’re mostly haiku, but I’ve done a few on tanka, and one neon buddha collection. These are always a pleasure to give out at various poetry events. At my encouragement at early Haiku North America conferences, it has now become a tradition for more and more people to make these or similar handouts at prominent haiku events. It’s a great way to share your work without the commitment of putting together a book, and it’s nice to give them as gifts rather than charging anyone for copies.

13. **Rengay.** Anyone who knows me knows that I’ll write a rengay at the drop of a hat. They’re a great way to commemorate get-togethers with haiku friends, encapsulating the time and location of creation, and also a good way to get to know the writing process or aesthetics of another writer. I have many dozens of unpublished rengay that I’d like to get out into the world. The year 2012 is also the twentieth anniversary of the rengay form that Garry Gay started in 1992 (he and I wrote the very first one together), and I’m thinking that it would be wonderful to publish a rengay anthology to commemorate this milestone.

14. **Local Poetry Readings.** As if I weren’t busy enough, I’m also the curator for two monthly poetry reading series near where I live (in addition to my being a board member of the Washington Poets Association and editing its journal *Cascade*). One reading series is SoulFood Poetry Night, which features two prominent Seattle-area or visiting poets, plus an open-mic reading. The second is the Redmond Association of Spokenword (RASP), of which I’m a board member. There we feature a single poet or fiction writer, occasionally a nonfiction writer, plus an open mic. These readings routinely attract from 25 to 55 people each month, and since I don’t have time to go to enough poetry readings elsewhere (Seattle is particularly blessed with a hyperactive poetry scene), it’s nice to have great poets come closer to me. I’ve written an essay about the local poetry scene at [http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/building-a-suburban-poetry-community](http://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/building-a-suburban-poetry-community). These two reading series focus on longer poetry, but I do have an occasional haiku poet as well. It’s also a good place for me to read my longer poetry, which I write a lot of as well.

15. **Translations.** In the last few years, it’s been my pleasure to work with Emiko Miyashita on a number of different translation projects, including translating the Japanese winners into English from several recent Haiku International Association haiku contests. More substantial projects have included translations for four artbooks published by PIE Books in Tokyo, available on Amazon. Two of these books came out in 2011, the most recent being *Furoshiki*, presenting photographs, descriptions, and relevant poetry about ornate Japanese gift-wrapping clothes. Before that was a book titled *Bonsai*. For this artbook, our contribution was to provide
translations of a dozen Bashō haiku, one for each month of the year, to introduce the twelve months used to arrange the bonsai photographs. Before that, we worked on translations of Noh drama summaries and associated poems for a book titled *Noh*, which came out in 2010—complete with wonderful photographs of Noh masks and costumes. The book I feel most attached to, though, is our translation of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*, one of Japan’s most revered books, up there with *The Tale of Genji* and Bashō’s *Oku no hosomichi*. This book, which we titled *100 Poets: Passions of the Imperial Court* in English (partly to differentiate it from numerous other translations) was published in 2008. It pairs stunning art photos with each of the one hundred waka we translated from the thirteenth-century anthology. As mentioned earlier, the entire book is also available as an iPhone app, with male and female voices reading each of the poems in Japanese, plus a game based on the poems. One wonderful surprise resulting from this book was that early in 2011 I received an email message from the United States Postal Service, asking to use one of the book’s translations on a U.S. postage stamp! The poem will appear on the back of the stamp, so I’m told, but it’s still a thrill. They’re printing 15,000,000 copies! I’m looking forward to seeing first-day covers, posters featuring the stamp, and other collateral materials—plus numerous copies of the stamps themselves. The poem they contracted with me and Emiko to use is about cherry blossoms, and it will appear on a lovely pair of first-class stamps commemorating the 100th anniversary of the cherry trees in Washington, D.C. Here’s the poem:

ひさかたのひかりのどけき春の日にしづ心なく花の散るらん

*hisakata no hikari nodokeki harunohi ni shizugokoro naku hana no chiruran*

the light filling the air
is so mild this spring day
only the cherry blossoms
keep falling in haste—
why is that so?

紀友則
*Ki no Tomonori*

As you can see, lots of opportunities and motivations!

The other day my son came home from his second-grade class with a little paper project where you flip three portions of a page to mix and match different parts of faces he had drawn. I immediately thought you could do the same with the three lines of a haiku, so I amused myself for an hour not only in figuring out the layout for such a creation, but the lines of several poems that would be suitable. After a bit of trial and error on the layout, and a few scissor-snips of the printed paper, I had my little creation. It has nine haiku, and you can flip parts of pages so each poem can have various combinations of first, second or third lines. The effect is interesting, and perhaps just a novelty (and not new, except perhaps in this short format), but it’s always interesting to try things out to see what works. Motivation for poetry activities comes from ideas like this, and I never know when an idea will seize me and I’ll stay up too late writing or tinkering (I think I’m constantly short on sleep!). I wish I were better at finishing projects than starting them. My day job keeps getting in the way! But activities like this, including mentoring numerous poets by email and in a private Facebook group, helps to sustain and inspire me. That’s motivation!
Colin: Thanks for allowing us a glimpse into what makes you tick, Michael. Just to let you know, NFTG also considers poems that have been uploaded to sharing networks and blogs as unpublished. I for one would dearly love to see more of your essays published—particularly your extensive work on déja-ku. But in the interim, could you finish with the answer to a question you wished I had asked?

Michael: For some reason I can’t help but think of a poem from Pablo Neruda’s *Book of Questions*. The last two lines are among my very favourite of Neruda’s poetry, here in William O’Daly’s translation (Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2001):

Tell me, is the rose naked
or is that her only dress?

Why do trees conceal
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the regrets
of the thieving automobile?

Is there anything in the world sadder
than a train standing in the rain?

Those last two lines seem very akin to the Japanese notion of *sabi*, a sort of sadness that is melancholy but accepting and even celebratory. Neruda’s words remind me of a favourite poem written by British Columbia poet Naomi Beth Wakan, which also speaks to that joyful sadness of writing haiku (from *Segues*, Toronto: Wolsak and Wynn, 2005):

**How to Write a Haiku**

Details confuse me,
so when I see a rose,
although I do not know
its pedigree, I write down “rose.”
And when I cut it,
I do not know whether
I should cut it on a slant
or straight, or under water twice,
so I write down “cut.”
And when I put it in a vase,
I do not know whether it is raku

or glaze, or, perhaps good plastic,
so I write down “vase.”
and when I see two red leaves
on the earth beside the rose bush,

I do not know from which tree
they have fallen
so I write down “red leaves.”
And as I set the vase
and the leaves on the table,
I write down

rose just cut
beside the vase
two red leaves

And although I do not know
the details of what I have just done,
the sadness of it all
cracks my heart open.

To return to Neruda’s poem, maybe I’ll try to answer those questions, the ones Neruda poses. It takes the heart of a poet to see the rose as both naked and fully dressed, to feel passionate about its beauty, and its thorns. It takes the muscles of a poet to know when to conceal his or her roots, or the strength behind his or her poetry, to know when to whisper rather than shout. And it takes the mind of the poet to think imaginatively of things as abstract as a thieving automobile, or what regrets an automobile might have. All of these belong in haiku, at the right times.

And is there anything in the world sadder than a train standing in the rain? Perhaps so. Perhaps what is sadder is when a person is able to write and share haiku but is unable to do so—or worse yet, chooses not to. We are better off when we share our haiku with one another. If any other haiku poets are like me, they ache every day, with every haiku they read, to have their hearts cracked open.

