field notes

Archival Feature

The Haiku Foundation
Welcome to Field Notes. With each installment, a number of writers representing a variety of points of view are invited to form an online panel to explore questions pertaining to haiku. No limits are set; participants are free to interpret each question in any way he or she chooses.

We hope there will be, at intervals of six weeks or so, many such explorations. And you are welcome to add your response to this and all subsequent topics. To add a response, you’ll need to register on our forum. Click the Register link at the top of each page.

I want to take a moment to talk about Field Notes. In a sense, it is comprised of two parts. The first I think of as a symposium which my online dictionary characterizes as: a collection of essays or papers on a particular subject by a number of contributors. These contributors were told in advance what the current Field Notes topic would be, and in the course of two weeks or so wrote what you now have available to you. Like you, they are seeing each others’ responses for the first time.

The second part is discussion. If this were an actual conference, it would be the time when the audience is invited to ask questions, offer comments, or express their own views on the topic under consideration. One difference is, the “panelists” of this online conference may or may not be available for discussion. Online discussion, the kind some of us might wish for, requires a commitment of time and focus that not all of us (perhaps few of us) have at our disposal.

Even so . . . . A few people have written to me saying: okay, there’s a lot of good and varied stuff here-- now how do we get the discussion started?

I am hoping that you will help answer that question.

There are a number of entry points. The first one is to simply take your place on the panel and offer your response to the topic. As was true for the panelists, you may do so however you wish. Interpret the question in whatever way makes sense for you.
Another is to say how a given response affected you. If you are logged onto the forum, you can use the “quote” function available with every post. This places the text you wish to quote in a reply window. You may now edit this to select only the parts you wish to comment on, and then proceed to your comments.

Another is to ask for clarification or expansion on something someone said. You never know, you might get it. (And here, too, the “quote” function is useful).

All this may be pretty obvious, but I just want encourage you to jump in.

By way of offering one more entry point, let me ask a variation on the question Where do your haiku begin?

Was there a haiku in your life, or a haiku poet, all those years or months ago, that got you started-- hooked, perhaps-- as a writer, reader, scholar or aficionado of haiku. With which haiku (or poet) did your love of haiku begin? And what can you say about that?

Oh, and one last thing: is there a topic of great interest to you which you would like to see addressed on Field Notes? Let us know.

Peter Yovu
field notes
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In this, the first installment of Field Notes, a panel of writers has been asked to explore the question: Where do your haiku begin? As you will see in the symposium to follow, responses ranged from fairly short to quite long, from philosophical to practical to imaginative to personal, coming always from the hearts and minds of poets for whom haiku matters.

We would like to encourage you to add your voice to the mix.

Where do your haiku begin?

John Stevenson

I believe that the origin of my haiku, and all of my poems, is a waking equivalent to the origin of my dreams. While everyone dreams, many people will say they don’t do so simply because they have not trained themselves to be aware of it. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those of us who have taught ourselves to be lucid dreamers; not only remembering dreams but actually being conscious that we are dreaming while it is happening. My feeling is that all of us have the material of poetry flowing around and through us but most are no more aware of it than they are of their dreams. The people I have known who were most effective in the arts have been people that I would describe as “practical dreamers.”

Martin Lucas

I’m not certain I know what the question means, but it seems to me to be asking about creative process.

The humdrum answers to this question, in my own case, are (1) that it’s difficult
to generalize, as different haiku begin in different ways, in different places, and
(2) insofar as there is any common tendency, I often simply latch on to some observed phenomenon that strikes me as having haiku potential, then look around for other images to support it, and having formed a kind of rough sketch, I work it over in my “mind’s ear” until I settle on a precise form of words that appears to have some creative kick (and often that result is never achieved and the kernel of the idea is simply discarded). One section of one of my chapbooks, Earthjazz, was entitled “mist and dusk and light” because I realized these three themes recurred with great regularity in my haiku – mist and dusk and light put me into a haiku mood and I find myself writing about them – at least until I reflect that I’ve maybe written about them often enough by now ...

But while I’m happy enough to discuss my own process, I think it’s more interesting to reflect that everyone’s process is different. Some are prolific, turning out draft after draft; others write no more than one or two haiku every year. Some people revise and revise; others never revise (I sometimes do, but rarely). Some even revise after publication, which upsets me somewhat, as I sometimes appear to cherish the original version of their haiku more than the author does! Some people work their ideas out on paper; others (I’m one) turn over the poem in the mind, and don’t commit it to paper until it is fully-formed. Some people advise homing in as closely as possible on the original experience and the feelings it evoked; others (I’m one) prefer to work with the words and allow the words to evoke their own feelings, even if this takes them some distance from the original inspiration. Yet, paradoxically perhaps, I also find myself in the school that prefers haiku to relate (however tangentially) to actual lived experience; whereas others are happy to write at secondhand about the experience of others (as seen on TV?!?) or conjure imaginary scenarios that lack any direct experiential basis.

Wearing my editor’s rather than my writer’s hat, I regard all these approaches as valid. A haiku journal that reflects a variety of different approaches is (I believe) more interesting to the reader than one that steers down a narrow channel. We judge a haiku according to its final form, not according to some impossible-to-know measure of the authenticity of its inspiration. Even the writer might not know the beginnings of a haiku; so how can the reader? And although we’re all
very fond of considering haiku in a competitive light – competing for an editor’s
approval, competing for space in journals and anthologies, competing in best-
of-issue awards or for cash prizes in contests – fundamentally all this competitive
stuff is a sideshow, and there’s no need to judge a haiku at all. Creativity is
effulgent and limitless and free. In a sense, it is a process that happens to us, it is
not something we own. So who knows where it comes from, or how it all began?

Billie Wilson

From my earliest attempts at haiku in the 1960s, there was an almost mystical
rearrangement of my DNA into a chronic haiku rhythm. My relationship with
the natural world became more focused—a laser-like awareness that was more
addictive than any drug. With that heightened awareness came the insatiable
desire to learn more from other haiku poets. I began to grasp the surprising
knowledge that crafting an excellent, memorable haiku might be as challenging
as learning calculus. In the beginning, haiku were everywhere and they poured
from my pen by the dozens daily. I was totally in love with my world and it
rewarded my passion with page after page of (pretty much unpublishable) little
poems. Decades later, my haiku still begin there: in that young love affair that
has begun to mature over the years of study and experience. The obsession
has been tempered a tiny bit with discernment, so some haiku ideas never get
noted; they are released back into nature like dandelion fluff. And those ideas
that do make it onto paper often require much thought and tinkering before
they feel whole. Certainly I miss those first-love days when it was easy to think
everything I wrote was wonderful. But the new discipline has its own depth of
quiet passion; sort of like the way one still smiles every time their now-aging
lover enters the room.
We are asked where, not how, our haiku begin.

“The point at which the poem should really begin is often where, in some other intellection, it might have ended.” – Paul Muldoon, interview in The Paris Review No. 169, Spring 2004

My haiku begin, I want to say, at the end of many other poems. They have a tail that stretches back a long way.

note to self: read outside your field of knowledge.

Places come to mind: a parkland of grasses, silver maple and old irrigation ditches; an open book with a torn jacket and musty smell; the museum flanked by gardens where a teacher proposed we compose a poem; a living room with a shag carpet, mom reading aloud to my sister and me; my own body and mouth . . .

Can I place an instant of becoming? I’m reminded of the placeless places in the lexicon of Emily Dickinson, who begins a poem (Franklin #958) with these two lines:

Absent Place - an April Day -
Daffodils a’blow

Her poem emerges . . . where? Rooted and yet not fixed, whatever else that space encompasses—Eden, agony, love—creation resides therein. I want to say my haiku begin in love.

note to self: resist the view that haiku conveys mysteries other genres do not. How does it convey, how does it suit my voice?

[we head out into the field with our notebooks; upon returning, we share our findings; they are all different; i want to say my haiku grow from a tree that has
many roots and branches.]

“To be modern is to be contemporary, of our own time; inevitably we must be so.” – Jorge Luis Borges, from his 1969 prologue to Moon Across the Way.

[one of us claims she heard an ivory-billed woodpecker, and imitates its call; someone else believes he may have seen one; a third person suggests it was a related species and also beautiful.]

note to self: question anyone who tries to impose a singular vision on our cultural and poetic space.

I want to say my haiku begin with us. Our haiku emerge from us and everything we know.

Max Verhart

Where do my haiku begin? That’s the question – a question I can answer for at last thirty six of them: they began in the solitude (not loneliness) on a small boat in the old city of Ghent, Belgium, in late October 2012.

I spent 72 hours on that boat, with its eight square meters cabin, moored in the center of town. It was late autumn and cold and the circumstances on board were primitive. I had to live there without heating, without a phone, without radio or TV, without books, without internet, without electricity or running water, without anything to read – unless I wrote it myself first.

That was part of the idea: to write my own stuff. The bigger idea was to get rid of all kinds of obligations and daily routines, to be alone with yourself, to find out what new perspectives would open up that way – if any…

I did write my own stuff.

I sat or stood outdoors, on the tiny deck, if the weather allowed, notebook and pen in hand, looking around, jotting down observations and thoughts just as they came. Some notes took the shape of a haiku. Ands as time moved on –
unmeasured, since I had decided not to wind the clock that was part of the meager outfit on board – I started to consider my notes as a haibun. Then it was given a title: To Be Where You Are. The title was taken from a small, loose paragraph. That paragraph reads thus (in translation, since the original is Dutch):

“What is very good possible under these circumstances is to be where you are. But aren’t you always where you are? No, often you are not in the least where you are. And once in a while I think that some people never are where they happen to be. Right or wrong, that’s what I sometimes think.”

And here’s another paragraph:
“One’s attentiveness increases. You see details that do exist and may be noticed just as much as the impressive ancient meat hall, the historic house fronts and other sights to see. And look: since coming on board until this moment (…) I have written more haiku than in all of the preceding year.

That of course is a conclusion with regard to quantity. It does not say a damn thing about quality. But it certainly does say something.”

What it says, of course, is where my haiku begin. At least where the thirty six came from that are an integral part of that five thousand word amalgam of rather loose bits that came to me on that boat.

gusts of wind
azalea petals
in the piss-pot
tolling bells
on a girl’s back
a cello passes

my shadow and I
we are inseparable
They always begin with some sort of stimulus—a glimpse, a scent, a memory—about which I suddenly have a strong feeling that “There’s a haiku in this.” I’m curious to find out what I will say about this “this.” When I take out pen and paper, or more recently, the iPhone, I’m trying to catch the momentum of an impulse to discover. The first image is always easy; it’s the spark that ignited the curiosity. The second image or, perhaps, thought, will be the discovery which, if I’m lucky, will make the quick journey from part A to part B a haiku. For this step I rely on everything I know and have felt, my deep intuitions, my lifelong love affair with the English language, and, trusting in all this, nine out of ten times the second part comes even as I am writing it down—and I have a haiku. Whether or not it’s a good haiku is a matter to be decided later, but for the time being I’m content to add it to the computer file titled “MyKu” that contains over 3,000 similar bursts of discovery, from 1983 to yesterday.

Here’s an illustration of how it works. On August 31, 1998 I was having lunch at a little restaurant in New Orleans: Venezia on Carrollton Avenue. I noticed, across the room, an elderly Catholic priest who, like me, also sat alone. He was waiting for his lunch to come, sipping a glass of dark red wine. This off-duty priest drinking wine was the stimulus. I was curious to find out what the haiku (or senryu?) about him might end up saying. I quickly took out my hip-pocket pad and scribbled the words, “the old priest.” I should mention here that I was
an altar boy; my memory is filled with up-close images of priests drinking the transfigured blood of Jesus from sparkling chalices. I imagined that perhaps even this morning this priest across the room might have done the same, and so the pen kept moving, and I discovered . . .

the old priest dines
his wine
just wine


Michael Dylan Welch

Basho has said that haiku is what is happening at this place at this moment. I’ve always felt this was a misleading statement, because of course there’s a lot more to it than that. It takes effort to craft the moment into a poem. So not everything happening here and now is really haiku. The process requires sensitivity and selection. For me, haiku most often begin with experience. By being sensitive to what I experience with my five senses, I try to transform selected experience into words. But they also require, I think, a sensitivity to my emotions. My reactions to images and experiences can give the building blocks of sensory experience a context. Sometimes I’ll get a great two lines, and struggle to find a juxtaposition. But with patience I’ll see what I need out the corner or my eye (visually or intellectually), and the poem will snap into place. From experience to words. For me, that’s where haiku begin.

I’ve written at greater length on this topic in an essay titled “How Do You Write Haiku?” My emphasis is not on the world “how” but on “you.” How do YOU write haiku? You can read the essay at https://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/how-do-you-write-haiku. We each have different ways of writing, and they’re surely all valid paths. The most common ways I write haiku include
direct experience, memory, imagination, pastiches, from reading, and by other 
processes, which my essay explores. A postscript adds that it can be effective to 
think of an idea and then generate poems to fit that idea, or to solve a puzzle or 
challenge.

A note on memory. While some writers enjoy writing from direct personal 
experience, they may forget that memory is part of that experience. It’s not the 
recency of experience that matters, but the vibrancy. So a haiku of mine might 
be triggered by hearing a phrase, even at random, and letting myself recall 
something from memory to write a poem about that. On the National Haiku 
Writing Month page on Facebook (NaHaiWriMo), a daily writing prompt serves 
to provoke haiku in exactly this manner. Searching one’s memories is no more 
manufactured than writing from immediate experience. And we can never write 
IN the moment, anyway. At best, we can write only FROM the moment. I believe, 
in this sense, that all haiku are moments of history (see “Haiku as History: The 
Ultimate Short Story” at https://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/essays/haiku-
as-history). I also appreciate the notion that haiku need not be limited to the 
so-called “haiku moment.”

A note, too, on authenticity. Whether something “really” happened is not all 
that important to me, in both what I write and in what I read. It’s inherently 
unprovable anyway. Instead, what matters to me is whether the poem feels 
authentic. The truth can feel false. And the false can feel true. I want the true 
to feel true, first of all, but I also welcome the false if it too can be made to 
feel true. Yet I also welcome the truth if it can be presented in a way that is 
clearly false (this is not just the realm of science-fiction haiku). These are all 
effective ways to write haiku. Yatsuka Ishihara is famous in haiku circles for 
saying to “tell the truth as if it were false.” This is not just a license for hyperbole, 
but a reminder to present poetic truth. Ultimately, if the poem makes me care 
about the subject, then I know that I have read a good haiku. Whether it really 
happened is essentially beside the point. All I need to do is to believe it is true.

I’ve ended up talking about where haiku end up, haven’t I? That’s not irrelevant, 
though, because one’s goal can inform one’s process. Many people talk about 
the value of process in poetry, to the point of rejecting product, or claiming not
to care about product. But I think one needs to strike a balance between both process and product, and to think of one’s audience at an appropriate point, if one wishes to share or publish one’s haiku. But where do haiku begin? Well, truth be told, they can begin anywhere. So maybe Basho was right after all.

Tom D’Evelyn

I begin in/with the Fertile Void

The concept of “beginning” in the question, “Where do my haiku begin?” is a problematic one. (Which is no doubt why it was chosen to open the gates in this particular forum!). Even if you ask, “Where does this sentence begin?” you must follow the trail “back” and then “up” into the mind’s capacity to question its own expressions. A question worthy of St Augustine.

My haiku begin with an increasing awareness of how everything I think is a reflection of change, of passing; but not simply as temporality. Every thing I “notice” is in passage, going somewhere. Where? From whence? Who knows?

This “double” aspect of thoughts — what now, and where to — is happily structured into the form of haiku, as I understand it. That is why my haiku in particular “return” to this origin as they take shape. The origin is the transcendent Other to this doubleness. As in Chinese classical poetry, the appearance of something as it passes on its way is “tzu-jan” or an “outbreak” from the fertile void. As a student of Chinese poetry, Basho configured his invention of haiku (I’m aware this may be a scholarly can of worms) in terms of tzu-jan, or original appearing and passing away.

So, now I can say, my haiku begin in this fertile void. How so? Of what state of mind does this “fertile void” partake? If we accept, for the moment, its reality, how do we participate in it?

This is the great cultural problem for haiku in our time. The ethos of modernity — the basic “metaphysical background” which governs our thinking about
ourselves and everything else — is not hospitable to such a notion as “the fertile void.” If anything, our modern fix is on the negative version: the nihilistic void. This has some convenience: it is easy to attach our American individualism to that nihilism. I am I. My work is I. My world is I. There is no radical Other to this I. There may be a Thou, but he/she/it is a projection of my faith, a fiction of my belief. This is comforting, in light of the nothingness.

But there is nothing and there is nothing. I believe this modern ethos cripples haiku because it blocks the fertile void — the no-thingness of the Nothing, but not literally nothing. Rather the nothing of ex nihilo: the creative nothing.

The nihilist nothing is deeply foundational to our sense of reality and of self. (There is a vast literature on “self” and it is worth mastering, at least some part of it!) I see lots of haiku that simply point to something: look there! We are glad to have that pointed out; we credit the poet for seeing something and pointing it out without a lot of fuss, without a lot of dialectical worrying, just a friendly gesture.

To me, this flatness of this model reduces the poetry and traduces the promise of the haiku form, which is to locate something AS a movement of things and consciousness out of, through, and away from my capacity to notice it. Tzu-jan! Appearance appearing of itself! (I believe that’s how David Hinton translates it.) The wonder that there is any thing at all! Haiku “aha!” is deeply structural in the ethos of the fertile void.

When I wrote haiku regularly and published them in a weekly space, I would always “tune” my mind by reading classic haiku. I needed to clear it of the modern ethos to let it recognize the fertile void. The images I hoped to encounter would be double — both “of” things and “of” finitude, change, passing, and passage. I am concentrating now on “long form” lyrics (my series of Pond Songs modeled on Chinese classical poems) and only occasionally write haiku. I do teach haiku and my students study the Chinese masters along with Basho and the great Japanese and the occasional contemporary haiku poet who has broken through to the fertile void. Returning to the Beginning is always a great joy.
Cherie Hunter Day

This question isn’t easy to answer. It stumps the intellect much like the Zen koan: what was your face before your grandparents met? As soon as I formulate a response, the answer seems trivial and hopelessly inaccurate. Haiku begin in experience but the senses are like looking through cracks in a wall. I see/hear/smell/taste/touch only a small fragment of the entire view. It’s this tease of the infinite that holds my brief attention.

I didn’t find haiku; haiku found me in grammar school. It was like a lightning bolt. The clarity of those few, well-chosen words resting in a sea of white on the page was so powerful. I was instantly attracted to the form. That encounter set me on the path, but it took several more literary inoculations for the full effect. I moved from reading haiku and mimicking translations to studying and writing haiku my senior year in high school. No other form so defies easy definition or a quick encounter. Decades later I can’t say where haiku begin or where they end. I agree with Bob Boldman’s assessment that haiku uses words to express wordlessness; discrete moments in time to reveal timelessness. Haiku are little celebrations and I’m grateful for each and every one.

Gravedigger, when you dig my grave, could you make it shallow so that I can feel the rain?

—Dave Mathews “Gravedigger” from the album Some Devil (2003)

Paul Miller

As someone who believes that haiku is poetry, the question then is: where do my poems come from? And then perhaps: why haiku? When I first started writing poetry years ago, I wrote longer forms—free verse, twenty or thirty lines or so, and bad—and I found a few years after the fact that each poem could really
be cut down to some essential juxtaposition, turn, collision, transformation, etc. What I had been doing was taking a simple core moment and trying to expand it to make some kind of point, or to find some larger meaning. Those core moments were proto-haiku. As I whittled the poems down to what was absolutely necessary often those proto-haiku were the only things that were left. For the most part those core moments were my interactions with the world. They were discoveries or bits of wonder. They were life, breath. But also imaginings—which is also an interaction with the world. I’ve confessed elsewhere that as an accountant I am always looking at how the pieces of the world fit, myself included. I try to stay open to everything, whether it conforms to my current world belief or not. For myself, 99% of the time haiku seems the perfect form for such explorations. But ultimately, I don't look too deeply into the origins of those discoveries or bits of wonder. When you’re in a forest and there is a spark, it’s less important what caused it than what you’re going to do about it.

Lee Gurga

Snatches of conversation; commentary on King Lear; a yoga stretch; sitting in bed with a cup of coffee; gazing at the moon; standing a a bus stop; traffic noise; a poem by Rilke; a wood carving from Indonesia; an old emery board; a dry eraser; a battered suitcase; my wife flossing; the word “zamboni” or “(fill in the blank)”; a comfortable chair; the 60-cycle hum; a doorbell that sticks; a chart of Lake Michigan; a green backpack; a walk-in closet; clean underwear on the bed; a world series ticket; hockey skates; the smell of my grandfather’s cigar; love scent; dog saliva; a remembered smile; an empty beach; smokestacks on the horizon; matching dressers; a rubber band; a child's laughter; an old man's sense of wonder at being alive; a game of chess; death of a loved one; a visit to the north room; an orange fire hydrant; a new telephone pole; a chain saw in the woods; the corner of Lincolnshire and Lynwood; yard waste bags stacked at the curb; your last email; flowers budding or past bloom; an empty bracket nailed to a tree; a pitcher set before the pitch; soft pitch in the sun; the son I’m estranged from; a strange feeling in the air; air escaping from my left front tire; tire tracks
on my neck; the neck of the bottle glistening with blood; blood on the tracks; tracks his ancestry with a swab of saliva; saliva to drive a screw into wood; would that I knew where haiku came from.

Gary Hotham

They begin around me and then within me.

T. S. Eliot writes about the poet’s mind which captures well this process for me:

“When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.”

I think haiku like other good poems or any work of art are examples of new wholes.

And for me the haiku themselves are formed into words, when to use a phase from William Wordsworth, they are “recollected in tranquility.” Maybe not exactly with the same intensity as Wordsworth described it in the Preface to his book, *Lyrical Ballads* back in 1800. But there are times and places when I fit the words together for a haiku and the process demands some tranquility. By the way isn’t it comforting to think that even back in the 18th century poets needed

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2. The full context for the phrase: “I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”
My haiku begin with my life from birth to a given present moment and my relation to the universe and its visible and nonvisible nature. My individual haiku arrive as a rhythm of energy and feeling that formulates into the haiku form and words. Such a haiku is both a record of a moment and a realization coming forth in that moment.

As I know them, haiku begin with a motivating experience, a notable occurrence that stands out somehow from the ordinary stream of existence and around which fragments of language begin to coalesce. Since by temperament and choice, I’m an outdoors poet who is lucky enough to live in the Rocky Mountains region, usually for me a motivating experience will occur in a natural setting. But in some cases it may involve something else—a vivid memory, say, a striking phrase in a conversation, or an image in a film.

The two-part juxtapositional structure of haiku invites us to combine experiences into greater wholes. So a haiku needn’t necessarily be a more-or-less faithful transcription of a single moment’s “essence,” even if many good ones are. It may represent a synthesis of two experiences—even, say, two visits to a single place.

As Shiki, in Harold Henderson’s translation, said, “Use both imaginary pictures and real ones, but prefer the real ones. ... If you use real pictures, it is still difficult to get very good haiku.”

In speaking of the origins of haiku, I believe it’s worth stressing that haiku composition can and perhaps should be, as Shiki says, difficult, even if some of the finest things appear in an unlooked-for flash of inspiration—a flash, it’s worth noting, that took only a universe and a life to prepare.
As one case study in beginnings and difficulties, I’ll offer the backstory of a haiku of mine that has been reprinted a few times and that itself concerns the theme of origins.

A number of years ago, I passed a day by climbing up to the source of Bear Creek, a vital watershed in the Pikes Peak region that holds the area’s only remaining population of greenback cutthroat trout, Colorado’s state fish. If you walk the short way from my house to Monument Creek, stroll past where it becomes Fountain Creek, head on to the confluence with Bear Creek, and begin following this tributary west through Bear Creek Regional Park and as it then ascends 4,000 feet of the Pikes Peak massif, you’ll arrive at the creek’s spring, where it seeps from a hillside between Tuckaway and Almagre Mountains.

At some point, the motivating experience of visiting the spring led me to write a line in my haiku/birding notebook. I knew it was the first line of what wanted to become a haiku. But I didn’t know how it ended, and nothing in my notes or in the memory of my first visit seemed to work. I could have made something or other up, but I decided to follow Shiki’s advice and prefer the actual. So I knew that to find out, I’d have to climb up to that spring again. I found a free day and did. From high in a conifer, the loud, distinctive song of a ruby-crowned kinglet on its breeding ground, just as I approached the spring again, allowed me to complete the haiku in terms of both meaning and sound—but with a certain flinty jaggedness in the lineation, too, that perhaps hints how beginnings aren’t always merely neat and easy.

source of the creek
a kinglet’s
breeding song

Dietmar Tauchner

My very first attempts in writing a haiku have been full of generalizations and abstract terms. I didn’t trust in the unique and special qualities of the
environment and in concrete language at all. This would be too simple for a smart writer, I thought.

But after a while I found out that these poems, - I never ever would show these to any reader, even in case I should have them left in some dark corners of my early notebooks - aren’t good to satisfy me or someone else, since they were typical “so what”-poems.

I decided to follow Shiki’s advice to write sketches of my daily life, and wrote my first “real” haiku:

   leaning against an oak
   a stinking garbage bag
   in the spring wind

It worked! Though I wouldn’t write the poem again in this way, I still like the mood and the images. My conclusion of this period until now:

Images may remain, since they combine subject and object, while thoughts mostly won’t.

I learned to trust in my perceptions, rather than in thoughts. I learned to trust in the resonance of all things around. Perception means a conglomerate of feeling, senses & thinking. Haiku for me is the art of perception.

   open poppy vivid the sense of life

Don Baird

Haiku happen. They occur everywhere all of the time. I suppose it’s a matter of me remaining “in tune” enough to recognize that one did occur and then, in addition, relate to its importance, if any. My haiku begin there. It’s simple really, and most often not accompanied with much fuss. I enjoy my surroundings; I’m
aware of its parts whether large or small; and, I find it a fantastic challenge to translate what I witnessed/experienced into a haiku. The pleasure of the moment is important to me and it is the moment of truth for me - of the beginning of my words that carefully form my poem.

Philip Rowland

- in observation/renewed awareness of world and word
- in “the feeling of presence, not concept” (Robert Duncan)
- in other’s writing, particularly where a word or phrase snags and suggests a different take
- in the stimulus of collaboration (linking to another’s poem, kept in mind while conceiving one’s own)
- in the next poem, in the sense in which “the next poem is always the aim of the prior poem” [“and this is how poetry develops, not offering us truth upon truth, but by reminding us how truth is always passing into a lie”] (Michael Heller)
- in the urge to begin again, to encounter the world afresh:

  to find just
  the right weight
  up against the fact
  of what the poem
didn’t create
  (after Oppen)

- in the wish to acknowledge change and uncertainty; for a kind of home in homelessness:
Where do my haiku begin? A quick answer focuses on the mechanics of writing. For me, I keep a journal, started in 1975, in which I write whatever I want. As my interest in haiku and tanka grew, the journal became primarily a haiku and/or tanka journal. As I became more computer-based, my journal moved from pen on paper to a digital journal. On this most simple level, my haiku begins with my writing whatever comes to mind or whatever I’m experimenting with or exploring at the time. I write for myself. Later, I come back to the journal and look for pieces worthy of editing or sharing with friends, family, or strangers (through submissions to editors). My haiku begin as drafts in my journal, with some private entries going through an selection and editing process to get them ready for sharing with others through readings or publication.

Two years ago I wrote a related essay, “Genesis of Haiku: Where Do Haiku Come From?” which was published in Frogpond, 34.1, (Toronto, Canada), Winter, 2011, pages 37-50. This essay is available at <http://www.hsa-haiku.org/frogpond/2011-issue34-1/revelationsunedited.html>. This essay was a mix of personal narrative about my early start as a haiku writer and writing theory on invention as it applies to writing haiku. As a theoretical essay, I considered 5 general theories on the genesis of writing: (1) imitation & the intertextuality of texts, (2) creativity & insight, (3) inspiration by a muse, (4) collaboration & co-creativity, and (5) consonance & dissonance as prime motivations for all human communication.

I am not going to revisit each approach as it applies to where my own haiku begin, but I will give a brief synopsis of these theoretical approaches.

(1) Imitation & intertextuality. Many haiku begin as imitations of other haiku admired or enjoyed by a reader. It is a natural response to write a haiku in response to a haiku that moves us. Therefore, all haiku are, on one level, connected to each other; each haiku has intertextuality relationships with haiku that have come before. Haiku come out of each other when we respond and alter haiku that have
(2) Creativity & insight. In one of his essays on haiku poetics, Raymond Roseliep wrote, “Creation is still more exciting than imitation.” His essay, “This Haiku of Ours,” was published in Bonsai: A Quarterly of Haiku, 1.3, July 1976. Roseliep also wrote: “I believe we are preserving the quintessence of haiku if we do what the earliest practitioners did: use it to express our own culture, our own spirit, our own enlightened experience, putting to service the riches of our land and language, summoning the dexterity of Western writing tools” (p. 12). Haiku begin with the creativity and insight of the writer, using all the writer’s resources (linguistic, mental, social, and literary) to be expressive.

(3) Inspiration by a muse. This Western theory argues that the best writing is simply inspired, a gift of genius from the Gods or a muse. Often associated with Romantic literature and writers, this approach emphasizes “natural born” talent or giftedness as the primary source of our best writing. According to this theory, writers don’t know where their haiku begin or come from, they are just spontaneous bursts of creativity.

(4) Collaboration & co-creativity. This theory argues that all writing and communication come from social collaboration. With this approach, haiku begin with social play, a collaborative act of creation. In view of haiku’s origin as a playful linked-verse tradition, this theory seems very appropriate. Often haiku begin out of the social interaction of a haiku group, a playful process of sharing and creative response. This approach also seems to fit well with the idea of haiku as a co-creative process with the reader. As Makoto Ueda explained in Modern Japanese Haiku, “Any poem demands a measure of active participation on the part of the reader, but this is especially true of haiku. With only slight exaggeration it might be said that the haiku poet completes only one half of his poem, leaving the other half to be supplied in the reader’s imagination.” Modern Japanese Haiku by Makoto Ueda, University of Toronto Press, 1976, p. vii.

(5) Consonance & dissonance. On a broad level, several writing theories claim that consonance and dissonance are the primary motivations for all communication, including writing. Some genres emphasize one of these more than the other, but all communication starts with either consonance or dissonance. Most writing
plays with a human tension between consonance and dissonance or moves from one to the other. Briefly, this means that our underlying motivation to write often comes from either a feeling that something is wrong or broken or needs fixed OR that everything is perfect, wonderful, beautiful and it’s great to just be alive.

In my 2011 essay, I ended with an example of the genesis of one of my haiku, “dirt farmer’s wife” which won an award from Modern Haiku magazine in 1977. In this essay, I will share that example and a few more examples of where some of my haiku began.

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dirt farmer’s wife
at the screen door—
no tractor sound
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Where did this haiku begin?

First of all, I was reading a lot of haiku in anthologies and haiku magazines, including translations by Makoto Ueda, R.H. Blyth, Harold Henderson and Lucien Stryk. I was interested in the idea of writing haiku, and I was especially intrigued by the power of silence and things unsaid in haiku and how haiku could focus on perceptions of emptiness and absence, such as Buson’s imaginative haiku about stepping on the dead wife’s comb. I began trying to write haiku about noticing things not there. I was writing a series of haiku about growing up in western Kansas, where I spent many summers helping my grandparents with the wheat harvest. I was trying very hard, without much success, to write haiku that were not merely descriptive but also emotionally evocative without being overt about the emotion. I wanted the emotion to be suggested by the actions and images within the haiku. Both of my grandparents farmed, but I was very aware of the differences in their lives. My mother’s family was homesteaders who owned a ranch and kept a herd of cattle. My father’s family were cash-rent farmers who depended on the success of each crop to pay the bills. I observed significant social and cultural differences in these two homes.
Of course, none of these things were the genesis of discourse for this haiku. This haiku did not come from these contexts and circumstances. It did not come from theoretical goals such as “objective correlative.” This haiku came from me writing in my journal about a heartfelt memory of my grandmother who died in 1963 when I was nine years old. I remembered her in the farm kitchen made from a porch on the front of a little Sears-Roebuck house. I remembered her in an apron, listening for grandpa to come in for breakfast after his early start in the field. I remembered the feeling on a day when she returned to the screen door several times to listen for his return, to listen for the sound of his tractor, a sound that usually was carried easily across the Kansas fields on the south wind to her house. I realized this was an image that contained a felt memory of her care and concern and love for my grandpa as his biscuits and eggs grew cold on the dining room table. As I wrote this haiku, I wanted it to connect to a broad audience, so that they could imagine it for themselves, so that they too could wonder why she could hear no tractor sound, so that they could continue the emotion inherent in her perceptions at the screen door. To let more readers into this haiku, I didn’t write “my grandma / at the screen door.” I wrote “dirt farmer’s wife” which brought the social context and suggested the urgency of the tractor’s success. I thought this distanced me as well—presenting her as more alone and isolated on the prairie, concerned about her absent companion. This haiku is not about being a grandson. It is about a wife watching over and caring for her farmer husband. I wanted to end with “no tractor sound” so that the haiku would be forever unresolved, left open to the reader to imagine the rest of the story.

all our canoes touch
at the north mouth of the lake
more water lilies
Merit Award in the English Haiku Division, 15th Ito En “Oh-I, Ocha” New Haiku Contest. Award haiku are published in *Jiyu-Katari [Free Talking]*, (Tokyo, Japan) September, 2004.

Where did this haiku begin?
This is a haiku that came out of a sense of consonance and wonder about the beauty of communion with loved ones and nature. I wrote this haiku on a family reunion in Glacier National Park in Montana. I enjoyed writing in my journal about the grandeur of these mountains, but more important to me was the sense of family coming together. So this haiku came from a collaborative social spirit . . . cousins, uncles, aunts gathering from around the country at pristine glacier lake. We canoed all morning, through slight rapids and gentle bends of the river, agreeing to meet up at the mouth of the lake for lunch. Coming into the lake out of the river was like entering the sky after passing through the trees and boulders of the mountain river. Whereas we had been somewhat boisterous and laughing down the river, now we gathered, almost with reverence. There was a great calm expanse of water and sky. Very beautiful. We felt no need to talk or shout out to each other. We all just quieted down, so much so that we could hear the bump of each canoe joining the cluster of others. Also gathered at the mouth of the lake, more so than any other part of the lake, were water lilies. They too clung to each other, providing support and holding against the slight current of the river coming into the great expanse of water and sky. Our canoes were surrounded by water lilies. We waited and enjoyed, for a moment, their daily life. This haiku came from that peaceful coming together.

tai chi
with my wife . . .
morning glories open


Where did this haiku begin?

This haiku is another haiku that comes out of a feeling of social consonance, a feeling of synchronicity with my wife. At Millikin University we have a wonderful theatre professor who teaches movement, and she teaches Tai Chi at our local YMCA. I’m a bit of a klutz, but my wife, Shirley, has grace and good kinesthetic memory. So when we joined the Tai Chi class, she was a natural while I was like the Tin Man trying to keep up. Eventually, I got better at moving my chi,
although I never lost my dependence of following the teacher or Shirley’s lead. So together, in synchronicity with my wife, I gained some grace with Tai Chi. This became a wonderful way to share the start of our days. I like this haiku because it captures our companionship and shared life energy. We share the chi. Of course, it is even better to do Tai Chi outside in the fresh air with companions, who like the morning glories, open up into full bloom and life-full-ness in the morning sunshine. This is a haiku about love and feeling vibrantly alive in morning glory.

This edited version of the haiku also comes from my playfulness with language. In writing and editing this haiku, I wanted the expression and subsequent rhythm to convey the calm, steady movement of Tai Chi. I wanted this haiku to imitate in style the graceful sign-language appearance of people doing Tai Chi. These movements can pause at times, like a morning glory open to the sunshine.

school’s out—
a boy follows his dog
into the woods

_School’s Out: Selected Haiku of Randy Brooks_, Press Here, (Foster City, CA), 1999.

Where did this haiku begin?

This title poem from my collection of selected haiku, School’s Out, came from my recognition about different types of consciousness—the analytical thinking that occupies my mind as a teacher and administrator and the intuition, spontaneous playful consciousness as a haiku writer. I learn and thrive from both types of consciousness, but as I said in my author introduction, “When school is out, I get to step down from my analytical frame of mind as a professor, and spend more time in a reflective or meditative state of mind that is more conducive to writing haiku.” This haiku comes from a feeling of letting go—letting go of direction, plans, to do lists. It is also about the companionship of a boy and his dog, how they can explore the woods together. It is both a breaking out of the confines (dissonance) of school to the freedom and endless possibilities (consonance) of the woods. I think the dog has already picked up the scent of
some great adventure. Let’s see where it goes!

    the homestead cedars . . .
    our toy cars follow a dirt road
    through fallen needles


Where did this haiku begin?

This haiku comes from a celebration of the playful, creative spirit of my ancestors. It recalls many summer visits to my grandpa’s ranch in western Kansas. My great-grandfather homesteaded the ranch in 1885 and my grandfather was born there in 1888. My ancestors built or cultivated everything to be seen, except for the buffalo grass and cactus. They planted a couple of rows of cedar trees along the lane, slightly downhill from the windmill and its horse tank. No matter how hot it was outside, or how windy, under the cedar trees was fragrant, cool shade. The fallen cedar needles were dry and soft, a great place for grandsons to build a fort and hangout. This haiku comes from a sense of comfort, an oasis in a harsh land. It also comes from the appreciation of imagination and playfulness . . . about building things out of the materials at hand. My brother and I built a ranch in the cedar needles, with a toy tractor in the field and a dirt road for our toy cars. This haiku came from that feeling of being at home on grandpa’s homestead and imitating our ancestors’ work to create a home on the prairie.

    creek water warm . . .
    I swing the grapevine
    up to my cousin


Where did this haiku begin?

Pure consonance! The pleasure of playfulness with close cousins—the joy of sharing the fun of a discovered impromptu swing at the swimming hole. This
is a haiku of pure summer playfulness—swinging over the muddy creek water, shouting a Tarzan yell and letting go. It comes from the comfort of the warmth of the creek water, and the social comfort of sharing this with cousins. Technically, I was trying to play with perspective and movement. The haiku starts in the warm creek water, but the focus moves to the cousin up on the creek bank. The grapevine connects us, with both the narrator and the cousin gripping the rough-textured grapevine.

cool haiku stone . . .
black ant down and out
of the kanji


Where did this haiku begin?

