

Two Differing Views of Time and Nature in Haiku

By David Cobb

1. A haiku is an unrhymed Japanese poem recording the essence of A MOMENT keenly perceived, IN WHICH NATURE IS LINKED TO HUMAN NATURE. (From *A Haiku Path*, recording the official definition adopted by the Haiku Society of America and used in Frogpond magazine.) [My capitals.]

2. In the first place, Japanese haiku are NOT NATURE POEMS AT ALL. Japanese poems are concerned with the four seasons of the year, so they are SEASON-POEMS. Haiku are TIME-POEMS; where content is concerned, haiku deal with the passage of time, with things that have passed away, with the present and the future. And the poet illustrates this process of becoming and passing away within a short or long period of time by referring to things in the natural world, both alive and dead. (tr. from an article by Thomas Hemstege in *Vierteljahresschrift der Deutschen Haiku-Gesellschaft*, Vol.16, No.60, March 2003.) [My capitals again.]

This definition argues that references to Nature are incidental or instrumental to the poet's impressions of the passage of time. The nub of the action is something that poets do with Nature. The case is made for a haiku continuum rather than a haiku moment.