Colin: Thank you for giving us much to ponder, Michael.
cnoi evening
the curlew’s sad call
breaks the air

Haiga by Susan Shand Image by Jo Shand

Susan & Jo Shand - UK
new coolness
the rift between
old mates

Barbara A. Taylor - Australia
Two rengay:

before the storm

sitting in the oak's shadow
the leaves are
with me

before the storm
the stillness of the reeds

another cup of coffee
no face
on the surface

rain barrel
the weight of
my reflection

soap bubble
your smile in

dusty attic—
in an old mirror frame
my father's portrait
loneliness

steps on the staircase
the door viewer
full of my breath

piercing wind—
I look at the bottle of whiskey

star in the dark
your belly button ring
reflects moonlight

bright night—
his bald spot
shines

first hoarfrost
the last leaf turned gray

long shadows
unexpectedly
she says adieu

Jacek Margolak & Mariusz Ogryzko – Poland
rambling days done—
I reorganize the maps
alphabetically

Ruth Holzer - USA

the swing
by the lake—
frozen chains

Ruth Holzer - USA

final sale
what's left of the bookstore
doorknobs

Ruth Holzer - USA

news of a death
the gamekeeper
cuts bean-sticks

Nick Sherwood - UK

country station
flower baskets empty
the steel rails singing

Nick Sherwood - UK
October rain
splashing red and gold
on the brick path

Adelaide B. Shaw - USA

wall painting—
sunflower faces
the other way

P. K. Padhy - India

startled by two crows startled by me

Polona Oblak - Slovenia

becoming cold
a white butterfly drifts
into my dream

Polona Oblak - Slovenia

hot house
her moist lips brush
an orchid

Susan Shand - UK
early autumn
world markets plunge again—
morning radio
I switch it off with my crutch
and watch the leaves fall

Sonam Chhoki – Kingdom of Bhutan

at first light
still in the hold of dreams
I look for his smile
and realize
it's the day of his death rite

Sonam Chhoki – Kingdom of Bhutan

I have friends
who pray for me
to save my soul—
to whom they pray is a puzzle
but I'm grateful all the same

Bob Lucky - Ethiopia
Crazy Mary

Mary's Antiques and Collectibles resides in a small pink house in the eclectic part of town. It's proprietor is affectionately known as “Crazy Mary.” She is a strange mix of Annie Oakley meets Phyllis Dillar, a wild-haired straight shooter who likes to poke fun at her husband. "Honey, the man couldn't find his way through a maze if the rats helped him."

haggling over
a bust of Elvis—

Mary babbles to herself and bends the ears of anyone who walks through her door. I've learned over years of visiting her that a conversation isn't what she's looking for. A nod, a smile and a couple of your dollars is all that it takes to make Crazy Mary happy. We should all be so easy to please.

"Most people ain't got a pot to piss in," she says with a wave of her hand, "I got a whole store full."

broken coffee table
the madonna
wears a lamp shade

Terri L. French - USA
winterspring—
I shake the snow
off daffodils’ heads

We are sometimes told that haiku should have just one season word, yet here is one with *four*. While just one season word is usually sufficient, the evidence of Japanese haiku shows that the masters occasionally wrote haiku with two or more season words (for example, in Stephen Addiss’s recent book, *Haiku: An Anthology of Japanese Poems*, from Shambhala, I counted at least twenty). In such cases, one *kigo* typically dominates the other, making it *function* as the season word, while the other reference does not. This enabled the masters to write about two seasonal topics that interacted with each other, or to write about topics out of season if they chose to do so, being true to nature as it actually is rather than limiting it to a narrow codification out of a book. In the preceding poem, the moment of perception is the transition between seasons, and we would be impoverished as haiku readers if the poet had not written this poem because of some perceived “rule.”

sun and wind—
the frisbee tilt
of a seagull

If you’re going to use metaphor in haiku, *this* is how to do it. The metaphor here is fresh, original, and hits the perfect pitch. We see the *seagull* better because of the metaphor—its sideways slant in a careening wind—whereas many other metaphors attempted in haiku point more to the verbal trick than to the image. We don’t want the finger pointing to the moon to be bejeweled. This same poet, who enjoys jogging, has also deftly written other poems with metaphor, as in “running past / a strip of trees / a strobe of sun,” and poems with simile, as in “at the doctor’s / her heartbeat crackling / like the moon landing.” While it’s another one of those “rules” to avoid metaphor in haiku, it seems useful to remember that there’s difference between overt metaphor *intrinsic* to the haiku itself and an implied metaphorical *interpretation* that takes place in the reader rather than in the poem—in other words, an *extrinsic* metaphor. While overt metaphor rarely works in haiku, there’s no requirement to avoid it if we can really make it work. As for metaphorical interpretations, they are a source of reverberation for nearly all of the best haiku.

stroking
a stunned wren—
as though for her sake

Yes, the masters broke the “rules,” but not often, and so can we, but not often. It’s a good habit to return to the center, to the heart of haiku, where objectively presented image-moments can penetrate us deeply if we handle them with care. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves, who is haiku for? It is for sharing with others, of course, and haiku poets have been deeply blessed by the sharing of each others’ haiku. But in the end, each haiku is also for the poet. Haiku enable us to see ourselves more fully, and to experience our surroundings as profoundly as we can. Each haiku poem is a gift to ourselves as well as to others.

the heat that lingers
on my trembling hand
o, withered leaf
Free of words,  
for instance, bird,  
is it flying

Jack Galmitz - USA

A plastic pail upset on the marble floor

Jack Galmitz - USA

Real enough to feel a paper rose

Jack Galmitz - USA

After the funeral  
crows circle  
in a sky  
where there is no sun.

Jon Summers - UK

Agnus Dei  
the blood red  
of the stained glass spills  
over the prayer book.

Jon Summers - UK
late pregnancy—
from an old pattern
I knit a shawl

Patricia Prime - New Zealand

spiked
by barbed-wire
the lamb’s afterbirth

Patricia Prime - New Zealand

last light—
new-born calves call out
in their own shadows

Sonam Chhoki - Kingdom of Bhutan

from love even
and among fruitless rocks
the pine grows

Gennady Nov - Russia

Spring awakening
my teenage son realises
he’s not adopted

Deborah Stewart - Canada
early morning
the silence clings to carved walls
in Petra
a man with a poop-scooper
awaits the horse carriages

Bob Lucky - Ethiopia

it may seem
I speak out of tune
with the times—
the truth is the times
have tuned me out

Bob Lucky - Ethiopia

in bed
reading the personals
she laughs—
her ex-husband's
pompous ad

Carol Raisfeld - USA
at the drop of a pine needle silence
I find the forest deep in thought

Claire Everett - UK

after the Poet spouted, intoned . . . for hours
i went home
polished a single tanka
and threw two away

Beverley George - Australia

clouds of dust darken the sun
at Fukushima—
the poet bows his head
to write tanka

Joyce S. Greene - USA
stolen moments . . .
this pocket watch clasped
to a silver chain
and tucked away
for me to discover

I walk the trail to the lower slopes of Whinlatter Forest, where the beck tumbles through what is often called the ‘Seldom Seen Ravine’ on its journey to the lake. Here and there, moss and fern pass through the fine toothcomb of pine tree light. Skiddaw slate finds its voice in late spring rains and I cherish the notion that these fairy falls did not exist until I found them. Yet I know that this is country beloved by Wordsworth and the distant salver of Bassenthwaite is reputed to be the setting for Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’. Waterfall begets stream. Lake, glen and gill bask forever in the shadows of mountains.

how gentle the touch
of air and water . . .
the stonemason
stooped in morning light
keeping the time of stars

Claire Everett - UK
The Last Time I Lost My Father

twilight
father asks
if I hear the chimes

I led my father into the Moravian Book Store which smelled of coffee. “I’ll just be a minute,” I said. “I want to check the bargain books.” When I looked up my father was gone.