Literally, this haiku came from a journey to Japan in 1996 to meet several international haiku poets, editors and scholars. The haiku was written in my journal upon visiting a famous haiku by Shiki carved in stone in Matsuyama, Japan. I was a stranger in a strange land, so I employed a literary device in my journal, a haigo. I wrote a series of “black ant” haiku and tanka with the tanka being published by AHA Online Press as “Black Ant’s Journey to Japan.” This online collection is available at <http://www.ahapoetry.com/blackant.htm>.

Figuratively, this haiku comes from an awareness of the impossibility of translation. It captures a tension between consonance and dissonance—the pleasures of experiencing so many new sites, new perceptions, new sensations, new artistic works and the frustration of being so limited by language and lack of cultural understanding. Like an ant, I use my feelings and enjoy the presence of things. Unlike an ant, I wish I understood so much more. This haiku comes from so many ironies in this experience. How can we read kanji? How long does it take to learn how to read the brush strokes, in this case, brush strokes carved into stone. This haiku stone is Shiki’s ephemeral haiku memorialized as a stone
monument near the location where it originated. I could touch the stone, feel the carved strokes. Like an ant, I could crawl over the words with my fingers, feel the coolness of the shaded stone. The ant makes no sense of the kanji, but simply passes down and out of it, experiencing the shapes. The haiku stone requires translation into words, into my own language. I could ponder the translation of the haiku, and again try to feel it. Perhaps the location of the haiku stone provides a similar landscape or perspective of the haiku poet? I touch the stone, feel the words and like the black ant, move on.

after all these years
she asks about her mother . . .
I put on another log

Mainichi Haiku Competition Award, Mainichi Daily News, Tokyo, 1997.

Where did this haiku begin?

This haiku that also begins with dissonance and suggests some hopeful movement towards consonance. We live with so many mysteries, so many things untold and unspoken because they may be painful. When a child grows old enough to start asking difficult questions, sometimes we have to pause and attempt answers. It will probably require a story or several stories of long ago. The exact story doesn’t matter in this haiku, but the reflective pause of the father or grandfather or guardian is where this haiku comes from. Here the haiku pause, the cut, becomes a rush of memories and thoughts and feelings . . . hesitations . . . as the narrator stokes the fire with another log, buying a little more time to think. This will take awhile. The fire will need to last and not die down soon. The questioner has evidently been wondering and has come of age to imagine “about her mother.” There is some implied distance or loss between the asker and the mother, and this is the moment of trying to find some connections and understanding of long-held unknowns. She is seeking some peace or resolution about what happened. The scene is a simple question while the narrator tends the fire. The underlying drama and emotion is one of love and tending of growth for a young person coming into adulthood. The haiku remains open to readers because it is about this moment of seeking answers and the caring, trusted
Where did this haiku begin?

This haiku comes from a perceived sense of movement and suspended animation. Time seems to freeze and stand still, waiting by the side of the road for the funeral procession to pass, but nature continues to move on. I wanted to write this haiku in such a way that the reader could position themselves from a variety of perspectives. The reader can be anyone except for the dead person in the casket. You can imagine being in the hearse or a car in the procession, looking as the blowing snowflakes are visible in the headlights, or you can be on the sidelines watching the procession go by.

Most interesting for me is the “slow motion” feel of everything. Funeral processions don’t hurry, and the snowflakes are coming down but not in a flurry. They are visible in the headlights and lively, but there is no rush to the cemetery. There is also the contrast of the black hearse and the white snowflakes . . . a time of death and the ritual of the procession goes against the flow of the snowflakes covering everything white. This will be a stark black and white funeral. Formal and quiet. A time to consider the ephemeral nature of life . . . in the blowing snowflakes.

Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years edited by Jim Kacian, Allan Burns and Philip Rowland. W.W. Norton & Company (New York, NY),
Where did this haiku begin?

News stories, photographs, war stories, relatives home from Iraq and Afghanistan. This haiku comes from my attempt to portray the tension between ordinary playfulness and gambling with life-threatening risks. Soldiers are used to taking chances, of gambling with precious life. They are often in dangerous locations, with walls that must be protected, areas to be secured . . . against an ever-shifting enemy. Yet beneath the razor wire . . . they play, and, of course, the play in this case is gambling with dice. Sometimes you’re lucky, sometimes you’re not. Take your chances. Let the dice roll. Put your money down. Your money or your life. Razor wire is not friendly, not a fence to keep something in; it is intended to keep a dangerous enemy out. It often fails. You lose. In the darkness of an alley, another enemy lurks. Out of the public eye, away from the light of the street, the soldiers are tossing dice. Who wins? Who loses? Chances. What are the odds of survival, to odds of coming out ahead?

two lines in the water . . .
not a word between
father and son

Where did this haiku begin?

Most directly, this haiku came from a favorite folk song, “My Father’s Only Son”
by songwriter Carrie Newcomer. In this song, Carrie sings about her father having three daughters, so she became his only son, especially because she was the only one who would go fishing with him. The chorus is “You never talk much in a fishin’ boat / ‘Cause it just scares the fish away / You just give it time and watch your line”. In the song, one of the key lines is that the daughter has some significant news, that “his only son was expecting a child.” So they actually have lots to talk about! I wanted to imitate this admired song and write a haiku about not talking in a fishing boat.

I like this song because it is about the importance of just being together, just spending time together. No talking necessary. I wrote my haiku version starting with a somewhat abstract image of “two lines in the water” and did not want to hint at some sort of significant news. I wanted to focus on the “not talking” but leave the haiku more open-ended to the reader’s imagined response. Some readers imagine this as not talking because there is some tension or problem between the father and son, so that if they talk it would destroy the fun of just being together. Other readers have told me they view this scene as being about not talking because everything is so perfect, no words are necessary. Words would just detract from the beauty and peace of sharing this time together. In other words, depending on the reader, this haiku draws readers into consonance or dissonance and I love that what the reader brings paints such a different resulting feeling. For me, I just like that status, that point of silent being where the relationship for this moment is presence, not words. The father and son are connected without saying anything. They are in sync. Their lines rest in tandem out into the water.

cookie crumbs . . .
she returns to the web page
where they met


Where did this haiku begin?
The Internet leaves a trail of where you’ve been—contemporary cookie crumbs. A history or cache of places visited enable you to return. Perhaps, in this case, the electronic cookie crumbs are postings on Facebook or a forum resulting in emails exchanged. In this haiku I sought the idea of trying to look back on a relationship through this electronic record. Remembering the excitement of meeting, of getting to know each other. If we consider the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale, cookie crumbs were left intentionally so that they could find their way home after a daring adventure into the mysteries of the woods. So this haiku also links to that fairy tale. (Another form of intertextuality with a fairy tale loaded with dissonance.) Perhaps she is trying to get back to who she was before she met, back to some safe “old home” now lost. There is both a sense of nostalgia and loss in this haiku. She can return to the web page, but it is no longer active, no longer who she is. It is now just a memory of where she was . . . where they first met. She has moved on and the web page is a digital ghost, an electronic artifact of her past. It is an old web page that has either changed since she last visited or has become dated and no longer relevant, except as a memory.

I also like that this haiku because it has very little sensory presence. At best, we can imagine her sitting at a computer. Computer screens are visual and provide some aural elements, but they are ultimately flat and lacking full sensory presence. Somehow, the computer screen context makes this scene more artificial and detached from our human need to touch and connect. There is no wabi to an old web page, no human touch. It’s just an old html file pretending to be something of lasting value.

October light
I open my ribs
 to pray


Where did this haiku begin?
I will end with a haiku which exemplifies the movement and tension between
dissonance and consonance. This haiku comes out of a year of hardship and longing for things to get better. The October light is a thin light of a grey sky that is chilly. It is a forewarning of the coming cold of winter. This light doesn’t warm us up. Yes, it is light, but seemingly colorless. It’s hard to see through the gray sky to the sun. Everything seems muted and half-alive. That’s the context, the opening of this haiku.

The second half comes from the importance of breathing, how our ribs expand and compress to breathe. For me, this connects to the sense of the spirit moving within us . . . how the spirit is held and released through our breathing, protected beneath our rib cage. The spirit is alive within us, but in this haiku it is constrained. When we are troubled, we feel like the weight of the world is bearing down on us making it difficult to breathe. We just can’t take a satisfying breath. Our breaths are shallow and frequent but not fulfilling. The spirit is caged in the ribs and can’t get out, can’t connect to God. Like the muted sun in the October light, the narrator of this haiku can’t breathe, can’t pray.

At last the narrator sighs, takes a deep breath, and opens his lungs . . . to pray, again. It’s going to be a long prayer, with so much held in for so many days. This haiku is a breaking out of the spirit from the cage of being constrained in our all too human shells.

Aubrie Cox

Philosophically, my haiku begin with the desire to create and share a moment, art, imagination, and good conversation. But as for the actual process and origin of individual poems, I would say, they often do begin within a “haiku moment”—I see something while walking, driving, looking out the window that does make me “ah!” and however fleeting the moment actually is, it lingers. Other times, though, it can happen more subtly as I come across a word or phrase (or sometimes just a sound) while reading or listening to music. Sometimes it’s in a photograph or piece of art (sometimes my own, sometimes not). Regardless the source, as I feel something stir in me, the words start to come.
But even though I may start stringing words together at that moment, the haiku in its entirety or final form may not happen for some time (though it’s a happy day when it all falls into place at once!). I may get half the poem at the moment and have to search for the other for days or weeks; sometimes they never get finished at all even though the moment remains in the back of my mind. For example, a week ago I saw what looked like the end of a rainbow touch down in an open field. A little spark went off inside me as I thought, “Haiku!” I’ve fiddled with a few lines here and there and haven’t found anything satisfactory, but who knows, this poem may still find its shape.

Richard Gilbert

silence, what is
to be mentioned:
as far as how to speak where things concatenate
seems to be there is no me to be
I say “I prefer,” the preference for a given word,
definition of rhetoric:
to persuade. silence
is what I see, the power of symbols to create reality. it serves no purpose
to belittle language, what is silence
for a languaged being.
options.
an argument against.
opting out.
co-opting in.
choosing “not.”
choosing not to knot or unknot.
no having to cut silence in two.
before / after.
craving something.
just a minute or moment.
between space and fear.
not having to compose a list.
not having to beg a word for prayer.
mostly not.
not that anyone would care to listen.
not a performance.
not silence, not the choice not to utter.
not shutup not invisible not mine.
that’s what i like; when i prefer not
to communicate.
you remember the shapes of silence
as time transmits space, time unburdens itself
time does not dream or have a past or a book
time fuck shit piss blue mine love mend leaf kiss must call
an instrumental four letters, analogous
silence because I want you to find out
silence because I want you to look
silence because I want you to take the time
not to speak, silence because the ear
is made more sensitive to pressure variation
surrendering to the plenum of acoustic space
alive with endless reflection; all what has
been said, to rest to rest to rest, at times
silence is like this repeating itself
a book with pages of folded knowledge

silence has levels of silence,
resting silence
thoroughly resting silence
completely thoroughly resting silence
silence which is neither thought nor unthought
silence which has no name
so with a will I need to be
so I must call to you
without sound.

Haiku as groupings of trees

it was in the trees that the smell of the air came through her writing
never at night in the radiator sounds of home-baking and old bones
along the slice of water and sky where beneath the surface a poem
glides along. time stopped for the present. a moment or two. then
with new determination an ecology of selves shining and new
what was in the trees to begin with just before and just after love
when he had almost saved her. that she could write.

as a body born of words, inasmuch as clinging into forms thoughts
as a body bones of words, in arrears as forms of what the use of
words to which the world happens to be. how my furthering
unfurls against moving horizons as she writes preoccupations.
not everyone is safe, who can be saved, who can be safe and
these days our world tilts while I hold the sun without capture:
backlit skirted pantsuit in umbral fortitude descending the nautilus day.

taste the asian pear, gingko berry, the seed hidden within.
moon cradled you recall the voice of another I might be the distance
measured by drawing out string from here to there: do you remember
someone will remind you one day will say not I am here but I am there
that the thine that becomes the subject of one stroke of genius no as-if
about it, on the beach by the trees between two moments. that is me.
Commentary on track

I don’t know that I can write “where do your haiku begin” in a prosaic manner. I seem to psychologically strongly resist the thought -- so I’m glad you left the form and genre style open, as to comments. A lot of my writing is about some kind of contemplation of origins and poetic/consciousness process-experience (in my fantasy). Referring to the two poetic statements I sent to you, I feel they are sincere or honest in addressing the question, in that their answers have arisen as unintended consequences, coming to your question at a tangent. In both writings, I later published a line (of four-letter words from “silence”), and several lines from “trees” as haiku, with little or no alteration.

As praxis, the answer of “where do your haiku come from” is “they came from there” (in these instances). In the midst of composition of (such) a longer piece, when writing those (later-extracted) haiku lines, I was sometimes partially consciously possibly aware of perhaps composing something with the power and form of haiku then and there in it; like hey, that cuts well, says it; yeah, Daddy-O. Yet it was after the fact of writing, later (much), working from an editorial head – like almost everyone, I’ve come to realize – that I saw there was autonomy. Luckily Roadrunner Haiku Journal is open-minded regarding experiments—the fact of R’r’s existence can’t be overstated; I felt encouraged, knowing there was potentially a place for them, a collegial, even receptive audience—unlike the longer poems themselves, which were posted as notional letters to a few friends; kind of like nightstands with doilies.

This compositional method isn’t typical; it’s just something I thought to try. The pieces were written within a week of each other; and I was thinking about haibun; the idea of embedding haiku into longer poetic forms; loosening the genre-concept of poem versus prose; hardly new ideas. Yet if writing for the reader always ends in ‘goodbye’; to give that goodbye gist is something like “mono no aware” -- that cutting moment of resolution, wholeness/emptiness in presence/absence -- where a world breathes, dissolves, and conjunctives such as ‘and’; an abiding ‘with’ or an ‘or’, or ‘however’ may exit the palette (so, an elemental palette?), along with similes like ‘like being’: A flowering world,
lacking simile? Isn’t language always “like” something? Isn’t a poem, read, heard or sung a dynamic simulacrum? Simulacrum, yet paradoxically, the real thing. It’s good to ask the question, though as a self as a national park as a managed trail as an air there I don’t immediately find the ferry. Haiku take us here to there; wee ferries of the invisible or surely certain ineffable secret fantasies. Plus cargo. Like any good instrument that places the cosmos in your hands, it takes time to work the tools; the payoff is they can effect novel navigations to near and foreign shores. That’s why I like reading excellent haiku, because haiku always begin there. And goodbye.

**Kristen Deming**

Where does my haiku come from? It comes from a love of the form, from reading a lot of haiku over the years, and from a long struggle to write haiku. Sometimes I feel like the snail trying to climb Mt. Fuji!

Writing haiku is taking up the challenge of expressing in words and images what is often inexpressible. It is a encounter with the world, a search for what feels true, beautiful, and what uplifts and inspires.

My haiku come from a pleasurable anticipation of play and discovery. I always hope to find fresh inspiration and to capture something that pleases me and that will find a response in the reader.

Journalist and poetry lover Bill Moyers once wrote “Poetry is news: news of the mind, news of the heart.” It begins with who we are and the sum total of our life experiences to date.

**George Swede**

I wrote down the following reasons as they arose on June 15, 2013, between 9:27 and 10:02 a.m. (with a few additions between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m.)
From a morning cup of coffee while sitting on a sofa with an inner city view thru seven windows.

From childhood years spent hiking with my dog thru orchards, evergreen forests and across grassy hills dotted with cow skulls.

From gazing into the windows of a locked farmhouse whose Japanese owners had been forced to leave immediately for internment camps during WW II.

From a Myers-Briggs assessment of my personality as suited for writing poetry.

From the Nazis shooting my father and dumping his body into a common grave.

From the Russians shipping my paternal grandparents from Riga to somewhere in Siberia where they died.

From the memory of being nursed by a young woman who cared for me when the Nazis imprisoned my mother for six months.

From a need to seize the moment.

From getting teased for wearing lederhosen on my first day of school in Oyama, British Columbia.

From learning English as a third language.

From studying Japanese and Chinese history for two years at the University of British Columbia.

From taking LSD at Indiana University in 1965, when it was still legal.

From learning about the psychology of creativity and the psychology of art.

From a desire to be original.

From the inability to write a novel.

From the study of Makoto Ueda’s *Modern Japanese Haiku*. (University of Toronto Press, 1976).

From being together with Anita Krumins for over four decades.
From writing down the comments of my two stepsons, Andris and Juris, when they were preschoolers, the age of linguistic genius.

From praise for my poetry.

From the reflections natural to old age.

From being told that poets have no status in society.

Alan Summers

My haiku began in two countries, first back around 1991 in England, and then later in 1993 when Ross Clark’s Local Seasoning: A Haiku Journal was launched. Ross Clark, Australian Book Review Poetry Prize winner, had his haiku book announced by the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Queensland, of which I’m now a Life Member.

The first experience, when something called a haiku was read out, it left me cold, and for all I know it wasn’t a haiku. There was no explanation, it was just dropped into a reading by a local English writing/reading poetry group, and it was never raised again.

Thankfully I was heading out to Australia, and by chance discovered the Queensland Poetry Association (now defunct) and Fellowship of Australian Writers, Queensland, still going strong. It was the FAWQ newsletter that announced Ross Clark’s book and a forthcoming workshop. I was able to buy the book, and I became hooked by its simplicity and accessibility. The evening’s event following the workshop further hooked me as Ross Clark performed his haiku differently than I had supposed with while reading his book. That delighted me, seeing there was far more to haiku than appeared at face value, and I decided to know more, research more. By chance the little local library in the Ipswich town outside Brisbane had two copies of The Haiku Handbook, plus other books on haiku. The Haiku Handbook consolidated the growing realisation that the haiku approach would be a strong factor in my poetry life,
and it has been ever since.

That’s the background, in a very small nutshell, as to the first set of factors. After I read The Haiku Handbook through twice, cover to cover in little over a week, I joined the Haiku Society of America, and subscribed to Modern Haiku. Bill Higginson’s Seasonings Column in the HSA newsletter was something I looked forward to every quarter, and both Frogpond and Modern Haiku magazines were devoured page by page and then back again before I started my own attempts at haiku. I was published in Frogpond by Elizabeth Searle Lamb, and in Modern Haiku by Bob Spiess, as well as Francine Porad in Brussels Sprout, then Bill’s call out for haiku for The Haiku Seasons Project culminated into my first major publication in an anthology, the classic English-language saijiki called The Haiku World. I had already sent out submissions of haiku to every haiku magazine that was around during that time so I had nothing to send, but a stroke of magical luck was about to happen, and that was perhaps up to a million Flying Foxes were to fly over Ipswich (Queensland) through a blood-red sky, very Hammer Horror/Dracula fashion. Two of my Flying Foxes haiku were accepted by Bill Higginson which later he told me how much he’d enjoyed them, that it had made his day, that day.

I have to thank first of all Ross Clark of Queensland for his timing, and then Bill Higginson and The Haiku Handbook, then Francine Porad for publishing my first haiku, and Bob Spiess sending me so many notes and comments and believing in my work, followed by Elizabeth Searle Lamb, all great American names in haiku literature. Then back to Bill for his Haiku Seasons Project, and The Haiku World. Those people made me keep going with haiku, and still do, although sadly those Americans have all gone from our lives.

above the mountain
earth’s shadow
blocks a moon

Note: eclipse of the moon, Queensland, Australia, Friday 4th June 1993
Publications credits: Frogpond (Summer 1994) ed. Elisabeth Searle Lamb; Fellowship of Australian Writers, Queensland, Scope magazine Focus feature on myself (paid feature) (1994); Micropress Yates (1994);
That’s where my haiku began as a writer, but where do my haiku begin? They started in the farm country of Queensland, getting up at 4am everyday to feed the horses, then go cycling, and never missing a sunrise, accompanied by the neighbour’s dog. This would be followed by either several hours being quiet on my Queenslander veranda in total silence, except when I adopted two Murray Maggie fledgling birds who would sit on my shoulders as I filled my notebooks. Or going into landcare duty on a big project reclaiming a couple of thousand acres, where I’d be the first there, and sit by a billabong (yes, really) for several hours around dawn to sun up, and before other volunteers came in. Haiku and an incredible abundance of birds and other wildlife, and the flora as well as the fauna, kept me busy writing long and short poems off and on throughout the day.

In those days I needed complete silence other than a Riflebird call, or the cicadas, now I’m in an urban setting, often plugged into contemporary dance music. Either way, what I now know is a writer zoning in, was and still is occurring. That space between silence and noise when something gets written, and later I do not recognise the poem as having been written by me, because I couldn’t possibly try to write like that if I tried. It’s a strange sensation, akin to an iPhone game I play against the odds, not thinking I’ll lose or win, it’s a blinking out of normal space and time. It does its thing so I don’t overanalyse it, or break it down to repeat the whys and wherefores, because I’m not concerned with churning out haiku to a template. Each one of those haiku I’ve written from the early failures to the successes, mostly, of today, are both extraordinary gifts, and there’ll be a time when it will end, either due to death or dementia. Time is short, so haiku on, to misquote the Wayne’s World guys.

this small ache and all the rain too robinsong
Eve Luckring:

Honestly, I don’t know if I know.
If I try to trace it, from something/somewhere beyond me that tingles and quivers something/somewhere inside my body, hangs on a few words, and then slips away again.

In the Between.

Where language becomes physical.

Where memory meets the present.

Where the body meets the world.

Where the world becomes spirit.

Where the heart is mind and the mind is heart.

Where knowing becomes forgetting.

Michael McClintock

Personal Notes on Where Haiku Begin

I remember how the world was at age six --- a bloom of red geraniums. I lived and slept for twenty-five years in a crummy room; now my fortunes have changed and everything surprises me.

My haiku begin in memory. An experience an hour ago --- or days, weeks, months, years ago. As a little bump of something felt, with maybe a word or two stuck or adhering to it. A memory with a tactile presence to it: raw material, pre-lingual. I think it's probably something my subconscious has already done a lot of work on.

The haiku begins when I begin dredging it up. Meditation is my dredging tool. I sniff for words I can adhere to the memory . . . and then I start writing the words, just pencil on paper, keeping some, crossing out others, again and again, all kept in notebooks. Layering one memory on another happens, too. This process can take a minute or it can take much, much more time --- hours or days. I have
returned to unfinished haiku after many years.

Of course, in another sense, haiku have no beginning, they have no ending. They are sliced out of our experience of material things in space-time, our stream-of-consciousness.

But, still, a haiku is an artifact of that stream-of-consciousness, isn’t it? A deliberate act of the will to isolate, cut-out, and give that little bump of experience a linguistic texture — a kind of translation of it that can be read and shared. As an artifact, once read and experienced, it goes into our memory. And there it exists as a kind of portal back to that other experience, where it originated. The ink on the paper isn’t the real poem, it is the poem’s physical tracing, its representation in language. When we read a haiku our mind peels it off the paper and transforms it into another kind of energy; it’s that energy that goes into our memory as “the poem.” That is how a haiku becomes a metaphysical reality. Finally, it comes down to finding out what words can do, full of holes as they are. I used to think that haiku began in the external phenomenal world but, no, that no longer is my thinking.

I wrote this poem a few years ago, trying to get at the subject in a more direct way:

I’ve this memory ---
riding my father’s shoulders
into the ocean,
the poetry of things
before I could speak

Peter Yovu

Where Do My Haiku Begin?
A bird. And where a bird begins.
A wing and where.
I wear an atmosphere a bird breathes with me.
A well. And where a well begins.
A pebble and a sow. No, keep going . . .
a pebble and a sound. A sound
sown in. I own
a needle and an atmosphere.
I stitch in time.

The night and where by light
I am undone and done again.

A word. And where a word begins.

A wind and where.
The wind begins.

A shoreline and a line of fire.
A howl and where a whale begins
to find a sound.

The unfathomable

fall of lip on lip.
A bird, a pebble and a sea.
The benediction of a cloud.
A cloud and where.
Where rain begins
to wear stone down.

Surrender. A tender
twenty dollar bill forgotten in
last winter’s coat and found
where all my words begin
to fail.

I’m falling through the sound
of snow about to fall
and where the sea begins
not gray not blue unseen
a bird among the shaken reeds
a wind around the field within
the notes that take me

Here.

Chris Gordon

FIRST RESPONSE

My haiku begin about 3,000 years ago in a wasp’s nest in Iberian Gaul. My
haiku begin about 2,000 years ago in the writing desk of Martial, known for
his epigrams and fits of melancholy. My haiku begin about 100 years ago in
the phlegm-soaked handkerchief of a dying poet who loves persimmons. I hate
persimmons.

My haiku begin where my ability to explain things fails. My haiku begin in
discarded trash left on the pavement in the rain. My haiku begin where thoughts
and emotions hide in common everyday objects. My haiku begin when I pick up
a pen and defile the perfect emptiness of a page.

My haiku begin when I fall down a flight of stairs and spend three years in bed.
My haiku begin when someone else says “yes.” My haiku begin when my father
dies and I realize he was never there.

My haiku begin when I notice I’m in love with insects. My haiku begin when I
notice I’m in love with the moon. My haiku begin in the place where you discard
your panties.
My haiku begin when I have nothing left to say. My haiku begin with an article because this is how I talk. My haiku begin in lowercase because it’s not a sentence it’s a poem.

My haiku begin to imitate themselves, so my haiku begin to change. My haiku never begin and so they never end. My haiku begin to bore me, so I write other kinds of poems. My haiku begin to get noticed, so I let them go their own way.

My haiku begin with objects. My haiku begin with fragments. My haiku begin with sensations and ideas. My haiku begin with no expected outcomes. My haiku begin with you.

SECOND RESPONSE

“The Haiku Moment” or “Is it Representation or is it Art?”

Sometimes I think our haiku are so focused on exactitude, verisimilitude, that we lose the opportunity for storytelling, for open meanings. We get stuck in the process of representation and miss the subtle opportunities for innuendo, for hinting at the narrative fragments our haiku may possess if we change our lenses and allow for uncertainty. Here it’s difficult to resist the language of film. Are we tourists taking snapshots? Are we artists composing still lifes? Are we storytellers suggesting complicated meanings?

On the other hand, like the contents of our diaries or dreams, the snapshot or home-movie can become openly aesthetic once it is separated from its intended audience. Prior to that it is banal and pedestrian. Once it is unencumbered by those pretensions it becomes more than merely documentary. It becomes meaningful as an artifact. Artifacts cannot resist our curiosity. They make us tell stories.

THIRD RESPONSE

I never know how people are going to feel about my poems. I’ve been embarrassed later by some of the work of mine that editors have chosen to publish. I also have
personal favorites that no one else has ever noticed. There is one haiku I love to
death that others have appreciated as well:

a loveletter to the butterfly gods with strategic misspellings

It came fully formed into my mind without any warning. It just sounded so
beautiful and mysterious and profound. Who sent it to me? That's up to you. I
will say that it arrived in the midst of a fit of writing. I didn't just sit down with
my pen and pull it out of thin air.

Much of my best writing, in my mind, occurs because of the process of writing
itself. Hence my belief in the muse. While I have chanced upon compelling
images and written a haiku on the spot, these poems later often have a flatness
to them that prevents me from taking them any further. Often it is my intention
that gets in the way of a satisfying piece of art.

As my writing practice has developed over the years this has been an enduring
phenomenon, and there was a time when I discarded the bulk of my work
because it seemed to lack purpose or focus. These qualities are necessary with
certain types of writing, but seem to get in the way of the process of discovery
that occurs with the creation of compelling art.

Where do my haiku begin? Everywhere and nowhere.

Peter Newton

Where do your haiku begin?

My haiku begin on foot, most often. I walk each day as most of us do, to get from
Point A to Point B. But I make it a point of my daily writing practice to walk
from Point A to wherever I end up. Of course, my dog helps lead me astray. On
these walks come poems. Not always, but often. Many unformed, rough-edged,
mundane observations but a few beginnings worth taking back to the shop for
polishing. All this takes time, which I would argue is the key ingredient in most quality writing. Even if a poem or two lands fully formed at your feet, it is the result of the patient work that comes before.

All poetry comes from some passionate need to give voice to the unexpressed.

Haiku happen at just the right speed.

The haiku I choose to pursue often begin with a phrase, a word, a feeling. Each seems to lure me closer. Haiku are the Xs on my life map in the making. The result of some voracious need to wander. A treasure hunt for language. What must be said? What has to be shown? Then . . . how to sing it.

My haiku begin where there’s a void. A silence. An open space that might fit the poem taking shape in my head. To be honest, I have no idea where my haiku begin. The worlds I discover in my haiku are the moments I’d like to remember. Life bookmarks. I place one here, drop another one there like bread crumbs just in case I need to find my way back. At the same time, my haiku begin by getting lost.

Garry Gay

Where do my haiku begin? I would have to say at the beginning.

As I live my daily life I trip over haiku, one step at a time.

All haiku are ah ha moments and that is the true beginning for me.

Often it is something I see everyday and suddenly I realize I am seeing it in a new light like never before. That spark of realization is the beginning of the haiku, the found moment. I know it’s more than just a casual relationship, but the awareness of my surroundings seen with a new keen eye.

Sometimes in photography it is said that a photo taken at the peak of the action is the “decisive moment.” In haiku I think it is the perceived moment. You say to yourself ah ha!
begin
at the beginning
glistening maggot

Everything from nothing, nothing from everything: the question as the answer.
The question ‘Where do your haiku begin’ is, some might say, at the heart of all things, a question within the greater question of all things. Gauguin dovetailed the two - creativity and essential meaning - together best when he said:
Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?
And he said it as a creative act.

snowbird a/k/a Merrill Ann Gonzales

Since I’m not a word person... I seem to have impressed images in the place words should have been forming as a child... I mostly have my “haiku” awareness’ in image form... but every once in awhile, as I come across the way a line forms or the light strikes something etc. words come to mind and startle me. This sometimes happen from exploring deep psychological paradoxes but most of the time it happens in the outdoors, or while I’m walking. It usually happens on a very pragmatic mission, such as walking to the store for groceries. The intrusion into my ho-hum day with something as unremarkable as the milkweed I pass, at the point of turning to seed.... or the time a bluebird landed on a milkweed as the seeds shed their silk. That last image turned into a haiga that was published in REEDS: Contemporary Haiga some years ago. It spoke to me of taking new paths... and so I did. A very strange things happens often. I end up living my haiku. There is something of a premonition about them for me.
Where do your haiku begin?

Where do I begin to answer this question? Doesn’t seem like there’s a single place or time, but many of each. Off the top of my head, I am thinking of coming across zen telegrams by paul reps when I was a teenager over 20 years ago. That’s how the title and his name appeared on the book I saw: in lower case letters. I was struck by that. I hadn’t read anything by cummings yet. But I was struck by the brevity of the poems. Didn’t know you could do that. I wrote some down in my notebook, which I still have. Of course the poems had illustrations with them, which I thought was neat. Not really illustrations, but simple lines or brush marks that were like their own kind or words. Like words you couldn’t say. Or if you had to say them, you’d have to use your elbows or eyebrows or something to say them.

At that time I didn’t know about haiku. So I wasn’t thinking these reps things were like haiku or anything like that. They just had an immediate charge to them. They were what they were. That’s a cliche, but I sometimes think it’s kind of rare that a poem, or a haiku, is what it is, and is not pretending to be anything else, or copying anything else. Strange, but rare.

He called them telegrams. That part I could figure, the zen part was new to me. The charge, the electricity in a telegram. The urgency in it. I guess the zen part is something about things being what they are.

I tried to write a few things like that myself. Threw it all away, couldn’t do it like reps.

Now I can say he was influenced by haiku, and by the Beats writing haiku. But I really like the way he found his own thing with it.

So that is one part of where my haiku begin.

I don’t know where my old notebook is right now, but I memorized two of reps’ telegrams. (Pretty easy to remember actually).
cucumber
unaccountably
cucumbering

and this one I don’t remember how the lines go exactly

please
telephone me
in the rice field

I enjoyed thinking about this. Don’t know if it answers the question really.

Thank you

Don Baird

“Sometimes in photography it is said that a photo taken at the peak of the action is the “decisive moment.” In haiku I think it is the perceived moment.” - Gary Gay

Yes, this is what I’m also inferencing - haiku are everywhere and it’s the sudden moment of perception of it by me that begins my haiku. Awareness, to me, seems first. It is awareness of the activity of all things and in specific, one activity that catches my attention that is the causal action of my writing.

Being aware of what is on my mind, what is in my environment, and what is in my imagination is key - to me. The rest; well, that is the problem of how to write it - to portray what I experienced, felt, and understood. Possibly for discussion down the line.

« Last Edit: June 25, 2013, 11:22:56 AM by Don Baird »

I write haiku because they’re there ...
through
the hole of a cheerio,
spring!

Peter Yovu

Henri Cartier-Bresson, who did not coin the expression “the decisive moment” but who wrote about it as a way of helping us understand his work, took photographs with uncanny compositional qualities, juxtapositions of elements that if he had managed it not hundreds of times but only once or twice, one might say were merely serendipitous.

One could argue that his photographs are visual haiku, or as I like to say “they have haiku”, a quality of fleetingness with a sense of the whole universe coming together at just that place at just that time, and the attendant sense that everything will be different in a moment.

Even so, the cucumber will go on cucumbering, but in a different light, and another light, and with a woodchuck thinking of taking a bite. Or me.

I will try to find some of what H C-B said about the decisive moment-- I wonder if it intersects with Garry Gay’s “perceived moment”.

Tom D’Evelyn

reading these over in several sittings, getting comfortable with the various voices, seeing continuities amongst all the differences is a rather moving experience, at least for me. My preoccupation with the spaces between philosophy and poetry does not prepare me for the sudden awareness as I read of something like contentment. Each writer has struggled with the demands of this tiny poetic form, each has no illusions about the cost/ benefit ratio. Each shows a devotion that transcends the work, and yet which always returns to the work with few illusions. There is an abiding mystery in this craft.
Philip Rowland

Peter’s mention of Cartier-Bresson’s “decisive moment” and photographs “with uncanny compositional qualities” reminds me of Roland Barthes’ idea of the “punctum” in Camera Lucida; the punctum being the piercing quality of (from a detail in) a photograph, that which “escapes” language, a quality similar, perhaps, to what the best haiku possess.

“The decisive moment” also made me think of a title of a more recent book about photography by Geoff Dyer: The Ongoing Moment (which I haven’t yet read, though I’ve enjoyed his other books). Decisive and ongoing... seems to sum it up.

Chris Gordon

Here’s the first thing I noticed.
Eve, George, Lee, Peter, Richard.
They each wrote a poem about their poetry.
All very different and compelling.
The rest of us talked about cameras.
This is going to be fun.

Alan Summers

What makes so many of us not only come to the haiku side of poetry, but push ourselves to write it well, setting aside, and regardless of, publication credits and peer groups?
warm regards,
Alan

snowbird a/k/a Merrill Ann Gonzales

Peter, It seems to me that your comment about Henri Cartier-Bresson comes to the point of what makes art art. I often feel that I paint/draw in order to see. As I enter the painting everything is new and creates new things I didn’t know I wasn’t seeing and in seeing anew, I see deeper. I’m in the middle of a watercolor where I needed to find a palette for flesh. My oil palette no longer applies and as I’m rendering the hands with washes of color upon color to sculpt the forms... I notice my friends hands more deeply. I notice how the color is formed with shadows, reflections, with the way the blood colors the skin in some people more than others and on and on. By the time I finish those hands I may never look at hands in quite the same way.

Other artists go in the direction of making those discoveries evident to others which has led to myriad forms of art.

And I would suspect that dancers, and musicians also come to that moment. That’s why it’s so vital to have the “haiku moment” in haiku... That’s all there is.

martin gottlieb cohen

Where do your haiku begin?

In many different places, one of which is this:

I am experiencing something that seems familiar as I’ve gone through it before and then suddenly I wake up in a cold sweat walking to work and hear something...
the sounds of mallards fall to the next pond

Honest!

Alan Summers

Illuminance

Certain Zen schools conceive of seated meditation as a practice intended for the obtaining of Buddhahood, others reject even this (apparently essential) finality: one must remain seated “just to remain seated.” Is not the haiku (like the countless graphic gestures which mark modern and social Japanese life) also written “just to write”?

Roland Barthes, “Empire of Signs”

Rinko Kawauchi (Shiga, Japan, 1972)

Her unique approach to “drawing senses” and consistent motifs of every day details, as well as circulation of life and its transience has been admired by art lovers all over the world.

“Fotografia Europea” international festival.

Fotografia Europea 2013 - Cambiare

Kawauchi’s work has frequently been lauded for its nuanced palette and offhand compositional mastery, as well as its ability to incite wonder via careful attention to tiny gestures and the incidental details of her everyday environment. In Illuminance, Kawauchi continues her exploration of the extraordinary in the mundane, drawn to the fundamental cycles of life and the seemingly inadvertent, fractal-like organization of the natural world into formal patterns.

Illuminance

Publishers: Aperture, USA / FOIL, Japan / kehrer verlag, Germany / Editions Xavier Barral, France / POSTCART, Italy
Haiku have often been said that they are the sum of two parts, and that the haiku, however brief, is greater than the sum of its parts, but really isn’t the two parts of haiku, if that is its core feature, this bi-part verse, more like Bipartisanship where a political situation, usually in the context of a two-party system, finds opposing political parties obtaining common ground through compromise. Where often I experience a dislike, or fear, abhorrence, pity around poetry by the public, they become engaged with haiku, even to the extent they will read a hundred haiku I’ve tied to trees and bushes on an art trail, or blutacked along book shelves in a large library, but I’ve witnessed few people read a single longer poem in, or as, an installation or displayed in a library?

Perhaps the reduced ego in haiku, and of the haiku poet if they are present, creates a cessation that we all crave? In times of crisis, some people will turn to sex to embrace or challenge death not so much to escape it, so some will turn to haiku, even to the extent to reading a hundred haiku where they would struggle to read a single longer poem for two or three minutes.

My raison d’etre however oblique is to communicate, and I feel more alive interacting with people new or wary of poetry. My writing process is a painful one, even distasteful and something to be avoided, that I do not regularly seek the practice of creating my own poetry, and rarely enjoy, it’s just a compulsion that is uncomfortable with me and if needs must, then I must write it. I’m a very quiet person yet I will stand up and communicate in person as I did for Antony Gormley’s Fourth Plinth project in Trafalgar Square in London, now archived by the British Library for posterity. Perversely I decided against reading my haiku, or talking about haiku, or creating a live renku session, and choose instead to communicate words for an hour direct with the public, from those who did not have a platform to communicate them.

British Library Fourth Plinth Alan Summers Archive:
http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100223124345/http://www.oneandother.co.uk/participants/Alan_S

BBC interview

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8176398.stm

But going back to haiku, and my painful process of writing this and any type of poetry, reminds me of this quote I used to end my piece entitled “Defying the enclosures of regularity” where Samuel Johnson talked of, back in 1751: “Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity.”

counting down
to those waking dreams
my skill at handguns
c.2.2. Anthology of short-verse, ed. Brendan Slater & Alan Summers
(Yet To Be Named Free Press 2013)

Haiku seems to defy its own enclosures, and also defy the enclosures people put upon themselves, or have put upon them by others, around poetry. I guess I write haiku not so much to engage people with poetry, that’s their affair, but to steer them away from their fear of this intensely searingly intimate writing that sometimes they feel only ridicules their own existence, and say hey! you can absorb poetry because each person is a poet, you needn’t write it, or even read it, but you should never be denied the right of it.

am I the ghost
of a child who died before me?
autumn deepens
Haiku Novine ISSN 1451-3889 (December 2012)
Quote from: Don Baird on June 25, 2013, 10:37:44 AM

haiku are everywhere and it's the sudden moment of perception of it by me that begins my haiku. Being aware of what is on my mind, what is in my environment, and what is in my imagination is key - to me. The rest; well, that is the problem of how to write it - to portray what I experienced, felt, and understood.

Sometimes as I mentioned above it's laid out as a gift already written for me…

I was working on a hot and muggy August day near the marsh at miserable Home Depot as a cashier in their outdoor part of the warehouse. I noticed to my dismay what looked like big white blossoms on the trees. I couldn't understand what I was seeing…

heat lightning
the tree's blossom unfolds
into an egret

Other times I have to dig and never find it…

The thought came to me today, in talking to a friend... I was telling him about this "fly" a little black fly... and we realized that I had "haiku' ed"... it had come from the coming together of time and space in a way that taught us both something... both the moment was necessary, but also the space... the object... my friend called it a priori.
What can poets who do not write haiku learn from haiku? What can poets who write haiku learn from other forms or genres of poetry?

(I should say that the question as originally posed was:

“What can “mainstream” poets learn from haiku? What can haiku poets learn from “mainstream” poetry?”

We didn’t want the word “mainstream” to set the tone for this exploration, and so changed things a bit.

Nonetheless, it hung about in the corners of the room like yesterday’s birthday balloon. Some writers ignored it. Some did not).

But as before, writers were encouraged to make the question their own, to be brief or long, and as straightforward or as imaginative as they wished. I think you will find their responses quite interesting, and would like to encourage you to post your own thoughts on the matter.

Mark Harris

What can poets who write haiku learn from other forms or genres of poetry?

My first thought is to look to poets known for their work in other genres, who have expressed more than a passing interest in haiku.

The following lines of verse pair observation of everyday details with an intimation of all that is connected and all that connects us. The authors are conscious of that interconnection, and yet they don’t try to describe what knowing is like. They convey their awareness of the worlding of our world through words as themselves. They engage language actively.
These excerpts are integral to longer works; please read the whole poems in their original language if you can:

Afterward they set up the dark shell of the mine in a sandy plantation as an ornament together with the shells of Strombus Gigas from the West Indies.

And the sea wind is in the dry pines further away, hurrying over the churchyard sand, past the leaning stones, the pilots’ names. The dry sighing of great doors opening and great doors closing.

Anyhow, there it was. Milk poured for cats In a rank puddle-place, splash-darkened mould Around the terracotta water-crock.

Ground of being. Body’s deep obedience To all its shifting tenses. A half-door Opening directly into starlight.
— Seamus Heaney, from “Squarings” published in Opened Ground (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1998)

Death is a smudge on a film,
a spot on the horizon.
We sleep together in the dark
but confuse
light with love.
— Rae Armantrout, from “The Light” published in Versed (Wesleyan University Press 2009)

Bruce Ross

Considering prominent and not so prominent poets worldwide have written “poetry” as well as haiku (which is considered poetry in Japan and elsewhere) the issue is a bit moot. I have written and published both poetry and haiku and sense matters of sensibility (which in an exhausted culture or form becomes sentiment), form, image, symbol, all the haiku values, all the poetic figurative values, could interplay in a poet’s creative expression in haiku and “poetry.” The influence from East to West in creative expression, including haiku, is well known. Not so well known is the influence from West to East (as is various cultural formations, such as naturalism, Marxism, humanism, etc., in specifically Japanese haiku). More interesting, post Meiji Restoration, is the relation to language, tone, and phrasing, including more formal or classical and more free form, not unlike romantic: a more weighted adherence to codified feeling and form or a less weighted adherence to codified feeling and form. In a sense those aligning to one of these directions in either poetry or haiku will find similar directions in either poetry or haiku. So, in a sense, what can be learned has already been learned.

Alexis Rotella

I read the work of all the major longer poets (and ones not so major). I especially
love W.S. Merwin (who by the way wrote a book of haiku of his own years ago). He also published the Collected Haiku of Buson. The late Czeslaw Milosz is another favorite who published a haiku anthology in Polish and he was kind enough to include poems from Cor van den Huevel’s anthology. Milocz did not just bow to the old masters but gave us modern haiku writers a break (too bad it never made it into English).

Reading haiku can help us all in our longer writing—imagery is what wakes up a poem and long-winded language can put a poem to sleep. Reading longer poetry nourishes the haiku poet, makes us think outside the box. It’s hard to believe that any of the big name poets haven’t sunk their teeth into haiku and I’m not just talking Basho, Buson, Issa. Billy Collins is a prime example who published considerable work in Modern Haiku under the editorship of Lee Gurga.

Billie Wilson

My mainstream poetry – as well as my prose – were both improved as I learned more about haiku. It became easier to recognize and remove the superfluous. Flowery poetics became less appealing. (But it took a lot of mentoring from fellow haiku poets before I began writing haiku without superfluous words and flowery poetics).

Cherie Hunter Day

“For Sale: Baby Shoes. Never Worn.” Ernest Hemingway wrote these words after he was allegedly challenged in a bar to write his memoir using just six words. Turns out this form is more than a barroom pastime. Narrative magazine regularly features six-word stories by noted poets and fiction writers such as: Sherman Alexie, Margaret Atwood, and Janet Burroway. We have become the ‘sound bite society’ dealing in buzzwords. We are inundated with messages all day long, and we’ve adapted to the speed of delivery. Literature is metered out
now in characters—140 for twitter fiction. There are anthologies of 25-word ‘hint’ fiction and 50-word story competitions. Does it foster impatience or a short attention span? Perhaps.

Haiku fits neatly into that pocket of brevity, and yet it defies the rush. Haiku writers and readers seek an oasis in the midst of hurriedness. We can find respite in contemplating the thing, and the thing behind the thing. This is haiku’s gift. It’s not carving away words from a larger story to meet the restricted word count. It’s juxtaposing a few words, the right words, whereby synergy happens. This reverberation in the mind and in the soul is the cornerstone of all literature.

The use of the term “mainstream” can create polarity—the ‘us versus them’ dichotomy. I think reading/writing other types of literature helps to dispel the categories. There are no bright lines between poetry forms like haiku and senryu, or even between poetry and prose as in prose poetry. Enjoy as much of the continuum as possible

Tom D’Evelyn

Haiku is a very condensed form of poetry. It would seem then that mainstream poets can learn from haiku just how much can be cut away from a poem for you to still have a poem.

On 15 July, Stella Pierides posted on Twitter this haiku:

Pinetree cicada
the bleached cotton dress
of my youth

The first line (she uses no punctuation but from the genre we know it is independent in a sense from the concluding two lines) represents an “other” to the more personal base. Time and the edge of time: pine tree and the cicada’s erotic song. The slow-growing tree is host to the insect, singing its mortal ecstasy.
Ancient Greece and Issa, among other sources, flow through this complex image. Over against this, and somehow distanced by it, the image of the “base”: the time-dense simplicity of “bleached cotton,” the emotional complexity of “dress of my youth.” “Bleached” may refer to sun-bleached; the figure of youth is distanced, yet the imagery of the kigo – so erotically charged – makes the dress shimmer with presence.

This is what we may call a “classic” haiku.

Michael Longley is an Irish poet who draws on diverse traditions, including Japanese and classical. Here is “Dusk”:

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DUSK
Poem Beginning with a Line by Ian Hamilton Finlay

Dusk is in the shed
and in the stable
now Rusty has gone
and her glossy knees
that smell of apple
or woodruff have gone
and her blaze has gone.
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From the image of “Dusk” we are drawn into a catalogue of things no longer present. We start with a proper name, then aspects of the animal; the senses fill the emptiness. The sense of smell, so redolent of what once was, fills the small space, which finally blazes with loss.

From the point of view of the ethos of modern haiku, the lyric is “wordy.” It is not “objective.” It uses syntax to create subtle perceptions: Dusk IS in the shed, and in the stable, Rusty HAS GONE. And other of her “epithets” have also gone, and her presence is absent. Even the repetition of the word “gone” shapes our response to the loss, gives it shape, gives it a place in memory.

The repetitive syntax is transformative, is part of the meaning. To reduce that
would be to mar the music.

It is a poem of grief, a grieving poem, and uses brevity as such poems do: we repeat them in our need. The beat of the poem steadies our trembling heart.

The juxtaposition of these poems raises an interesting question: which is the more difficult to understand?

For the last decade or so I have been preoccupied with the Taoist background of classic haiku. I have done this research so that reading classic haiku is “easier.” I “get it” faster now. I still have to think hard about these little poems.

And this study (I must mention again Pipei Qiu’s superb study Bashō and the Dao) has enriched my appreciation of contemporary haiku, but in discussions I have become aware that contemporary haiku writers often do not acknowledge this tradition. Or can’t – the ramifications give them the heebie-geebies.

In some sense, then, Longley’s poem is more available to us as general readers. Pierides’s haiku will be interpreted in many ways, some of them conflicting, and in some corners this will be accounted a good thing. Longley’s poem leaves little doubt about how it is to be read.

That said, each poem shows things – makes things appear as -- complexly woven of time and timelessness, somethingness and nothingness. The haiku raises fewer questions about the processes of the meditation: it is like a crack of thunder out of a clear summer sky. The drone of “Dusk” has a different curve of feeling. The lyric poet’s mastery of repetition and phrasing suggest a different skill set, but the wisdom of the poems seem to me comparable. Both poems fulfill the office of art to meditate on the passage of timely things within the context of the heavenly way or Tao.

Whoa! Heavenly way? No way! If that’s your reading, I’m not buying it! I don’t care how well you present your case, I just can’t go there!

This bit of prosopopoeia – or shifting to an imagined speaker to voice a reaction to what has been said – likely fits what many readers are feeling. I think this block cripples our imagination and keeps us from valuing haiku and other poems; we can’t really open ourselves to the poems as happenings, as complex strategies
overcoming the tendency of language to freeze reality into little fruit-flavored pop tarts.

The same block shows up in contemporary readings of the Zhuangzi, which is a key source of Basho’s poetics. At issue is just what words can do. But we can see evidence of an awareness of the stakes in a collection titled “Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi” (SUNY 1996). For example, Mark Berkson writes: “The ability to recognize the existence of a Heavenly point of view will be enough to change how one lives, for it will give one an awareness that allows one to live a natural, human life without being trapped in the false confidence of one’s limited perspective” (108).

By the way, I maintain a couple of blogs relevant to this issue: ecoku.wordpress.com and artoftheshortpoem.com

Diane Wakoski

My own view is that haiku written in a language with a letter alphabet like English, while seemingly modeled on Asian haiku, written in a language of pictographs or whole word characters, cannot fulfill the premise of the latter. But its ghost gives us what is possible: an imagist poem. I think all poets can learn from the condensation necessary when using the syllabic 5-7-5 economy, especially if the poet chooses to cleave to the discipline of letting the disparate, or at least different, images co-mingle and create a third (unspoken) image that is not a comment but a revelation. Today’s free verse imagist poems have gotten very (too much so) talky.

Max Verhart

After having considered the issue a few times, I can but conclude that to me it’s a non-issue. What can haiku poets and mainstream poets learn from each other?
To be honest: I don’t know. But what’s probably more significant: I don’t care.

Whatever you write: pick the format that suits you best for that particular piece of writing, then make it the best you can according to your own standards - regardless of whatever anyone else might think of it.

As to my own experience: I probably have learned more from some prose writers than from (mainstream) poets. What I learned from them (I hope) is what I call implicit writing. Or evocative writing.

Yeah, you’re right: the down to earth phrase is ‘show, don’t tell’.

George Swede

(Gathered After Moments of Cogitation, July 11, July 14, July 16 2013)

What can poets who do not write haiku learn from haiku?

To be more succinct.

Many longer poems could have fewer lines without losing their power.

What can poets who write haiku learn from other forms or genres of poetry?

To create unexpected connections among images.

Many haiku have images close to one another on the associational hierarchy.

John Martone

A poem is a poem. As Ben Jonson wrote, a single line can be. And Hopkins thought of single words as fossil poems.

Impossible to imagine Pound, Williams, Oppen, Stevens, Levertov, Merwin, Creeley, Eigner, Corman (can one imagine Basho without him?!) in short the 20-21st century American poem without haiku’s measure and way, including
-- perhaps especially -- the sequence.

There's that Poundian equation: Condensare = Dichten. Nothing is more condensato than the haiku.

Go to Andrew Welch’s Roots of Lyric (with its chapters on image and charm) and Jerry Rothenberg’s Technicians of the Sacred (especially for those micropoems of shamanism). The connections go unspoken because they are everywhere. The whole sparkles like Indra’s net.

Cid Corman’s Kyoto magazine was Origin 本 — the root. Be after that.

Richard Gilbert

A Muse Meant on Poetic Thinking

In contemplating the nature of thought itself, how does one arrive at novel conceptions which rewrite, re-conceive, reframe the pre-existent? Experience of unconditionality seems intrinsic to novel conception. To create new templates, worlds, what exists must be penetrated, dissolved, gone beyond. Discussing this process, Paz quoted Mallarme: “the poet does violence to language in order to purify the words of the tribe.” There are many levels to this topic, from psycho-physical energy to the mind/body relationship, economic stability, sense of meaning in life, occupation, preoccupations, personality and character. I would like to offer the following sense of thinking as a prequel to the poetic.

In this métier of thought we are all poets, more or less I feel. Cognitively it may be argued that while getting there takes effort and dedication, devotion, the more challenging aspect to the viability of novel thinking is the creation of memory bridges between more unconditional states or levels of consciousness (altered states) and the pragmatic normative aspects of consciousness — via which we must ply the craft of writing.

This is very much in my experience — a “step-down transformer” type of experience, involving loss of signal strength, and information. Communication
is always sacrificial — isn’t “that” truth, pure, fairly speaking, inarticulate? Perhaps the Zen Buddhist tradition addresses this quandary most directly.

Added to the quixotic and fleeting (mercurial, ephemeral) wing of thought are those dislocations involved in divining its depths — for there is no bottom, no origin of first principles. Rather, the frustrations of archaic projection; not the root: reflection. Hillman and Jung have discussed this experience in their phenomenological approaches to mind when they indicate that the main difference between human and other animals has to do with the ability to reflect upon thought — to cognate and cogitate upon reflections (what we see as having seen, having arisen in reflection) of self and world — yet as Jung posits in his conception of anima, the origin of the illumination which allows for this humanizing process remains unperceivable. We scan the reflection not its origin; the projection not the projector. Human being in medias res.

The deeper into the origin of projection (you journey), the more form and the known destabilizes, the more those normative arguments of symbol systems, linked notions via which reality is determined shimmer and shape-shift with doubt and self-doubt: the doubt of things being things, the world being a world, self being a self. From this doubt springs resistance. To paraphrase Bruce Lee, things fight back. The world has a voice: into which notional drawers shall the world be shelved, and, with what degrees of arrogance?

It’s a David and Goliath story, an agon — Bloom’s tales of strong poets willfully, belatedly misinterpreting influential antecedents. The utility of Bloom’s conception lies in his elucidation of those necessities involved in the achievement of imaginative power: strong thinking exercises. Beauty, bliss, forgetting, and struggle erasing the world, reforming the world, renewing the world. This activity represents an apotheosis of humankind and something holy. With each return, the phoenix; out of violence and destruction, the rendings of Dionysus. Heal thyself, yes? To re-knit the world, to return bearing offerings (cultural) gifts.

A series of step-up and step-down transformations: at any point it is possible to get lost, become broken. Among the Articles of poetic thought is one which reads, “you will become dispossessed,” and another, “there is risk.” For this
I suspect that any writer could learn something from any other successful writer, regardless of genre. I’ve been a board member of the Washington Poets Association for nearly ten years, and have edited its journal Cascade, for longer poetry (available on Amazon). I’m currently editing another anthology for longer poetry, for the Redmond Association of Spokenword (for which I serve as reading series curator, and for whom I directed the Poets in the Park conferences). I also curate the monthly SoulFood Poetry Night, which has featured leading Seattle-area poets for more than seven years. And after I edited the haiku journal Woodnotes, I edited Tundra: The Journal of the Short Poem, which sought to integrate haiku with other short poetry. In all these experiences, and my own extensive writing of longer poetry, I’ve found that I tend to prefer longer poems that share haiku sensibilities. So maybe haiku is limiting me in that regard! But more importantly, I find that haiku has greatly improved my longer poetry. I believe that haiku can do this for others, too, and I teach workshops to elucidate why. There’s a lot that haiku strategies can teach anyone seeking to improve their writing, whether fiction, poetry, or even nonfiction.


1. Focus on concrete images (one of haiku’s strengths; it’s surprising, though,
that some people don’t really understand what this means, so it’s helpful to show examples, and to contrast them with conceptual statements or intellectualisms).

2. Rely on your five senses (tactile experience improves any kind of creative writing; the potential of the future “enters” our bodies through the portals of our five senses, and “now” is that moment when future potential becomes our past/history -- haiku celebrates that moment of transition).

3. Control objectivity and subjectivity (I used to teach that one should avoid subjectivity in haiku, but really it’s more important to know how to control it; this is similar to knowing when to show and when to tell, because some “telling” can be appropriate in haiku, in moderation, if you know how to do it well).

4. Distinguish between description and inference (the point of haiku is to use careful description, but not as an end in itself; rather the goal is for description to infer something, usually emotional -- likewise, writers of fiction or “mainstream” poetry can do the same, and can learn how to do it well with haiku).

5. Seek immediacy and accessibility (this doesn’t mean to avoid being challenging or at least a little beyond the depth of some of your readers, but it helps to give readers some kind of access point, some sort of grounding, whether it’s common images or everyday experiences).

6. Control formal devices (this is really about craft, and knowing when and how to use metaphor, simile, rhyme, metrics/scansion/rhythm, allusion, sound, and other poetic devices -- lack of control of these devices can be glaring in haiku, so if you can master them in haiku, you can use them effectively elsewhere).

7. Find the right form (another craft issue, about realizing disconnections between what you’re trying to say vs. the way you’re trying to say it -- this has to do not only with issues of organic vs. free vs. metrical form, but also about whether a triolet or sonnet or epic form is best suited for your idea or experience or narrative).

8. Follow seasonal rhythms (this is about being aware not just of nature but the rhythms of nature, which also includes humans; seasonal details will enrich any writing, and can tap into archetypal symbolism as such references do in haiku).
9. Trust juxtaposition (another cornerstone of haiku, where disjunction can create energy and space, or a create a vacuum as a result of what is left out -- and without a vacuum, what is there to suck the reader in?).

10. Discover more about haiku (the idea here is promotional rather than informational, but I think the idea still has merit, in that by exploring haiku more deeply one can move beyond pseudo-haiku misinformation and also explore farther than the nine previous items I mentioned -- a lot of people aren’t aware of the Haiku Foundation, the Haiku Society of America, Haiku Canada, the British Haiku Society, the various journals for haiku, the Haiku North America conference, and more, and by knowing about this activity, perhaps more people will increase their respect for haiku, and perhaps be more open to what they can learn from haiku).

What I’ve just written summarizes ways that “mainstream” poets can learn from haiku, but what about the opposite? What can haiku poets learn from those who write longer poetry? An initial thought is range, and to think about tackling big subjects, or aspects of complex ideas, and to incorporate both light and dark subjects and tones in one’s writing -- and to find the best ways to do so. A second thought is variety. Just as a poet or fiction writer will vary his or her grammar, syntax, and sentence length, a haiku poet can do the same. Short sentences? They’ll add energy. And then you can contrast that rhythm with longer phrases, whether the contrast is between haiku or within a single haiku. A third thought is allusions. They’re rampant in good poetry. We all know what Haruo Shirane wrote about the vertical and horizontal axes of haiku. In “Beyond the Haiku Moment: Bashō, Buson, and Modern Haiku Myths” (Modern Haiku XXX:1, Winter-Spring 2000), he observes that the horizontal axis of haiku (a focus on the present, contemporary world ) is abundant in North American haiku, but that the vertical axis (a movement across time, including geographical, historical, and literary references) is largely missing. I’m not sure I agree that it’s largely missing, but I do think we could make better use of the vertical axis in haiku -- something we can definitely learn from those who write longer poetry. We need not quote Greek or Latin like Pound or Eliot, but we could do better to trust the full breadth of our own culture and our own experiences and avoid trying (as some poets repeatedly do with their haiku) to merely imitate Japan.
I’m sure there’s much more we who write haiku can learn from those who write other poetry, or even fiction. Openness might be one such thing. Haiku is essentially a ghetto in the city of poetry, but it’s not other poets who have put haiku in that ghetto. Rather, it’s haiku poets who have put themselves in the haiku ghetto by siloing their work, or by complaining so much that haiku is misunderstood -- I’m guilty of this myself. This doesn’t mean that we should suddenly recognize spam-ku as literary art, or let our guard down in other ways (some poems, even so-called gendai haiku, are good short poems and not necessarily haiku). But it does mean we could share our best haiku in venues (journals, conferences, and the like) that don’t traditionally focus on haiku. This is already happening of course, and this activity is increasing, which is good to see (Haiku Society of America panels at American Literature Association conferences are but one example), but there’s much more to be done. And perhaps “mainstream” poets (especially its editors) could be more open to haiku, too.

I’d like to conclude by citing an example poem that, to me, masterfully employs the haiku trait of juxtaposition. I’ve seldom been affected in a longer poem as deeply as by the sad and dramatic twist in the last line of James Wright’s “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.” You can read it at https://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/poems-by-others/lying-in-a-hammock. Those who write longer poetry hardly need haiku to come up with good techniques for writing their poetry, but perhaps they can sharpen their craft by paying closer attention to key aspects of haiku, including compression, that make them shimmer.

John Stevenson

I know that this question was framed as a composite version of many other questions relating generally to a similar topic. Since it’s not how I would put it, I just have to dispose of some of my quibbles before attempting any further reply.

While some poetry may be essentially didactic, the poetry that interests me most, both within and without haiku, consists of those poems that deal with what is
mysterious and beyond the power of words to express with the exactitude of even the best prose. If the poetry that I care about is not primarily motivated by a desire to teach, what I learn from it is necessarily idiosyncratic and entirely personal. Clearly, however, the question asks for projection and generalization. I'll play along.

I think it must be a rare event that anyone's first idea of poetry has been formed by their knowledge of English-language haiku. If all ELH poets were not already aware of more contemporary English-language poetry before coming to haiku, they most certainly were exposed to some Shakespeare, Pope, or Yeats. Or nursery rhymes, or song lyrics, or limericks, or advertising jingles. So the answer to what haiku poets can learn from “mainstream” poetry is “whatever we HAVE learned.” I was writing and publishing other poetry for over thirty years before I read or wrote my first haiku. I would suspect that most writers of English-language haiku had plenty of influential exposure to other poetry in English and that, before they were haiku poets, they learned whatever it is that they do know about poetry from that exposure.

(One could look upon this as a question about what haiku poets can learn from the mainstream “business” of poetry. As someone who immediately discards the business section of a newspaper, I feel unqualified to answer that question.)

The other half of the question seems more reasonable in scope. As an example of what “mainstream” poets can learn from haiku, I will tell you what I think I have learned from it.

I now see “mainstream” poetry, in a way I hadn’t before my involvement with haiku, as “displays of brilliance.” In fact I see this now as a feature of most Western art. Individualism and originality are prized and the reaction one is hoping for in one's audience is something like, “My God, how does he do that? I could never do that!” The first reaction to English-language haiku, on the other hand, is often something like, “That’s cool. I bet I could do that.” And the fact is that many people can do it from the start, often producing some of the best haiku they will ever write out of a “beginner’s mind.”

I’m not saying we do not want brilliance. I enjoy displays of brilliance as much as
the next guy. But we are very well supplied in this area. An aesthetic of modesty is what is truly new and refreshing about haiku within the arena of English-language poetry and art.

Eve Luckring

For the first half of the question, I will sidestep (or perhaps create a Mobius strip) by referring to Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*. For those unfamiliar with these lectures, Calvino discusses the qualities of literature that he most valued: 1. lightness, 2. quickness, 3. exactitude, 4. visibility and 5. multiplicity. These five features characterize much of what I strive for in writing haiku and what moves me when reading it. (The sixth quality, consistency, was left unwritten because Calvino died before he finished the text. I do not know if it would relate to haiku as much as the other five do for me.) Calvino was a short story writer and a novelist; and though he was not specifically addressing poetry, let alone haiku, in his Six Memos, he flushes out what I think gives haiku its oomph and what I think any writer can learn from reading haiku. Since I cannot write a summary that would do poetic justice to the nuance and depth of Calvino’s commentary and his lovely way of framing each of these five categories with revealing examples, I will instead refer anyone interested to an online PDF (also available for download):

For the second half of the question, if I had to generalize, I would say that different types of poetry enlarge and flex the quality of our attention. Different “schools” of poetry, and the approaches of individual poets, show us something distinctive about how to attend—from the Latin root, attendere—“to stretch toward” the universe, its inhabitants, and poetry/art itself.

To address the question more specifically, I will comment briefly on two living poets, Rae Armantrout and Lyn Hejinian from whom I have learned much. I believe these poets write with a sensibility very related to what I value about haiku. They tackle the thorny realm of “the problem of description” as Hejinian calls it. Both use words precisely and concisely. Both model how thought and
sensory information intersect. Both thread the abstract through the concrete of the everyday. Humans and the rest of the natural world are in full intersection in their work. Both offer a way to navigate the contemporary state of information overload in our everyday lives, which is seldom addressed, and perhaps even avoided, in haiku. Both use a tonal range that spans from whimsical to philosophical, from scientific to lyrical. I have a quote from the linguist Roman Jakobson scribbled in my notebook: “a connection once created becomes an object in its own right” –these two poets’ work embody this sentiment in different ways.

Armantrout makes fully palpable our advertisement saturated, internet-connected, image-mediated world of public relations and pornographic voyeurism with acute attention to the language that frames it, often in measure against the physicality of daily life.

The Subject

It’s as if we’ve just been turned human in order to learn that the beetle we’ve caught and are now devouring is our elder brother and that we are a young prince.

* 

I was just going to click on “Phoebe is changed into a mermaid tomorrow!” when suddenly it all changed into the image of a Citizen watch.
If each moment is in love
with its image
in the mirror of
adjacent moments

(as if matter stuttered),

then, of course, we’re restless!

“What is surface?”
we ask,

trying to change the subject.

I love how Armantrout uses the space of the page, simply and elegantly knocking things against one another, bracketing language-as-image against image-as-language against language-as-language, letting it all coalesce into the whole of a poem or an accumulation of poems. Her poems are spare and overflowing like good haiku.

Like Armantrout, Hejinian is exacting, rigorous, and lyrical. In her classic, My Life, she demonstrates in vivid imagery how the past crashes into the present and how language navigates a continuous stream of concrete sensory information. A small excerpt (without the proper formatting):

A pause, a rose

something on paper

A moment yellow, just as four years later, when my father returned home from the war, the moment of greeting him, as he stood at the bottom of the stairs,
younger, thinner than when he had left, was purple—though moments are no longer so colored. Somewhere, in the background, rooms share a pattern of small roses. Pretty is as pretty does. In certain families, the meaning of necessity is at one with the sentiment of pre-necessity. The better things were gathered in pen. The windows were narrowed by white gauze curtains which were never loosened. Here I refer to irrelevance, that rigidity which never intrudes. ....

In Hejinian’s essays on poetics published in a book, The Language of Inquiry, she discusses Stein’s work (another poet who I think has much to offer writers of haiku, though that may seem antithetical to many), ruminations on “line”, “the rejection of closure”, and an essay entitled “Strangeness” that seems very relevant to haiku, especially in this contemporary information age. (Phil Rowland and I discussed Hejinian’s work briefly in an earlier Troutswirl discussion and he brought this essay into the dialogue.) In it she discusses metonym: “Metonym moves attention from thing to thing, its principle is combination rather than selection. Compared to metaphor which depends on code, metonym preserves context, foregrounds interrelationship...The metonymic world is unstable. While metonymy maintains intactness and discreteness of particulars, its paratactic perspective gives it multiple vanishing points.” For me this says a lot about how good haiku works.

Aubrie Cox

Although I’ve had the chance to study both haiku and non-haiku poetry (Western, “mainstream,” or whatever descriptor seems most appropriate to the reader), my experience with haiku came first, then everything else. Haiku was a gateway genre for me, if you will. Poetry finally made sense, and that made me want to explore it further. Once I began reading other forms of poetry more diligently, I did notice a change in my haiku—primarily within language. My vocabulary became more diverse and I felt myself loosen up a little with word play (which I can’t help but find mildly ironic since a literal translation of haiku is “play verse”). I think part of this has to do with the atmosphere I was learning in
at the time, where the professors heavily pushed for the love of words, interesting words, to explore words and the rich density and musicality language has to offer.

As haiku poets, it can be easy to fall into the same imagery and wordage, and even rhythm for poems. Line one: Kigo and/or nature image. Lines two and three: A juxtaposed image, action, or thought. Reverse to create something almost different. Sometimes we have to stop to remember that haiku, although different than other poetry is still a poem. Yes, brevity and the captured moment itself are important, but so is the sound of the words together. It can be worth it to take that extra time in editing to look for possible alliteration or frankly just words that sound cool together. When a reader can enter both the moment and the words themselves, the experience expands in new directions. (Note: This is something I will always fondly remember haijinx for—the attention to details within language and play.) This, in turn, can push haiku poets to explore new subject matter or different perspectives within poems.

While haiku poets can learn to be more attentive to language and what’s on the page through exploring other forms of poetry, the main thing non-haiku poets can learn is probably the exact opposite. Lyrical fiction writer (and dabbler of poetry) Isaac Kirkman commented to me not too long ago that, “There is a lot I can learn from haiku writers, the power in line, in space in between, in brevity. …. Haiku [is] very alien, but very very, beautiful (and potent).” Brevity and line breaks are great skills for any poetry to learn regardless of the genre (and I think haiku poets can learn some great ways of working with line breaks in non-haiku poems), the weight of words and what’s not being said are excellent lessons to learn from haiku. Whereas I wrote earlier that I learned to embrace diversity of language with other genres, haiku is where I, as a poet, learned how much a single word can carry so much significance (especially when one is working with 6-11 words total), and thus how to cut back on my words to create the potency Isaac mentioned. I could show (and tell) more with less.

In non-haiku poetry workshops, the unsaid is a territory I’ve found my classmates (and my students in comp classes in which I’ve incorporated poetry) are leery about. They want to tell it all, they want you to know how they feel, verbatim. With more exposure to haiku (or even just short poems or flash fiction), those writers
learn to let go and be more willing to give up a little control of the reading of the work. Non-haiku poets learn it’s okay not to say everything, how to amplify the space between the lines, and perhaps, in some ways, how to be more generous to the reader. To write haiku, I think, is to put some faith into the reader. As though to say, “Here, you take this part. I want to see what you’ll make of it. I know you, too, have something to say and feel.”

Peter Yovu

Are there poets who do not write haiku?

I.
Blossom-snow.
By noon the pear tree stands
in its white shadow.

VII.
It wasn’t death
fogging the window;
it was my breath

From Don Paterson’s “Renku: My Last Thirty Five Deaths:”

Children’s Department

The library always smells
like this:
an ancient stew
of vinegar and wood.
It’s autumn, again,
and I can do anything.

Dorothea Grossman
Early Hours

In the high hours of the night
stars get naked
and bathe in the rivers.

Owls desire them,
the little feathers on their heads
stand up.
    Humberto Ak’ abal

“That’s a beautiful truck;
that would cost a lot,
    wouldn’t it?”

The silver tanker
leaving the station.
    Rae Armantrout, Last lines of “Circuit”

I’ll live gently
As the wind, flying
Over the town,
My chest full of sparrows.
    Shinkichi Takahashi, Last lines of “Wind”

Everyone is alone at the heart of the earth
pierced by a ray of sunlight:
and suddenly it’s evening.
    Salvatore Quasimodo (That last line also serves as the title of the poem).
the delicate pinkish
late-afternoon light shines through
the bullet holes.

***

under her muddy
battle-dress uniform--an
orange push-up bra

Marya Rosenberg from ““If I Tell You You’re Beautiful, Will You Report Me?”: A West Point Haiku Series” (This series was chosen by Heather McHugh for The Best American Poetry 2007).

I’d like to buy her some toffee
but I don’t have a daughter

as I pass a sidewalk store in autumn

***

Exhausted
the mother has fallen asleep
so her baby is listening all alone
to the sound of the night train

Ko Un (These are two of four short poems published in the 9/25/06 issue of The New Yorker).

Did these poets study haiku? Yes. No. Maybe. . . but I’m pretty certain that Poetry, from the very beginning, has studied Haiku. I imagine a woman slowly, carefully, brushing her hair, bringing its shine out, its nuanced tones.

As George Oppen writes: “consciousness// Which has nothing to gain, which
awaits nothing,/ which loves itself”

Light within light. Did Roseliep say/imply that-- about haiku?

It is not as clear to me that Haiku has studied Poetry-- going down to the roots. No, haiku is root, approaching, bowing down to and dissolving into the unknown by way of the known.

You cannot be good by doing only what you are good at.

At the zoo. A great silverback gorilla sitting alone, at rest, perhaps at peace despite the bustle around him. The shine of his fur, a dull shine on his leather chest. His eyes. Though he is denied the strengthening environment from which he originated, one senses the enormous power of the animal.

“But why doesn’t he do something?” a child asks and walks away.

Buddha.

A strength of haiku, and of all poetry, all art, a strength some poets and artists often ignore, resides in limits. The first limit imposed on haiku, or perhaps the most obvious, is length. Can anyone doubt the power of brevity?

Restraint is only meaningful when it has the full force of what is withheld behind it.
If one is going to avoid using certain poetic “techniques”—metaphor, simile, enjambment, rhyme, etc., one had better learn to use them first.

One of the limits inherent in such a short genre is in the development of sound. Of course, sound can be, and sometimes is, skillfully used in haiku. The sound of a drop of water on a hot wood stove as it seizes up, skitters a bit, and dissipates. Quick like that.

I discover that I’ve written a haiku that has two or three “ah” sounds in it, and I sense that they somehow encourage an image that has emerged. And I’m pleased about that.

In a longer poem, I might see the same thing, and I might be compelled to explore those sounds further—what do they want to say? What other vowel sounds do they want to hang out with? How are they different in the middle of different consonant clusters, or propelled by gutturals and fricatives?

Robert Bly says an interesting thing: “When we sit down to write, we often imagine that thoughts are coming, or feelings are arriving. But actually what are arriving are syllables, each a marriage or affair of vowel and consonant”.

(A lot of haiku writers may not like that idea, but even sitting down in front of a butterfly or a factory smoke stack brings “syllables” to mind).

And I would add that the sounds that come are carrying thoughts and feelings with them. A poem is the utterance of something—a naming—that could not be otherwise expressed. There are orphaned feelings, thoughts, ideas and shades of consciousness in our depths which long to be embodied, long for the mirroring validation of the poem, to be, in effect, carried out into the world and sung. To be tried out.

That may be asking too much of a haiku. In such a short genre, it is difficult to develop the metamorphosing qualities of sound. The great challenge of brevity is that it tends to favor wit and the associational mind. A longer poem, skillfully
employing sound and rhythm, can counterbalance this. A haiku barely has a body.

Nonetheless I feel I must be ready for it-- ready for whatever sounds/thoughts/feelings/shades of consciousness come my way.

I’ve taken the following from Randy Brook’s essay on (and here quoting) Raymond Roseliep:

“The poet is an animal with the sun in his belly. He is one breed of the species cited by Luke the Physician as ‘a whole body … filled with light’ (11:36)…. [H]e imitates the Creator. With language he puts flesh on ideas and feelings; to airy nothing he gives local habitation and name”.

I want to say it is only possible with a serious study of poetry-- finding out what sound can do, how it feels, how it can be inseparable from meaning, as a Tyger is inseparable from the forests of the night.

Or how it can be meaningfully separable.

One way writers of haiku and very brief poems can develop the metamorphosing, echoing, dialectic, counterweighted, underpinning, overtonic, centripetal and centrifugal properties of sound (and rhythm) is through the composition of longer works, of a number of haiku which play with and off each other sonically and thematically, haiku which find themselves at times getting longer, which risk not being haiku, which call for additional, non-occasional, unexpected but necessary poems without which some depth would be denied.

Mark Harris has moved in this direction in his book *Burl*. John Martone has published numerous sequences which dance around and through single themes.
I enjoy the way Kay Ryan plays with rhyme.

**Intention**

Intention doesn't sweeten.  
It should be picked young  
and eaten. Sometimes only hours  
separate the cotyledon  
from the wooden plant.  
Then if you want to eat it,  
you can’t.

The rhyming in this poem is obvious. It is a technique. Does it get in the way? Does it get in the way of Poetry, or does Poetry/Consciousness want to love itself like this?

A double, triple, quadruple helix of sound. Up and down Emerson’s “ladder of surprise”.

But it’s not a haiku.

I would contend, and maybe Kay Ryan would say “rubbish” and call me a nebbish, I would contend that the sounds here (I love “sweeten” with “cotyledon” metamorphosed to “wooden”) brought forth the meaning as much as the meaning brought forth the sounds.

Exercise for PY: go through a bunch of your haiku or short poems. Is there a sound which occurs frequently and variously perhaps insistently? Just as Bly talks about “sounds calling to sounds” is it possible that haiku call to haiku, poem to poem?

And are they calling out for another poem, or two, or three? For their lost relatives, for their abandoned friends, for their shadows?