No sign of him in the fiction section or children’s books which were closer to the street. Did he follow the wrong man? Did he hear a voice like mine? The book store was busy. Customers lifted vases up and down, studied prints, held candles. What do I do? I walked up and down the aisles trying not to panic.

I found my father near the cash register. Pressed away from passing customers like a tall tree. His pale blue eyes were wide open as he stared above them. “It’s me Dad,” I said. “Come on, let’s go home.”

Father weeps
at what is nearly gone
April moon

Glenn Coats - USA
Night is a memory of footsteps

I.
The tracks in the snow stop thought itself
A rifle reports the field’s whereabouts
A startled bird turns blue to black

II.
I stand still a tree with protruding knots
The moon climbs the steps of the tenement house
Water squirts from the clown’s flowered blouse

III.
Our tongues meet it’s spring again
Many buildings go up the sky reshapes itself
Night is a memory of footsteps

IV.
A crowd tries to save a beached whale
At the water fountain no water comes out
My tracks in the sand are wiped out

Jack Galmitz - USA
Based on The New Shisan model.
breezy day
and your hand so lightly
around mine

Michele L. Harvey - USA
An Open Letter to New and Aspiring Tanka Poets

To begin, let me be frank: I am not a scholar. Hell, I don't even possess a college degree (the Devil, you say), and, typically, my only commitment to research involves smelling ground beef smashed into eight ounce patties before tossing them onto the greasy surface of the grill. That's right, I'm a cook; just a cook. Truly, I'm not even required to wear chef's pants where I work. (It's faded blue jeans with the knees blown out all the way, babe).

Such as it is, how could any opinions I have regarding the poetic form known as tanka possibly be taken seriously? Well, I'll be the first to say it: they shouldn't. Don't listen to me. Rather, adhere to those who consistently do their homework and present us with abundant evidence and annotations, people like Sam Hamill, Jane Reichhold, Michael McClintock, M Kei, and many others. These enthusiasts have spent long hours scrutinizing nearly every aspect of tanka, and they deserve the warmest reception for their efforts.

On the other hand, tanka, unlike haiku, is thought to be a form not locked away from deep pathos. "Pile on the emotion" is often the advice given to newcomers. So, then, since I am—except for maybe in my ex-wife's eyes—undoubtedly a human being, and since the trajectory of my life has certainly brought me to collide directly with things like joy and pain, love and loss, perhaps I do possess an adequate amount of credentials to, at the very least, offer my own subjective impressions of these incredibly-addictive little poems.

my friend died last night, I'm told long distance I go up to fix the fence where the horse got out

Dave Bacharach

I've been known to declare tanka as the perfect poetic form. Why do I feel this to be the case? Probably the strongest reason I can give is tanka's obvious lack of excess. The best poetry, in my opinion, zooms in on the heart and lungs of a moment, undistracted by the ball game that's on TV in the other room. In this sense, tanka is not, as some might think, just an abbreviated depiction of a moment, but one that is certainly more focused. Of course, this does not mean that there's no room for connotative gestures or metaphoric language. It also doesn’t mean that only poems confined to five lines are capable of effectively representing the essence of a moment. Read free-verse poets like Ted Kooser and Dan Gerber and the evidence will clearly suggests otherwise. However, there is something comforting in knowing that the best and worst of what we are can be captured so clearly, and with such brevity. So much for epic poems.

eagerly we follow the hog trail cut through our woods, neophytes that we are to most things wild

Janet Davis
What is tanka? I’m not even going to try to answer this. Again, I defer to those who have devoted so much of their lives to gathering all of the relevant information. However, I would like to acknowledge that, in my experience, learning and then following the guidelines, alone, will not lead one to compose strong verse. Likewise, deviating from the standards—sticking your tongue out at the traditions—will not automatically ensure masterpiece after masterpiece. Thus, I suppose, some simple advice might be to memorize what are mostly believed to be the standards, and if the moments can be captured within those parameters, proceed, but, if the moments themselves must be compromised in order to make them fit the form, then I would consider stretching the rules slightly. And then simply live with it. If others seem unwilling to acknowledge the poem as a tanka, don’t be shaken.

Whether one follows the perceived rules or not, toes will be stepped on and readers will be disappointed. I’ve certainly had my share of duds, of both varieties. Yet, despite the frustration I felt at times, I continued to write, and as a result there were those few late nights when it seemed I did produce something that represented my life authentically, and, at the same time, fit into the form to an extent that it could, if even loosely, be called a tanka.

Saying goodbye
I struck the singing bowl
she kept by the door
I don’t know
if it ever ends

Peter Yovu

Years ago, long before I’d ever heard of tanka, I developed an interest in the western occult. (Not to be confused with "a cult"). I asked a knowledgeable teacher which books I ought to read so as to fructify my interest, thinking, of course, that he would direct me to obscure titles such as Abramelin the Mage, or Madam Blavatsky’s The Secret Doctrine. Instead, his answer was "Read Shakespeare. Come to know the diverse energies—both human and non-human—that influence our lives. Read the Sonnets. Read The Tempest."

What does any of this have to do with tanka? Well, I believe we must all ask ourselves a question: does poetry exist merely for poetry’s sake, or do our poems have the potential to become, as someone once said, "magical spells" that gather into tight bundles all that slips too easily through our fingers? In other words, can the act of writing poems turn us into alchemists of sorts—our spines into columns of light that beam upward into the unknowable dimensions of time and space—or are we just doodling, passing the days?

Truly, being intimate with our own poetic intentions influences our abilities to say what we want to say, what needs to be said. Whether our stories delve into the imaginative myths of personal history, or the unassuming details of our own peculiar geographies, I’m compelled to believe that our stories, our poems, will be measured, more than anything, by the voracity of the telling.
Michael McClintock

Let me say this right now: many of today’s tanka poets are as swift and precise with their language as those of ancient Japan. Some would disagree, claiming that most tanka written these days lack a clear and decisive aesthetic beauty. This is certainly their right. But, I wonder, if those practitioners of old were here in this era, would they devote themselves so fully to bamboo groves and cherry blossoms, or might they be more inclined to comment upon their long waits in the unemployment lines? Masters that they were, they would probably manage to pay homage to both, and, in the process, take many, many risks.

But this inheritance belongs to us, the contradictions of our times having given birth to a whole new crop of masters: men and women from all over the world who have perfected this incredible balancing act. And the masterpieces? Well, they are simply the dirt-honest portrayals of their very lives.

Tom Clausen

It would be easy for me to sit here and list a half dozen or so tanka poets whose poems consistently impress and inspire me on multiple levels. This being the case, it seems it would only make sense for me to fully embed myself in their words most every day, after I’ve clocked out of work and tucked my beautiful daughter to sleep. But, I don’t. Truth be told, I find that there is a certain danger in reading too much tanka, in being too locked into the rhythms and meters one encounters in tanka. Those rhythms and meters, while a vital component of the genre, have a tendency to make me seek only that which can seemingly be confined to those cadences, and, consequently, produce poems that are predictable and trite. And so, in an effort to hurl myself away from that corner, toward the freshest possible air, I read a variety of other compelling authors: Jim Harrison, Linda Pastan—even Charles Bukowski. I also spend a great deal of time composing other forms and genres, such as ghazals and short fiction. Of course, before too many weeks have passed, unable to withstand the urge to indulge myself in its unparalleled starkness, I return to tanka.

Brendan Slater
Unfortunately, tanka has yet to make the impression on the literary world that haiku has. Those little poems, over the years, have charmed some big names, as well as manifested themselves at nearly all levels of the public domain. In fact, I would venture to guess that haiku has become an equally-familiar term as, say, "disco."

Meanwhile, tanka, despite the fact that it’s centuries older than haiku and that it has more in common with the ever-popular free verse, hangs back in the shadows. When it does creep forward, it’s often approached as heavy-weighted or clumsy haiku that lacks vital Zen-like qualities—that says too much. Perhaps these perceptions only add to tanka’s "best kept secret" feeling, its overall value and splendor, its power to become a medium for such personal commentary. Those two extra lines seemingly add up to miles and miles in which to roam the spaciousness of our own natures, and roam we must.

So feel not disheartened, new and aspiring tanka poets. Keep true to your moments and the stories will tell themselves. And then, some unassuming night, stepping out to let in the cat or smoke a cigarette, the moon itself will become spotlight on you, and you will suddenly be known to us.

a new pacemaker  
in my grandther's chest . . .  
on the warm tongue  
of the doe he shot  
snowflakes melt  

Andrew Riutta  

Andrew Riutta - USA
A Moment in the Sun: When Is a Haiku?

The “now” of haiku isn’t quite as simple as many haiku poets think. Is it the original moment of experience? Is it the moment of inspiration when you are moved to write about an experience, regardless of when that experience happened? Is it the “moment” that is captured within the poem, that may or may not have actually happened, but that readers believe happened, or could have? Or is it the moment when the reader “gets” the same experience upon reading the poem, upon realizing that he or she has had the same experience? It’s easy to say “all of the above.” And perhaps that’s the fullest answer, but not every haiku poet believes that each of these possible “moments” have equal value. Some believe that haiku must be about direct personal experience, and that you must not alter any of the facts. This perspective contrasts with Bashō and many other Japanese masters who routinely tweaked the facts for literary purposes (Bashō heavily revised and reordered elements of the Oku no hosomichi, and Buson’s wife was very much alive when he wrote about the chill of stepping on his “dead wife’s comb”). Experience is frequently the best inspiration, but not the only possibility. For me, what matters is to make the poem believable, with veritas, which is independent of whether the experience really happened or not, or to what degree. Does the poem affect the reader as if it really happened? That is at least a notch more important than whether the experience really happened or not, which can’t even be proved anyway. Haiku is poetry, after all, not diary entries.

This poetic license includes shaping the “now” of the poem to achieve the best literary effect, provided that the poem still remains or feels authentic for the reader. Here’s a poem of mine that many readers have resonated with over the years:

spring breeze—
the pull of her hand
as we near the pet store

I share this poem in my haiku workshops, and nearly everyone responds by saying that they picture a child. No child is mentioned in this poem, yet a child is just what I want readers to imagine. I think that happens because of specific edits to elements of the experience. What “really” happened was that it was my girlfriend, in November, and she was eager to get to a coffee shop (in Palo Alto, California) because it was cold out. And so she pulled a little ahead of me, and it was the pull of her hand that arrested me, especially when it was usually me who walked faster than she did. She always used to call my fast walking a “Disneyland walk,” as if I were always in a hurry to get the next ride or attraction, which made it unusual for her to be walking faster than me. In that small motion, I felt her eagerness, her urgency, and I wanted to record that. It felt more right to me to make it spring, which seemed closer to youthful enthusiasm. And to match the exuberance of spring, I made the destination a pet store instead of a coffee shop. These revisions all came quickly and intuitively.

So I changed the “now” of my poem, or at least parts of it. But what I changed was selected facts of the original experience, in this case staying true to the core inspiration, the pull of the hand. What remains strong, I hope, is that moment when the persona in the poem (presumably me, the author, though not necessarily) feels the pull of “her” hand. As readers comprehend this, they presumably recognize the experience from their own lives, and resonate with it. And hopefully the emotion of eagerness and perhaps even joy is heightened by its association with spring and the pet store. Even the breeze has a lightness to it that aids the feeling (I don’t remember if that “really” happened, but the point is that what really happened does not necessarily matter).

I’ve also found that the moments haiku depict come in two varieties, which I call static and dynamic. A “static” moment isn’t really a moment at all, but a state of being. Something is described that exists in a particular way, and will continue to exist that way for an undetermined amount of time. Nothing changes. In these poems, it’s the observer’s realizing what he or she is seeing that becomes the “moment,” the “now” of the poem. Here are two examples:

after the quake
the weathervane
pointing to earth
grey sky—
the dog’s water dish
iced over

In the first poem, something significant has obviously happened, but not during the time of the poem. There’s no action in the poem itself, but a state of being—the weathervane was already pointing to earth, and then the poet sees this. No wonder the poem uses a gerund—indicating a “present continuous” state of being. In the second poem, the action has also taken place beforehand—the dish icing over because of cold temperatures. The state of being is observed later, but nothing actually changes or happens in the poem itself. Sometimes poems with “static” moments have no verbs, which is a useful technique. It’s worthwhile to think about verb usage (or lack thereof) in haiku to assess whether the poem would be best presented as a static or dynamic moment—and sometimes the static moment is best, although perhaps less common.

In contrast, other haiku have action that starts and stops—a “dynamic” moment. In my “spring breeze” poem, the hand pulls. It’s not an extremely quick moment, but it’s an action that does start or stop during the time of the poem, thus it’s dynamic. Consider this poem:

landing swallow—
the ship’s chain
dips slightly

Here the action of the bird landing on the ship’s chain seems to cause it to dip at that moment. Or it could be that the bird is so inconsequentially light that it couldn’t possibly affect the chain, yet the chain happens to dip at that same moment. Either way, the chain dips, and it’s a moment that quickly starts and stops. It’s a little quicker than the “spring breeze” poem.

Moments where the action starts and stops may be slightly longer than ones where the action only starts or only stops. First, the following poem is an example of a quick moment where the action (the domino’s click) immediately starts and stops:

first cold night—
the click of your domino
as we play by the fire

The moment is indeed very quick, but we are also aware of time before and after the domino’s click, which may make the entire poem feel longer. Now consider the following two examples, the first where the action starts but does not stop (the conversation is ongoing, but the focus on death has just started), the second where the action was ongoing but then stops in the poem:

dwindling fire—
our conversation shifts
to death

slushy street—
with my index finger
I stop the busy signal

By focusing just on the beginning or ending of an action, each of these examples may have a sharper or quicker moment than a poem where action starts and stops. Neither variation is more virtuous for haiku than the other, but it’s worthwhile being aware of the difference, not just between actions that start and actions that stop, but between an action that either starts or stops and one that both starts and stops. In the second poem, the seasonal reference to the slushy street helps to place the poem in time, but note that that does not affect whether the moment is static or dynamic, or whether the moments start or stop, but can make us more aware of time in the poem, which is often true for season words—one of ways kigo can improve haiku.

Sometimes, too, action can occur in the poem, but we see neither the start or stop of that action:
summer moonlight
the potter’s wheel
sloows

chessmen in boxes . . .
the café’s ceiling fan
turns by itself

In the first example, the potter’s wheel is turning both before and after the moment of the poem, although we do perceive a change in the wheel’s speed. Because that change of speed is a continuum, we cannot pinpoint the exact moment when the change in action started, at least not within the poem. In the second example, the fan keeps turning, so there’s action in the poem, but we don’t see the fan either start or stop, so the “moment” in the poem is actually static (unchanging action) rather than dynamic.