And what’s it all about?
Sound. Technique. One could go on in a similar way, with a similar understanding of the benefits of reading outside haiku, in regards to metaphor, image, simile, line breaks . . .

Restraint is the not the same as rejection. Limits are not stone walls, or if they are, they allow me to see and converse with my neighbor. Or just to sense her presence.

There are techniques I may never use in haiku or in other poems I may write. But knowing them, and knowing the power of not using them, and also knowing the power of potential (helixed into the helix of limits)-- something in me stays open, and available to whatever wants to be written.

And then-- I suppose this is for another time-- there is Blake saying:

“The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.”

The power of brevity.

Yes.

Michael McClintock

I have always thought that studying and understanding something you love, including something you would like to do well yourself, or excel at, fall very naturally into a person’s daily routine. How have others loved it? What are the best examples? Poetry has been a lifelong study and occupation. I have learned a few things about the craft of poetry, from poets, of course, but as much from teachers who themselves never wrote a word of it, and that would include common laborers, the uneducated, and children.
Mainstream poets can read as if they are on vacation & expect their readers to join their leisure. So the brevity of haiku may open to the mainstream poet a more concise landscape: not brevity for the sake of accommodating readers in a rushed state, but rather to aim for a fuller journeying, a more occupied sweep of the poem’s arena. Diane Di Prima said more than a few times (while I studied with her a few years ago) that one can tell how good a poem is within reading a couple of lines. This sounded extreme to me when I first heard it, but I have found it a bracing provisional lens.

Haiku poets can gain from mainstream poets largely in the realm of lyricism. Specific words that “lift” the reader (never a fan of the overly “simple English” haiku practitioners whose haiku risks being needlessly boring) can be a marriage between a fine word and precise meaning (whether metaphoric or not). Probably my own “fine word” bias is the result of all the poetry I’ve read and loved, predominantly contemporary mainstream & other, in my endless search to find thrilling poetry (and to sell the books of poetry that fall out of the thrilling dimension).

For some time, I was rather scornful of the mainstream magazine POETRY, but several years ago, it began to change. That change resulted in my discovering some poets whose work thrilled me—sometimes foreign & in translation, sometimes “names” in mainstream poetry, some busy in their MFA degrees but without a book yet. I’ve paid attention to the MFA students & the poetry instructors. Diane Di Prima strongly dismissed writing programs as regimenting factories—yes, teaching people to write, but is it worth reading? Rather, she suggested getting a degree in anything—geology!--& it would be better than a MFA. But, there are exceptions!

In my personal pantheon of contemporary poets, my favorite is Anne Carson, a classicist, doing her own ancient Greek and Latin translations, as well as all her contemporary poetry, prose poems, plays, and two remarkable books,
Eros the Bittersweet (Princeton, 1986) and Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan), (Princeton, 1999). Her unique “novel in verse,” Autobiography of Red (1998), tells a contemporary coming-of-age of a young, tormented soul who is also “Geryon,” a winged red monster. A luminous moment occurs when the adolescent Geryon for the first time meets Herakles:

Herakles stepped off the bus from New Mexico and Geryon came fast around the corner of the platform and there it was one of those moments that is the opposite of blindness. The world poured back and forth between their eyes once or twice. [italics added]

For me, that description in italics is what would characterize any momentous meeting with a fated love, a love that might be called “the love of one’s life.”

Sometimes God will drop a fit on you. Leave you on your bed howling. Don’t take it meanly.

Because the outer walls of God are glass. I see a million souls clambering up the walls on the inside to escape God who is burning, untended.

“The God Fit” [Glass, Irony and God. [New Directions, 1995]

Anne Carson’s recent Antigone (Sophokles) is presented in Antigonick [New Directions, 2012]:

Chorus:
Blessed be they whose lives do not taste of evil
But if some God shakes your house
Ruin arrives
Ruin does not leave
It comes tolling over the generations
It comes rolling the black night salt up from the
Ocean floor
And all your thrashed coasts groan

Archives of grief I see falling upon this house
Death on birth birth on death there is no end to it
Some god is piling them on
One last root was reaching up for the light in
The house of Oidipous

But the bloody dust of death
Hacks her down mows her down
All the tall mad mountains of her mind

Zeus you win you always win
The whole oxygen of power
Belongs to you
Sleep cannot seize it
Time does not tire

Your Mt Olympos glows like one white stone
Around this law:
Nothing vast enters the lives of mortals without ruin

Chorus:
Eros, no one can fight you
Eros, you clamp down on every living thing
On girls’ cheeks on oceans, on wild fields
Not even an immortal can evade you
Certainly not a creature of the day
Why,
They go mad
You change the levels of a person’s mind
This Haimon crisis is all your doing
You shook his blood
You glow on girls’ eyelids
Who cares about the laws of the land
Aphrodite, you play with us

You
Play

Deeply

Chorus:
Here we are
In a song about joy
Here we are in a day about dust
The dust it takes to house enemies
The house it takes to dust justice
The justice it takes to dodge a bullet
The bullet it takes to justify lovers
The love in which to delete your own darling
The darling you dust
The dust you disperse . . .

(If these chorus excerpts should interest you, there is something else remarkable about this book: the astounding drawings on translucent vellum pages by Bianca Stone, to overlay the text—thrilling imaginative drawings to complement this unique version of a Greek tragedy.)

Hopefully these excerpts demonstrate the leaps of her imagery, the precision of her descriptions, the irony that tinges her work. On she goes, inventively.

Another mainstream poet I have found enthralling is the elder British poet Geoffrey Hill. Though often unable to fully grasp his extensive literary and
historical allusions, I can be thrilled by the almost visceral weight of his language and his trenchant phrasing. Interestingly, the most compacted language appeared earliest in his career and to some extent persisted until his chronic depression was more adequately treated.

4 Drake’s Drum

Those varied dead. The undiscerning sea
Shelves and dissolves their flesh as it burns spray

Who do not shriek like gulls nor dolphins ride
Crouched under spume to England’s erect side

Though there a soaked sleeve lolls or shoe patrols
Tide-padded thick shallows, squats in choked pools

Neither our designed wreaths nor used words
Sink to their melted ears and melted hearts.

--excerpt: “Metamorphoses” [For the Unfallen, 1959]

I

AVE REGINA COELORUM
Es ist ein Land Verloren . . .

There is a land called Lost
at peace inside our heads.
The moon, full on the frost,
vivifies these stone heads.

Moods of the verb “to stare”,
split selfhoods, conjugate
ice-facets from the air,
the light glazing the light.
Look at us, Queen of Heaven.
Our solitudes drift by
your solitudes, the seven
dead stars in your sky.

--excerpt: “Two Chorale-Preludes” On melodies by Paul Celan
[Tenebrae, 1978]

For the Jews in Europe

Knowing the dead, and how some are disposed:
Subdued under rubble, water, in sand graves,
In clenched cinders not yielding their abused
Bodies and bonds to those whom war’s chance saves
Without the law: we grasp, roughly, the song.
Arrogant acceptance from which song derives
Is embedded with their blood, makes flourish young
Roots in ashes. The wilderness revives,

Deceives with sweetness harshness. Still beneath
Live skin stone breathes, about which fires but play,
Fierce heart that is the iced brain’s to command
To judgment—studied reflex, contained breath—
Their best of worlds since, on the ordained day,
This world went spinning from Jehovah’s hand.

-excerpt: “Two Formal Elegies” [For The Unfallen, 1959]

Haiku poets—a few of them—can uplift me as effectively as my favorite mainstream poets. In this select group of thrilling haiku poets, I would say that each of them has a style—and that style is the vehicle of their inquiring minds. In the realm of style, there seems no difference between mainstream & haiku poets, but how would the mainstream poets know this? One of the popular “styles” in haiku right now is a kind of excess of metaphoric cleverness—which can breed a low-level metaphoric churning. Some “successful” metaphoric poets (winning
competitions, etc.) seem to drop out of the publishing scene. Having seen this happen more than a few times, I wonder if their brains have tired of the game. A kind of reduction of life into the clever metaphor possibly burns out as a trajectory sooner than the poet ever seeking the way to entrust experience to a newer grid. Scott Metz, profiled in MODERN HAIKU some years ago, could be immediately recognized as a haiku poet following his own private aesthetics—and this singular devotion has persisted to the present. [Regarding my own submissions to ROADRUNNER, I feel that I never know what will be accepted, that only by reading a new posting will it become clearer—the ever morphing grid.] The following ku by Scott Metz appear in: lakes & now wolves [Modern Haiku Press, 2012].

fallen, trampled moss. The month then the year got away
without child
    I find my wife inside
an inedible mushroom
walrus with its mouth wide open war statistics

Perhaps those haiku poets with clear and recognizable aesthetics would most easily be recognized as kindred poets by mainstream poets. This has been demonstrated within Roadrunner’s “Scorpion Prize,” a prize that is chosen by some haiku poets but a by majority of mainstream poets and literary critics and theorists. So it may not be the whole vast field of haiku that warrants equalizing with mainstream poetry, but those exhibiting most creative aesthetics truly would offer an exchange of valuable models.
Philip Rowland

Haiku offers poets the chance to engage with a contemporary, cross-cultural tradition. It also offers distinctive kinds of concision or cutting as means of compression. (‘Mind,’ as they say, ‘the gap.’)

Perhaps what haiku poets can learn most from other poets’ work is to stay hungry, i.e., not to get too much of a hang of haiku. The broader the poet’s (any poet’s) acquaintance with the art form in general, the better the chances of his/her own writing staying fresh.

Peter Newton

What can haiku poets learn from more mainstream poets?

First, I can only tell you what I have learned. What I continue to learn, which is:

Discipline. Control. Pace. Where to break a line. How to write with your ear. Trust it. And create your own cadence. To value close observation that speaks a certain rhythm all its own. To crash words into each other and see what happens. Or to sing the lyric dreamily like dropping a path of words along a trail...luring the reader closer. I’m thinking of a particular Mary Oliver poem that begins: “It is a negligence of the mind not to notice...” That kind of turn of phrase: “a negligence of the mind” is something that haiku poets are trained to steer clear of. Too intellective. Cerebral. Up to the ol’ poetry parlor tricks. Yet language is musical when we train ourselves or give ourselves permission to listen for that disembodied phrase, for that one unforgettable wonder of a word like undulate, cudgel, soliloquy. Some words beg to be spoken aloud.

Compelling non-haiku poets pledge their allegiance to language first, it seems, not rules. First the sound, then the sense.

Non-haiku poets have taught me an abiding love of language. Word by word.
That a good book can sometimes be the dictionary. Haiku poets have taught me this as well. But I came to poetry as a young undergraduate memorizing Dickinson’s “The grass so little has to do a sphere of simple green with only butterflies to brood and bees to entertain…” Or Bishop’s wonderful lines from “Insomnia”: “…into that world inverted where left is always right, where the shadows are really the body, where we stay awake all night, where the heavens are shallow as the sea is now deep, and you love me.” Longer form mainstream poetry was my introduction to the world of lyric language. Short, heart-breaking lyrics hobbled my heart from the get-go. I would never stray far from Poetry. Haiku came much, much later.

The haiku poet can learn from the non-haiku poet how to take chances and how to invent words. e.e.cummings’ “mud-luscious”, for example. Certainly, word inventing is not confined to the realm of mainstream poetry but you don’t often see it in English language haiku. Why not? It’s supposed to be light verse. Why not laugh a little more. 21st-century haiku requires good ol’ fashioned, traditional innovation.

I have learned from non-haiku poets how to film a poem. How to set the lights, cue the music, yell: “Action!” And then when to be quiet. Silent. How not to step on your one dramatic moment that makes the reader stop—feel. Remember. Thank you Ellen Bryant Voigt for tapping out like a schoolteacher the notes of my own singing. For telling the class—showing them, with arms overhead that “your poem is exactly that -- a sustained crescendo -- hold it.” No one said it would be easy. We all begin with a blank page. We must teach each other to never give up. To write only what matters even when we don’t know what matters.

Write it all.

Sort it later.

Sustain your crescendo as if that is all anyone will ever hear.
I apologize for my late response:

Clarity.

Haiku are a million words reduced; they are what I reference, clarity in confusion; and, they represent and are the solution to the loquacious ramblings of an undisciplined mind. The art of writing haiku is the art of writing, living and speaking from clarity rather than chaos.

How could clarity not help everyone on the planet?

The intellect is a fuzz ball - a theory mongering absence of clarity - a co-creator of chaos. And what it creates, it will most assuredly never solve, resolve. Chaos is a natural attraction of the intellect - the mind. Clarity is the solution and it comes from “less, not more.” Perfect for haiku; haiku perfect for it.

How could clarity not help everyone on the planet?

In saying less, you have more. In acting less, you have completed the task. In dreaming you create and in creating, you become lost in words; and, becoming lost in words, lost in the intellect, chaos will have you over for dinner - if not the subject of dinner.

How could clarity not help everyone on the planet?

Concision is a lost art - in thought, speech and writing. Haiku is a found one. The wind itself is confusion. A poet noticing the affect of wind on an ant, is clarity. The swinging of a sword is chaos; the tip of a sword is clarity.

How could clarity not help everyone on the planet?

Clarity.
Paul Miller

I avoided this question because it was too big; it was also too small.

Too big for the reasons others have given—that we are all poets, whether short or long, “mainstream” (whatever that means… poetry, after all, is a very small ghetto, and if you asked the average person who Natasha Trethewey was you’d get a blank look; so can you truly call her mainstream?... even if she is the poet laureate) or haiku. There is no point to borders. There is just the work.

But also too small. because you don’t learn from a genre but from an individual poem. From hundreds of individual poems. Some wonderful examples given above by others—many names I don’t know, but I’ve jotted down to check out one day. Thanks for those.

Michael Dylan Welch

In response to Diane Wakoski’s comment, I don’t see haiku in English (or any other language) as being a “ghost” of Japanese haiku. English-language haiku is just as much flesh and blood and every bit as alive as Japanese haiku. But even if that’s not what she meant, it’s more importantly every bit as capable as well, even while there are differences. The essences of haiku have been repeatedly shown to be translatable to any language, and while core techniques such as season words and a two-part juxtapositional structure will have nuanced differences from culture to culture, they are still just as possible in English as in Japanese.

Nor is haiku just an imagist poem. Gendai haiku has shown that haiku can be far more than just an imagist expression. I would argue that it was actually the West that influenced Japanese haiku into evolving what has become gendai haiku, but even before gendai haiku’s return influence on the West, haiku was broader than just an imagist poem. Nevertheless, I agree that imagism (lowercase) lies at its core (and here I would note that it was haiku that influenced the West to help
generate the Imagist movement in the first place).

In any event, Diane suggests that poems written in a letter-based alphabet like English “cannot fulfill the premise” of poems written in a language like Japanese that is based on pictographs. This opinion begs the question of which premise she has in mind, but I don’t see any premise in haiku that cannot be fulfilled in English or another language just as readily as it is in Japanese. In my view, Japanese has a set of advantages and disadvantages just as much as English. Where one language has gains, the other has losses, and vice versa. Each language has its strengths. English, for example, has a vastly larger vocabulary, and can control nuances in tense and articles in ways that are not so clear in Japanese. My wife is Japanese and she says whenever she’s angry or upset she prefers to use English because it’s clearer and more direct. On the other hand, that does not mean that Japanese is the only language where one can hint at things or be intentionally indirect. Perpetrated ambiguity is still perfectly possible in English.

Regarding form, it’s worth reading Keiko Imaoka’s essay on “Forms in English Haiku” (see https://sites.google.com/site/graceguts/further-reading/forms-in-english-haiku for the definitive version), which addresses differences in syntax and word order, and ultimately supports the effective creation of haiku in English without needing to follow a form of 5-7-5 syllables (an urban myth for haiku in English, as has been said often). Other strategies matter far more than form, and I believe those characteristics have shown themselves to have little or nothing to do with whether a language is letter-based or pictograph-based.

H. Gene Murtha

Any poet can learn from any poet regardless of form or genre: from language to economics to region to culture to beat to rhythm to rhyme, to form, to birds, etc., etc.

What is the point of the question.
Richard Gilbert

What I’d add to the discussion on form is the long paper I published with Judy Yoneoka on haiku form and metrics in Japanese and English, and issues of emulation:

From 5-7-5 to 8-8-8: Haiku Metrics and Issues of Emulation — New Paradigms for Japanese and English Haiku Form, by RICHARD GILBERT and JUDY YONEOKA


Particularly the penultimate section:

A Metrical Approach to English Haiku Based on the Japanese Template: A Musical Analogy

Also see The Metrics of Japanese Haiku especially, A Foot-based Template (which begins:)

Music is not the universal language; rhythm is. Plenty of people are tone-deaf, but everyone has a heartbeat.
- Chico Hamilton, Jazz drummer

Peter Yovu

H. Gene Murtha, responding to the Field Notes forum question regarding what poets who write haiku and poets who don’t can learn from each other asked:

What is the point of the question?

I have a roundabout reply, but will try to be brief. Discussions on the old Troutswirl
blog and later on *Sails* were often quite lively and stimulating. However, they tended to attract a relatively small (but loyal) band of participants. At times discussions within discussions went in the direction of “how can we get more people involved?”

With Field Notes, the idea was to invite a number of people to participate in the exploration of a variety of topics, and to make it as appealing and simple as possible. Some are people who have little time at their disposal and may not visit the forums on a regular basis. FN has provided them a good way to offer their views.

You can see the results. It is not meant to be exclusive. Anyone interested can respond to a given topic in any way they wish. Anyone can pick up on something that someone else has said, and take off in that direction, perhaps invite discussion. That’s what Michael has done with an intriguing statement made by Diane Wakoski.

So, in general, the point of the questions is to stimulate thought, to generate discussion, and perhaps to inspire. Some questions are going to do none of that for some people. This particular question came out of a lot of interest that has been expressed about the relationship between poetry in general and haiku in particular. Each person’s question around that general subject is likely to be a little, or a lot, different.

That’s why FN panelists and all participants are encouraged to “make the question their own”-- to find their own version of it. An example of that, picked up by several people so far, might go something like this:

“Can you talk about a poet (who doesn’t write haiku) who has helped you write haiku?” The ideal response, in my view, is one in which you find out what you didn’t know you knew.

For some people it seems, this particular question may be a bit of a tree stump--used to have some relevance, perhaps, but now, there’s nothing much to climb on. For others, there are fresh shoots to appreciate.


Don Baird

“In my view, Japanese has a set of advantages and disadvantages just as much as English. Where one language has gains, the other has losses, and vice versa. Each language has its strengths. English, for example, has a vastly larger vocabulary, and can control nuances in tense and articles in ways that are not so clear in Japanese. My wife is Japanese and she says whenever she’s angry or upset she prefers to use English because it’s clearer and more direct. On the other hand, that does not mean that Japanese is the only language where one can hint at things or be intentionally indirect. Perpetrated ambiguity is still perfectly possible in English.” MDW

I think, in a way, this shifts away from what haiku poets can learn from other forms of poetry and what other poets can learn from the haiku form. It goes outside and beyond and into another realm of often heated debate as to whether a haiku in English is even considered to be haiku. Many say no; numerous others including myself, say yes! This is a lively set up for debate! We can place the people in a Haiku Cage fight! LOLLL Just kidding!

So, I suggest this topic to become a primary topic for FN to consider as a new Notes discussion.

Peter? Some time down the line? Lets do it!?

I write haiku because they’re there ...

through
the hole of a cheerio,
spring!

Alan Summers

I am in agreement with Don (Baird) that whether haiku is poetry, or can be poetry outside the Japanese poetical canon etc... could be an interesting future
question, especially if new light is shone onto the subject.


The poem, in all its forms, perhaps, to paraphrase Ian Sansom - frequent contributor and critic for *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books* - remains a most elusive thing. One minute you think you have it pinned down, and the next it’s moved, both geographically, and in its mode of transport. If you thought you knew everything about haiku poetry, here’s an exploration into other styles and approaches.

What of short verse, and in particular, haiku and other aspects of haikai literature in the fledgling 21st century?

How do we enter into conversation with these poets, or is a poem an argument? What are the basic intentions on offer that are indispensable to compose these poems?

Fill […] the granaries of your skull with all kinds of words, necessary, expressive, rare, invented, renovated and manufactured. Equipment [like a] pen, a pencil, […] an outfit for your visits to the doss-house […] an umbrella for writing in the rain, a room measuring the exact number of paces you have to take when you’re working… Vladimir Mayakovsky, *How Are Verses Made?* (1926), tr. G.M. Hyde

Ian Sansom stated “The poet invents. But the reader invents also.” And I’d respond by “The poet invents and the haiku writer engages, and if both writers are open they will learn from each other, and although non-haiku poetry may be communication and dialogue between similar poets, both types of writers should take the reader with them.” As I’ve professionally discovered, haiku poetry is often a gateway for members of the general public to re-engage with poetry, who have various reasons in having stayed away from poetry as a whole.

A haikuist should always be a writer aware of other genres, always looking at current practices in poetry, though I wonder if this approach is adopted enough by both poets from inside and outside the haikai practice, as much as it used to
be by poets such as Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound etc… If poetry is dialogue it needs to be ongoing and inclusive and allow non-poets to feel welcomed and included.

Should not all poets attempt to enter the tight cage of haiku and other poetry, with what Johnson talked of, back in 1751:

“Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity.” Johnson (May 28, 1751)

Peter Yovu

You could say that Field Notes provides a sort of virtual container for discussion—to function both as an amplifier as well as a haven—much as the upcoming HNA conference will no doubt do, and much as retreats can do.

That’s the intention at any rate. Questions that have been raised by Diane’s and Michael’s (and others’) posts will almost certainly come up for FN exploration. I don’t exactly want to steer anyone away from ongoing discussion right now, however. If it needs to happen, it will happen.

I’m sure these posts have got a few of us thinking.

Philip Rowland

An all-too-brief comment, with so much opened up by these field notes, but Don Baird’s topic of “clarity” – his thought being that “The art of writing haiku is the art of writing, living and speaking from clarity rather than chaos” – made me want to mention George Oppen, for whom, as Eliot Weinberger says in his Preface to Oppen’s New Collected Poems, clarity “was a favorite word.” In “Of Being Numerous,” for instance, Oppen writes:

Clarity
In the sense of transparence,
I don't mean that much can be explained.

Clarity in the sense of silence.

And in “Route”:

Clarity, clarity, surely clarity is the most beautiful
thing in the world,
A limited, limiting clarity

I have not and never did have any motive of poetry
But to achieve clarity

It seems significant that Oppen speaks of his “motive” to “achieve” clarity, as this implies the difficulty or struggle involved: that clarity must be earned. For (also from “Route”):

Words cannot be wholly transparent. And that is the
‘heartlessness’ of words.

Thus – Weinberger again: “Oppen’s struggle for ‘clarity’ … did not result in the kind of small perfection of unadorned speech achieved by Reznikoff and Niedecker, poems that reached what Zukofsky called ‘total rest.’ Oppen's poems represent the struggle itself …”

Which is too big a topic to go into here, but it could be interesting to reflect on where haiku comes into this (or to compare with Don’s idea of speaking “from” clarity), as well as the question of clarity, in poetry, more generally.

And to put Oppen’s sense of clarity into the perspective of the opening lines of “Of Being Numerous,” which may resonate more clearly with haiku poetics:
There are things
We live among ‘and to see them
Is to know ourselves’.

Tom D’Evelyn

Right. Much ambiguity here. good! Not so clear. Perhaps objectivism rather
than imagism provides the central discourse for the topic clarity. I’d rather see
haiku structure as set of open analogies, clear perhaps as narrative/ situation but
polyvocal in resonance, ultimately open to mystery of finite existence, that there
is anything at all.

All clear!

E Luckring

All clear, Tom!!

Phil,
you brought up this quote from Rae Armantrout from an earlier Troutswirl
conversation; seems relevant here:

Rae Armantrout, speaking of metonymic work by Hejinian and Niedecker:
“Their poems may not be as easily readable as those of [Sharon] Olds
… but clarity need not be equivalent to readability. How readable is the
world? There is another kind of clarity that does not have to do with
control, but with attention, one in which the sensorium of the world can
enter as it presents itself.
Thanks, Eve, for reminding me of that Armantrout quote. It’s a useful distinction (between clarity and readability; or attention-based vs. controlling clarity), which chimes with Oppen’s thought and, in a way, with the general relation of Objectivism to Imagism, which Michael Davidson sums up neatly: “Objectivism served as a corrective to (not a repudiation of) Imagism’s faith in the visual by linking the phenomenal object with an experiencing, language-using subject” (Oppen, New Collected Poems, xxxvi). As Oppen himself wrote, his intention was to “construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry, from the imagist intensity of vision.”

Constructing a method of thought may not sound very haikuey, and as Don says, “the intellect is a fuzz ball – a theory mongering absence of clarity – a co-creator of chaos”. I imagine Oppen would largely agree, aware of the dangerous power of the mind and the “frightening” aspect of words. But his response would also seem to be that the chaos (so much a part of our world) must be faced, and that if one keeps striving “out of poverty / to begin // again impoverished / of tone of pose …” (“Song, The Winds of Downhill”), thinking and speaking (“constructing”) with great care and sincerity, clarity might be achieved – the words “earned,” truth restored to them. A previously uncollected poem in the New Collected articulates this faith:

A poetry of the meaning of words
And a bond with the universe

I think there is no light in the world
but the world

And I think there is light

Much as Tom describes haiku as “ultimately open to mystery of finite existence, that there is anything at all,” Oppen’s writing is marked by a strong sense of awe.
or amazement. His well-known “Psalm” begins:

   In the small beauty of the forest
   The wild deer bedding down—
   That they are there!

And ends:

   The small nouns
   Crying faith
   In this in which the wild deer
   Startle, and stare out.

The poem also serves as a fairly straightforward example of his “linking the phenomenal object with an experiencing, language-using subject”: “Their eyes … The roots … Their paths … The small nouns …”

My impression is that contemporary (roughly speaking, 21st C?) English-language haiku tend to involve the “experiencing, language-using subject” more often or more explicitly than used to be the case. I agree with Tom: “Perhaps objectivism rather than imagism provides the central discourse for the topic clarity.” At least, I find it the more interesting and relevant discourse.

Peter Yovu

I removed my earlier response-- too expansive for now, I feel.

What I would like to suggest is that the discussion be anchored with some examples--

haiku that derive from objectivist principles, and haiku that derive from imagism. Is this possible?
Maybe we can look at how “clarity” operates in either case-- or doesn’t.

I was just moving around my room to some Afro-Celt Sound System music, reading a poem or two from Seamus Heaney’s Wintering Out (I have the Faber edition) and thinking about this subject-- or subjects really. I had some good thoughts. I’ve forgotten most of them. You had to be there, I guess.

A lot’s been set down in the small space of this brief (so far) discussion. Perhaps someone will read it and decide to write an essay about the influences of Objectivism, Imagism, modernism, post-modernism etc. on Elh. Can such a journey even be traced? Kind of a companion to Haiku in English.

I too think that what Don has said-- “The art of writing haiku is the art of writing, living and speaking from clarity rather than chaos” is worth looking at. Maybe Don will speak a bit more to what this means to him. It is possible that the thoughts that come to mind right now around this will not relate directly to his, or only glancingly. But I suppose that’s what’s discussion is about-- coming to a point where one is responding to a fulness, not reacting to a perceived angle.

What I want mostly is to write poetry. This for me has always meant a process of discovery. It does not necessarily start from clarity-- or at least not one yet discerned. It starts from curiosity-- where will these words, these sounds, this image lead me? Why am I drawn to this tree? What’s nagging at me from some unlit place?

It’s easier to apply this to poems longer than haiku. In very good poems, you can kind of trace the poet’s process-- maybe Oppen’s poems are good examples. I think this is one reason many poets dismiss haiku-- they don’t appear to have been written in the way I’m talking about. They appear to be products-- they are all too clear.

I think the problem in part, is this: reading a number of haiku that are simple and very clear-- they are easily grasped-- some people get the idea that this is something they can do. Maybe that’s a good starting point, but I think ultimately it’s a mistake. A better, more sober, more exhilarating starting point is when you realize you can’t write haiku. I can’t write haiku. Maybe I’m just being perverse here, but I think it’s not until you really feel this that you actually can. Write a
poem. Haiku.

And yes I realize that with haiku much of the process-- the study, the engagement with language, with what perception is and so on-- and with everything that brings up-- remains mostly invisible. It comes prior to the poem we see. (Sidebar: Valery-- “A poem is never finished. It is only abandoned).

I’m not convinced that this needs be the case with haiku. Does the appearance in haiku of Philip’s “experiencing, language-using subject” speak to this-- bringing process into the work? I think some will say that’s exactly what haiku should not do-- that it blurs rather than clarifies. Here too, examples would be helpful.

But with poems which are all too clear, which are easily grasped, which appear not to have been written but to have been constructed-- one does not sense the engagement.

A number of people have asked for concision in these posts. Hard to do sometimes when one needs to think things through a bit to discover one’s meaning. Or get a rhythm.

So, back to the music. Some I may have to face.

Philip Rowland

Peter asked whether it’s possible to give examples of ‘haiku that derive from objectivism, and haiku that derive from imagism’: Not sure that it is, clearly, except for the haiku written by poets directly involved in those movements – and even then, it’s worth remembering that ‘objectivist’ was a name that Zukofsky suggested only at the request of Harriet Monroe, the editor of Poetry magazine, for the 1931 issue in which Oppen, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Bunting, Williams, Rexroth et al appeared. (Zukofsky later wrote, ‘I said objectivist, and they [the ‘history books’ writers] said objectivism and that makes all the difference.’)

My impression is that Imagist haiku tended to be more literary, classicist or orientalist: e.g., Pound’s metro poem and ‘Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord’
(beautiful poem) and Lowell’s ‘Autumn Haze’; Objectivist haiku or haiku-like poems to be more down-to-earth, urban and contemporary, e.g. Reznikoff’s

Among the heaps of bricks and plaster lies
A girder, still itself among the rubbish

And ‘About an excavation / a flock of bright red lanterns / has settled.’

A little-known poem of Oppen’s – one that he didn’t consider worthy of inclusion in his first collection Discrete Series – can be read as a response to Pound’s metro poem:

The pigeons fly from the dark bough
unleaved to the window ledge;
There is no face.

The ‘precious’ elements of Pound’s poem are gone: the ‘petals’, ‘the apparition of these faces’, the poised tone. Oppen also wrote: ‘The weakness of Imagism [is that] a man writes of the moon rising over a pier who knows nothing about piers and is disregarding all that he knows about the moon.’ Does this stance align him more or less closely with ELH?

There have been many strands of later poetry that owe a lot to the Objectivists: hard to imagine Theodore Enslin or Harvey Shapiro (both of whom wrote some haiku-like short poems) without Oppen, for instance; or Creeley or Grenier (some of whose ‘Sentences’, esp., could well qualify as experimental haiku), without Zukofsky -- his play with sounds and attention/weight granted to the ‘small words’. Richard Gilbert’s haiku, ‘as an and you and you and you alone in the sea’ suddenly springs to mind.

Thomas A Clark, an inheritor of the Objectivists (Basil Bunting in particular?) has written many poems closely akin to haiku. And John Martone, whose careful weighing and fracturing of words and phrases in many poems (good examples of ‘linking the phenomenal object with an experiencing, language-using subject’?)
owes something to objectivism – more so than to imagism, I’d say. But this is not to claim that Martone’s haiku are ‘derived from objectivism’, just that his work is entwined with strands of the Objectivist legacy.

On the other hand, I remember reading Rae Armantrout describe her early work as ‘neo-imagist’, and her giving the following poem (co-incidentally in 17 syllables?) as an example:

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VIEW

Not the city lights. We want

-the moon-

The Moon
none of our own doing!
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Perhaps this resonates interestingly, or ironically, with Oppen’s point about the ‘weakness of Imagism’. At any rate, when I read the poem, rightly or wrongly, I imagine the first mention of the moon - the oddly hyphenated, lower-case one – as the actual moon (as it’s noticed, the speaker not sure at that point where the poem’s going to go, or what her ‘view’ is), re-appearing all too soon capitalized, beginning to be subject to our ‘control’, which (as the last line exclaims) is not what she wants at all.

I very much agree with what Peter says in his last post about wanting, mostly, just ‘to write poetry’, and starting upon a poem (with some sort of seed in mind) as a ‘process of discovery,’ working towards rather than writing ‘from’ clarity.

Excuse the mess!
I find these two comments of Peter’s interesting:

“In very good poems, you can kind of trace the poet’s process-- maybe Oppen’s poems are good examples. I think this is one reason many poets dismiss haiku-- they don’t appear to have be written in the way I’m talking about. They appear to be products-- they are all too clear”

“But with poems which are all too clear, which are easily grasped, which appear not to have been written but to have been constructed-- one does not sense the engagement.”

Seems to open up a lot of doors. Does this bring us back to the question of whether haiku must be experienced/discovered in order for them to be valid? That somehow “desk ku” which are “constructed” are less so? Or does this hinge on the word “appear” used thrice above, which throws the boiling pot into the hands of the reader. Should our “constructions” be more clouded to be taken seriously? But that seems to fly in the face of clarity.

Yes, Paul’s post is interesting and germane to the topic of clarity. If he or anyone feels that I have muddied the stream a bit here, they may well be right.

By “written” I mean a poem, regardless of its origins, which has gone through a journey of discovery to some sort of-- I can’t avoid paradox-- dynamic resting place on the page, and in the reader’s imagination.

What I mean by “constructed” refers to a poem whose parts don’t quite cohere as a felt “whole”. It can be grasped, but not intuited.
It’s hard to talk about this, frankly, without sounding harsh or dismissive.

Martin Lucas might disagree with my approach here, but I think he talks about, and with greater clarity no doubt, something similar in his essay *Haiku as Poetic Spell*.

He says: “. . . poets writing original haiku in English have focused on what is said and paid relatively little attention to how it is said”.

I would say it is this “how” which underlies writing as a journey of discovery.

Of course, to get a better sense of what Lucas is talking about, to get more context, requires reading his essay. Nonetheless, I’ll extract a bit more and say that he refers to haiku which are “essentially rational”; which easily yield to prose paraphrase;

and which can be “analyzed in terms of information content alone” as “International Formula” haiku. (There’s more to it than that-- but again-- read the essay).

He says that haiku which are imbued with “poetic spell” on the other hand, are “essentially irrational- prose paraphrase not possible”; and they “cannot be analyzed in terms of information content alone”.

So another word for “constructed” may be “formulaic”. The parts which go into such a poem can be taken apart with no real loss of meaning. The poem does not go beyond the author’s intent.

And by “written” I’ll now say that the writer has worked with elements of prosody (among other things) under some compulsion or belief that sound and rhythm-- the contours of which need to be explored and discovered-- will yield a felt or intuited meaning, perhaps beyond any intention of the author. It cannot be taken apart, and the attempt destroys it.

This does not necessarily mean that “information” has no place-- just not a dominant one.

And of course there are poems, I and others who publish in R’r and elsewhere have sometimes been guilty of this, which are “clouded” to use Paul’s word--
which for me means they resist taking any shape and mean whatever you want them to mean.

I’ll just add, though I think it belongs in another discussion, that “experience” as treated in haiku need not be determined as “outer” phenomena only, but may be of inner and equally real phenomena-- and expression of that may well appear to some as made up, imagined, or even fantastic, as it requires unusual language and juxtapositions. It may end up being dismissed as “desk ku”.

Philip Rowland

To respond to Paul’s: “Should our ‘constructions’ be more clouded to be taken seriously? But that seems to fly in the face of clarity.”

Armantrout’s suggestion, from Eve’s post above, seems to help answer that question: “but clarity need not be equivalent to readability. How readable is the world? There is another kind of clarity that does not have to do with control, but with attention, one in which the sensorium of the world can enter as it presents itself.”

If readability is not necessarily equivalent to clarity, a poem may appear to be “clouded” or difficult but prove, given our full attention, astonishingly clear.

Cherie Hunter Day

I don’t recall who said, “I write not so much to be understood but to be heard.” This quote would be appropriate on the back cover of Poetry magazine. It may be, in fact, where I read it. The words seem pitched for discussion. Do we write for a sense of belonging, to verify our experiences, to build consensus, to entertain? Or do we stand in the gap as a witness at the edge of the void. I’ve been a different places at different times in my writing. Honing words to a simple, clear, precise expression works in both registers—to be understood and
to be heard. That aha! moment in haiku is one of clarity but it may be clarity at a picture of chaos. It looks so simple, much the same way silence may look like a vacuum waiting for words. But there is a great presence in what is not said. I agree with Mark Rothko who said, “Silence is so accurate.”

**Peter Newton**

In re-visiting this question briefly and reading the density of discussion above I am reminded what drew me to haiku in the first place--and a bit further away from the longer free verse I had been writing--clarity. Or is it a purity of language. A step away from academics toward the wilderness of life. For me, that's haiku. What can haiku poets learn from other forms of poetry? (Especially, the poetry one might encounter in the major literary journals) A quick, flip but accurate answer: What not to do.

**Chris Patchel**

Though I find much to concur with in the posts above I'm still not clear on where the topic is coming from or going to, or what the focus is about. Clarity of image? That's certainly the goal, except when it isn’t. Clarity of meaning? Same thing. Clarity of vision, intention, execution? A more affirmative yea to that, but in the end I guess I don’t have definitive thoughts or feelings about the word. I’m much more keen on the idea of ‘immediacy’ when it comes to haiku.

**Don Baird**

“… I think some will say that’s exactly what haiku should not do-- that it blurs rather than clarifies. Here too, examples would be helpful.
But with poems which are all too clear, which are easily grasped, which appear not to have been written but to have been constructed-- one does not sense the engagement.” ~ peter yovu

I’m not sure that “clarity in chaos” necessarily equates to reader understanding. Clarity, as I envision it, is a reference point of the author’s place of being when writing a haiku. It is a psychological position that centers the poet’s keenness, not unlike that of composers, sculptors, artists, and others. What I am pondering is that the poem itself may remain unclear following a first reading while the poet’s clear mind wasn’t obscured during the writing of it. For the reader, there is a process of reading and re-reading for meaning that Dr. Gilbert often references. Regarding the poet, there is an embodiment of clarity that needs to exist, give or take a few libations!

Reader misunderstanding may occur. But, that, in and of itself, is not symptomatic of chaos within the poet. There is a unique relationship between the poem’s accessibility and the reader’s resistance to its meaning.

To compose such a haiku that allows reader accessibility and yet doesn’t immediately give the prize away, requires a poet of clarity (clear mind). This is a much different position than stating the poem itself is easily accessed (clear).

    through
    the hole of a cheerio,
    spring!

Peter Yovu

I strongly suspect that Don and others will agree with what I am about to say, though it may appear to be in opposition. My sense is that the “prize” in haiku (and poetry) is something which in fact cannot be grasped-- only intuited. It is, to play on that word a little, what is priceless about it.

So, coming down this discussion a ways (as on a river, sometimes muddy,
sometimes choppy, sometimes broad and seemingly still) I would say that a haiku which is “all too clear” is one that it does not go beyond what can be grasped by the mind, especially the mind (call it the left brain if you will) which wants to “get it”.

Even so, there are haiku which are limited in this way which nonetheless have great charm. Kerouac’s

    Missing a kick/ at the icebox door/ it closed anyway

Though some will say, well it’s isn’t a haiku. I won’t go there.

Maybe Peggy Willis Lyle’s poem:

    reaching for green pears/ the pull/ of an old scar

could be cited as one which goes beyond graspability. Yes, there are elements that one “gets”-- but there is something more too. Of course, how it was written is important--the attention to sound and rhythm. For one thing, how the double stresses of “green pears” match the double stresses of “old scar”.

I write about haiku and poetry because I want to see more. It’s like talking about a dream, and inviting others to say what they see too-- it brings it out in interesting and sometimes unsettling (because revealing) ways. It can also bring people together.

It doesn’t have to be an academic exercise. It can come from the wilderness and joy of looking closely at something. Wilderness because at heart one is looking for what is fresh and enlivening. For something unseen-- and perhaps unseeable. Clarity is not for the eyes only.

I’ve heard people say they don’t want to talk about haiku, or to be “intellectual” about it. That’s fine. But me, I want to see if I am writing from some unconscious notions which reading poetry, which hearing about and reading Oppen, for
example, may reveal. I want to know what the Objectivists meant when they said “the poem is an object”-- do I or others write, perhaps unknowingly, from that stance, and is it limiting? Does it reflect how I see the world?

Point I wish to make is, reading poetry and what poets have to say about it helps me question what I do, to open it up.

Don Baird

Nicely penned, Peter.

“But me, I want to see if I am writing from some unconscious notions which reading poetry, which hearing about and reading Oppen, for example, may reveal. I want to know what the Objectivists meant when they said “the poem is an object”-- do I or others write, perhaps unknowingly, from that stance, and is it limiting? Does it reflect how I see the world?” ~ peter yovu

The poem, as “an object” (to me), is much like a sponge that can absorb the reader as much as the reader can absorb it. That inter-mutual connection, while not clear as to how it works, may be clear in the end when the reader connects to the essence of the poem . . . or not.

E Luckring

“Or do we stand in the gap as a witness at the edge of the void.”--Cherie

This statement by Cherie, Paul’s comments, Chris’s interjection of “immediacy”, and Don’s last posts made me think of this lovely short interview with the painter, Philip Guston, who over the course of his life’s work has created an idiosyncratic oeuvre navigating realism and abstraction in a remarkable way:

“But it almost looked too good. it’s almost as if I hadn’t experienced anything with it.”
For me this has a lot to do with the underbelly of our discussion around “clarity and chaos”.

Devora

Excuse me, Peter, but your assertion “that a haiku which is ‘all too clear’ is one that it [sic] does not go beyond what can be grasped by the mind” is a bit too resolute. In fact, I find both Kerouac’s and Peggy Willis Lyles’ haiku equally professional, instantly grasped and wide open to cavernous complexities. I like that combination (not so easily achieved, as you know). I have read many of your and others’ work in R'r,[i] and I sometimes find them annoyingly experimental. What I do acknowledge of these poems, however (whether I “get them” or not), is the absolute understanding that if haiku is to endure, it needs to be cultivated by the best minds, and I am quite willing to give up “clarity” (your “prize”) for that advancement. What I am not willing to give up is my love for the many “traditional” works (some of your exquisite poems among them) that still move me well beyond the immediate.

Peter Yovu

Well, I think I was saying much the same thing-- that a poem can be easily grasped and still work.

The kind of poetry I’m talking about is a rare thing, but I am interested in rare things. Maybe a sense of this, which brings in the feeling of longing, can be heard in something Christian Wiman says in a wonderful book My Bright Abyss:

“I have wanted some image to open for me, to both solidify my wavering faith and ramify beyond it, to say more than I can say”.

He’s writing within the context of art and faith, but I think you can see why I offer it here.
And yes, I agree too that a lot of stuff is out there about which even I, with my aversion to words like “getting” and “grasping”, am likely to say “I don’t get it”. And that probably means as much as anything that it doesn’t have that wonderful quality of feeling right without one’s being able to say why.

But who knows what experiments-- most of which are likely to fail-- may lead to? Those poems, the ones I praise and aspire to, require a different kind of attention than do those I’m calling “all too clear”. No doubt in the writing and the reading both. But I’m not asking nor do I need anyone to agree with me. Well, maybe 2 or 3 people.

**Chris Patchel**

A short reply just to say:

- I enjoyed the Philip Guston clip and readily relate to what he had to say.

- Wiman’s last poetry collection, *Every Riven Thing*, impressed me enough to add *My Bright Abyss* to my reading list.

- ”I am interested in rare things” as well, yet I also resonate with this final remark by Billy Collins that I just read in *Haiku in English*: “I like to think of the haiku as a moment-smashing device out of which arise powerful moments of dazzling awareness. But I also like to think of it as something to do while walking the dog.”

- Count me among the 2 or more people that, more often than not, agree with, or certainly appreciate, Peter’s ruminations.

**Devora**

“The kind of poetry I’m talking about is a rare thing, but I am interested in rare things,” but what aesthete is not, Peter (and Chris)?

For me, I have read from time to time haiku that rival Nick Virgilio’s lily:/out of
the water/out of itself, so I know they are out there

Richard Gilbert

Quote from: Don Baird on July 29, 2013, 01:13:35 PM

Clarity

. . . The wind itself is confusion. A poet noticing the affect of wind on an ant, is clarity. The swinging of a sword is chaos; the tip of a sword is clarity.

Clarity

In consideration of this topic, and Don's above partial comment, though off-topic, a review of Jack Galmitz' recent work, quoting Don (in Reply #7, this thread) with reference to clarity:

Jack Galmitz — Experiments in Languaged Obliquity

And, just this morning, caught an NPR interview with John Zorn. It’s long, so I abridged it to focus on the topic of clarity “at age 60.” Zorn also speaks about creativity (the link to the freely available source-transcript is on the page):

John Zorn on Clarity

Quote from: Peter Yovu on September 07, 2013, 11:00:15 AM

. . . that a poem can be easily grasped and still work. The kind of poetry I’m talking about is a rare thing, but I am interested in rare things. Maybe a sense of this, which brings in the feeling of longing, can be heard in something Christian Wiman says in a wonderful book My Bright Abyss: “I have wanted some image to open for me, to both solidify my wavering faith and ramify beyond it, to say more than I can say”. . . . But who knows what experiments-- most of which are likely to fail-- may lead to?

Those poems, the ones I praise and aspire to, require a different kind of attention than do those I’m calling “all too clear”.
(some further thoughts, based on Peter’s, Don’s, Devora’s &c., comments:)

I think of poetry (not just haiku) as being created in many many ways --

If it’s not something new, in-process, with each new instance, i think you don’t usually end up with good “media” (art product -- art is about production as a goal; a making).

So we can talk about what Gary Snyder called “The Real Work.” For Don “clarity” is key, a keynote, and a keyword. For myself, it might be: “the amorphous” or “the cloud of unknowing” -- the way of “via negativa.” What comes into “focus” may be things I find only later find sweetbitter, later grasp.

And maybe there was something automatic, something like a trance, something like self-extinction.

“Clarity” poses a “something.” It is a positive. Perhaps a centering, a “truth” -- in any case a “thing.” An evident suchness; of this -- but not: that. However, in-process (poetic process, as acts of consciousness) I’m likewise deeply attracted to experiences of, as Chet Baker puts it: “Let’s Get Lost.”

When Jim Kacian wrote “pain fading the days back to wilderness” -- I felt instantly an engram of this experience -- as part of what impels me, as an explorer, a searcher; with a sense not of forging, but following. That’s where I feel to go: or it leads me, or opening before me, as if in view, though purely imaginal: back to wilderness. Wildernesses. Not chaos and not clarity; a third thing.

The paths wind on, out, dissolve, into senses (sensibilities) of infinity. “Distance is the soul of beauty” (Simone Weil). And then you may meet up with a rock, a tree.

In the Buddhist Lojong mind-training system are 59 slogans. A few are related with absolute Bodhicitta [“the mind that strives toward awakening and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings” (wiki)]. Primary is “Regard all dharmas as dreams.” (“dharmas here means “things,” “things in themelves,” “thing-as-such,” “stuff.”)

“Mind is fundamentally poetic in nature.” Soul is “that which deepens” (James Hillman).
We tend to approach reality dualistically: there is literal i.e “real” experience -- and by contrast there is fantasy: thoughts, dreams, fiction. Both Hillman and Vajrayana Buddhism cause us -- or, call us, to deeper contemplations -- to view consciousness, mind, life, less superficially. Hillman discusses this interestingly in his revolutionary work “Revisioning Psychology.” And in “The Dream and the Underworld” and in “Healing Fiction.”

It’s quite significant to me -- this question or Koan -- of regarding all dharmas as dreams. Dreams bring us close to a peculiar experience -- at the moment of the dream it feels completely real, and yet the moment after, what has happened. Something, perhaps something powerful, even life-altering -- yet how to we place it? In Hillman’s dreamwork, the key is not to extract meaning or symbolism from the dream (thus ending its story); but rather to return in active imagination -- to attend upon it, attend upon psyche. To learn what psyche wants or asks of us. The image here is that of turning towards a unique, unknown face. (A face likewise can be a landscape, a specific topos.) Hillman describes the process of “de-literalizing the literalizing function.” The “literalizing function” is his better term for “ego.”

I don’t know about you, but for me, living in a purely literal world, as a literal being -- is like psychic death. A kind of pure fundamentalism -- even a form of idiocy. But that was the world I grew up in, the messages I received. So, just say “No!” to literalism (or singular, or rank literalism). Oh, it’s been a lovely road -- to finding one’s love.

You recall the dual rivers of Eros and Thanatos -- the sense of possession in love, the rapaciousness of death (Persephone in Hades). The great Rivers (psychic streams) of the underworld; Lethe, she of forgetting, her sister Mnemosyne, river of remembrance. Dis-habituation is part of the action of poetry.

This relates to the irruption of habitual mind, a “falling” “slipping” “forgetting” of your step. Suzuku Roshi in “Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind,” discussed this concept as “shoshaku jushaku” -- living life “as one continuous mistake” (from Dogen Zenji).

In this context, what is clarity and what do we mean by it? To regard all dharmas
as dreams, for Tibetan Buddhism is a hint -- perhaps a finger hinting at the moon. “”shoshaku jushaku,” similarly. I’m not talking about haiku in particular here -- more about consciousness in creative-poetic flow. I don’t think haiku necessarily present a particularly “special” form of poetic consciousness (what do you think?). In fact, we know that some number of poems appearing as haiku were first born in lines of longer poems, in letters, from hypnagogic pre- or post-dream states; from all sorts of places.

“Enriching” -- is a kind of keyword for me. To make ourselves more wealthy, culturally, psychologically -- in embodiment, in actuality, in the fullest sense of the word. The Cartesian dialectic of clarity/chaos seems at best primitive, psychologically. More evident to me -- more relevant is the dialectic: normal/abnormal. Is “ordinary mind” an oxymoron? A tautology? Who are we?

That’s why I like the taste of haiku -- it’s not an answer, it’s food you develop a taste for.

So that’s another keyword: nourishment. Sensuous, kinesthetic savor. Truly the pleasure of the text.

Don Baird

thinking of clarity isn’t clearly clear and so think not
~ don baird

when nothing thinks a wilderness
~ don baird

Enjoyable thread to ponder, though as Richard points out, a bit off topic. My fault. I delved in another direction from the topic of “what can haiku poets learn from other forms of poetry?” I’m glad I did as now we have a few more very interesting comments regarding the spin-off topic of “clarity in confusion/chaos and its balance, if any.”
Blessings. And thanks Richard and all others for posting your thoughts. Very interesting and fun to explore this very solid, well developed thread.

ps ... Richard: I think your posts prove my point, actually. Those are clarity and represent some of the best qualities of your creative mind. You have a crisp and clear thought process . . . in a wilderness way!
field notes
For this third edition of Field Notes: Explorations in Haiku, we asked members of a panel of writers to consider which haiku, or which poets, strongly influenced them in some way. I think you will find it interesting, and perhaps touching, to learn the results of this inquiry, and I hope you will continue the exploration by adding a few of your own life-changing haiku.

Was there a poem which startled you, or perhaps nudged you, in the direction of writing? Was there a poet whose work overturned all your previous expectations or beliefs about haiku, and changed your approach to writing and reading?

— Peter Yovu

Aubrie Cox

acid rain less and less i am at one with nature

less and less nature is nature

— Marlene Mountain

I read this haiku in the third edition of The Haiku Anthology very early within my haiku existence. I was taking my first haiku course at Millikin University in 2008. Although I’d read works I enjoyed by Peggy Lyles, George Swede, Caroline Gourlay, etc, this was the poem that got to me.

This is a poem that didn’t just change the way I thought about haiku; this poem changed about how I thought about my writing. Furthermore, it ultimately steered the content of a majority of my prose for the last six years.

I’d tinkered with human/nature relations in my fiction before, which is maybe what drew me to this poem in the first place. But it was often mildly political, maybe
fantastical, but rarely spiritual or philosophical. Is there a spiritual component to this haiku? Maybe. Certainly a philosophical one in the trickle down effect that occurs with the form (the footnote) and within the content.

The repetition and the form caused me to read and reread this poem (it still does), and the process of rereading takes the first line and the footnote into a deeper space each time. The erosion from the acid rain and the disconnect between man (and the self) to nature... and then erosion of nature from nature... which consequently leads to the fact that the less nature is nature... the less man is man (at least in my reading). A loss of nature is a loss of the self. The acid rain becomes even harsher, foreign, even though it's also a matter of our own self-destruction.

I'd say this poem fostered kindness within me (much like haiku itself has done), even though this is not a kind poem. The lessons learned in Mountain's haiku—treat nature as yourself, identifying identity through nature, the dangers to nature (and the self)—became a part of my own poetry. The prose I mentioned earlier are a series of stories I've revised and added onto sporadically from undergrad to graduate school, stemming from responses to haiku and focusing on mysticism and the challenges of it within a changing world.

Needless to say, I'm grateful for this poem.

**Sandra Simpson**

This list could be much longer, but can't, I'm sure, be any shorter. I have tried, to the best of my recall, to arrange the haiku in the order I first met them. For me, they are each an illustration of good writing and I return to them when I'm in need of a reminder of what that is.

Not life-changing so much as life-affirming. The longer I go on in haiku the broader my tastes become, although I see there is nothing particularly “modern” in the group below … yet.
scampering over saucers —
the sound of a rat.
Cold, cold
— Yosa Buson

Each line (as translated by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite in The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse, published in 1964) is strong in its own right; together they leave us trembling with fear, revulsion and freezing cold.

summer grasses —
all that remains
of warrior’s dreams
— Matsuo Basho

Life, death, the futility of war, the power of nature … all in three lines and as applicable in 2013 as it was in the late 1600s. (Not sure where this translation comes from, but it's my preferred version.)

dusk
up to my ears
in birdsong
— John O’Connor, New Zealand

How often we let the busy-ness of our minds and lives dominate. This is a haiku of redemption – letting go the artificiality and falseness of modern life and just being. And what brings this about? The beauty of birdsong. Setting the poem at dusk rather than dawn adds to the feeling of the day’s burden being lifted.
thunder-filled clouds —
over the bridge come
jingling-jangling horses
— Cyril Childs, New Zealand

I can “see” this haiku, as well as hear it. The pace and rhythm are surely those of a pair of Clydesdale horses with buffed and burnished coats, plaited manes and tails, and decked out in bells and brasses for a show or fair, stepping in unison and causing everyone they pass to stop and stare. The close heat suggested by the first line adds to the “unreal” sight of the horses. Magic.

foghorns —
we lower a kayak
into the sound
— Chistopher Herold, US

I sometimes forget haiku can be playful and I sometimes overlook the importance of word choice. Here is a perfect teacher and one of my favourites … and it all hinges on the word “sound”.

gentle as a dead friend's hand
resting on my shoulder —
this autumn sunshine
— Nakamura Kusadao

A beautiful lament on the passing of life, both the friend's and the poet's. I first met the poem in *The Penguin Book of Japanese verse* but prefer this version from *Haiku Poetry Ancient & Modern* (MQ Publications, London, 2002). No translation credit was given.
river sunrise  a girl’s shadow  swims from my ankles
— Lorin Ford, Australia

Yes, thank you, I know full well what my chronological age is, but on the inside … I also think of this haiku as a “return home” poem where the sunrise and river have triggered a long-dormant memory.

rain, rain . . . 
we let her unborn twin 
return to loam
— Mark Harris, US

In the midst of the deep grief expressed I sense an acceptance that bodes well. A powerful and moving haiku.

Jim Kacian’s work never does less than delight and astonish me although I find I can’t pick one from the many so this statement will have to stand as acknowledgement of the influence of his body of work.

Philip Rowland

Below are some poems that, from memory, alerted me to somewhat ‘non-standard’ possibilities in haiku, and in that sense made me rethink my approach around the time I was discovering and starting to publish haiku (the mid-to-late 90s).

A pair with similarly appealing pathos and humour:

missing a kick
at the icebox door
it closed anyway
— Jack Kerouac

I open the drawer with nothing in it just to see
— Hôsai Ozaki

Also Hôsai’s:

I cough and am still alone

for its astonishing brevity and simplicity. Likewise, Jacques Roubaud’s minimal poem (from *Dors*):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une branche</td>
<td>a branch</td>
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<tr>
<td>frotte</td>
<td>rubs</td>
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<tr>
<td>la fenêtre</td>
<td>the window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>et puis</td>
<td>and then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frotte</td>
<td>rubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la fenêtre</td>
<td>the window</td>
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</tbody>
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which James Kirkup describes as ‘pure haiku’ in his essay ‘Some Modern European Haikuesque Poets’ (in the anthology *A Certain State of Mind*, 1995 -- a book that I found stimulating, despite its being, as David Burleigh has put it, ‘carelessly assembled and [having] no overriding theme’).
Another ‘haikuesque’ set of poems that I found fascinating was Robert Grenier’s Sentences (published in the 70s). The fragmentation in many of these was suggestive of possibilities for haiku that hadn’t been explored much. e.g.

except the swing bumped by the dog in passing

or the starlight on the porch since when

Martin Shea’s classic

moving
through the criteria---
a breeze.

was also eye-opening and memorable for its pivotal use of the unexpectedly abstract word ‘criteria’.

And John Ashbery’s pieces in haiku mode (from the 80’s collection A Wave) seemed to offer a distinctive take on haiku; also marking, in some cases, a boundary of abstraction, e.g.

I inch and only sometimes as far as the twisted pole gone in spare colors

Sayumi Kamakura’s collection A Singing Blue, a ‘quieter’ counterpart to her husband Ban’ya Natsuishi’s A Future Waterfall, made at least as lasting an impression on me:

The swimsuit on,
my soles forget
absolutely everything
The child deep
in green sleep;
the mother sleeps
in purple

Francine Banwarth

For me, it was, and is, the haiku of Raymond Roseliep that got me started, make me think and rethink my approach to haiku, show me possibilities for the craft, and keep alive my faith in the genre. He was an innovator in the form during the 19870s-80s, and it was my great luck to study under one of his students, Bill Pauly, professor at Loras College in Dubuque. Roseliep’s work is timeless and ageless. His style/voice is one of the reasons that I understand there are many ways to write successful, compelling, and challenging haiku, in both traditional and nontraditional practice. I am also greatly excited about Richard Gilbert’s The Disjunctive Dragonfly and do believe Roseliep would embrace the variety of voices writing English-language haiku today.

Three from each of Roseliep's collections, Listen to Light (1980) and Rabbit in the Moon (1983):

lilyhold
on itself
before burst

the cry
is here
where I buried it

flake too quick
for a peephole
to the absolute
What haiku changed me as a haiku poet? As a person?

This one by Peggy Willis Lyles:

winter stillness
leaves become
their veins

I heard Peggy read this in June of 2009 at The Haiku Circle in Northfield, MA. She came up from Georgia with her husband, Bill. What Southern manners. She read and we fellow poets listened. Yes, in a circle. Entranced. The nuances. The humor. The heart-felt observations of a life well-lived. And well-written.

Earlier that day, Peggy said that “a haiku is the shortest distance between two hearts.” Only someone who’d spent a good part of her life writing haiku can mean something like that. Poetry, Peggy was teaching me that day, is in the art of the simply spoken truth. No more. No less. This poem helps me remember what Poetry is.
winter stillness
leaves become
their veins

Yes, they do don’t they. Death becomes life becomes death becomes the cycle of a tree, which is the cycle of us. A portrait of the disintegration of leaves with its descending order of syllables, 4-3-2 acts as a count-down of sorts. We become our skeletal selves, it seems to say. A return to our original strength. For me, this is a lesson in the multiple levels on which even a six word poem can work, in fact, must work in order to be the most effective. Literal and figurative.

Brevity — there’s even more to it than I’d thought. I started to look at poems in a new light.

Poet as cat thief: get in get out before anyone discovers what’s missing.

I didn’t know I’d been robbed of my emotions. After all, it was just Peggy, a woman with her words with an image she wanted to share. No ego. No baggage. No glossary of poetic terms necessary. Her words and the order in which she placed them like carefully placed footsteps.

I began to realize that a powerful poem and specifically, a powerful haiku has to have invisible scaffolding holding it up. Let’s make it an invisible trellis because it also has to be beautiful. The heart remembers a trellis.
I first encountered the Roman poet Horace (65 – 8 BCE) in high school Latin, then more seriously in grad school. All that indirectly prepared me for a “life in letters” (to use an old phrase): teaching, writing, editing, agenting. As an undergraduate, I had a quarrel about Ezra Pound with a professor whom years later I'd learn was famous for haiku. I didn’t know anything about haiku until twenty some years later I decided to add a haiku component to a continuing education program at Brown University. But I had been prepared by Horace (and no doubt Ezra Pound), whose lapidary style (as Nietzsche called it) depends on brevity and juxtaposition. Another feature of Horace's style is a “leap” in content prepared by often unnoticcd word associations. So when I started to teach haiku (first in order to draw new students to the course, then because students demanded a haiku component), I was prepared to treat the form with great care, knowing that the form carries with it a “mind-set” or “episteme”: the kigo in Basho, in conjunction with a “realistic” scene, transforms the scene as if by magic, allowing it to express feelings otherwise muted or repressed. As for Horace, scholarship for Basho has deepened my understanding and enjoyment. My head often tracks a conversation between the Roman poet and the Japanese haijin (see my haibun Accidental Pilgrim, Single Island Press, 2008). What they have in common is vital form, a way of structuring words so that invisible “intimate universals” become visible. This expectation of vital imagery drawing on deep connections – what we may call the fertile void – leaves me dissatisfied with a lot of modern haiku. Today the new Norton anthology provides us a handy canon with which to explore the “mindsets” of modern haiku, perhaps even construct a cultural history of haiku in English. It will be fascinating to discover the tacit assumptions about reality that have reshaped haiku so that it resonates with contemporary expectations.

Paul Miller

I don’t think I can point to one poem, but I can point to one poet: Fay Aoyagi. If you
look at the arc my work has taken it started out very derivative of what I was reading in Blyth, and then started to incorporate local flavors, mostly from my hikes in the various hills/peaks of California. This is also around the time I discovered John Wills and Christopher Herold, both poets who at that time tended to subsume their personality to their surroundings. There is nothing wrong with this. And frankly I found it a relief to write about the wonderful natural world I was encountering than to be yet another confessional poet. As my pseudonym implies, I know/hear enough about myself to not want to hear anymore, and at that time I couldn’t think why any other person would want to hear about me either; I delighted in writing about the other.

Yet, on occasion, the self and the other collide in meaningful ways. At this time (don’t ask me the date) I became familiar with Aoyagi’s work through HPNC. Never underestimate the value of groups and what other poets can teach you. Aoyagi wrote in the wonderful Introduction to her first collection *Chrysanthemum Love*:

> I don’t write to report the weather. I write to tell my stories.

That was shocking. And even more shocking were her poems, which were often very modern in that the link between her observation and herself was seemingly tenuous—perhaps even too personal for me to understand. But that didn’t mean you couldn’t write it! This all came about as I was starting find my own voice and to incorporate more of myself into my poems anyway, and as Fay commented to me once, “You are always in your poems, but lurking in the background, unseen.” Her example gave me permission to step forward into my poem’s foreground, to be more overt; and occasionally as Charles Trumbull once said of my work, to be “Aesopian.” To quote Jim Carroll: “Everything is permitted.”

Perhaps this is obvious to many poets reading this, especially with the avant garde haiku we’re seeing in so many of the public journals these days, but it wasn’t obvious to me at that time; and I can see how it may not be obvious to some today. After all, we have any number of “gate-keepers” to get through to get our work published (I suppose I am one of them), and to do so we sometimes write what is expected or
what we think is expected, rather than what truly emerges from our mind/heart/soul. I think the lesson I learned from Fay was to believe in my own voice. She will tell you that most editors at the time rejected her work; but that didn’t stop her.

Since this is supposed to be about poems, I’ll conclude with a few of hers:

migrating birds—
the weight
of my first voters’ guide

August waves
I tell my history
to jellyfish

cold rain—
my application
to become a crab

I particularly love the last one. No idea what it “means” but I take away a lot.

**Max Verhart**

was that a leaf
returning to its branch?
ah no! a butterfly!

This Moritake poem (in my rendition) primarily represents classical Japanese haiku here. And guess what? The whole phenomenon sure enough had some influence on me! This particular poem moreover convincingly evokes in me the awareness of being.
What does not change
is the how and why
of a dragonfly.

This poem primarily represents W.J. van der Molen’s haiku poetry, demonstrating how a classical Japanese tradition can merge with a western poet’s highly personal poetics. Who ever would have thought of that? Not me – at least not without examples like this.

stars     crickets

This George Swede poem demonstrates the power of evocative writing. For whatever the poet himself had in mind, I am immediately taken into a summer evening in the south of France: you can even smell it! And what’s more: it shows that form follows function, that haiku does not follow rules, but that the rules follow haiku.

Richard Gilbert

It’s rare to experience a poem that has caused me to rethink my approach. By “rethink,” I take this to mean “expand” widen my conceptual range or understanding; to become aware of new modes of possibility or approach within the form. Haiku that have catalyzed such experiences have been presented in various articles and books I’ve published since 2000.

I’d like to share a poem which has most recently caused me to see haiku in a new way. This same poem catalyzed a new category of disjunction, which I termed “forensic parthenogenesis,” and is now found as one of the newly coined “disjunctive techniques of ‘strong reader resistance’” in Disjunctive Dragonfly (Red Moon Press, August, 2013, 132 pp.). By way of explanation here is an excerpt describing this poem—with some additional examples (from pp. 98-100):
In “Forensic Parthenogenesis,” particulars of non-human sentient beings self-generate a cosmos (as environments, a wilds, expressions of nature) through strong disjunction; such beings appear as autonomous creatures (i.e. not as pets, or associated to the human body). Concerning notions of sentience, haiku that do not place themselves so strongly in alternate types, such as “misplaced anthropomorphism” or “displaced mythic resonance,” and usually utilize the genre-style of naturalist description.

In haiku with strong parthenogenic disjunction, transformative elements, though presented as objectively descriptive fact (naturalistic), will also often be “impossibly true.” As relatively urban/nature-insulated moderns, surrounded by environments of utility and digital realities, technology, etc., haiku possessing forensic parthenogenesis reveal something about how we sense wild nature. There seems an urge or desire for new forms of mythos here being expressed — new ways of animal dreaming — that are at the same time, animals dreaming us.

inside a bat’s ear
a rose
opens to a star

(The haiku which inspired this category. The idea that an animal (or animal particular) provides a motif or fulcrum for a new poetic cosmos, impelled via disjunction. The poet draws the reader into a unique contemplation, from “inside a bat’s ear,” within its dark auricle, drawn from a creature of darkness, colorblind, ultrasonic, navigational, acoustic — and offers a mysterium coniunctionis (“mysterious conjunction”; a final alchemical synthesis) which may represent the unification of body, soul and spirit.)

in the nucleus
of a migrating cell
the summer sea

— Mark Harris, 2012, *Modern Haiku* 43.3
within mist
the blueness of a fox
falling petals death in war

clouds in a mare’s eye the fracture beyond repair
— Clare McCotter, 2012; *HIE* 314

never touching
his own face
tyranosaurus

(As *Tyrannosaurus Rex* couldn’t even touch its mouth, with arms so short. This poem of realism forges a connection between that most terrible king of predators and our own face, by implied contrast: with the crucial difference of touch.)

ants begin to look like an idea
— Scott Metz, 2009; *lakes & now wolves* (MHP, 2012)

as the world fails saxophone in the lips of a walrus
— Marlene Mountain, 2009; H21 130

*The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A New Approach to English-language Haiku*
Kristen Deming

Show me a haiku that changed your life —

I wish I could say when lightning struck and what poem it was, but there is no single haiku that changed my life. It has been like looking at a gem with many facets. The feeling and intuition are everything. And each haiku has its truth.

Haiku has been life changing for me because it is life affirming. It has also given me years of pleasure and companionship in the sensitivity, perceptiveness, humor and humanity of my fellow poets.

What got you started?

I started writing and publishing my poetry in high school, but had little exposure to haiku until college. I had read a lot of modern poetry by Elliot, Yeats, Frost, Pound, and others. Pound’s famous haiku-like poem stood out:

Apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough

And I had read some of Kerouac’s experiments with haiku:

Birds
singing in the dark,—
Rainy dawn

Brighter than the night
my barn roof
of snow

I also was intrigued by the imagery and economy of words in Chinese poetry.
Although I don’t remember specific poems, this is an example by Wang Wei:

“On branch tips the hibiscus in bloom.
The mountains show off red calices.
Nobody. A silent cottage in the valley,
One by one flowers open, then fall.

Like many older haiku poets, I started with 5-7-5, working in isolation, not aware of any haiku groups, books on the subject, magazines, etc. And without the infinity of the internet.

My first exposure to haiku was Peter Pauper Press’s *The Four Seasons* and Harcourt, Brace, and World’s *Cricket Songs*. The translations were forced into 5-7-5 pattern, but something came through.

Leaf falling on leaf,
on mounds of leaves, rain splashing
in pools of rain…
— Gyodai (*Cricket Songs*)

R. H. Blyth, well known to most haiku poets today, was also an influence through his four-volume series of translations of Japanese haiku and commentaries published in the 1950s. His work helped many aspiring haiku poets gain insight into Japanese haiku.

Living in Japan was a major influence. I was exposed to a society where millions of people enjoyed writing poetry and where poets were highly respected.

In the early years in Japan, I focused on the classical poets like Basho, Issa, Buson, Santoka, and others, whose work was translated and available.

I especially liked the directness and simplicity of Santoka Taneda’s haiku:

No more sake
I stare at the moon
All day I said nothing
The sound of the waves

Gradually, in the 80’s and 90’s, more and more haiku by modern poets was translated into English. We could enjoy the extraordinary haiku of Seishi Yamaguchi, Kato Shuson, Akito Arima, Takaha Shugyo, Inahata Teiko (granddaughter of Takahama Kyoshi), Yatsuka Ishihara, and others.

Some examples of their work: Akito Arima:

into the ranks
of the suits of armor
deep winter,

the Big Bang’s
afterglow yet also
first light of the year.

Takah Shugyo:

In its mane
the grime of one whole summer —
carousel horse

Leaving the ocean
piece by glittering piece
winter Orion
Inahata Teiko:

Lightning  
running down inside  
lightning

Yatsuka Ishihara:

Pulling light  
from the other world…  
The Milky Way

In the 90’s, poets like Yatsuka Ishihara, Akito Arima, Kazuo Sato, Tadashi Kondo, and Tota Kaneko, among others, stepped forward to support the internationalization of haiku.

As the American haiku movement grew, we had William J. Higginson’s influential books and Cor van den Heuvel’s *Haiku Anthology* to give us an overview of the breadth and variety of haiku being written.

In the late 90’s after leaving Japan, I found new inspiration at home in the U.S. There were new directions in subject matter, experiments with punctuation, spacing, and more.

Some of the haiku expressed not just gentle perceptions of nature but also captured the loneliness and alienation of modern life in a spare few words. Here is Jack Cain’s

empty elevator  
opens  
closes
And Christopher Patchel's

    winter night
    the female voice
    of my computer

Looking at American haiku, I especially admire the feeling, the authenticity, the sense of place and large spaces. There are so many examples, but for instance, Chad Robinson's

    Buffalo Bones
    a wind less than a whisper
    in the summer grass

Lee Gurga's

    winter prairie —
    a diesel locomotive
    throttles down in the night

And Billie Wilson's

    retreating glacier —
    how long since we've heard
    the black wolf's song.

There is even some wabi/sabi in poems like Nicholas Virgilio's
town barberpole
stops turning
autumn nightfall

And there is something very close to the bone in the haiku of Roberta Beary, as she explores the complexity of human relationships:

third date —
the slow drift of the rowboat
in deep water

In this poem by Yu Chang, there is a mysterious connection between the two juxtaposed images:

starry night
biting into a melon
full of seeds

We feel and accept the mystery of the connection, but do not really need to pin it down.

Marlene Mountain’s striking

pig and I spring rain

appears to have opened the way for more one-line haiku.

The last line of Kiyoko Tokutomi’s haiku gives us a shock of reality:
Chemotherapy
in a comfortable chair
two hours of winter

There are haiku describing our ordinary lives and work, as in Dee Evetts’

summer’s end
the quickening of hammers
toward dusk

Becoming dusk, —
the catfish on the stringer
swims up and down
   — Robert Speiss

And there are haiku that catch the moment ”live,” as in Dee Evett’s perceptive

morning sneeze
the guitar in the corner
resonates

Also in Glenn Coats’s

house inspection
a stranger plucks
the violin

And there is always the pleasure of reading a haiku aloud:
Rain in gusts
below the deadhead
trotswirl
— John Wills

So many good poets, so many good poems. It is a legacy and a community to be
proud of.

Allan Burns

In a poetry handbook (I wish I could recall which one), I encountered a translation
of Bashō’s striking “heron” haiku. Sam Hamill translates it like this:

A lightning flash —
and, piercing the darkness
a night heron’s cry

I had been writing terse imagistic poems since 1990 and was searching for appropriate
ways to render the experiences I was having while hiking and birding in and around
Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. As I started to grasp what haiku might be, it seemed
the perfect vehicle for helping me to achieve my goals. At the time, I was completely
ignorant of all efforts to write original haiku in English except the provisional ones
of the Imagists.

A few years later, while browsing a bookstore, I stumbled upon the third edition of
Cor’s Haiku Anthology . . .

My early efforts, predictably, were in strict 5-7-5 form, which I then believed was
“essential” to haiku. Cor’s anthology supplied some excellent models along these
lines, such as some of the work of James W. Hackett and O Mabson Southard.
But what was eye-opening was that most of the haiku were not composed in that form. One that instantly took me by the throat was Nick Virgilio’s

bass
picking bugs
off the moon

Seven syllables, five stressed. Here was everything I was after: concreteness, suggestiveness, density, essence, relations, fidelity to experience and perception rather than mere literalness . . . a visionary naturalism that seemed to fulfill the unachieved ambitions of the Imagists and their allies. And like a faithful translation of Bashō or Buson, it wasn’t 5-7-5. With such a catalyst, I was ready to evolve in my own practice.

Recently, I experienced a sense of renewed faith in the power and possibilities of the genre when I read this:

one of the wolves
shows its face
firelight

— Chad Lee Robinson, *South by Southeast* 19.3, 2012

So much of what’s important here is unstated yet implied: the darkness, the howls, the cold, the people huddled round the campfire. There’s a spine-chilling atmosphere to the whole thing. This fleeting encounter, fraught with a mixture of fear, respect, and awe, presumably on both sides, possesses an elemental and timeless quality that’s actually quite rare. It could have been written during the Ice Age. And yet it speaks also to the contemporary reintroduction of wolves into the United States, and in that respect it’s about humans and wolves in quite another way than what’s apparent on the surface. Both a cave painting and the field note of a contemporary ethologist, it reminds us that a seemingly traditional subject can be a very current
one. And even as it evokes past and present realities, it might seem also like the seed out of which myth is born. It was that rare one in thousands that instantly imprinted every word on my memory.

And that firelight, do you see it principally in the wolf’s eyes?

Cherie Hunter Day

warm rain before dawn:
my milk flows into her
unseen
— Ruth Yarrow

I remember seeing this haiku in the second edition of The Haiku Anthology by Cor van den Heuvel in the summer of 1992. My son just turned three. I would read and write haiku while he took his afternoon naps. This haiku opened a whole new realm for me. It granted me permission to write from very personal experience. I had nursed my son for nearly a year and it was surprising to me how my slim body produced enough milk to not only feed but fatten a baby. I remember how the let-down reflex felt as milk begins to flow. It’s a very intimate moment between mother and baby, and Ruth shared this experience. Yarrow juxtaposes the warm rain that feeds the earth with mother’s milk – the connection feels absolutely true and part of a deeper mystery. It’s celebratory. This haiku validated for me that a woman’s experience is a worthy subject for poetry. In a culture that vilifies a woman for breastfeeding in public even when hidden under a cover, this haiku clearly challenged that notion, but it does so in the most gentle and positive way. Twenty-one years later it still reverberates for me. I’m grateful to Ruth Yarrow.

Though I rarely write haiku as openly sensual as “warm rain before dawn;” I admire poems that take that risk.

    everywhere you touch is yes cherry blossoms
    — S.B. Friedman
Michael Dylan Welch

On being posed the question, “show me a haiku that changed your life,” I can’t say that it’s possible for me to narrow it down to a single haiku. I first started writing haiku fairly regularly in 1976, when I learned about this poetry in high school. I wrote perfect 5-7-5 haiku, all with glorious titles, for nearly a dozen years. Then, in July of 1987 I bought my first haiku book (a minimalist Lucien Stryk translation of Basho) and began buying other books of and about haiku. In November of that year I got a copy of the second edition of Cor van den Heuvel’s *The Haiku Anthology*. This book, more than any other, confronted me with my naïve presumption that haiku in English was supposed to be 5-7-5 syllables. If I could point to one poet who flew in the face of the 5-7-5 straightjacket, it was Marlene Mountain. Her visual work was especially confronting. Together with Cor’s “tundra” and other visual/aural poems in this anthology, the general fact that nearly 90 percent of the poems were not 5-7-5 (yes, I counted) radically shifted my sense of haiku. That, I think, changed my poetic life. But again, I don’t think I could point to a single poem that changed my life.