As a contrast to short moments, the following moment is longer—the minutes it takes to do a particular seasonal task:

first Christmas—
on the baby sleeps through
the unwrapping of his gifts

Now consider this haiku:

old folks’ home
the square of light
crosses the room

An afternoon goes by in this poem. Some people would say that it presents too much time for a haiku. Such an attitude presumes too narrow a sense of what a “moment” should be in a haiku, it seems to me. As a teenager, I spent a summer working in a nursing home, and saw how time flows differently for its elderly residents. I see time, for many of them, as having greatly slowed down, perhaps to a point of ennui, and I wanted to present the idea that the crossing of the light, which takes an entire afternoon, is a moment for the very elderly. This is a dynamic moment, but obviously a long one. I hope, too, that the poem conveys a measure of sadness, perhaps even loneliness, as a result.

Sometimes it’s hard to tell when a moment starts or stops, or a difference of interpretation alters our perception of the “moment” in the poem. For example, in the “chess men in boxes” poem already mentioned, if we interpret the fan as starting to turn by itself, then the poem would indeed have a dynamic moment rather than a static one. An action, however small, may be interpreted as ongoing as opposed to being an event that starts or stops, or we may perceive something as being in a state of being rather than as an action. Consider the following one-liner:

deserted park hail on the chessboard

The hail on the chessboard may be about to melt, so there’s possibly an implied action about to happen. On the other hand, “on” could be interpreted as “falling on.” If so, hail is falling, and thus the action seems dynamic. Nevertheless, because the falling of hail is ongoing, at least in terms of the poem, there is no actual start or stop to the action conveyed in the poem itself. Thus this poem could be read as having dynamic action, yet the poem is still not a “dynamic” moment. Even though action is happening here, the poem still presents a state of being, like “summer moonlight” and “chess men in boxes” poems. And of course, it’s ambiguous, because the description could also be interpreted as lacking the action of “falling.” Rather, it could be that hail that has already fallen is just resting on the chessboard, and though we know it will melt, for now the hail is simply there, its whiteness contrasting with the chessboard’s black squares and blending in with the white ones. In this interpretation, the poem is static rather than dynamic, even though readers may readily infer the dynamic action of the hail falling or melting. These inferences are part of what give poems their reverberations. These inferences sometimes arise from how time—and the moment—is handled in haiku.
Indeed, a distinction is worth making between the moment that a poem specifically focuses on and what the reader infers will happen later. As another example, consider the following:

sultry afternoon—
I return again
to the unsigned painting

Here, the “moment” is the action of the persona returning to the painting. The action happens and then stops, and thus this moment is dynamic. We infer that the persona lingers in front of the painting, but the poem does not actually say that. In fact, the return may have been accidental, except for the clue that its being unsigned has something to do with why the person returned to the painting. It is thus important to differentiate between what the poem itself says (in this case, that the persona returns to an unsigned painting, presumably in a gallery) and what the reader infers (that the persona stays there for whatever reason, and why).

Some poets will write of two moments that take place too far apart, or that couldn’t be experienced in a single location (such as indoors and outdoors). In these situations, typically two different observers are required for the poem to be experienced at a single moment in time, thus the poem loses authenticity, or at least the immediacy of one personal experience. A haiku nearly always works best with a first-person point of view, and its believability may suffer if it employs an omniscient or third-person point of view. For me, that nearly always goes too far with the “moment” (and location) of the poem. Others may not be bothered by this, but perhaps they should be because it diffuses the poem’s intensity. Here’s a made-up example that I believe fails because of these problems (which, alas, I’ve seen in too many published poems):

my finger presses the doorbell—
her knitting laid aside
on an antique end table

This poem strikes me as having a problem with perspective, taking, as it does, an omniscient point of view, or one viewpoint (outside the door) and then a second one (inside the house). This is generally best avoided in haiku, certainly by beginners, because both moments or scenes are unknowable from a single personal perspective, unless you can see through a window—although the poem would have to make that clear, which it doesn’t. The reader is thus potentially confused as to which point of view in the poem he or she should identify with. At the very least, the poem would be stronger with just one point of view. In our normal experience, we are each just one person or the other in such a scenario, and can never have the experience of both people simultaneously in a single scenario. The poem also has the issue of cause and effect, which is usually too facile a way to describe events in haiku, and typically also requires two moments, which can again diffuse the intensity of a poem. Indeed, in this example, notice the problem of one event happening and then another (whether it’s cause and effect or not), and how this diffuses the intensity that haiku is capable of. A worse situation would be when the two parts of the poem are separated by an even greater amount of time.

One of my favourite examples of a sharp moment is in a poem by Christopher Herold:

dark dark night
a leaf strikes the pavement
stem first

This is exquisite. We see the leaf for the utterly briefest of discernible moments when it first touches the pavement. We know that an instant later the leaf will fall to the side and lie flat, but for a split second we focus on the moment when it first touches. The image suspends us there, and we revel in it. The image is barely perceived visually because of the low light, but what makes the poem even stronger is that perhaps it’s not seen at all, but heard. Because we are told that it’s a very dark night, perhaps the leaf can’t be seen at all. So the poem is deepened even further, in that this subtle experience is perceived by ear, not by eye. When you add the biographical detail that the poet wears strong hearing aids in both ears (as a result of a former career as a rock musician), the sensitivity is deepened even further.

So what sort of “now” should a haiku have? It could be static or dynamic (these “moments” could also be referred to as passive and active). Both moments can be effective. The dynamic moment need not always be
very short, though it seems worthwhile that it not be too long. A haiku is usually improved, too, by focusing on a single moment rather than two, unless very close together. At the very least, it’s worthwhile to be aware of “when” a haiku is, and the various ways a haiku poem can have its moment in the sun.

meteor shower . . .
a gentle wave
wets our sandals

*Michael Dylan Welch - USA*

*WelchM@aol.com*
spring green
in the woods a softness
to my step
peace demo
coppers call
the kettled black

Helen Buckingham - UK

harvest moon
the cool weight
of the bread knife

Helen Buckingham - UK

Slip Point Lighthouse!

Neal Whitman - USA

perched
far below
a silent tide

Neal Whitman - USA

The sound in front
the ride through the rapids
the sound behind

Bruce England - USA
spring evening light through an angelhair fern

Maeve O'Sullivan - Ireland

muscovite glinting
in October sunshine—
Dad's headstone

Maeve O'Sullivan - Ireland

a strong wind . . .
the sadness
of leaves

Louis Osofsky - USA

pulsing, the wind's
mirror from horizon
to horizon

Louis Osofsky - USA

old love
the man sleeps in
dreaming's sound

Louis Osofsky - USA
the songs
of Heian women
on a scented breeze—
waiting
I brush the hair he loves

Joyce S. Greene - USA

leather boots
up to her knees
she digs her heels
into the earth
as if it were a horse

Andrew Riutta - USA

when I was eight
he threw the car keys
at my mother . . .
on clear blue days,
the scar can be seen for miles

Andrew Riutta - USA
Clouds That Come

There is a still point between waving heads of goldenrod and when the first autumn asters open. Most of summer birdsong gives way to crow calls and geese making practice runs. When the sky takes on the watery blue of early autumn.

turning the clocks back . . .
the incoming clouds
on her chest x-ray

Michele L. Harvey – USA
her bedroom
the way she left it—
early frost

Christopher Provost - USA

late summer
I wish upon the light
of a dead star

Christopher Provost - USA

yellow jacket stings
almost as painful
as her absence

Christopher Provost - USA

diary page . . .
she cuts off the thread
of the finished fabric

Martina Heinisch - Germany

hail storm
the conversation
we never started

Bob Lucky - Ethiopia
string symphony
the dip and tilt
of a butterfly's path

Aubrie Cox - USA

charcoal on my fingers
mother explains the plans
for her ashes

Aubrie Cox - USA

new moon—
we've run out
of tomorrows

Aubrie Cox - USA

bamboo autumn ~
through the rustling breeze
a golden light

Narayanan Raghunathan - India

November sunrise—
his trembling old hands
seek deeper pockets

Jerry Foshee - USA
just enough shadows
to hear the birds singing
a day without you
Earth song
between two wingbeats
a day