The larger point here is that haiku has more range than many of us might at first believe. This idea is central to the idea of “targets” for haiku rather than rules. Haiku has many possible targets, 5-7-5 being one of them, if one so chooses—although the syllable-counting target is one that comes at a cost for producing a longer poem than the seventeen sounds counted in Japanese. A given haiku might not hit the season-word target (by accident or on purpose), or might not hit the cutting word or juxtaposition target, and so on, but if a poem hits a preponderance of possible targets, then it can succeed as a haiku, or at least be a haiku. There’s a point where a poem goes too far and is no longer a haiku, and each of us will draw that line where we will. But the general point holds up, I believe, that the difference between haiku and not-haiku is whether a poem hits a preponderance of possible targets for the genre. Beyond a certain point, a poem might evoke a haiku sensibility, or beg to be considered as poetry in relation to haiku, but there’s a point on the continuum where a poem is no longer haiku. As we learn more varieties and approaches to haiku, we may add new targets to the various possibilities, and thus the threshold point may shift. Also relevant is how territorial or proprietary we want to be in saying “this is
haiku” and “this is not haiku,” but the first perceptions most people have of haiku are necessarily narrow—or in some cases exceedingly broad. Exploring the possible targets for haiku is a process of expanding our reading and writing experience, of encountering the strange and uncomfortable. Those encounters don’t stop after one gets past the urban myth of 5-7-5. In this context, I suppose that any poem that one encounters along the way has the potential to change one’s life if it changes the way one draws the haiku map.

We can become addicted to edge haiku, though, and forget that they’re just the edges. Such poems that “change your life” do indeed tend to be on the fringes, the way Cor’s “tundra” is a fringe haiku—and one that changed my life. It’s a poem I dearly love but would not use as a central model for teaching haiku. So, not to be neglected among “boundary” haiku that might change one’s life are more centrist haiku that might not have changed anyone’s lives but are still dearly loved for aesthetic or personal reasons. Basho talked about taking the “middle way” with his poetry, and I think it’s important to remember these poems as much as the fringe poems, even if they don’t necessarily change our lives. I know some people keep notebooks where they record favourite haiku by others that have really moved them over the years. I wish I’d had such a practice, as it would be useful to see what mattered to me at certain times, and perhaps to understand why. Over time we can see how certain poems continue to stand out, whereas others might fade away. In all, I would say that what matters is not just poems that have changed your life, but poems that are your life. It’s not just one’s first and last breaths that matter, but every breath in between.

Bruce Ross

A certain deep moodiness in which tangible reality and an affective expression meet in haiku began to seep in the 1950’s by reading in the Beats and what they read and exposure to the Rochester Zen Center. Basically a realization of facets of Buddhist ideas and practice. This coupled with a fondness for nature poetry, by way of the English Romantics, Whitman, Snyder, etc., and exposure to Native American culture, and later in understanding Shinto fused with the simplicity of imagist sensibility,
such as in Amy Lowell. All this came together when I read Virginia Brady Young’s:

moonlight—
  a sand dune
shifts
  (*Frogpond*, 1990)

Later I used this poem as an example of the so-called “haiku moment.” A kind of realization provoked on the sensibility by an occurrence in the natural world. How simple and how momentous. An opening up of consciousness.

And later still I was struck by a haiku by Burnell Lippy in *Frogpond* (2004) whose depths I have not yet totally fathomed:

   deep in the sink
   the great veins of chard
   summer’s end

I recently understand the first two lines augur the burrowing down of the natural world, literally for flora through roots and fauna through hibernation and us through warmer clothes. They demarcate as embodied in the objective correlative of the chard’s prominent veins (the plants’ roots deep in the earth). One envisions perhaps the approaching coldness in the deep metal sink. The poet’s sensibility picks up already the beginnings of this coldness in line three which loops back or links to the objective correlative of lines one and two. I had been writing haiku based on the subtle change of seasons but this poem occurs in a subtler expression than I could have achieved up until reading it. In all, the poet is alive in a subtle sense and the haiku records the opening of broader consciousness and natural sensibility that occurred. When I read the haiku and experience the depth of the opening, as in a different modality I had with Young’s “moonlight” haiku, I am drawn into the wondrous facet of such openings as such and the conjunction of this with all the
affective elements of poetry that are so appreciated in such a simple pared down manner, as if haiku were an essential metaphor, the simplest poetry in and of the world.

John Stevenson

Haiku, in general, has changed my life but I can’t identify individual haiku in this way. Here is one that changed my sense of haiku:

pig and i spring rain
— marlene mountain

I am grateful that this poem was already published and well known before I encountered the world of ELH. It both partakes of traditional ideas about the genre (seasonal resonance, juxtaposition, concision) and makes them new. It was, for me, an invitation to use all of my previously developed skills as a poet in this new (to me) poetry. Many other poems subsequently reinforced this point but this one might have been the first for me.

Abigail Friedman

We’ve been asked to share a haiku that influenced us or taught us something or changed the course of our writing or reading haiku. As I mulled this over, I went to my bookshelf and picked out R.H. Blyth’s four volume set, Haiku. These books were my first introduction to haiku, and I flipped through some of the poems I recall having liked when I first read them.

yuku ware ni todomaru nare ni aki futatsu
When I reached this haiku by Masaoka Shiki, it overwhelmed me once again. My muscles relax, my sense of time disappears, and I slip into a haiku vortex. What is it about this haiku that moves me so? And by extension, what has it taught me? A few thoughts come to mind.

First, in the original Japanese, the aural rhythm of the poem is gorgeous. The haiku flows when I speak it aloud. (Another haiku with perfect pitch, which also happens to be by Shiki, is one of his most famous: kaki kueba kane ga naru nari hōryūji.) These are haiku I can sing in my head, the way I might a favorite tune.

So, from Shiki’s yuku ware haiku, I learned to respect the aural aspect of a haiku. A haiku isn’t just about the moment or just about the message. It’s poetry. Make it sing!

Another powerful aspect of Shiki’s yuku ware haiku is the moment that it captures. If haiku involves capturing a moment in time and space (I’m not saying it has to), then which moment is worthy of a haiku? Why this moment and not that moment? A great haiku poet or a great haiku captures a moment that stirs not only the author, but also the anonymous reader. This is not easy, given that the reader wasn’t there for the original moment, and can only experience it secondhand.

So, the second thing I learned from Shiki’s haiku is to pay heed to the moment I choose to capture. I suppose a more accurate way of putting this is to say that I learned to throw out haiku that capture trivial moments, or moments that others cannot connect with.

Finally, a third aspect of this haiku which I value is its intellectual appeal. In addition to grabbing me on an emotional level, I like a haiku to stimulate my mind. With a good haiku, the more I learn about the author, or about the circumstance in which it came about, or about its context, the greater my pleasure.

Shiki wrote his yuku ware in 1895, upon bidding goodbye to his friend Natsume
Soseki, when Shiki was leaving Matsuyama for Tokyo. Only a few short years later, though, Shiki’s tuberculosis worsened to the point where he was completely bedridden. In 1902, at the age of 35, he died. In his waning days, as he lay on his futon, nearing death, I wonder whether this haiku held an entirely different meaning for Shiki and for his friend Soseki:

I who am going,  
and you who remain  
two autumns

Eve Luckring

on this cold  
spring 1  
2 night 3 4  
kittens  
wet  
5  
— Marlene Mountain

This haiku was the springboard for Jim Kacian’s playful and illuminating talk, called “A Grammar of Organic Form”, at HNA this year.

I was happily reminded of the first time I read this many years ago.

For me, this is a brilliant example of how content and form can become one and the same. What makes this poem stand out for me is how it gives shape to an event—a cat birthing kittens—that defies an easy outline. And in the process of giving form to this experience, the poem itself is born in front of us. The poet’s process of discovery is delivered in “real time” right along with the newborn kittens.

Like the best of any haiku, this poem does not rely on the illustration of appearance;
rather it is an evocation of experience: cold, darkness, anticipation, wonder, surprise, wetness. It is resolutely concrete, deceptively simple. Its novelty does not feel to me like it is trying to be clever; it feels like the poet is trying to communicate the perception process itself.

The Arabic numerals, their placement, their sounds, and the rhythm of their counting sequence irrupt the flow of normative reading. The first three lines are composed of single syllable words. The sounds of the words in relationship to one another (along with the line breaks) cause them to enter the counting rhythm of the numbers. This suspends, ever so briefly, any one-to-one mapping of word to meaning. Words and numbers point to their referents in different ways. Are we making a list? of what? Are we counting spring nights?

With the next line, the two-syllable, one-word “kittens”, I suddenly realize what is taking form in this cold dark air. And the next one-word line “wet”, an adjective, dangles sensually out of its proper position before the noun and lingers viscerally. The sequence of the one-word lines “kittens”/”wet” slow the pace and visually direct me down vertically, from the moving shape of the mother’s lumpy belly to the last kitten, “5”, just out of the birth canal. This poem is simultaneously mother, carrier of new life, and the newly born itself.

Rebecca Lilly

While I can’t find any examples of what I’m about to describe, I know I’ve encountered haiku in journals and anthologies that have provoked my thinking about the relationship between dialogue and haiku, and the ways in which haiku could incorporate the words of a particular imaginary character who is meant to be distinct from the author---say, a fantastical being or comic strip character. I’ve lately been curious as to how to create a comic strip with characters that “speak” in haiku and how such a comic would differ from the usual comic strips---that is, what limitations on dialogue would be imposed by the haiku form. If it were an action-centered comic strip, resembling a serial with a plot, how would the narrative momentum be carried if the characters spoke in haiku? Perhaps an extended haiku
comic (with dialogue) would consist of a series of present-centered observations, all revolving around a single subject, so that the contrast between perspectives would generate the interest for a reader. The value would lie less in the suspense created by a serial plot, and more in recognizing multiple perspectives on a subject, and in clashes or absurdities that might result from that. These juxtapositions would spark interest, rather than the suspense of a narrative thread (though the two need not be mutually exclusive). But suppose the writer wished to create a haiku comic strip consisting of character dialogue with narrative pacing, and suspense---how might this occur? That is, how would the speech of the comic strip characters generate narrative momentum yet remain true to the spirit of haiku (however that might be defined)? How would the distinctive personality of each character be developed through haiku dialogue? Perhaps each would have a particular ‘style’ of speech, defined by syllabic accent (smooth or staccato), number of syllables per haiku, a distinct vocabulary for each (such as a season word).

To offer an example, one haiku that recently reminded me of this possibility of developing dialogue in haiku between comic strip characters was Kerouac’s:

The bottoms of my shoes
are clean
From walking in the rain

—which could be the admission of someone who’s just come out of the rain, to another, in words which sound like a prelude to further dialogue:

Great to hear---but wipe
here, in any case---floor’s dry---
been a long day. Boy!

It would be interesting to see how well the elements of the serial action-centered comic strip could be preserved if the character dialogue were re-composed in haiku.
1974 - Silence in Fear of Words

For this Forum we were asked to write about one haiku which has impressed us and had a long lasting effect on our own haiku. I think I have already done that with one haiku for Scott Metz's *Virals* when I wrote about meeting up with one of Larry Wiggin's haiku in the 1974 edition of *The Haiku Anthology* edited by Cor van den Heuvel.

1974 was very early in my writing life and I tell the beginning of my haiku efforts from high school in the forward, *God Bless You, Mrs Maloney, Wherever You Are*, to my 2010 collection, *Spilled Milk: Haiku Destinies*.¹ The Wiggin's haiku didn't show up until August of that year.

In 1974 I was newly married and living in Japan stationed at the U.S. Air Force base in Misawa² and had time or took time to keep a notebook of thoughts and attitudes about various haiku I was finding in the current haiku journals. So in looking over the entire year it wasn’t just Wiggin’s haiku that was having significant impact on my haiku poetics.

Maybe more than now we looked to the haiku of Japanese masters for examples of what we wanted our haiku to do. So we read what we could find in English. In late December 1973 I received a copy of thistle brilliant morning, a booklet of translations of Shiki, Hekigodo, Santoka and Hosai by Bill Higginson.³ This one by Santoka resonated with me:

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¹ Based on my more detailed essay that appeared in *Woodnotes* 31 in 1996, edited by Michael Dylan Welch.
² I found out from both Bill Higginson and R.E.T. Johnson that they also had been stationed at Misawa in the past.
³ Published by Gerry Loose under the Byways imprint in England.
Words creating or re-creating summer days I had experienced growing up in northern Maine. So easily said.

And another by Shiki:

mums withering
on the fence socks dry
a fine day

Rather odd images to juxtapose: mums withering and socks drying. Neither of great significance but part of a fine day. Simply said.

From the January issue of Dragonfly which I received in March⁴ a Larry Wiggin haiku:

scouring pans;
snow deepening
in the yard

and Michael McClintock’s

going out
into the ground mist
on naked legs

⁴ At that time edited by Lorraine Ellis Harr.
And also in March this by Thom Szuter published in *Haiku Magazine*⁵:

```
the only
noise the hunters
red jackets
```

It was from a collection published in 1965 and probably not written as a haiku but had the power of one and certainly created a vivid moment.

And from the April *Dragonfly* which arrived in April this one by Karen Kayali cited in an essay by R.E.T. Johnson:

```
Doves in its branches
the pine
grows old
```

And one by the mysterious Tao-Li⁶ whose non-traditional format for a haiku were creating some fascinating discussion:

```
on the of
the shadow a
geranium geranium
leaf leaf
```

As one who finds shadows of more than passing interest this was one to pull into my notebook.

---

6. After much speculation we were later to find out was really Evelyn Tooley Hunt.
An issue of *Modern Haiku* [V.1] arrives in May with some good haiku but this one by Foster Jewell was the one to copy into my notebook:

```
Even the pond
holds the passing of wild geese
to the very last
```

And from a scholarly article, “Ancient Facets of Modern Haiku”, by Kaneko Tota this haiku by Nakamua Kusatao⁷:

```
O falling snow
Meiji times gone far away
sense of regret
```

The juxtaposition of the now with a well-known time in history was a delight. I suspect you might have to enjoy history as I do for that. Later that year I found what I considered a better translation by R.H. Blyth in the 2nd volume of *A History of Haiku*:

```
Snow falling;
The Meiji Era,—
How far off it is!
```

OK, I grant you, the exclamation mark is bit too much. I don’t blame Kusatao for that. It does have a tighter expression.

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⁷. *The Japan Quarterly*, Vol XIX, No. 1, Jan-Mar 1972, pp. 66-70. I must have found this in the base library since I did not have subscription. We now see the essayist’s name spelled Tohta.
In August *The Haiku Anthology: English Language Haiku by Contemporary American and Canadian Poets* edited by Cor van den Heuvel arrived with a wide range of stimulating English language haiku in a variety of styles. And in it Cor’s

```
hot night—
turning the pillow
to the cool side
```

Great simplicity. And one haiku that has been re-done by a number of others!
And of course Larry Wiggin’s haiku of powerful simplicity:

```
crickets…
then
thunder
```

One in later years I would use to impress Robert Bly and Cid Corman with the worthiness of English language haiku. It was a try but to no avail . . .

In September, Janice Bostok, an Australian, who was editor of the haiku journal, *Tweed*, showed up with a collection, *Walking Into the Sun*. Many good ones and this one I copied into the notebook:

```
pregnant again…
the fluttering of moths
against the window
```

Later in September a copy of Eric Amann’s, *The Wordless Poem: A Study of Zen in Haiku*, arrived. I spent some time thinking about his points and in November spent some time interacting with them in the notebook. I would use Wiggin’s cricket
haiku to argue against his thought “that the haiku poet seems to avoid words rather than display them.”

I think Wiggin’s haiku is a penetrating display of words. In the case of haiku fewer words means greater attention is drawn to the ones used. Poetry is about the effect of carefully chosen words, carefully placed. Good poetry, good haiku, are the words that silence fears.

So that was some of the 1974 haiku world’s influence on my writing.

Don Baird

Pin-pointing a poem or poet as the strongest influence over my writing in the last 15 years is a difficult deed for me. I’m somewhat of an open channel that if I taste the salt in the air, near the ocean, I wonder if it is msg - and the wonderment changes me somehow . . . and my poetry. I could start with Basho, but then, there is Onitusra and his endless pursuit of truth/fact in poetry; yet, the smoothness of Buson is intriguing and then there is Virgilio who often came up with stunning, mind bending, and terrific moments in his haiku.

Yet, for the thousands of hours of my reading, studying and pondering, it is Dr. Richard Gilbert that caused me to pause, to wonder and search more for what I want to express in my haiku compositions. It isn’t that I will emulate; it isn’t that I will consciously change my writing. These are not my thoughts at all. Rather, in some esoteric fashion, I believe that what I learn isn’t learned; and, what I master isn’t mastery; and yet, my palette to draw words and style continues to expand, enveloping more choices of hue and finer brushes to work with by pondering Gilbert’s thoughts and poetics.

My experiences with Dr. Gilbert have been something like all of the above. He

9. Which reminds me of what James Tipton said in the Biographies appendix of *The Haiku Anthology* about his interest “in the possibility of discovering new energy through words put together with precision and emotion.”
is challenging - his mind is unusual and rich with oblique perspectives that are sensible at the core but challenging to understand.

The following poems of his . . .

\begin{verbatim}
what became deeper of you i let in
R’r 12.3

deep in woods
all the dancing in
space

running forever
spring after
tragedy

R’r 12.3
\end{verbatim}

. . . are poems that create and recreate thoughts within the reader as the reader’s resistance to the meanings is diminished through the gate of reading and re-reading for meaning - “misreading as meaning”1. I’m not one to emulate style intentionally but I also do not believe anyone has written anything, ever, without at least some incidental emulation — even if the source for emulation is the extant rules of writing haiku (5/7/5 etc. et al) as purported by earlier generations. Education does affect us.

Recently, I penned . . .

\begin{verbatim}
nagasaki . . .
in her belly, the sound
of unopened mail

Haiku Now, 2013, 1st
\end{verbatim}

. . . and I am sure this poem would not exist if it were not for my crossing mind-paths with Dr. Gilbert.
Michael McClintock

A book of haiku that changed my life and helped to confirm my desire to follow haiku as a lifetime adventure was John Wills’ 1970 edition of river. No collection of haiku up to that time had equal or greater impact, and very few since. Poems like these became a kind of scripture for me---

river shanty
sliding by the faces
in the doorway

river
just at twilight moving off
in rain

blackbirds
on the blowing reeds
one above another

another bend
then at last the moon
and all the stars

Though set in a rural world very unlike my own at that time, in Los Angeles, these and other poems in that book convinced me that haiku were possible as a way of life in a complex world, affording me a means to live well, wherever I happened to be, whatever I might be doing —

haiku could be foundational to a life worth living, wholly sustained on its bread, fruit, and meat. It offered me the world and I took it up. I have not been disappointed.
Lorin Ford

I had to decline Peter’s original invitation because of all kinds of life things but am now catching up on reading all of the wonderful responses... both the affirming and the challenging.

So I’m responding now by adding the couple of haiku that certainly surprised me and “nudged me in the direction of writing” haiku.

Disclosure: I was completely unaware haiku existed until about early 2004, and I wasn’t interested as those haiku I heard (in my ignorance) seemed to be no more than (sometimes funny) puns or po-faced faux-profundities by annoying people who wore superior cat-like smiles and answered my queries about what haiku was with such impenetrable statements as “Haiku is Zen. Zen is haiku”. Enough to put anyone interested in the experience of poetry right off.

The ‘life-changing’ haiku for me were the first two I came across that struck me as being poems.

The first was Carla Sari’s:

```
back from the war
the tap he couldn’t fix
still dripping
```

— 2nd place, paper wasp Jack Stamm Award, 2003

Carla read this out at an informal poetry workshop I attended, and asked for critique. I distinctly recall my response: “Ya can’t have that! It reads as though it’s the tap that’s back from the war. It needs rephrasing.“ (‘tap’ = ‘faucet’ in US English, btw) Carla pointed out that there were certain conventions that applied to reading haiku: there was a break between L1 & the rest. Ah.
The succinctness struck me, as did the metaphorical and emotional resonances of that precise, literal image in context of someone being back from ‘the war’. Suddenly, I was interested.

Next, perhaps even on the same day, or perhaps not, Carla read out this haiku of Dhugal Lindsay’s:

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picking up a jellyfish
my lifeline
clear and deep
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My reaction: instant memory of doing just that as a kid, picking up moon jellies that’d washed up on the beach, seeing through them to the lines on my palm. This haiku startled and moved me, actually reconnected me with what I liked and valued, what I felt nurtured by when I was a kid, what made me happily wonder and discover things in my world. (I had no idea, until much later, that Lindsay was a marine biologist, so didn’t get that aspect of this haiku)

And, I realised, that this kind of experience was the same as what attracted me to poetry in general. Lines from ‘long’ poems I was long familiar with, that stand out in contrast to, break away from, the more discursive verse they are ‘framed’ by, occurred to me in a new light such as:

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Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
Wrinkles and slides. I am here
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.
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from ‘East Coker’, *Four Quartets* - TS Eliot

and
... A barnacle goose
Far up in the stretches of night; night splits and the dawn breaks loose
— from ‘High Talk’, Last Poems, WB Yeats

These sort of lines always seemed to me to be a breakthrough into a different kind of perception from the rest of the poem, not only a change in the register of the language.

So that’s it. I began writing and reading haiku. That’s the big life-change.

But now another change, and not a sudden, sunlit, illuminating one, is creeping up on me in relation to haiku and prodding me to come to terms with it.

Another disclosure: long ago I read a lot of Science Fiction, short stories & novels... and still do when I want to relax and take my mind off haiku & related, though these days it’s more often re-reading. Philip K. Dick is one SF writer who’s dealt a lot with perceptions of reality, co-existing realities as perceived by an unreliable mind. Others have dealt with fantastic ‘what ifs’, possible realities.

Yet another disclosure: Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest’, his last play, remains my favourite play of all time.

All of which, I would’ve thought, might’ve prepared me for this sort of sea-change:

    the galactic aquarium shatters
    our arms ending in starfish
    — Peter Yovu

But it didn’t. You’ve blown me out of the water, Peter. I’ve yet to come to terms with this one.
H. Gene Murtha

John Wills haiku “dusk”

dusk from rock to rock a water thrush

The above haiku did it.
For Field Notes 4, we asked panelists to take a look at *Haiku in English: the First Hundred Years*. The book presents a wide range of haiku spanning a century, and so it seemed a good idea to ask: what does *HIE* tell you about where haiku has been, where it is now, and where it may be going?

— Peter Yovu

**Richard Gilbert**

My genuine appreciation of *HIE* is accompanied by five main questions for discussion. My primary question has to do with the inclusion of works designated as haiku within (by default as it were), which are snippets extracted from poems that are not haiku. There is no discussion within of the disjunct between editorial decision and authorial intention, that I can find. Next, as a number of people have mentioned to me, there is plenty of blank space on many poet pages, and a number of poets seem under-represented (by just one or two ku) — though their oeuvre includes a good selection of excellent works. Is *HIE* overall too conservative in its selections? This goes to the point (present in any “selected” anthology) of bias.

These questions aside, *HIE* was instrumental to my ability to research haiku for the 2013 book, *The Disjunctive Dragonfly*. I praised the achievement, within. *HIE* provides a sorely needed resource for haiku, and as it’s published by Norton, *HIE* has in a stroke extended the long-term impact of the English-language haiku genre. My main interest is in having a discussion relating to how *HIE* 2nd. ed. could be improved.

Questions for others:

1) What do you think of including as haiku, extracts of poems that clearly are not haiku? Does *HIE* well-explain this choice? (Give some *HIE* examples, and discuss.)

2) Do you think included poets are underrepresented (with spare page space
apparently available)? Which poems (and poets) should have been included/would you have included? What was missed? Please give some examples.

3) General bias. Does HIE adequately represent haiku in the 21st century, particularly in the last decade? If not, what poems/poets are missing? Too conservative, progressive? (3b. What might be missing, from any particular decade?)

4) Who or what (poems, poets) would you remove from the anthy as non-representative/irrelevant, misleading, etc. And the converse, what/who might have been missed?

5) How could HIE be improved? Could you present a prioritized list, with a short explanation of each point?

These are the things that piqued my interest, as points of discussion.

I feel that an honest critique of the work is important, and could parallel a discussion of “What does HIE tell you about where haiku has been, where it is now, and where it may be going?” which seems to overleap possible limitations or issues with the anthology. It also may be helpful to the co-editors to hear from FN inviteds on what they miss and would have liked to see.

John Stevenson

It seems to have been a passing interest for early poets; of interest primarily as it might relate to Imagism. Kerouac seems to be the first to really make it an important focus within his writing. We are now in a time when there are “haiku poets” - in great variety. In the future, we may see “haiku poets” with work appearing in other kinds of anthologies — non-haiku poems that were produced as a passing interest for her/him — the symmetrical opposite of Pound in HIE.
Max Verhart

In a way *Haiku in English* (*HiE*) is too much for me. In a way to me it simply is a sort of fourth edition of the *Haiku Anthology* (*HA*), the first three editions having been compiled by Cor van den Heuvel: state of the art of haiku surveys at now four different points in time. And there is much to be said for that, for both *HA* and *HiE* have a lot of poets and poems in common - though of course you'll hardly find non-American poets in *HA*, while *HiE* covers a few more continents.

But *HiE* has a greater ambition than simply collecting what the editors perceive as best haiku written in English. ‘Best haiku’ as such is not even a selection criterium. The poets and poems selected were picked for their contribution to the development of English-language haiku. So there I am, reading in *HiE*, liking some poems, not understanding others and often wondering: so this poet and/or poem somehow contributed to the development of English-language haiku - but how and what? And I am at a loss, for to be able to understand how and what a certain poet contributed to the development of English-language haiku, one has to know what the state of that art was at that particular moment. *HiE* simply fails to convey the relevance in that respect of this entry and that one. And besides, most poets are included with just one poem (and yes, I am happy to be one of them). Now what the heck is there to learn about that poet’s contribution to etcetera on the basis of just that one poem?

And another question: are we to understand that all poets not represented in *HiE* have not contributed, or not significantly enough, to the development of etcetera? I don’t think so and I am quite sure that the editors do not want to imply any such idea. We all fully understand that the selection of poets and poems is subjective and hence arbitrary. Which also means that in that respect *HiE* is a failure. But necessarily so.

Too conclude: *HiE* is both a major achievement and a failure. In a way too much for me. But I cherish it.
What does *HIE* tell you about where haiku has been, where it is now, and where it may be going?


Cor had the podium for 39 years, and now with *HIE* a different set of editors has weighed in with their selections. There are poets that are elated at inclusion and others that are disappointed either in being excluded altogether or with the number of their poems that were included. Side-stepping discussion of the sequencing and selection process, what makes this anthology different? First consider Cor van den Heuvel’s opening remarks in the introduction of the first edition of *The Haiku Anthology* (Doubleday, 1974): “Haiku in English got its real start in the fifties, when an avid interest in Japanese culture and religion swept the postwar United States.” He offers this lengthy footnote to qualify that statement:

> “The Imagists, and those who follow them, had no real understanding of haiku. Because they had no adequate translation or critical analyses available, they failed to see the spiritual depth haiku embodies, or the unity of man and nature it reveals. English-language haiku owes practically nothing to their experiments except in the sense that all modern poetry owes them a debt for their call for concision and clarity in language.”

Here is a major difference in *HIE*: the editors start the haiku clock in English much
earlier than in previous anthologies—1913 to be exact. Indeed, the timing of the volume’s release coincides with the centennial anniversary of the publication of Ezra Pound’s two liner in *Poetry* magazine. The Imagists are represented as are Objectivists, Modernists, Jazz poets, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, Black Mountain poets, New York School, Black Arts Movement, the Beats, and other well-known novelists, essayists, and translators. One of the chief goals stated in the acknowledgements was to “spark much interest from the poetry mainstream and aid in the realization of how much common literary heritage we share.” Haiku written in English has a rich heritage, not only in Japanese culture and literature but also in Western literary influences as well. In the spirit of inclusion, *HIE* makes a case similar to the Parable of the Sower in the Gospels that the haiku seed fell not on rocky soil or among thorns and was lost, but rather fell on good poetic earth at the beginning of the 20th Century. It grew and produced a hundredfold. In addition to being a wonderful opportunity for mainstream poets to appreciate E-l haiku poets; it’s an invitation for E-l poets to become familiar with the work of mainstream poets. There must be innovation in order for the genre to move ahead. *HIE* thoughtfully opens that dialog. Where haiku is headed is up to what poets make of it.

Mark Harris

As the editors of *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years* maintain, “an awareness of the interface between haiku and other short-form poetry is vital.” Their anthology includes poems by poets who never claimed to write haiku, Wallace Stevens for one. Is it too much of a stretch to make room for a poet who “never termed anything he wrote haiku”? In my opinion, the decision to include such work corrects the view that haiku poets work outside the influence of historical and contemporary English-language poetics, and instead places the genre within a cultural and literary context that is as natural as it is unavoidable.

Combined with the timeline threading through the bibliographic information provided in the book’s “Index of poets and credits,” the rough chronology achieved by ordering *HIE* “based on the publication date of the earliest poem in each poet’s
selections” suggests interesting connections.

For example, “tundra” appeared in Cor van den Heuvel’s 1963 book *The Window Washer’s Pail*. The editors of *HIE* observe in their foreword that Cor’s one-word (surrounded by blank page) poem, “tests a boundary between haiku and minimalist-concrete poetry…” and proceed to make it possible to pursue that line of thought.

in 1958, 5 years before “tundra” appeared in print, E.E. Cummings published *95 Poems*, which included

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One year later, in 1959, the following poem by Paul Reps appeared in his book *Zen Telegrams*:

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cobwebs 
hesitating 
us
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Thus helping set the stage for “tundra” …or so I imagine.

Taking a closer look (hope I’m correctly interpreting the index credits) I notice that haiku contemporary with “tundra” also made it into *HIE. American Haiku* was a
fledging journal in 1963. Its first issue contained this 17 syllable haiku by James W. Hackett

The fleeing sandpipers
turn about suddenly
and chase back the sea!

O Mabson Southard’s 5/7/5 take on a similar scenario also appeared in AH 1:1

One breaker crashes . . .
As the next draws up, a lull—
and sandpiper cries

Looks as if “traditional” and “cutting edge” English-language haiku have progressed side-by-side for quite a while now, doesn’t it?

Here’s another grouping that interests me (these are my free associations, inspired by the format of HIE, which I recommend to you if you have yet to peruse a copy).

In 1977 (the date given by HIE; the year was 1978 according to MM’s website—maybe the release month is uncertain?) Marlene Mountain published this one-liner in Cicada 2:1

one fly everywhere the heat

In 1978 Matsuo Allard published Bird Day Afternoon, which contained the one-liner

alone at 3:00 a.m.—the doorknob turning slowly
and in the same year Robert Grenier published *Sentences*. His collection of brief texts resists sense and categorization, and yet in the context of *HIE*, a line such as

> except the swing bumped by the dog in passing

helps to frame the whole.

... I’m running out of time and space for this particular field note, although I’m tempted to continue—that’s the goal of any anthology, to inspire readers to delve deeper, don’t you think?

**Gary Hotham**

*Field Notes 4 (FN4)* is tough. As I read the e-mails for this one all I could think was there goes Peter Yovu again – asking too much. Soon he will be suggesting we provide examples of the Great American Haiku or at least our criteria for one. So what is the meaning for us of this anthology, *Haiku in English: The First 100 Years (HIE)*? What deep power will it have on the genre? I’m not ready with any profound response to the *FN4* expectations. An evaluation at this time has all the dangers that any pundit had writing a few days after the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, in Sarajevo, on 28 June 1914. Do you think any advised the European royalty: never ride in a vehicle that doesn’t have a reverse gear.

At least in the short term I think *Haiku In English: The First 100 Years* will be a significant anthology for the world of English language haiku. Just like the anthologies Cor van den Heuvel compiled starting in 1974 have been important for the growth, definition and development of English language haiku. I think *HIE* reflects a generous variety of styles, depth, ranges, possibilities and successes for the English language haiku. In providing many real examples of the genre over the past century the anthology should be very helpful in bringing an understanding of the form to anyone starting out in the haiku world either as reader or writer - and
even those who have been working longer in that world. The haiku in *HIE* provide substance to any prose definition. Also once a reader discovers some haiku that strike home then it is easy to follow up on those writers to find more. Or write one’s own.

Hopefully some of the best English language haiku written in the last 100 years are in the anthology – I know some of best will be missing and at some date in the future we will probably discover that some of the best writers were missing from its pages. Will someone try to make the case that it contains some of the worst? We know there is no perfect anthology. Even so I think it will be a collection worth going back to for another read from time to time. Just like any good collection of poems whether by one poet or an anthology it will bring pleasure again and again. The great thing about good poetry is that re-reading them is not wasted effort – good poetry adds layers to one’s world.

Tom D’Evelyn

A Modest Proposal: Haiku in English is haiku, not poetry

Looking at *HIE* as a historian of poetry, I see several aspects worth commenting on: *HIE* as an anthology (which raises the issue of selection and canonicity); the differences between this and other anthologies of Anglophone haiku; the editorial matter as interpretive or descriptive; and the relative value of individual haiku. Some of these aspects would require too much space, some can be covered by general comments, the last requires some examples.

The intention of the book, judged by the editorial material, appears to be not simply to collect the best haiku but to document the case for the proposal that haiku is poetry. The various arguments made by the editors do not seem to me to succeed in making the case, in part because of a lack of coherence at certain points, in part because the editors didn’t first question the definition of poetry itself. The argument seems to be played out among established hierarchies. Why raise the issue “what first is poetry?” if we can assume what the audience believes. Best let sleeping dogs
lie. But the problem then for the historian is what the audience believes. I have no way to discuss that except by inference so won’t do that here.

That said, the editors seem to graft the question of poetry onto the question of modern poetry, or contemporary poetry. Poetry is modern poetry; and we all know what modern poetry is? Modern means “contemporary”? Here the idea that haiku is “contemporary” seems paramount. But historicist claims are famously sticky. In masterful hands, they are tactical. The role of the concept of modernity or the contemporary, is crucial at certain moments in the history of poetry. Whether in Catullus’s Rome or Baudelaire’s France, the claim of the modern is tactical: to promote the new style in face of the traditional hegemony. But in the case of HIE, the claim of the contemporary produces slippage in the argument: are we supposed to believe that contemporary haiku is “modern” by contrast to poetry in general or modern by contrast to a more traditional haiku, or both? Or is poetry automatically contemporary? The argument that haiku in English is poetry may well be lost in the argument about a particular contemporary style of haiku being representative of haiku-in-English. There are signs in the state of the debate about HIE that those who feel this way see the anthology as excluding other kinds of contemporary haiku; they see HIE as a manifesto. This comes as no surprise to the historian of poetry.

One may say a little more. Given the ideology of the editorial matter it does seem that there is an “American” assumption that good haiku are written by interesting individuals (see the thumbnails) who display the American virtue of individualism, even iconoclasm. Haiku then would ideally capture something arbitrary in the writer’s experience that mark it as unique. This would justify the approach to interpretation that favors impressionism over analysis connecting the text to beliefs shared by others. Perhaps contemporary haiku as envisioned by the editors involves a kind of “will-to-power,” a happy-go-lucky nihilism.

Trying to make sense of all this gives one a headache, so we turn to the haiku collected here with relief. Something occurs to me repeatedly as I peruse this anthology. While I see the good-natured nihilism, I don’t see the anxiety about poetry. At best I see mindful very short texts that respond quite well to rational criticism. The clarity of the language, the seamlessness of form and significance reminds me not of poetry but of the family of short forms that includes aphorism, maxims, pensees, etc. (see

So maybe brevity is the soul of haiku and the problem faced by the haiku writer is the problem of exclusion. How much can be excluded before you cut into the bone? How deep a feeling can a very short text produce? What’s the trick of making a very short text memorable? Since this is a literary problem for every writer, haiku can be read as exemplary of very short texts (I need not mention the success of flash-fiction today).

Form in art, regardless of size, depends on repetition as well as movement or change; repetition makes change evident. (The writer of shorts Lydia Davis is a master of repetition.) Take as example Peter Yovu’s piece: “she slips into / the ocean / the ocean / slips into.” Read this as many times as you wish, the mystery remains, and the mystery is coded in the repetition of this very big thing, “ocean.” This is no formal mystery: Ocean IS mystery. Can the ocean itself be compare to a woman to slips into it? What can the ocean slip into? If the ocean is a traditional name for “what surrounds us,” one feels a dizzy imaging this horizon slipping inside its own horizon. Aside from the verbal slide, the rhythm conveys a sense of vertigo. This is both clever and provocative. It embodies a vertiginous question that irritated Plato into thought. And everybody worth the name of thinker since.

A variation on Yovu’s elegant repetition (I’m not saying one haiku is based on the other: they are both based on a seminal idea of form) is Philip Rowland’s “inside an envelope / inside an envelope: / funeral money.” Where Yovu may strike a metaphysical note, Rowland discovers the pathos of discretion in the face of death. Again, using repetition, the haiku captures a moment of ultimate reflection. The subject matters. Death and Ocean: two mammoth themes. While both of these texts are “original” in the simplicity of their design, they are also traditional in their topics. They are unique witout being arbitrary, profound rather than solipsistic.

 Finally, contemporary haiku may draw intertextually on the origins of haiku in the Japanese early modern period, thereby gaining authority by innovating, marking a difference within a dense undergrowth of tradition. Jane Reichhold does this in “autumn / taking a dirt road / to the end.” This is both “classic” (Bashō’s Japanese tradition, which she knows intimately) and utterly at home in the English language.
It resonates every which way. It is “classic” in more senses that one (or two).

So I do find much to admire here. I have always loved writing that is short; I try to practice “writing short” whenever I write. Years ago I studied Greek and Roman epigram and traced its influence through European language. I teach “writing short” in various genres. For the last ten years I have specialized in carefully balanced couplets framed on models supplied by classical Chinese poets, especially with regard to the making of resonant images. That training has prepared me to enjoy HIE – though “enjoy” may not be the word. I don’t like them all. It seems that many of the haiku collected here seem intent on expressing what the editor calls “sentiment” and that alone is not enough for me. Given the contexts provided by the anthology, many of the more famous writers represented here seem over-valued. Many of the haiku collected here are verbally clever but lack the verbal resonance and the deep sounding of the bottom of the heart I want in any literary text, however short. Each time I put the book down, I come away believing even more strongly that to write a good haiku in contemporary English is quite an accomplishment for a writer.

Michael McClintock

The Haiku in English anthology: Some Notes and Observations

The Haiku in English anthology doesn’t need a Paul Revere, does it? It’s a big, friendly collection, and comes without rifles or cannon shot.

My general impression of the Haiku in English anthology is that the collection and its prose commentary and history represent a solid, competent effort to provide a fair and balanced overview of its subject. There is ample bibliographic information for all readers to follow up on poets, translators and criticism . . . I am not aware of any other book that attempts to give a similar introduction to English language haiku and its first hundred years.

The real energy that can come from a book like this is difficult to measure but nevertheless is real and welcome. It’s ironic, perhaps, that the book’s physical limitations practically assure that its presentation is not --- nor should we expect it
to be --- exhaustive in its treatment. Because it is not exhaustive, I think it is certain to stimulate further anthologies and deeper, more narrowly focused collections and critical examinations of individual poets, as well as groups of poets, who share a time-period, region, subject matter, similar aesthetics, principles of composition, artistic philosophy or vision, and literally dozens more areas of interest. I know of at least five such anthologies in the works, one being already completed and, last I checked, targeted for publication this November.

_Haiku in English_ is a splendid book and makes a solid case for the genre, in direct line of evolution with the previous three editions of the haiku anthology edited by Cor van den Heuval, and numerous other collections and anthologies published over the last fifty years. Haiku poets have been fortunate to have received freshened exposure by a major anthology from a large, respected publisher, about every ten years -- that is as “mainstream” as haiku ever needs to be.

The real strength of any anthology resides in the poems selected to go into it. The selection here amply illustrates the diversity of approaches taken with haiku, but exhausts the possibilities of none of them --- another strength of the anthology. The haiku movement, as a movement, shows surprising endurance, having achieved this kind of track record and performance: the anthologies have sold well relative to other collections of poetry --- and this fact reveals something about the truly radical posture of haiku when seen alongside, and in opposition to, “mainstream” poetry --- in all its styles, fads, and movements --- over this same period of time.

The future? I think I’ll be practical here and sidestep too much guessing about the future of haiku in English. I have no personal need to speculate; I’m content to wait and see, and do so (I hope) with an open mind while at the same time aware of haiku fundamentals --- those qualities and characteristics that make haiku haiku and not something else. Meanwhile, what I’m going to do, in the time I have left, is try to write haiku that are good enough to find a place in the next anthology --- the one about the second hundred years.

Likewise, I’m sure, haiku poets generally will need to produce work that re-animates, through changing times, the aesthetic and artistic ideals of these past hundred years. The 400+ pages of poetry in _Haiku in English_ show that we are well-equipped to do that and not lose our bearings as a distinctive poetry with unique powers of
vision and language. We should be under no illusions about the artistic challenge in advancing haiku aesthetics and craft while at the same time perpetuating a relatively small body of core principles gleaned from the genre’s actual five hundred year history. It may be literary pooh-bah to think that haiku must be on the way to somewhere else: the great endurance and beauty of the genre may be rooted in the solidity and simple basics of its compass, art form, and territory now occupied.

Francine Banwarth

*Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*

Prompt: Where English-language haiku has been, where it is now, where it might be going.

Since the early years, when haiku was finding its footing in the English language, serious practitioners of the genre have played and experimented with its content and form. Gayle Bull, wife of James Bull, who, with Don Eulert, founded *American Haiku*, recounts the journal’s inaugural days when Nick Virgilio would send multiple versions of the same poem in one submission; he milked every possibility, and I can’t help but think that his willingness to view his haiku from all angles is among the reasons he became one of our foremost English-language haiku poets.

Throughout the history of *ELH*, we’ve also witnessed a proliferation of junk haiku, spam haiku, “haikus” that are not haiku. It is disheartening to see an art form that we respect and admire be treated so shabbily. How can we lift and keep haiku on a higher tier, let alone move it into mainstream poetry, if that is our goal?

The publication release of *HIE* includes the following assessment, which recognizes haiku at a level many are trying to achieve in their writing practice today:

“The best haiku, so many of which are collected in this volume, take but a moment to read yet are so condensed and so masterfully composed that they evoke an experience much larger than nearly any other collection of words so small.”
This statement alone suggests that there is so much more to the art of haiku than getting 17 or less syllables down on the page.

English-language haiku has been on an evolutionary path and continues so in the present, and hopefully so into the future. That is the lifeblood of any art form: if it is going to last through the ages, it must evolve. The challenge lies in the fact that there are many haiku being written today that need a good dose of freshness and originality; themes are overused and the “art of juxtaposition” has become a “quick fix” to tie 3 lines of verse together. Based on the thousands of haiku we’ve read in Frogpond submissions over our first 5 issues, many potentially good poems fail because the writer didn’t push deep enough or reach far enough with word and image.

What *HIE* comprehensively lays out for us is a level of excellence over the first 100 hundred years of English-language haiku that is equaled today by practitioners who assess their own work critically, who reveal rather than define meaning through subject, technique, form, and allusion, who are open to fresh and surprising possibility, and who experiment on a variety of levels to keep haiku alive and breathing on the page. This is what I hope for English-language haiku in the present and it is where I believe the future of haiku lies.

**Peter Newton**

Q: What does the recently published *Haiku in English; The First Hundred Years* tell you about haiku—where it’s been, where it is now or where it might be going?

In his historical overview at the end of *Haiku in English*, one of its editors, Jim Kacian states: “the subject of the best poetry has always been the wild—that over which we have little or no control.” I compare that statement to one by Thoreau who said: “In wildness is the preservation of the world.” Are they saying the same thing. I think so, yes. Though I suspect Kacian is speaking in more literary terms, Thoreau in more environmental. Maybe they’re both speaking on behalf of environmental literature.
From re-reading the last quarter of the HiE where, according to Kacian, many of the relative haiku newcomers appear, I noticed this call of the wild in some ways. Poems of protest almost. The use of haiku as an antidote for the increasing number of things that may seem like they are out of our control: be they global warming, species extinctions, alternative energies, rampant consumerism or nuclear meltdowns.

retreating glacier—
how long since we’ve heard
the black wolf’s song
   — Billie Wilson, p.227

the passenger pigeon returns
on a canceled stamp
   — Scott Mason, p. 280

the wind being farmed the wind that isn’t
   — John Barlow, p.260

migrating geese—
the things we thought we needed
darken the garage
   — Chad Lee Robinson, p.269

radiation leak moonlight on the fuel rods
   — Melissa Allen,p.300

These examples, among others, indicate to me that haiku is being written to counteract what Kacian calls “environmental disregard.” It seems to me that haiku is the original green poetry returning to its roots to help combat an increasing problem. And in the 24-hour news cycle we find ourselves in it is difficult for the average person to avoid even the basic knowledge that our planet is experiencing escalating abuse. What’s a haiku poet to do but fight back.
So is haiku becoming the environmental poetry of the 21st century? The latest insurgency of protest poetry? A movement by which we can realign ourselves with nature? Get back in tune, so to speak.

I hope so. And I think the very last poem in the anthology makes a similar point by grounding itself in nature. And drawing the comparison of two disparate images by using old and new ways of writing haiku. Old style, new approach:

Snow at dawn . . .
dead singers in their prime
on the radio

— Rebecca Lilly, p. 303

The seasonal reference sets the tone in L1, the way a lighting designer in a film might cast just the right shadows to evoke a mood. In fact, the line “Snow at dawn. . .” could’ve been written by Basho. Maybe even was at some point, in some poem. Lilly awakens the reader to nature --the fact that it is dawn and it is snowing-- and directs our attention to the imposed distraction of the radio instead of an expected silence. Falling snow is a soothing visual but contrasted with a pop song on the radio speaks to the near constant infiltration of noise, even white noise, into our lives. Her poem conjures a timeless loss—is it Amy Winehouse? Jimi Hendrix? Janis Joplin? All of the above. Either way, we are reminded of the brevity of dawn, of snowflakes, of songs and singers. The poem is a little “wild” sounding when you read it aloud. Irreverent. It is that wildness that forces us to stop and think.

Bruce Ross

Since the majority of haiku in HIE are American, an analogy to American modern dance is apt. As haiku was dominated by imagism while conceiving haiku as a nature poem primarily, modern American dance infuses various kinds of emotion with recognizably appropriate gesture, step, and music. A trajectory from Martha Graham
to Paul Taylor is exemplary. A lesser represented dance trajectory, from Alvin Nikolai, to Merce Cunningham to Armitage Gone!, as Whitman “broke the pentameter” in poetry, created new forms of movement and aesthetics of choreography as a whole. American poetry has taken many forms, borrowing from Classic or Romantic idioms, fixed forms and open forms, word fixated and visionary fixated, long forms and short forms. When modern Japanese haiku occurred, a rejoinder was: Fine, write what you want, but why call it haiku. The question is, What makes a haiku? So, in English-language reception of haiku, there has been a reliance on kanji (Chinese characters) for the “grammar” of haiku and a latent image in perceived/expressed experience in images and images in kanji, rightly introduced into Imagism and what follows. HIE captures some of these issues in choosing examples and discussing individual haiku poets. There is good in HIE: its breath of choice and individual haiku examples. There are some issues in HIE: haiku not represented of a given haiku poet’s style and a perhaps overstating certain directions in haiku in Japan and the USA (gendai). HIE has a “current” feel with Billy Collins’s “Introduction” and a number of “hip” idiomed contemporary haiku and examples by John Ashbery, suggesting an issue of whether American haiku and American poetry are really that close together in import. Otherwise, a volume to be enjoyed and pondered.

Billie Wilson

I speak more from an emotional than an intellectual base. A major highlight of my haiku life occurred at the “unveiling” of this book at Haiku North America. It was like being in the vortex of haiku history. One poem by each poet was read aloud – either by well-selected readers – or by the poet if present. The room seemed to vibrate as the first reader announced, “Ezra Pound” and then read his poem. The next reader said, “Wallace Stevens” and read his poem – and so it continued. Several poets were there to read their own work, and that was awesome, especially for someone who only dreamed of being in the same room with those poets. Whatever the book reveals about haiku, it deserves its place on the most prominent shelf in every haiku poet’s library. It will be as rich a resource for future poets as Cor van den Heuvel’s venerable anthologies and The Haiku Society of America’s A Haiku Path.
I have yet to read *Haiku in English*, particularly the prose content, but after reading through all the poetry, I'm generally pleased. The book does a fairly thorough job of representing most of the high points in English-language haiku history -- which any reviewer needs to remember is one of the book's primary goals, thus making it different from other haiku anthologies. It's true of all anthologies that they can be easily criticized for who they leave out, who they include, and whether they feature the editor or the editor's friends too much. This anthology is no exception, but it is still clearly a high-water mark for our haiku poetry. I also recognize that some omissions may have occurred because of exorbitant permission fees, or perhaps if a person simply declined to be included. I also know that hard choices needed to be made, making it impossible to include everyone's favourite haiku writers. Nevertheless, while inclusions and omissions are details that can still be debated, the general thrust of the anthology is effective, and marks a changing of the guard from Cor van den Heuvel's three venerable anthologies. *Haiku in English* does not supplant those anthologies at all, however; rather, it builds upon them.

What does *Haiku in English* tells us about where haiku has been, where it is now, and where it may be going? On its own, the book gives the perspective of its editors, so it needs to be taken in a larger context, of course, but overall it tells us that haiku has explored imagism, the concrete, and the surreal, and that it is now well established to have begun what I think is a healthy splintering into various approaches, even if these approaches are sometimes sharply divided (gendai being the latest vocal minority). There's a point where a poem goes too far and is no longer haiku, but then I've always felt it's more important to value something as poetry, regardless of whether it's a "haiku" or not, so I welcome all explorations, although I don't always agree that some of it is still haiku. As for the future, I'm not sure any haiku anthology can answer that question, except to point to its major practitioners with the invitation to watch what they get up to.

If I might comment on anything particular, it's that the E. E. Cummings poem is printed very incorrectly, and I feel that there are too many one-line haiku, out of proportion to their actual frequency and influence over the last hundred years. On
the other hand, there are one or two poets who are new to me, and several fine individual haiku that I also wasn’t familiar with, so for that alone I’m grateful. I believe the book will go a long way towards educating the public about the breadth and depth of haiku in English, a public that should include grade school and college teachers, education administrators (who need to fix badly outdated curriculum guides that define haiku in English superficially and incorrectly as just 5-7-5 syllables), MFA programs, poetry anthologists, poetry publishers, and anyone else who is interested in poetry, even if they’re not normally interested in haiku. A book like Haiku in English helps to get English-language haiku out of the ghetto that haiku poets have put themselves in, so bravo for that. Here’s to more haiku ghetto-busting.

Philip Rowland

Many thanks, everyone, for your thoughtful comments -- much appreciated.

To clarify the following question of Richard’s:

“My primary question has to do with the inclusion of works designated as haiku within (by default as it were), which are snippets extracted from poems that are not haiku. There is no discussion within of the disjunct between editorial decision and authorial intention, that I can find.”

In fact, I believe that there is only one longer work from which we extracted portions and presented them as haiku: Wallace Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”. And Jim discusses this choice in some detail on pp. 316-17. There are other instances of “found haiku” in HIE, but they are complete poems.
Jean LeBlanc

I use anthologies of literature in several courses I teach, and I know there's no perfect anthology. Or perhaps, the perfect anthology is the one that makes the reader think, “If I could edit an anthology, I’d add this, and this, and this...” By that criterion, *HIE* is a perfect anthology. I know it made me think, not only about what I’d include or not include if I had been asked to edit such a work (I’d have run for the hills, is what I’d have done, if asked to edit such a work), but also the “why” behind each work that was included. I kept in mind the stated purpose of this anthology: to highlight haiku that have contributed to the evolution of the form in English. Some of the poems in this volume delighted me. Some actually made me angry, and taught me almost as much as the ones that delighted me. From almost every haiku in these pages, I learned something. I annotated, even—talk about an English teacher gone wild! Above all, *HIE* shows how vibrant and necessary this form is. I can’t imagine a life without haiku, and now I can’t imagine a haiku life without this book as reference, guide, companion.

I am happy to cite a few that delighted me. On page 46, John Wills’s “a box of nails” took my breath away. To find the...I’m not sure how else to say it...human essence of a box of nails: hard, cold, isolated--to make one feel empathy for a box of nails...just brilliant. I feel the coldness of that shed. And the alliteration--”shelf in the shed”--one has to grit one’s teeth to say it. The poem makes one shiver.

Peter Newton’s “now here.” And Melissa Allen--her work is always a delight, always something new.

Those are only a few of the ones I return to again and again after reading the book through.

I’ll keep secret the ones that make me angry, knowing I need to understand more before speaking of these out loud. But as I said in my longer post, I learned something even from these.
Sandra Simpson

Time is still pressing so I will simply quote one haiku from *HiE*, p250, one that had a remarkable effect on me at the book’s launch at HNA.

in tune with
its
ob
st
ac
l
es
rain

— Eve Luckring (this appears almost as it does on the page).

Hearing the poet *read* this haiku let it in my ears instead of just my eyes, and what a difference that made. I understood - in fact, I realised I knew the experience - and enjoyed!
field notes 5
Criticism is the subject under scrutiny for Field Notes 5. To get things started, we asked panelists to have a go at this difficult matter. They were up to it, and we hope you are too. Jump in.

— Peter Yovu

Eve Luckring

Dear Reader,

Before I can answer some of Peter’s questions directly, I believe it would help if I explained a bit about my relationship to criticism. This unfortunately makes the following a bit longer than I would like for an on-line forum.

I appreciate criticism that makes me think about an artwork/poem, or an artist’s/poet’s body of work, in a new way. Usually this is because the critic puts the object of discussion in context of something bigger:

– the histories that surround the work,
– the formal attributes of the work in relation to other poetry/art (of the past or present),
– the social/cultural context that the work intersects with
– the life experiences and artistic/philosophical inquiry of the artist/poet

A good critic has to be very well informed.

All of this said, I want the art/poetry being discussed to be the center of the discussion and not simply an “excuse” for the critic to position themselves in regards to a particular ideological platform. In other words, the critic needs to have a strong investment in the work itself and how it contributes, or is poisonous, to the
field being looked at. Why is this work worthy of our attention, whether we may “like” the work or not. Of course I think critics speak most passionately about work they love, and choose mostly to write about issues that reflect their own deep-felt interests. That is why we can learn from them even if we disagree with them.

I believe English-language haiku does not have nearly enough in-depth critical discourse; however, while putting this commentary together, I realize that there has been a good foundation laid for future development.

Honestly, I think only a very small percentage of the “haiku community” has interest in the type of more scholarly criticism I crave. This makes me sad because I feel this type of reflection and contemplation--thinking about how something works and the contexts that surround it-- can help deepen our relationship to what we do. It seems that many think of criticism as only an academic exercise (I do not equate scholarly with academic).

I prefer criticism that is written accessibly, without a lot of jargon, but I am also willing to learn new vocabulary and investigate reference material in order to better understand something I am unfamiliar with, if it seems relevant.

I believe good criticism challenges me to educate myself further, to ask questions about what I am doing in my own work, puts me in conversation with others about topics I hold dear to the heart, and, on a fundamental level, to interface with language and thought differently than in my creative work. I have always read visual art criticism and I also read literary criticism outside of the field of ELH.

Off the top of my head, ( I’m sure I am overlooking more examples ) some recent memorable criticism of ELH books and poems that I have read:

• Francine Banwarth’s book reviews in Frogpond--because of her refreshing approach, which traces her own process of discovery in the reading of poems.
• R’r’s Scorpion Prize commentary, particularly Robert Grenier’s-- Scorpion Prize #22, R’r 11.1--so refreshing
• Jack Galmitz’s *Views*, a group of essays which includes discussions of a whole body of work by a single poet—we need more of this.
• Phil Rowland’s introduction to *Lakes and Now Wolves*, Scott Metz’s collection.

I do not agree with everything said in these various writings but all have connected me deeply with the value of haiku.

It is actually other types of critical writing about ELH that I am most interested in—writing that moves beyond reviews of individual poems and books.

Though they concentrate more on Japanese poetry, Hiroaki Sato, Makoto Ueda, and Haruo Shirane all have offered us invaluable insights in some essays that address English-language haiku.

Below, I have made a brief list of the types of things (from recent publication) I would most especially welcome more of. Again, though I do not agree with everything put forth in the following essays, they offer many invaluable points of consideration.

• Peter Yovu’s “Do Something Different” (*Frogpond* 31:1, 2008) -- This essay was timely, looking at the formal potentials of haiku in a way that expanded upon what had come before it. Written with the specific audience of the journal in mind.
• Charlie Trumbull’s, “Meaning in Haiku”, (*FP* 35:3, 2012)-- another timely essay with the journal’s readership in mind, very honestly and accessibly written.
• Ian Marshall’s “Phenomenology and Haiku’s Aesthetics of the Body: Or, Biking with Bashō and Merleau-Ponty” (*Frogpond*; Winter 2011, Vol. 34:1)-- Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is important to my own work and I am glad someone else recognizes its kinship to haiku.
• Jim Kacian’s various essays about haiku, particularly “Haiku as Anti-story” (*MH* 42:1, 2011).
• Richard Gilbert’s “Plausible deniability: Nature as Hypothesis in English language Haiku” contained in *Poems of Consciousness*-- I am
deeply invested in teasing out haiku’s relationship to “Nature” for myself, and so it was with curiosity and relief that I read this quirky, syncretic, philosophical questioning. I have been bugging Richard to develop it further.

And also The Disjunctive Dragonfly, the original essay and its recent expansion into a book.

- Jon Baldwin’s “Qualities of Haiku (from Roland Barthes), (MH 43:3, 2012)--I believe Baldwin has made another publication on Calmeo called “25 Ways of Looking at a Haiku”, that is also based on the same, Barthes’ recently translated, The Preparation of the Novel. I am a fan of Barthes in general and was pleased to learn more of what he had written about haiku. Baldwin highlights well some of Bathes’ more provocative interpretations about how haiku performs and supplies a nicely focused supplement to Empire of Signs.

- John Stevenson’s “Haiku as Dimensional Object”, (FP 36:3, 2013)--the creativity of this approach reminds me of Borges.

- Jane Reichold’s Symbiotic Poetry-- I have not read this yet, but I am very curious. It is good to see haiku put in a larger context this way.

I’m sure there are other good examples, but this is long enough.

Michael Dylan Welch

Concerning haiku, how do you regard the current state of criticism? That is, criticism of individual poems and poets, of collections, anthologies etc., and also of the genre in general?

I think generally the state of criticism in haiku is okay, but not stellar. In years past (I think of the old Inkstone magazine), there were some reviewers who could be nasty and polemical, and I think they did that just to stir the pot. That’s ultimately not what haiku needs, and comes across as whiny. Haiku needs deeper analysis and criticism.

I remember one reviewer I had for Woodnotes who told me she always included
something “negative” in each review “for balance.” That appalled me. It seemed
gratuitous, and was a shallow way to approach being balanced and well-reasoned
(and the gratuitousness showed in her reviews, which I stopped commissioning for
Woodnotes).

At the 30th anniversary Haiku Society of America retreat I organized in 1998, I
remember something said by our featured guest speaker, Dana Gioia (famous for
his “Can Poetry Matter” essay in The Atlantic, and later becoming chairman of the
National Endowment for the Arts, appointed by President Bush). In Dana’s talk on
“Perceptions of Haiku by Non-Haiku Poets,” I remember him saying that the haiku
community would do well do champion its best haiku poets and its best haiku books
to non-haiku audiences. He quoted Nick Virgilio (not by coincidence--he’s a fellow
Italian), and said that Virgilio was a case in point, a poet worth promoting, and that
we should find and promote other excellent haiku poets. So instead of writing a
summary of the haiku poetics of leading haiku poets for Frogpond or Modern Haiku
or the Haiku Foundation, how about writing such in-depth articles for leading
non-haiku poetry journals? It would be harder to get published there, but that’s
exactly he point. We have to try harder, and aim higher. Dana’s suggestion was that
by promoting a few of our best haiku poets, we can generally raise the perception of
haiku amid mainstream poetry. In addition, he said that unless a bad book of haiku
is particularly prominent, why waste time reviewing bad or weak haiku books or
saying negative things about them? That doesn’t mean one should never review a
bad book, but there’s definitely something to be said about promoting what’s good
ahead of what’s weak. This is not just an extension of what my mother always said: “If
you can’t say something nice, don’t say it.” Rather, it’s a deliberate choice to celebrate
what’s excellent, perhaps even to the point of hiding (if that’s the right word) what’s
not so good, at least in the context of mainstream poetry. I would tend to agree,
as this sort of stance would help the haiku community get out of its own ghetto
and to stop being so self-involved. But shucks, here I am telling this TO the haiku
community, which is part of the problem.

One inherent problem with reviewing is that we’re a small community, so we pretty
much know each other, sometimes very well. That fact has the potential to inhibit
honest reviewing if one needs to be critical, or can make for overly supportive
reviews. So many reviews are not really about the book in question at all, but more
about the relationship of the reviewer to the writer, at least among haiku books. Consequently, we might do well to solicit reviews of haiku books by non-haiku poets. Such acts might risk a reviewer not knowing what to look for in haiku (season words, juxtaposition, and so on), but I think it’s worth the risk -- the best poems often work without such extrinsic knowledge. We should trust more outside reviewers to find the truth, or the failings, of our haiku.

What more or different, if anything, would you like to see?

As you see it, what role does the “haiku community” play in criticism? Would you like to see it play a different role? How so?

Can you recall a review or any piece of critical writing which stands out for you as a model for what you might like to see more of?

Forgive me for mentioning one of my own pieces, but one I’d like to see myself live up to with future reviews is my review of the “Unswept Path” anthology. Reviews that place content in a larger context are the ones that I most often prefer to read.

Critical writing is not just book reviews, of course. There are key pieces of criticism that can change our way of thinking, like the writing of Haruo Shirane, for example, and some of the writing of Richard Gilbert, when you dig through it (yes, for example, let’s once and for all put an end to the use of the word “onji”). I’ve particularly enjoyed particular essays by Paul Miller and Lee Gurga, and was proud to have published The Nick of Time: Essays on Haiku Aesthetics by the late Paul O. Williams, which contains many fine models for anyone to follow when writing critically, in terms of careful, fresh thinking mixed with clarity and accessibility without being needlessly complex. (I now have copies of the book available for sale again.) I also have a closet interest in using library and Internet resources to find academic papers and dissertations on haiku (Japanese, usually), and these often serve as objective models on analysis that are well worth emulating. I routinely discover gems of scholarship by excellent writers who write about haiku very well yet are nearly always completely removed from the English-language haiku scene. They’re writing about Japanese haiku, of course, so they have no need to be involved with English-language haiku, or even be aware of it. But in contrast, I believe one of our best writers about haiku, Makoto Ueda, has benefitted by deliberately keeping his finger on the pulse of
English-language haiku; he subscribed to *Woodnotes, Frogpond, Modern Haiku* and a few other journals, and you could see their influence in his translations (and he mentioned this in at least one of his books). Ultimately, criticism, whether by fellow poets or by non-poets, is a symbiosis with the poets. I believe life, art, and poetry, is best when it’s a balance between the head and the heart. E. E. Cummings reminded us that “feeling is first,” but he didn’t say that feeling is all that matters. Analysis counts too, and that’s why criticism is important for all arts, including haiku.

Allan Burns

looking deeper
and deeper into it
the great beech
—John Wills

Haiku criticism at its best is that kind of looking directed at haiku itself.

The principal function of such criticism is to help readers see what’s happening in haiku (both individual poems and the genre) more clearly so that they come into a deeper appreciation of its many subtleties. Criticism aims for both elucidation and evaluation so as to provide readers with a sense of orientation within the ongoing flood of production. It must combine keen perceptions with wide experience and should also remind us that reading haiku is itself an art. Henry James once described the critic as “the real helper of the artist, a torchbearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother.” As James demonstrates, the best critics are often practitioners. But the history of literature also shows that good critics are even rarer than good artists.

I’ll mention just a few examples of English-language haiku criticism (a field still very much in its infancy) that stand out for me.

A pioneering work and one unlikely ever to lose its significance is Harold G. Henderson’s *Haiku in English* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1967). Henderson’s writing was a model of lucid, generous, intelligent, flexible, and informed appreciation and
discrimination. Early ELH was indeed lucky to have had him.

A significant and groundbreaking work in terms of examining the achievements of individual haiku poets is Barbara Ungar’s *Haiku in English* (Stanford, 1978). (There are several books with this useful title!) It studies haiku and related genres by Amy Lowell, Jack Kerouac, and Michael McClintock and suggests what further work along these lines—which I believe will come in time—might be like.

Tom Lynch’s essay “Intersecting Influences in American Haiku” (University of Nebraska, 2001) is an extremely valuable study of contemporary American haiku in relation to both classical Buddhist-influenced Japanese haiku and homegrown transcendentalism as initiated by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman and transmitted through the work of the Imagists and the Beats. We could use more such studies that connect haiku to larger literary currents.

For its close readings of individual haiku, Martin Lucas’s *Stepping Stones* (British Haiku Society, 2007), with a focus exclusively on British haiku, is a suggestive and insightful work.

Two ambitious and stimulating essays of fairly recent vintage that have examined and challenged prominent trends within haiku composition generally are Peter Yovu’s “Do Something Different” (*Frogpond* 31.1, 2008) and Lucas’s “Haiku as Poetic Spell” (*Presence* 41, 2010).

For compact histories of ELH (and by virtue of their emphases literary histories are also always works of criticism), there are Charlie Trumbull’s “The American Haiku Movement” (*Modern Haiku* 36.3, 2005 and 37.1, 2006) and Jim Kacian’s “An Overview of Haiku in English” (the afterword of *Haiku in English*—there’s that title again!—W. W. Norton, 2013, edited by Jim, Phil Rowland, and me). We await the first book-length history of ELH.

Of course, these are just a few touchstones. I’m not trying to compile a bibliography.

I’ll close by mentioning two works that I believe have done something quite rare by elucidating the sublime and transcendental potential of haiku art: Eric Amann’s monograph *The Wordless Poem* (1969) and Robert Spiess’s *A Year’s Speculation on Haiku* (Modern Haiku Press, 1995).
Bruce Ross

Haiku Criticism

Is it in the Japanese spirit to have haiku criticism? Yes. Each school has its own poetics that is expressed in their discussion of haiku. Is it in the spirit of the rest of the world to have haiku criticism? Yes and no. When honest, this latter criticism does or should connect with understanding what haiku is as a poem. Some of this latter criticism is a repetition of even the earliest, though valid, non-Japanese criticism. In Japan haiku criticism has tended to be impressionistic or, shall we say poetic, within the cultural and formal elements of haiku, perhaps related to how haiku has always been practiced in given haiku groups. In the worldwide justly so fascination with haiku, the most widely practiced poem, wild and wooly attempts at criticism have occurred. The individual haiku and lifework of a given haiku poet should be at the center of haiku criticism. Beyond that, attention to what stands out in a given haiku that makes it an engaging aesthetic experience should be a focal point of haiku criticism. All this should be predicated on an understanding of haiku form and its subject matter. In most adaptations of poetic form (changing the meter, rhyme, and idiom of a sonnet as with E. E. Cummings, for example), the basic qualities of that form are nonetheless present. With Shiki’s working out the nature of modern haiku, the response to more radical approaches to such haiku (phrase length and number, psychological approaches, etc.) was, Do what you want but why call it haiku? So implicit in haiku criticism is an understanding of that question. Is such a question being addressed in contemporary haiku? Not really. Certain presentations of psychological idioms (some no more than a mental phrase), non-Basho-like “lightness” of simplistic representation, telegraph-like phrasing, lengthening of line lengths as “poems,” and the like occur as winners of contests and are frequently published in major journals, often in a freewheeling way, as if an experiment is being carried out with the form at the expense of the form. As the modern call of free verse, form is never more than an extension of content, is baldly applied to haiku, something is lost and nothing is gained other than a too short poem. A look at what makes haiku unique, perhaps as a special form of metaphor or “absolute metaphor,” if you will, should be part of that question asked two centuries ago.
Richard Gilbert

1) Concerning haiku, how do you regard the current state of criticism? That is, criticism of individual poems and poets, of collections, anthologies etc., and also of the genre in general?

So little of it, so few places for it.

2) What more or different, if anything, would you like to see?

More thinking out of the box; open-mindedness. Fresh criticism that inspires poets and readers to compose freely, and read with newfound passion, interest, intensity; to witness critical ideas presented through new media as creative genre expressions; the THF forum, its various blogs and their comments, represent one example; criticism may also extend to poetry, video, documentary, biography; greater academic rigor.

3) As you see it, what role does the “haiku community” play in criticism? Would you like to see it play a different role? How so?

Blinds > mysterious mirrors. Words are also things, in a way. Substances, forms, shapes. Often half-hidden, yet revealing, even as they limit. It’s thought that nouns may be the last parts of speech to evolve. Nouns seem the most concrete things, yet conceiving a symbolic-represented engram (word) for the thing is an exceptionally abstract act; a cognitive tour de force. Who speaks, and to what world, and for what cause, what reason, with what evidence, to what effect? Paz wrote that the poem is minimally “two.” Audience, even as dream, is a noun, that is. Don’t we struggle with invisibility, questions of home, past and future, societal eventualities, and increasingly, planetary ecology? Haiku community isn’t unitary: diverse groups worldwide share this common interest.

One question is how haiku-critical exploration might enlarge its scope to reach beyond the genre, to speak to those interested in poetry, full stop. Will “haiku community” as such recede into mouse-holes of somnolence? To see things fresh, having something to push against: enervations inherent in “tradition.”
I’ve been musing lately that:
There are readers
There are poets
There are critics
There is community
There is sociality
There are group networks
There are group functions.

Among these, participants have differing needs, goals and expectations. For instance:

If you are fractured, do haiku represent:
Sanity, purity, healing, therapy?

If you are urgent, do haiku represent:
Social challenge, exploration, agon?

If you are tired, do haiku represent:
Freshness, re-invigoration, novelty?

If you are bored, do haiku represent:
Surprise, delight, reversal of expectation?
If you like language-interaction with consciousness, do haiku represent:
Novel language use, coinage, neologism, experiment?

If you like lineage and form, do haiku represent:
Continuity missing in culture, or in life at large?

If one is relatively socio-economically stable, do haiku represent:
A lifestyle choice, a set of values, mores, an ethical base?

Some of the above queries may fit for poetry in general, yet others seem more genre-specific. This itself is critically interesting, don’t you think? As a community, visiting various groups and symposia, are we overwhelmingly white, middle-class, bourgeois? Or should that read “of the well-educated professional class and successful”? Would the average age of our community be somewhere north of 50? Should we take an interest in new poets who are 20—30 something? Where are they, where’s the new talent? By all means let’s invite them in. I sometimes think we are really going somewhere, but then have doubts.

Actually, my thoughts and planned campaign of a haiku sailing pilgrimage around Japan is a critical response (and performance art piece) relating directly to all of the above. I hope to reach a larger audience; to connect more expansively: haiku < > society.

4) Can you recall a review or any piece of critical writing which stands out for you as a model for what you might like to see more of?

“What really constitutes good writing in haiku as poetry?”

George Szirtes had this to say about haiku (22 January 2014)

“Haiku form, in the 5-7-5 syllable sense, is one of those readily fitted for Twitter with its 140-character limit. I rarely thought to write haiku before going on Twitter, but once on there I experimented a good deal, writing about the form itself before going to write seriously in it. I do now and compose ever more frequently in series treating each haiku as a self-complete poem that then joins with others in some narrative or dramatic form. The writing of haiku has brought out something in my work, possibly a kind of plain-spokenness and a greater willingness to engage with the abstract. I save the absurd and the tangentially poetic for prose.”

I’ve met George Szirtes on a few occasions, but we never discussed haiku. He is also a fellow consultant on an online literary magazine which contained a substantial section on haiku including a short essay by myself. Many poets choose to go the 57-5 route, perhaps because it feels lyrical, without the extreme brevity that regular haiku writers use. The adaptation of the Japanese cutting technique called kire, in haiku, is not something that is easy for many poets to read into a verse, and understand, perhaps it’s too alien? I wonder if there are two main camps, haiku as haiku and haiku as poetry. Oddly I’ve rarely experienced difficulties with the general public understanding a haiku poem, but poets regularly writing outside the haiku market do appear to have some or great difficulty at times.

Why is this I wonder? I don’t have any ready or clever answers. I just know that haiku appears to be too sophisticated even for some poets regularly published in the best of literary journals. I experiment with various approaches to haiku, and the puzzlement however open appears the same: I feel that 57-5 haiku will always have a
place in poet's hearts, where they need more words, and at least have the equivalent to a line of poetry.

There are many people who only write haiku as tweets, and consider 140 characters just enough for a haiku, whereas for many here we could easily accommodate at least two haiku, and even start a third. Perhaps it is a combination of the attempt to utilise the kireji cutting, making a tiny verse into two smaller verses surrounded by an acre of white space that bamboozles many, including experienced close readers, and poets?

“What really constitutes good writing in haiku as poetry?” Is it engaging in more communication outside the regular haiku groups that we haunt? Does outreach, guest-readings, and talks, school, college and university visits, and performances help? How many regular haiku writers visit educational establishments?

Have we gone so minimalist that it is impossible for the public - who are aware of 575 verse, and also possibly read some translation versions of classic haiku from Japan - to be allowed on the same page any more? Are we in fact excluding the very people we wish to have included?

Before regular performance poetry events many page only poets grudgingly gave live readings, mumbling into their books, avoiding eye glance or eye lock, wary of those who even loved their work, and understood it or were prepared to. Is there a danger that we risk those dark ages, despite a huge movement of people enjoying live poetry?

In Bristol (England, U.K.) I remember having to do crowd control for a poetry slam. Bristol was the bigger scene, bigger than London, and poets were even interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on the BBC’s Newsnight flagship program. I’ve even had to move two haiku poets to the top floor of a bookstore for health and safety reasons, due to popularity, excitement, overcrowding, to continue their book signings. So it can happen to haiku poets too.

Poets should be communicators, surely? Are we front line reporters coming back with what we’ve witnessed, or not? Shouldn’t we be both across the page and across the room at the party? Something is missing, despite the recent surge of quality books around haiku that should appeal to the public. Nowadays there is more to
poetry than just good writing, but it helps, if only to start from there, and then engage, not as soldiers, but fellow communicators. After all, the age of cellphone cameras, selfies, and constant social media interconnecting is upon us, and haiku has always embraced new media from Basho onwards.

It will be interesting to see the impact of the two recent books of Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years (W.W. Norton) and Where the River Goes (Snapshot Press) this year into next year, plus more big books on the way.

Next time I meet George Szirtes I will certainly touch on haiku, maybe even have a haiku book to hand.

Kristen Deming

Someone wrote that “Thoughtful criticism itself is an art and a creative act.”

The question of criticism led me to think more about the role and responsibilities of the poetry critic/reviewer.

Literary criticism is about the reader: teaching him, guiding him, and putting the work being reviewed into some context or historical perspective. It is not about the critic himself or his ego.

I admire those in the haiku community who step forward to write criticism and reviews. We rely on them to be honest without causing pain; to tell us what works and what doesn’t work in a constructive way.

In my opinion, haiku criticism/reviews have been excellent for the most part, and gently done. If there has been any hesitation in being more assertively critical, it might be worry about breaking the wa (harmony) of the haiku community. However, the open exchange of ideas is worth the risk.
Recent discussions here and elsewhere have attempted to provide explanations for the evolution of English-language haiku in the 21st century. They have been brave attempts to understand haiku that are often incomprehensible, at least in terms of established ideas about the form. Perhaps what we need are concepts from outside the realm of literary theory that can illuminate gendai or the new haiku.

I have found a recent discovery in physics that might help. It is the amplituhedron, ”a jewel-like geometric object” that greatly simplifies calculations about how particles interact. It seems to make unnecessary two bedrock assumptions of physics, locality and unitarity (Natalie Wolchover, Quanta Magazine, 27Sep13):

“Locality is the notion that particles can interact only from adjoining positions in space and time. And unitarity holds that the probabilities of all possible outcomes of a quantum mechanical interaction must add up to one. The concepts are the central pillars of quantum field theory in its original form, but in certain situations involving gravity, both break down, suggesting neither is a fundamental aspect of nature”.