Beate Conrad 2011

Beate Conrad - USA
Visiting time

In my room lying on the bed listening to voices from the corridor growing in volume and intensity—none of them I recognize. I long for one last shot in the arm.

my eyes open—
the door frame
a pale grey

Brendan Slater - England
"overheard at a dimly-lit lounge"

"are you doing okay"
the bartender sounds
like my therapist

a wedding photo
shown to his date
"yes this is me"

"can we get refills"
who the hell says
""can we get refills"

"the lights are dimmed
more on amateur night"
strip-club politics

the stool between
"she's totally smokin"
my eyes roll in vodka

from behind she looks
nearly the same
"no sun tattoo, though"

Lucas Stensland - USA
first light
a spider exits
the watering can

Mark E. Brager - USA

our embrace
where the waves touch
the shore

Mark E. Brager - USA

slow breath between the breeze and sea rose dawn

Andrea Grillo - USA

moonlight in the waves froth lost edges

Andrea Grillo - USA

garden sprinkler—
my infant
steps with the flow

Ramesh Anand - Malaysia
winter sunset
again we fail to speak
about the future

Margaret Dornaus - USA

tree-trimming . . .
of mother's many birds
one dove unbroken

Margaret Dornaus - USA

river bottom
wild ferns unfurl beneath
my bare feet

Margaret Dornaus - USA

mayfly
a walker changes
direction

Simone K. Busch - Germany

weighing words
all the way home
crescent moon

Simone K. Busch - Germany
Christmas mall . . .
clouds move slowly
across the skylight

Kirsten Cliff - New Zealand

blue moon . . .
I hide behind these
onion tears

Kirsten Cliff - New Zealand

rushing thoughts . . .
the speckled breast
of this thrush

Kirsten Cliff - New Zealand

old diary—
I don't remember
myself

Tomislav Maretic – Croatia

night sky . . .
Venus with a hint
of lilac

Tomislav Maretic – Croatia
my mood
turning on a crow's wing . . .
autumn dusk

Claire Everett - UK

the sconce
in the hornbeam . . .
leaf-gold light

Claire Everett - UK

homecoming
the gentle wave
of gum leaves

Dawn Bruce - Australia

a shiver of green
in the slow moving stream . . .
spring dawn

Dawn Bruce - Australia

midnight swim
the curve of her hip
in my hand

Bill Kenney – USA
every woman
I see these days
is an urban fox
dodging traffic to feed
on the scraps of my heart

Brendan Slater - England

nothing to do
but lie on my back
in this single bed
there's no empty space to fill
just the coldness of the wall

Brendan Slater - England

in time
the cold sun
will warm . . .
until then I'll make do
with the fire in your eyes

Brendan Slater - England
newly poured
sidewalk cement
my husband
searches for a little stick
and a piece of lasting fame

Michele L. Harvey - USA

lingering scent
of a young woman's perfume
as if to say,
I was here
for a little while

Michele L. Harvey - USA

a train whistle
as it leaves Amsterdam
the chill
of what must be a past life
shudders through me

Michele L. Harvey - USA
After Buchenwald

It's a charming Hofbrau we're treated to on our last night in Weimar, but I have no appetite for either food or company. At one point, our host for the evening realizes that I've neither touched my food nor entered into conversation. After talking non-stop in his native tongue to our guide, he suddenly leans over to apologize for his rudeness. “I should be speaking in English,” he says. “So, what do you think of our village?”

dead camp
the charred remains
of Goethe’s tree

Margaret Dornaus - USA
"social media"

years later here we are
a book of faces
sometimes with kids  (ls)

friendships metastasize
sharing links       (gh)

a status update
from a lawyer
I used to babysit    (ls)

"likes" are a litmus test
for feelings and ideas
social alone in a room  (gh)

13 friends in common
every one a stranger   (ls)

you see what I show you
clicking through photos—
how we look           gh)

Lucas Stensland & Gena Henrich - USA
House by the sea
between dandelions
rocks turning green

Beate Conrad

Beate Conrad - USA
Beyond the Reach of My Chopsticks by Fay Aoyagi

A Review by Alan Summers

Fay Aoyagi’s haiku collections are a must for anyone serious about haiku, in my opinion. Fortunately for anyone who has missed out on her earlier work we have the extra bonus that her latest collection also includes a Selected Haiku section showcasing work from both of her previous collections.

David G. Lanoue has this to say about Aoyagi in his featured essay for Modern Haiku:

*In recent years San Francisco poet Fay Aoyagi has been exploring what she calls “the inner landscape” with the same keen focus and subtle perception that traditional poets of haiku bring to birds, flowers and the moon.*

David G. Lanoue further states:

*Personally, I believe that haiku is about discovery: the deeper the feeling of discovery, the better the haiku, in my opinion. In a great haiku we sense the poet finding out something in the process of composition, not reporting on a thing that has been previously mentally digested.*

Something with Wings: Fay Aoyagi's Haiku of Inner Landscape [1]
by David G. Lanoue, Featured Essay, Modern Haiku Volume 40.2

Aoyagi’s first haiku collection was a landmark book when it looked worryingly possible that haiku may finally, at least in English, become dried up like one of those tumbleweeds [ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tumbleweed ] you often saw in Westerns to show a town had died, become a ghost town. That’s what seemed to be the final logical outcome until books of the refreshing quality as in *Chrysanthemum Love* appeared.

Aoyagi had this to say about her work, in the introduction to her 2003 collection *Chrysanthemum Love*. *If you believe haiku must be about nature, you may be disappointed with my work. There is a lot of “me” in my haiku. I write very subjectively. I am not interested in Zen and the Oriental flavours to which some Western haiku/tanka poets are attracted. I love the shortness and evocativeness of haiku. I don’t write haiku to report the weather. I write to tell my stories.*

Aoyagi doesn’t do weather report haiku yet she still harnesses kigo in both her Japanese and English-language haiku:
Saijiki are a treasure vault of kigo and sample haiku and I rely heavily on saijiki when I write haiku both in Japanese and English.

Moon in the Haiku Tradition essay by Fay Aoyagi

Bill Higginson put it very forcefully, and unfortunately I agree with him. I’ve seen all too often that formula has become mistaken with form. Although in recent years, along with Aoyagi, there are promising signs that haiku in English have never been healthier.

Yet, for years now, I have had the feeling that our haiku community was somehow steering off in one or at most two narrow directions. On one road we have the Zen-imbued notion of the haiku as a momentary blip on the screen of our lives. On the other, haiku becomes a tool in the hands of the satirist, unfit for serious composition. The yeastiness of that implicit conversation among the formalists, the anti-formalists, the Zennists, the nature writers, the inventors of senryu on our continent, the haiku psychologists, and the damned-if-I-won’t-do-it-my-own-way innovators seemed to have dried up. Book after book of same-o-same-o haiku seemed to come pouring from the burgeoning presses of our haiku community, as well as occasionally from some larger press. This is not to demean the numerous collections of fine haiku that have appeared. Just to say that there seemed to be little coming out that was outstandingly fresh or developing a truly world-class richness and variety in our fledgling tradition.

Chrysanthemum Love by Fay Aoyagi reviewed by William J. Higginson
Modern Haiku Vol. 35.2 (Summer 2004)

There may appear to be a lot of jockeying at present about who will be remembered as a haiku writer, outside of Japan, on a world stage level. I would suggest, whether you are new, or a seasoned reader, to haiku, to search carefully which books you add to your haiku library. If you are a writer of haiku as well, only quality reading will inform your own writing. Bill Higginson touches on this, in his important review of Aoyagi’s first collection.

At the same time, new books on Japanese haiku should have been broadening our view of haiku. It seemed as though Makoto Ueda’s greatest masterpiece, Bashô and His Interpreters (1992), and the eye-opening Chiyo-ni: Woman Haiku Master by Patricia Donegan and Yoshie Ishibashi (1998) had fallen under bushel baskets. Where were the poets taking heed, building into our haiku the new richness and diversity of even older Japanese haiku that these books revealed?

Chrysanthemum Love by Fay Aoyagi reviewed by William J. Higginson
Modern Haiku Vol. 35.2 (Summer 2004)

There are few haiku writers who can harness, seamlessly, the old and the new, or can break out of a perceived mould of what a haiku should be, and what a haiku writer should be. All I can say is look out for them, and keep their books close to your side, and be particular about which haiku books build and increase your library.

I have my own list of authors who I see as the real thing, and some writers know that I include them, and I am always on the lookout for new exciting writers. I have high expectations after the stop start developments of the 1990s. Although the 21st Century is still new, barely over its first decade, we need more writers of Aoyagi’s qualities to cement haiku in the West as a true tradition, and not as a strange experiment. Bill says:

Fay Aoyagi has lassoed and galloped beyond most of what we have learned about how to write American haiku in five decades, and opened the way to a new century. Chrysanthemum Love is a stunningly original book and a whole collection of “my favorite haiku”—I hope you’ll make it one of yours. I guarantee, it’s the real thing.
Aoyagi is the real thing, and I urge you to beg, borrow, or steal her earlier collections, and if you are quick, you can even purchase her latest collection.

Just a few of her haiku, but you’ll find yourself both reading from cover to cover, and dipping in and out. The book is a pleasure to hold and look at, and is a suitably convenient size and shape to find permanent residence in a coat pocket.

low winter moon
just beyond the reach
of my chopsticks

who will write
my obituary?
winter persimmon

plum blossoms
a specimen of my dream
sent to the lab

simmering tofu–
father asks where I intend
to be buried

slow ceiling fan
a town hall meeting
of the pet shop goldfish

pastel-colored day
a password
for the budding willow

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**Beyond the Reach of My Chopsticks**
New and Selected Haiku
Fay Aoyagi
Blue Willow Press
http://fayaoyagi.wordpress.com/
I did wonder how to approach this book—whether to read it as a self-help book with haiku attached or a book of haiku containing motivational teaching—the simple fact is *Haiku Wisdom* is both and I need not have worried—the key to its reading is to sit a while and listen to tried and tested advice, as a diligent student would.

Baird is a master martial artist and an award winning haiku poet and he is, no doubt, a teacher of great merit too. Baird does not preach nor does he ask anything of his students that he has not or would not do himself, rather, he adopts the warm conversational tone of a favourite uncle. He often reminds us of the importance of play and the playground; where much of our learning is gained and to above all keep that lightness of touch – *karumi* – in all that we do.

This is a playful book which has some seriously good advice, for anyone who would receive it, and as one would expect from a true master of Kung Fu, Baird, advocates order and discipline over fighting. Though I have never seen Baird in full fighting mode I’d bet, that if his teachings and haiku are anything to go by, he kicks ass—but I also know he’d rather talk you round first.

Baird’s haiku often pose a kind of question which his prose answers.

indoor cat
... outdoor cat

nose to nose
I will not supply you with the resolution—I have purposely kept quoting from *Haiku Wisdom* to a minimum because it is just one of those books that you have to read to get. This is a truly unique haiku book and there is part of me that eagerly awaits the follow up but then the student in me knows that there can be no more until I have learned what has already been put to me. *Haiku Wisdom* may take around ninety minutes to read but there is a lifetime of teaching, contained within, to put into practice.

A thoroughly recommended read!

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**Haiku Wisdom**  
*Living the Principles and Philosophies of Kung Fu, Haiku and Nature*  
by Don Baird

Modern English Tanka Press  
Baltimore, Maryland, 2011

Steven Carter is a retired emeritus professor of English and his writings have won several awards for literature. *Snow Moon* is his first collection of haiku and haibun and seems chiefly concerned with the writer’s search to gain some sort of understanding of his place in life. As literature students we are taught not to confuse the speaker of a poem with the author, while we can perhaps do this with his haiku, Carter’s haibun style draws heavily on his own experiences and there is no separating the man from the poetry.

As the above haiku might suggest, Carter delves frequently into his family history in *Snow Moon*: A history which is both violent and tragic. In the haibun, *Descent*, he tells of his paternal grandfather’s father who killed five men in a family feud and was subsequently murdered. In, *In a Day Threatening Rain*, we learn Carter witnessed his mother’s death; a scene which Carter seems to revisit often in his dreams as we find in the haibun, *The House*. Given the above, it is understandable that Carter is searching for some meaning to it all:

**bathing in its own light**
**the moon**
**....those who are gone**

**snow moon—**
**rummaging the attic**
**all my fathers**

As the above haiku might suggest, Carter delves frequently into his family history in *Snow Moon*: A history which is both violent and tragic. In the haibun, *Descent*, he tells of his paternal grandfather’s father who killed five men in a family feud and was subsequently murdered. In, *In a Day Threatening Rain*, we learn Carter witnessed his mother’s death; a scene which Carter seems to revisit often in his dreams as we find in the haibun, *The House*. Given the above, it is understandable that Carter is searching for some meaning to it all:

**taking early retirement—**
**winter moon**
**no longer part of something**
There are, however, moments of wry humour, even if they are tinged with a certain sadness:

yellows
    of sunrise
    the world’s oldest man dead

While the current holder of the title may have died he will always have a successor to take place, and on it goes. So paradoxically the world’s oldest man never dies as we are, in effect, never without one.

There are poems about lymphoma and the resultant chemotherapy in Snow Moon—one wishes the author well—but the overall sense is one of numbness or rather a reluctant acceptance that the world keeps on turning:

May’s new moon—
    grandfather’s
    grandfather clock stopped

Though I enjoyed his haiku, I believe Carter is more effective in his haibun: his prose style is tight and he has the knack of being sometimes informative yet still able to tap into our imagination with his choice of language. In the haibun, 1991, Carter describes Auschwitz in such graphic terms that we cannot help to be moved. Carter adopts many techniques in this final piece from Snow Moon—there is metaphor, matter-of-fact, and the downright mundane. Yet he ends with the cliché of a violin playing:

    in the wind
    sound
    of a violin

There is, of course, the association to the expression where “Do you hear violins playing!” meaning that the person does not really give a damn. And this is perhaps the point of Snow Moon: we live, we die, and in between we suffer with no one to really empathise with us and our pain. Have you ever really told the truth to someone who has asked, how are you, and watched them baulk when they did not get the positive report that they are accustomed to?

cicadas—
    the elderly man’s words
    if you cry, cry alone

Recommended!

Snow Moon: haiku and haibun
Steven Carter
Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK, 2011
ISBN 978-0-9551254-4-7
The anthology showcases seasonally focused haiku from its members; a summary of winners from the Tokutomi Memorial Haiku Contest (2010); haibun; and essays. Ann Bendixen's fine interior art as folding inserts open out into larger pages that work as fine art subject dividers: a great idea, and very practical. An idea of her dramatic and effective touch of colour is shown with the full colour book covers.

By way of a review I will be addressing one essay in particular as it covers a contentious subject, possibly even deemed controversial in some quarters.

This Editors' Greeting that introduces the anthology includes this paragraph:

_The first three essays concern our core tools. Patricia J. Machmiller discusses the considerable value of the kigo. In 2010, she led several one-day seasonal workshops to study the use of the kigo in haiku. Her essay “Kigo: A Poetic Device in English Too” opens the essay section because the kigo is the bedrock of our study. Anne Homan, lead-editor of the San Francisco Bay Area Nature Guide and Saijiki (first published in 2010) shows us the importance of a saijiki (a kigo dictionary) and YTHS’s process of constructing one. Deborah Kolodji addresses the ginko (the practice of writing haiku while walking)._ 

More late on Machmiller’s essay but in the meantime I would to state that this is a most beautifully put together book by a great team, and my only regret, and worry, is that the book may have already sold out but I see on their homepage that a second printing has been authorized. Do check the Society’s home page on a regular basis, and even ask if you can get advance orders, it will sell out!

The anthology’s title is from a haiku by Patricia J. Machmiller:

the little child
wanting only to be held—
wild violets

So many haiku to choose from, but here are a handful:
A combined appraisal/review of Wild Violets via the essay on kigo, with a developing article tentatively entitled the Colour of Fainting Goats.

"Kigo: A Poetic Device in English Too" by Patricia J. Machmiller

For anyone not familiar with Patricia J. Machmiller: http://www.americanhaikuarchives.org/boardmembers/PatriciaJMacmillner.html

Machmiller approaches the subject in an intelligent open manner, giving a clean clear introduction about kigo for those new or even familiar with haiku.

She explains that kigo (plural and singular spelling) are devices used in haiku and renga and are symbolic of a season, and hold the power of allusion to literary, religious, and historical references. This simple statement holds a key, if not the key, to the ongoing debate whether non-Japanese writers can be allowed to use the kigo device.

Kigo have had two histories, one of a poetical device that resonated deeply with writers before, during, and shortly after Matsuo Bashō, on a level that may have included a genuinely deeply felt emotional set of triggers and insights for both writers and selected readers. But which readers, of what socio-economic or cultural background? Was kigo limited to aristocratic circles, and later also to the emerging and dominant merchant classes of the new middle classes?

Bashō made renga and its starting verse of hokku (later to morph into haiku) more accessible, to a wider audience. But were the ordinary working class members able to be allowed access to enjoyment of haikai literature (namely renga, and standalone hokku, later haiku) and its devices including kigo?

My preamble is to wonder whether the kigo was purely an academically created and driven poetic (literary) device privy to just an elite, perhaps articulated in an exclusive manner from working class people’s awareness of the natural world around them via their agrarian ties. We know that the post-agrarian society entering the industrial age had access to writing implements, and paper and card, and may have utilised seasonal words and phrases in their greeting cards and letters, as well as poetry, but were these the same as kigo, or early naïve attempts?
The second history is of the increase of centralising kigo despite Japan’s different climates from the South to the North of its islands. Bureaucracy decreed that kigo became regimented, and pre-eminence given to those that related to the environs of the old capital of Kyoto, and the newly emerging capital of Edo aka current day Tokyo.

Is kigo really the Japanese people’s collective consciousness, and so all non-Japanese people must be excluded? Or the secured preserve of a few?

We know that hokku and haiku began to be readily available under two American actions, the mid 19th Century arrival of US black ships brokering an end to isolation for Japan and opening up of world trade; and the 1945-1952 Occupation of Japan after WWII. Japanese artists welcomed these actions and embraced Western art, which influenced haiku poetry, and of course the West were introduced to Japanese art including poetry.

Why the resistance regarding haiku’s most potent tool, namely kigo, when haiku already started to absorb some Western techniques under Shiki? Would we, should we, insist that Japanese writers desist from writing Italian (or English) sonnets if they so desired? Of course not, and at least sonnets in English have been done.

I wonder if the mystification of the Japanese people by Westerners is bordering on not only mistaken beliefs, as if the Japanese people were separate from all other cultures and races, but encompasses patronising characteristics which are disingenuous, and precariously close to an odd form of inverted racism.

Michael Schmidt OBE FRSL is the founder and editorial and managing director of Carcanet Press Limited, the general editor of PN Review, and Professor of Poetry and convener of the Creative Writing programme in the Department of English, University of Glasgow:

_European poetry takes its bearing from a brilliant constellation of classical writers, whose lives (legend or fact) and (as it survives) continue to inform our writing and reading._


_Homerian diction… “a composite of different dialect strands . . . as though a poet wrote in Scots, South African, Texan and Jamaican, all in a single poem.”_

_Schmidt paints a vivid portrait of bustling Alexandria with its “racial mix” and “mess of languages and dialects.”_

_’The First Poets’: Starting With Orpheus_  

_The West is a larger group of poets than ever before, and joined by those in other nations, who look to Japan’s haiku as one kind of inspiration or another. The one great strength of Japanese haikai tradition is to share, and the non-Japanese nations also share by reading each other’s work unless there is censorship imposed on them._

_And certainly poets since Milton have strived to read widely, and absorb widely the many methods of other poets, of anything that could inform their work. I am often reminded of Bill Manhire’s poem _On Originality_. http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/manhire/originality.asp_

_These last two verses sum up my own approach to poetry, where I long ago left my early misinformed isolationist stance, and fear of contamination, so common amongst many poets first starting out; where we avoid the influence by others, of whatever nation or race._
We know poets concern themselves with form (or genre) with its shapes and techniques, and yet out of all forms and genres of poetry worldwide it seems there is almost an embargo on haiku with its most telling technique, that of the kigo. Where it is common practice in poetry to utilise and adapt new and old techniques from other lands, it is almost seen as *verboten*, and actually anti-Japanese to use kigo, and label it as such. I feel that both Bashō and Shiki would have been perplexed at this block in a poet’s attitude, and a potentially dangerous chink in their arsenal.

Merely calling something a season word or a seasonal reference, if a non-Japanese writer attempts haiku, could be misleading and unfairly limiting both to writers and readers of haiku outside Japan, especially if the word(s) go beyond just the spelling out of a season.

I agree with Machmiller when she says: “…I do not believe that the Japanese have a lock on kigo…”

Unlike Machmiller I feel it’s time to make saijiki (the kigo dictionary) a regular actuality in countries where there occurs a large number of haiku and renga writers. This process needs to be fluid and inclusive: not an exclusive club for elite literati to dictate to lesser mortals. As well as potential new strains of inverted racism, I worry that an ongoing inverted snobbery has gone on for too long both in Japan, and in the West. Or is it misguided rose-tinted spectacles placed on a fainting goat?

Machmiller states how certain words and phrases in Western culture already operate as kigo. I don’t intend to quote or reveal any more of Machmiller’s essay, as I want the anthology (in its entirety) to be part of many a haiku poet’s reference library.

On a final note, it seems that the terms *kigo* and its partner term *kidai* are Post-Isolation Japan:

*After haiku became a fully independent genre, the term "kigo" was coined by Otsuzi Ōsuga (1881–1920) in 1908. "Kigo" is thus a new term for the new genre approach of "haiku." So, when we are looking historically at hokku or haikai stemming from the renga tradition, it seems best to use the term "kidai." Although the term "kidai" is itself new—coined by Hekigotō Kawahigashi in 1907!*


_____________________________

**Wild Violets,**
Yuki Teikei Haiku Society Members’ Anthology 2011
Edited by Jerry Ball and J. Zimmerman


YTHS: [www.youngleaves.org](http://www.youngleaves.org)
back page

 Been here long?  

 Who’s counting!

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