Perhaps established ideas about the haiku are also not fundamental. Why not use the amplituhedron as a model for stimulating new and vital thoughts about what really is haiku’s true nature. But first, more from Wolchover:

“The amplituhedron looks like an intricate, multifaceted jewel in higher dimensions. Encoded in its volume are the most basic features of reality that can be calculated, “scattering amplitudes,” which represent the likelihood that a certain set of particles will turn into certain other particles upon colliding”.

Isn’t the collision of images the primary techniques of gendai haiku poets? And, the concept of “scattering amplitudes” might be useful for explaining what happens when images collide.
Poets are often leery of literary critics. People who write haiku have a pronounced aversion to “critical thought” and other such wordings that emphasize intellect over what you might call heart. At the same time, people want their work to be read with as much care as they gave to the creation.

To me, the sort of exploration and dialogue Peter encourages through Field Notes is inspiring. The ability to write critically about poems on a level that enlightens is rare. Few are so gifted. While that shouldn’t stop the rest of us from thinking through and writing down our critical impulses, we might do well to pause and remember kindness.

A friend and I touched on this topic in an email exchange a few days ago. I wrote:

“It is difficult for me to write about poems, in part because I am leery about unbalancing the poet’s words. You know, every sound and rest and letter is creating a whole that can be changed by what the critic hangs onto, or bolsters, or tears down. Violence can be done. Maybe more insidious, the poem can be taken, made the critic’s in a way. So, critical writing that is constructive must be wrought with attention and delicacy. You have a special talent for that--I am not up to it.
When last year I tried to explicate to you a few of my own poems, I could not get the balance right, and kept adding information, sapping energy and mystery from the original until I regretted saying anything.
Comedians know this--once you stop to explain a joke, it’s no longer funny, the timing’s shot and you might as well exit stage left.”

There’s the desire for silence, for leaving well enough alone. And yet, I often hear people talk about how they struggled to find just the right word to complete a haiku. What makes that word “right”? There’s the beginning of a conversation that may challenge our individual assumptions. The good critic can help us there.
After Seamus Heaney’s death this past August, I turned to my copy of his *Opened Ground: Selected Poems*. The collection concludes with *The Nobel Lecture* [1995], which I’ll quote here:

“Without needing to be theoretically instructed, consciousness quickly realizes that it is the site of variously contending discourses. The child in the bedroom listening simultaneously to the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster while picking up from behind both the signals of some other distress, that child was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult predicament, a future where he would have to adjudicate among promptings variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, skeptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and, taken all together, simply impossible.”

In my view, that’s an apt observation of how we navigate our worlds, so full of various and conflicting signals—as in the voices of critics, for example. Does it bother me that my own contending discourses are “impossible,” taken all together? On the contrary, that’s where I hope to begin.

**Don Baird**

It is very difficult to write a critique whether it is in a genre of music, art, or poetry, et al. Creative art categories often have rules; they are just as often ignored - the artist’s creative force looking for a way out - to be set free. A critic must understand the boundaries (if any) of the art form under his/her scrutiny before he/she can write even the first word. Haiku style has become wildly varied while contentions continue as to what it is - are there boundaries - is their structure? This atmosphere makes it nearly impossible to be a critic of haiku without sounding like a know-it-all-windbag of a pit-bull dog.
I imagine if a poet writes exactly the same style the critic enjoys, the poet will do well in the review. However, if the critic is of a different sort than the poet, the poet just might find the review contentious - even hateful.

Critics are forgotten, however. The poets and their work live forever. Beethoven was hated by a critic at the beginning of his career. Later, down the road, Beethoven won him over but not without taking a few beatings in the media. Today, Beethoven is a hero and almost as well known as God. In the meantime, his early critic goes unremembered - and will forever.

There are two things I suggest regarding critiques: 1) don’t write them; 2) don’t read them. However, if you decide to write one, be understanding, be as creative as the person you are critiquing, enjoy the process, find the good, be kind, and be honest. In case you decide to read a critique of your work, be brave.

**Cherie Hunter Day**

Criticism is rarely perceived as fair and warranted. It’s difficult to get past severe judgment and unfavorable comments and remain open to the evaluation that might be helpful or positive. Criticism is so distasteful that one of the most popular workplace performance review strategies is the “feedback sandwich”: sandwich criticism between two pieces of praise. Shaping behavior by positive feedback has been the mode in classroom teaching for many years. It used to be gold and silver stars next to names on poster board charts. That’s a very visible reminder of who is helpful and compliant and who is uncooperative. More recently it’s earning *bee*bucks, colored pieces of construction paper, handed out at the beginning of the day and subtracted for each infraction of the rules. This strategy can easily backfire. One morning in fourth grade my son handed his daily dole of *bee*bucks back into the teacher and said, “Keep these.” In effect, he told his teacher, “You’ll have them all by the end of the day anyway.” To him they were just pieces of colored paper, nothing real or substantial.

We are in the “everyone is a winner” age. View one episode of American Idol
during the audition rounds and see how criticism works for some contestants and fails to bring expectations into line for others. Clinical researchers now think such reactions are related to the recipient’s self-esteem. Abundant praise for people with low self-esteem leads them to choose safer goals and makes them less persistent and less motivated in the long run than those with better self-esteem. Criticism for those with inflated self-worth is completely disregarded, often with considerable hostility.

The submission process for writers is an indirect form of criticism. The journal editor either accepts or rejects the work. Very seldom do they comment or make suggestions. It’s up to the author to determine the next course of action. They can either send the work to another journal, rewrite the piece, set it aside, or discard it as a last resort. The author can keep the process closed or open the process to workshop. Facebook is chock-a-block full of pages for posting material. I suspect that receiving all those “likes” works for some folks and backfires for others. It might, in fact, make some writers more passive and dependent on the opinions of others.

These difficulties with praise/criticism exist in haiku as well. It’s rare, but I appreciate when editors take the time and effort to pen encouragements or make suggestions. Bob Spiess, Elizabeth Searle Lamb, and Peggy Willis Lyles were legendary for their kindness and support. I’ve also received notes and e-mails from readers and friends sharing how much a particular haiku meant to them and why. It’s a genuine connection that sits outside the praise/criticism dichotomy. It’s a thank you without the calculating aspect of the “feedback sandwich.” I’m advocating more thank yous in the haiku community. If a haiku moves you, tell the poet, and tell them why. Crafting a thoughtful response not only increases goodwill, it sharpens analytical skills, which in the long run makes us better poets.

Peter Newton

I’d say criticism is alive and well in the haiku world. Seems like there’s plenty of book reviews in the major and minor journals. They don’t all just sing the praises from what I can tell. Though many do, deservedly. What strikes me is that many constructive and critical book reviews are written by editors who are poets with
certain tastes and tendencies. Few reviews are completely objective. But we have come to trust the opinions of others. And these opinions offer valuable tools by which we can improve our own writing.

What I’d like to see more of as far as criticism goes in haiku circles is self-criticism. A tough thing to do. But, for example, there is a book recently out by Jean LeBlanc called *The Haiku Aesthetic: Short Form Poetry as a Study in Craft* (CyberWit.net, 2013) which I believe addresses a necessary and underexplored area of discussion: The literary nuts and bolts, if you will, of the short form using some of the author’s own poems as examples of both successes and failures.

I like the attitude of a fellow poet who says: we’re in this together. Who else but oneself to hold up as an example of what works and what doesn’t work in making a poem. Poetry is an act of discovery. It is okay to admit that we all begin with a blank page. The novice and the Nobel laureate. Let’s say to each other: Here are a few things I think I’ve figured out about the process of writing a haiku.

LeBlanc’s book offers an inclusive approach consistent with the haiku spirit. We can each benefit from looking at our own work through a critical lens. But it not only takes time and space to gain the needed perspective but a willingness to point out one’s own flaws as a writer. Doesn’t mean their fatal personal flaws--just lapses in technique maybe or following the wrong voice at times. False starts. We all do it. Poems rarely fall from the sky fully formed. Most of us have to build the thing from the ground up and hope it withstands the wind, the rain, and the repeated scrutiny of our own ear.

We need a larger body of this kind of self-critical study in the Western haiku world, it seems to me. Yes, anthologies sell. Individual how-to books by prominent poets sell. But what is our commitment to improving the overall practice of the craft of poem making. “Skin in the game” is a phrase that comes to mind. I guess I need to get to work on my own self-critical essay: “Confessions of a Haiku Frankenstein: How I Failed as a Poet and Learned that Every Poem is a Process of Bringing Myself Back to Life.” Or something like that.
Tom D’Evelyn

Theory and Practice of HIE Criticism

Note: to justify these comments on “poetics” I need only point to the new issue of “Noon,” Philip Rowland, ed: as I show below, a mindful reading of the poems in this journal actually produces the kind of thinking about form and selfhood I am doing here. We start with poems. Criticism is inseparable from close reading of texts. Texts are critical. Critical theory emerges in its own right from close attention to the practice of poets.

1. Close reading of classic, canonical poetic texts soon teaches the critic that texts (the word is rooted in the action of weaving, warp and woof) are produced as speech doubles on itself, folds, returns, thus commenting on itself. Shakespeare’s “SHAKE-SPEARS SONNETS” (1609), among other things, is a radical criticism of the selves of the tradition of the sonnet. This is a critical commonplace; it SHOULD be commonplace in HIE criticism.

2. The question of “self” is inseparable from literary criticism. Poems unhinge language from normal use as a medium of reference to an object or objective state of affairs; references within poems are not solely determined by the referential use of language; rhythm, rhyme, all the devices of poetry, heavily qualify that objectivity, sometimes subverting it altogether in favor of a different ontology (e.g. Zen). There is an “implied author” in poetic uses of language which “sort of” doubles for the author; the concept of “persona,” foregrounded by Ezra Pound, is widely accepted as one of the ways of discussing self in poetry. Haiku, with its roots in Zen meditation, often depersonalizes the speech-act as if the poem projects from a nothingness, or an emptiness, a “fertile void” or perhaps the dead void of popular nihilism.

3. In a wider discussion of “selfhood,” selves or identities can be seen as structured by what is called “non-identical return.” That is, selves (identities) are shown as processes, continuities with gaps and leaps and deep structures which sponsor reflective moments of “non-identical return” in which the continuity of the subject
is confirmed by something other, different, surprising. Transformation is always a possibility; religious ideas often help structure these moments (see below). This is very useful for literary criticism because poems always involve repetition (form is itself repetitive) and surprising “turns” that throw weird light on what is happening. In Catherine Pickstock’s *Repetition and Identity* (Oxford 2013), she writes, “the self must be a living, dynamic symbol, fusing sense and reference, fiction and history, able to traverse, apprehend, and grieve, decipher and fulfill the allegories of nature.”

4. Regarding HIE criticism, it seems to break down into two kinds, practical and more experimental. These kinds are determined by their occasions. Within the HIE culture, we see practical criticism practiced in many different venues: exemplary is the Facebook page Haiku Ink. “Experts” there “critique” the work submitted, often showing great sensitivity for the writer’s intentions and degree of skill and literary sophistication. The norms brought to bear come from the “soup” of formal notions originating in traditions old and new: whatever serves the moment, that is, the “kindness” of the job to bring a more mindful awareness to the occasion. Since at this level of practice, the question of persona rarely comes up, the effort being to “say” something clearly, distinctly, and perhaps memorably, the question of self remains a question of the author’s real self and what this self feels, what “it” wants to say. The idea of self in Emerson’s “self-reliance” holds sway: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you is true for all men, -- that is genius. . . .”

5. A more experimental, analytical approach fits journals like *NOON* edited by Philip Rowland. This carefully curated journal presents haiku in the mix of other short forms. The general take-away is that the poems favored by the editor of *NOON* are aware/make us aware of the hybrid nature of form. These texts frequently surprise the reader with experimental weavings of this and that, references, points of view, tones. Such a self-consciousness about form may raise questions about the “self” implied by the poem. Certainly the material in *NOON* acknowledges the possibilities of self as suggested by Pickstock: “the self must be a living, dynamic symbol, fusing sense and reference, fiction and history, able to traverse, apprehend, and grieve, decipher and fulfill the allegories of nature.” Compare this with the Emersonian self of “Self-Reliance”!
6. It would be cumbersome to note all the mixed kinds that appear in the current issue of NOON. One may generalize and say that curation appears to favor styles that in their repetitions and returns do not wander too far from a clean diction, a spareness of syntax, which these poems share with a large number of modern American poems indebted to the early Imagist movement and various members of that family. The book, carefully edited by Rowland, opens with a suite of poems – well, a series – by Peter Yovu (disclosure: Peter edited this piece). In their diversity they suggest the range – the different kinds of poems – available to “Noon” readers, who do include haiku or ku or H (as I call it when pressed) among the poetic, or non-poetic, forms of literature. Yovu addresses a range of topics, including authentic speech (“the second story”), the politics of drones (“a drone”), poetic allusion (“so luscious”), and metamorphosis as unconscious self-exposure (“words furred”), in a variety of styles and shapes. The first and fourth touch on classic subjective themes: authenticity and blockage (“the second story/falls into the first rubble/at the back of my throat”) and the revelatory animal form (“words furred over my awkward animal toward you now”). This “singleton” (or one-line ku) makes a good case for the type. The unfolding of the syntax follows the sequence of events as well as the total context: intense diction in “furred over” (past tense); the invention of a verb, “fur over” corrected in the progress of the sentence as “over” becomes a preposition: “over my awkward animal” – which thematizes the “non-identical” aspect of the repetition of syntactic form. This depends on a nod to the traditional distinction between “animal” and something more “spiritual” in the human (which distinction is probably not worth bothering with except in irony as here). The text explodes – as a good text should – with renewed energy as it returns “non-identically’ (that is, surprisingly, creatively, critically), to its repetition (its syntactic closure, “toward you now”). Try cutting “now” and you feel a perhaps widening of reference (Keats?). In any event, it is a very strong opening to a very compelling issue of “Noon.” Yovu is a very careful, efficient, economical, even minimalist writer, if by “minimalist” we can include the sudden opening up of a view to the abyss as achieved in “words furred.”

Rare in the poems included in this issue of NOON (with a few exceptions) are the lyric resonances one experiences in poetry influenced by the New Criticism – say the work of John Crowe Ransom, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Anthony Hecht,
Richard Wilbur, Louise Bogan, and so on. An exception would be Anna Arov’s exhilarating ‘revision’? Please see the poem *in situ*.

```
revision

you advised when writing
I should take a step back
make it less personal
change settings
dates
the ‘he’ to ‘she’
   so when touching you
I was touching her
   kissing her
then I lost the thread
and she was kissing me
   I could feel her warmth
her fingers pulling my ear
   and I was not in love with you
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This could be placed within the sonnet tradition for its sense of dialogical situation, its drama, its irony, it’s sexiness, like a less-naïve e.e.cummings than . . . what? Something new (feminist)?

8. That said, there are texts here--less brilliant, perhaps, as poems, than Arov’s jewel -- which taxonomy would place in the family of “lyric.” A hybrid “ku-lyric” is poem by John Levy. It’s a “lyric” put through HIE-related extreme minimalist reduction: “minute hand / hour hand/ second hand/ armada.” The repetition of the list of “hands” on the clock does not prepare us for the surprise of the “return” to the larger, more general, interruptive (even eschatological) concept brought forward by “armada.” But the “leap” is justified the more you think about it; and so the poem becomes memorable, the depth of feeling quite personal (if not paranoid!).
Upon closer inspection, the sequence of “hands” – minute, hour, second – yields an interesting complex “wave” structure: ordinary, bigger, then suddenly smaller, as if the heart were beating faster, time more urgent, time LESS along with the timelessness of “armada.” Is there word play in the “arms” – as opposed to hands – of the besetting “armada” (etymology shows this as a distinct possibility); such wordplay is “technical” and “witty,” which indexes the “self” of the poem.

9. Scott Metz’s contribution at first glance fits easily into the general family of HIE: “the river entering the / sea a sheet of / paper.” While the look-feel of this text (the lines ending in words that make the line-ending no ending) is experimental, the verbal event closely resembles that of many contemporary ku. The elegant visual aspect – the absorption of the energies of the river into the greater body of the ocean flattening and indeed dispersing its identity – leads the reader into potential metaphors such as “blank sheet of paper.” Depending on one’s mood as a writer, this could be depressing or thrilling! Here again the “self” is an ultimate subject of the poem. The analytic toughness of this poem – presenting a kind of critical moment to the reader’s judgement – makes it exemplary of a certain potentiality within HIE.

Eve Luckring’s love of risk sometimes leads to profitless obscurity (at least profitless for my small brain) but sometimes startles with the breath and cogence of the non-identical return. I’m thinking of

```
a delta
of refrains
sun-scrubbed
salt
you who speak of clarity
```

Suffice it to say that it seems to be about non-identical return: “a delta of refrains” (returns) subjected to the primal elements of nature and mind (sun-scrubbed . . . salt) – that wave of tensions collapses into a climax of address: “you who speak of clarity.” The old regime of Cartesian “clarity” is engulfed in the energy of this wave. Cartesian self becomes part of the soup of consciousness. Now that’s really something!
11. It is not uncommon for a poem in NOON to directly confront the questions raised by criticism. Elizabeth Robinson’s “On Terseness” situates itself in what critics call the aporia: the no-way through moment or “interruption” of repetition’s identity. “Here’s how I interrupted my story. / How I burnt my fingers on a match.” The pun on match captures the “romance” of repetition and non-identical return; a “match” or double (return) can often lead to interruption. The poem moves into a mythic scene: “Underneath the great deluge” – the “deluge” being the great interruption and foretaste of the final “show-down.” The final lines return to “mere” repetition as “surfeit” never to be absorbed, fleeing “within the bulk of itself.” The use of “itself” there recapitulates the “I” of the poem in its not-self never to return?

12. I really should stop. But I will continue reading the poems of this issue of NOON and other periodicals at tdeelyn.wordpress.com This blog is called “Meridian: Remarks on Contemporary Poems” and is devoted to the practice of criticism in light of the theories adumbrated here. (Interested editors, please send review copies to me at PO Box 4177, Portsmouth, NH 03802, and of course I can work with digital texts.)

Peter Yovu

you
look up

from
planting

bulb’s
into
fall’s

new
spaces
In a poem, as in life, (in poem-as-life and life-as-poem) there is always more going on than any analysis can reveal. I find this to be true of the poem above. It is by John Martone, and appeared in the latest issue of Noon.

So what is the point of analysis? What is the point of criticism?

The words jar. They connote a taking, even a tearing apart. How can we talk about this? Is there an approach which may loosen up some of the negative associations one may have around criticism?

Though it is not generally spoken about in relation to haiku, I recall the origin of the word verse as: a turning, as the turning of a plow, or line of poetry. The sense here, of course, is that a poem turns from line to line, each successive line giving a different but connected view, even if the connection is distant.

One “progresses” through the poem line by line until a whole is realized. That sense of wholeness will be more felt than anything else, the web of connections known to the body as the body knows its own wholeness through every part. Coming to this sense of wholeness, if indeed one does come to it, is the point at which one may say that one likes a poem, or does not. You could say that this is the body’s own critical response. And for many this may be sufficient.

But I would contend that looking deeply into a poem, examining it, and yes, analyzing it, serves to enlarge it—paradoxically, it serves to enlarge the whole. I’d like to explore how that might work.

If a poem is a series of “turns” working toward a sense of wholeness (a wholeness some of whose parts may only be intuited) then perhaps what is required of the critic (or critical reader) is that he or she review (view again) the poem in a similar fashion, by turning it, looking at it from different perspectives. This approach regards a poem as, though composed of lines, not linear, but as something with contours and depth. As something alive.

Each part reveals the whole. Here one quickly enters into the realm of paradox, because each part reveals a different whole. Perhaps one could say that each part reveals the whole differently. This becomes the joy of reviewing any work of art. Without such re-view, the sense of wholeness may settle, and the poem become an
object, a fixed rather than a living thing. It would be akin to a sculpture which one cannot or does not walk around. And cannot touch.

I like to think that criticism can take this approach. It is an approach that does not lose sight of the whole. It is grounded in feeling, and is therefore an embodied approach.

The tendency with analysis is to lose sight of the whole. To lose the diamond for the facets. So I would say the best criticism regards analysis as a function that doesn’t get too enamored of itself, that realizes that analysis is in service of something greater. This, on a more universal level, is the concern of Iain MacGilchrist who writes about the dangers of the left (analytical) hemisphere of the brain seizing control and taking precedence over the right hemisphere, that portion of the brain which deals with the totality of what is presented.

The totality of what is presented does not exclude the subjective. It strikes me that a good critic will be keenly aware of this. It is a phenomenological approach, basically. In his book The Spell of the Sensuous, David Abram writes:

“... the ambiguity of experience is already a part of any phenomenon that draws our attention. For whatever we perceive is necessarily entwined with our own subjectivity, already blended with the dynamism of life and sentience. The living pulse of subjective experience cannot finally be stripped from things that we study (in order to expose the pure unadulterated “objects”) without the things themselves losing all existence for us”.

The critic has the function of revealing windows. It is a wonderful experience to tell a dream to another, or to several people, and have one or all say what they have seen, often something one has not seen for oneself. In this process, usually the feeling associated with a dream remains present, and may be strengthened by looking at various elements.

But the critic also has the role of revealing where windows are foggy, or missing, or,
when looked at closely, are not windows at all, but stenciled pictures on the wall. The critic is the one who senses that a poem has not done what it set out to do and is willing to re-view it to find out why. Or who sees that the poet took too much control over the language, or settled for an easy effect, or . . . .

I have presented a rather idealized view of criticism. Briefly, I also want to say that there can be great value in criticism which is biased, partial, emotional, infuriating, uninformed, etc. If nothing else, such writing may serve to stir us into a response, if only to find out how we really feel about something, or even that we do feel something strongly.

So, does it help to look a poem like Martone’s to get some idea of how it works? Only if doing so enlarges that sense that one may have (as I have) that this is, brief as it is, a work of art. My remarks may not do that, or do it well, but I am willing to try. And in any event, I welcome the possibility that there is someone reading the kinds of poem many of us are putting out who is capable of such enlargement. I welcome as well the possibility that there is someone capable of showing where what you and I are doing falls short, or where trends and habits are taking over, where art is being colonized by technique, among other things.

you
look up

from
planting

bulb’s
into
fall’s

new
spaces
Martone sets his poem down in a way which will be familiar to any who have experienced his work before. The vertical, one word (or two) to a line format emphasizes the moment to moment shifts that language and perception make. (Can one word be said to be a line? This is the first of several subversions—turnings from below—the poem enacts. It has the effect of slowing down time, and perhaps of allowing us to see that a part or particle is in and of itself a whole).

The poem directs us downward, and yet the first two lines are “you/look up”, which I will venture to say creates a kind of perceptual eddy, a slight displacement. It’s emphasized by the double space just following, after which we learn about that from which we (the poet and I) are looking up: from planting. We’re on solid ground, and we have some idea now of what we’re seeing.

But then the poem turns again, is subversive again. The expectation would be that something is being planted, a seed or bulb, but instead, what the poem is directing us toward is not the thing itself, but a quality or state the thing— the bulb—possesses. Again, as we go down slowly, word by word, we don’t know what that is, and finding out is delayed by another turn, by something else, this time another category of thing: a season, a turning in time.

It is rather dizzying, as looking up at the sky can be after concentrated work in a garden, or on a poem.

Can a bulb and the fall, two very different but mutually involved entities, both “possess” the same thing? In this case, the poem tells us that what they possess (and are possessed by) are “new/spaces”. But looked at closely, what we see is that the bulb’s “new space” is not exactly the same as the fall’s new space, as the former is being planted into the later.

The poem seems to be saying that the act of planting (and the act of writing a poem) reveals or creates something new—it opens up a space which we were not previously aware of.

And it is—dare I say it—what close reading does: opens up a space where new meaning may be discovered, which even the writer may not have known.
And here, yes, it helps to look up, to take this poem’s season back to the beginning and immerse ourselves in the clarifying sky, the vastness of which contains and goes beyond any new space we may have encountered on our journey.

Francine Banwarth

It seems to me that first we have to deal with the word “criticism.” In the best sense one evaluates, analyzes, interprets, that is, carefully studies and offers an insightful response, which can be based on historical, social, or other approaches. Taken by itself, however, the word “criticism” has a rather negative and more narrow connotation, and that is why in my personal experience, I find it difficult to express honest criticism when I feel a work has little merit.

I imagine we’ve all participated in workshops and critique sessions where the air becomes uncomfortable and the silence unbearable while everyone tries to figure out something nice to say about a particular haiku or haibun, for example. It is engaging and energizing to evaluate and discuss work that is worthy and promising or innovative and challenging, but even done in the kindest way, an honest, less-than-positive response is difficult to deliver and often difficult to receive. Without some form of creative criticism, however, we fail to grow as individuals or as writers and artists, so it seems essential that we learn to express and receive constructive literary criticism.

It seems to me also that criticism is dimensional. For example, a book review may be just that, a review of a collection on a level that is a personal response rather than a critical assessment. The reviewer may choose to focus on what he or she finds positive and rewarding and avoid areas that are more problematic. I believe we see this type of approach often in the haiku community and that it is an approach that can be valuable to authors and readers alike.

I find that some of the most insightful evaluations are often offered in the foreword to individual collections and anthologies and that they can serve as models for study in the haiku genre. As far as critics go, we can be our own best critic. We can
look at the work we produce from a detached viewpoint, that is, step into someone else’s shoes and self-evaluate, if at all possible. If we practice that approach, we may gradually learn to offer, receive, and filter “criticism” with a mature and open mind. In that way, criticism itself is an art form.

Paul Miller

The Haiku Community is a wonderful thing. In contrast to the larger poetry scene where haiku is often marginalized, if not outright dismissed, the Community is welcoming and encouraging—not to mention educationally beneficial. Without the Community I don’t know if I would still be writing haiku—the genre/format/etc that seems to fit my poetic goals the best. I know I wouldn’t have gotten any better. I have many friends in the Community that I enjoy seeing at meetings, conferences, casual get-togethers, and corresponding with over email. I enjoy discussing and sharing poems.

However, what makes the Community so wonderful is also its worst attribute. Since I have so many haiku friends, it can be hard to criticize their work. I’ve addressed this elsewhere, but to recap at thirty-thousand feet: haiku are often personal poems—about our daily interactions with the world—so it is hard not to hear criticism as criticism of the self, of the interaction, not the poem. Yet criticism is what we need. Without it we won’t grow as poets.

In a larger poetry scene of a hundred thousand poets criticism is less of an issue. The Community being the size it is, I know I will undoubtedly interact with that person at some future point. This leads many reviewers to shower praise on the slightest of books. While this may be encouraging to the poet, it is not helpful to their development; and less helpful to a reader who might be thinking of spending their hard-earned cash on the book. With that in mind I have always tried to be honest but fair in my reviews. Years ago a prominent haiku poet objected to my calling another poet “one of our best,” citing the fact that we were all doing the best we could. He was essentially arguing for “participant” trophies for all. But that does my poetry no good.
In my roles as editor I have seen the effects of criticism. In response to what I thought were honest and fair book reviews I have seen poets get angry, lash out, and sometimes cancel subscriptions. In declining to accept submitted poems I’ve been told I didn’t know anything about haiku. Admittedly, as a writer, and because I’m human, I’ve had those interior reactions as well (well… not the canceling part). However, it is important to realize that none of us write brilliant poems all the time. I have been grateful (later) when editors rejected my lesser work (I probably didn’t realize it was lesser when I submitted it because the latest discovery is always the brightest) and equally grateful when an editor offered a critique or suggestion. However, there are many ways to criticize someone. Interestingly, a quick Google search for a definition of “criticize” brought up these two definitions:

1) indicate the faults of (someone or something) in a disapproving way
2) form and express a sophisticated judgment of (a literary or artistic work)

Clearly we should aim for the second definition, and be open to it when it is directed at our own work. It doesn’t mean we have to like someone’s judgment of our haiku, or agree with it, but we should view every judgment as a learning opportunity. A fellow poet once pointed out a particular and reoccurring theme of my haiku—one I wasn’t aware of. If they hadn’t had the gumption to criticize my work I might never have realized that.

The yoga studio I attend likes to call our workouts “practices”, which might be a good way to think of our poetry. We are not masters; we are just poets on a path. In that light we might be open to “a sophisticated judgment.”

Eve Luckring

Wow, there is a lot here to take in here, from *bee-bucks* to quantum field theory. I’m still wending my way through all this, but grateful for all who shared their thoughts.
Tom, in your post,

the river entering the
sea as a sheet of
paper

This poem is by Scott Metz, not Emma Bolden.

It is elegant, I agree, and your notion of the
“non-identical return” (if I am actually understanding what you mean by it)
expresses well how it works.

Lynne Rees

For me there are two fields of criticism, although they can of course overlap. Literary
criticism that will discuss and explore the social and historical context of a work/author. And writerly, constructive criticism - the kind we hope to get from editors
and workshops - that responds to the work on the page: its form, structure and
language choices. The latter focuses on what the work/poem is doing (or hopes to do)
and how it achieves that. In this kind of criticism the writer’s experience/existence is
irrelevant. The words on the page are the only thing to consider. Perceived intention
and perceived achievement.

I know it’s difficult, no matter how far along in our writing career, to completely
separate ourselves from the work, to create the divide between writer and writing,
but it’s essential if we’re to develop and grow in any genre.

And the only way to do that is to put ourselves in the critical arena, and learn how
to receive and offer criticism from/to our peers and from journal editors (if they
choose to give it) we submit work to. But that arena needs boundaries - we’re not
instinctively ‘good’ or ‘well-behaved’ critics - guidelines should be laid down by a
moderator/facilitator and adhered to.

And it’s also up to every one of us to be honest about ourselves and our writing before we enter that arena. Why are we there? Looking for praise, acceptance and approval? Wanting to develop as a writer? Wanting to be part of a constructive discussion that will help us and others?

Finally: learning to offer and receive constructive criticism in a writing workshop has been an invaluable tool for me in life generally.

Philip Rowland

One further correction: Scott Metz’s poem reads:

the river entering the
sea a sheet of
paper

[no “as” -- a significant difference, I think]

Since Emma Bolden was mentioned, let me quote also the poem that immediately precedes/leads into Metz’s (in the issue); juxtaposition being another kind of criticism, perhaps:

THE BEST I CAN SAY OF ANYTHING IS THAT IT WILL END

I am a liar. Look: under these clothes I am hiding
a body. I’m waiting for an axe, a ditch. I’m shopping

for cement shoes, a lake so dark that none
of its languages have words for surface or shore.
Mary Squier

I thought this was interesting, and fun to read.

I am new to haiku and perhaps naive, but this article felt quite timely to current haiku criticism. Maybe our poems and souls are too gentle for all that fierceness? however intelligent and provocative.

Alan Summers

I agree with Mary, and it reminds me of Bill Higginson’s comment, years ago, about toughening up book reviews.

It ties in with what I said above also, and a conversation with George Szirtes I’ve held since. He’s not the only one wondering where the poetry is going in haiku. Syllabic haiku is a strong factor amongst poets outside the haiku movement that we know: There are also proponents of this approach that feature Jim Wilson, who does deal in cogent arguments.

I always feel we have something to learn from those outside the haiku community, and even from outside the poetry groups.

What do others feel about the link that Mary gave us, and whether we need to, should do, keep in touch with the larger world of poetry? Perhaps we don’t, but I’m not sure about isolation.

We do have a number of haiku writers who are poets at large outside haikai literature. Is it a break from writing the “other poetry”? 
I enjoyed reading the interview via the link Mary provided. This has me smiling, and I agree with the spirit of it:

“I’d support a law making every poet write a review as the price for writing a poem.” - William Logan

There are 10 more interviews with ‘poet-critics’ on Contemporary Poetry Review, should anyone feel like browsing through them. Such interviews are a good idea.

Writing a review at all takes focus, concentration, thinking about the poems… *someone else’s* poems. We don’t have to be good at it, and probably won’t be until we’re well-practised at it. Reviews can range from simple appreciations through explications right up to scholarly analyses. Each will appeal to a different readership/audience. I think we need the variety, and all haiku poets should be encouraged to write a review from time to time. Those more experienced and/or more educated, I believe, should refrain from the urge to take a piece out of the throat of anyone who has attempted a review they disagree with or feel disdain for.

My personal preference, in reading reviews, are for those that allow me something of a preview of a book, some indication that the reviewer has attempted to engage with the actual poems contained within. What I dislike most are those (thankfully, comparatively rare) pieces which make me feel like an eavesdropper, where the intended audience seems to be a few mates whom the reviewer is in dialogue with or wants to impress.

Ellen Grace Olinger

Thank you for this conversation. There is a lot here to read and learn. For now, I
saw that Kristen Deming echoed the thought that Criticism is an art in and of itself. I’ve thought that as well, as I’ve read criticism in education, poetry, and other fields.

As I read reviews, I mostly appreciate a clear summary of what the book is like, and perhaps a few sample poems. Let the reader decide. Sometimes I wish I had read books before the reviews, so I can evaluate for myself before joining the broader conversation. A review may have seemed too negative, or too positive - thereby putting pressure on the poems that didn’t need to be there, in my view. This must be where the art of criticism is so important.

As for haiku criticism in the form of essays and books, I don’t feel qualified so far to speak to that topic. But I remember in educational and psychological research the difference between basic and applied research. Always felt both were equally valid, even though the former might not bear fruit for a long time. My gift was to translate the research into teacher preparation classes. In some areas, it seemed a small group of people were writing for each other - were translation of research into practice weren’t seen as equal by some (or so it seemed). Or different areas of the field were in competition. I’d say to my students, this is education, we should be helping each other.

Peter Yovu

Michael Dylan Welch has long favored the idea that ELH should take steps to break out of the “haiku ghetto” and position itself, by various means, in the larger poetry community. In his contribution for FN5 above, he recalls Dana Gioia encouraging the “haiku community” to “champion its best haiku poets and its best haiku books to non-haiku poets”, and to “find and promote . . . excellent haiku poets”. He suggests writing “in-depth articles for leading non-haiku poetry journals”.

I believe Michael is to be applauded for his efforts in this direction.

There is probably no consensus about what “excellence” in haiku may be (just as there is little consensus about about what haiku itself is), nor much about who are the “best” haiku writers and which the best books. So it’s unclear, at least to me, just
what or whom to promote or how to go about it.

There are no doubt many readers (and writers) of poetry who would be interested and likely surprised to learn what has been happening in ELH since the 50’s. An in-depth article on the subject might find its way into one or another poetry journal. *Poetry* magazine would be a logical place to try. The Poetry Foundation, which publishes it, has a mission to promote poetry in general and to make it accessible to a wide audience.

There may be reasons, however, they would be reluctant to publish such an article. More about that soon.

With the appearance of *Haiku in English* last year, at least one case has been made for excellence in haiku. It is probably the best case that has been made up to now. As far as I know it has yet to be reviewed by any major poetry journal, despite having been published by Norton, who also published earlier anthologies edited by Cor van den Heuvel.

Its primary aim, of course, is to demonstrate that “excellence” in haiku is not a static or single thing. Various writers, as the book makes clear, have done different things with haiku, but the anthology’s aim is not to demonstrate the excellence of writers themselves. It does not attempt to make a case for individual poets as “best” or even “excellent”.

And in truth, about how many haiku poets would that be possible? Put it this way: how many haiku poets are readily identifiable by their work? Only a few, I would say. For the most part, haiku itself, the idea of it, the ideal of it, has been promoted over the writer him or herself. Some poets considered among the “best” write haiku which could have been written by any number of others. It would seem that anybody can write a good haiku. That is often promoted as one of its charms, what sets it apart from the more “elitist” stance of poetry in general. The problem for me is that many of the poems one finds in the journals and anthologies have exactly the feeling of having been written by . . . anybody.
Haiku is often regarded as a purity which the writer attains by draining himself or herself of individuality or personality. The individual is equated with ego; writing as an individual, or with individuality and uniqueness is merely an act of self-expression-- of pointing primarily to oneself.

That’s not what I’m talking about. Nor am I talking about promoting more subjectivity. (Or less for that matter). Nor about psychological or confessional haiku, unless that is what truly matters to the writer, if elements of haiku are a means of bringing such explorations to life.

What I’m talking about is the individual as a unique expression of life-- and the writer as one means, by way of language, by which life gets to reveal itself. What I feel needs to be promoted is individual expression-- how you and I come to terms with the challenge and potential of haiku which, if we are serious, we have internalized (and perhaps metabolized) as an inescapable dimension of our lives.

Here’s the thing: I don’t think poets and readers of poetry outside the “haiku community” want to know more about haiku, but rather about writers whose language has been lit up by contact with it. The virtues of haiku itself are easy to discover-- recent anthologies make a good case. Non-haiku poets don’t need, as some seem to think they do, to be educated about haiku but to be exposed to writers who have used it as a means to produce distinctive and significant work, writing which comes through a poet’s struggles with word, world, and self.

I believe criticism can play a vital role in this. There have been very few in-depth critiques of individual writers. Such explorations, done well, can bring subtle or difficult elements of a poet’s work into the light, and serve to open doors to others. A good critic finds a third dimension where others could only find two. It is perhaps a somewhat ideal view, but I believe a symbiosis can take place between writer and critic, each bringing out the best in the other.

I would cite Allan Burns as someone who, by way of Montage, but more so Where the River Goes, has done good critical work, providing insightful portraits of various writers and giving some personal context for their work. Jack Galmitz, in his book Views, offers an often generous and in-depth look at the achievements of poets such as Mountain and Martone. His review of Mark Harris’ Burl is sensitive and insightful.
And Richard Gilbert has championed numerous (and in many cases previously unseen) possibilities inherent in haiku in such a way that, as I see it, the individual expression I am speaking of is given a broad range of “tools” to work with.

Of course none of that is possible without the poems themselves, without poets’ willingness to explore. And yet sometimes it may be that the critic sees something the writer did not, or only intuited. Even good writers know only the half of themselves. Great writers perhaps somewhat more, but I’m not sure such a creature exists yet among ELH poets.

Nor do I think one will emerge by favoring excellence in haiku over excellence in individual writers.

Rebecca Lilly

I read with interest your thoughts on the absence of individual voice in haiku, and agree with your general observation that when a single good haiku is looked at by itself, out of context, it’s not easy to discern who wrote it --it might conceivably have been written any number of good poets. However, I think this is, perhaps unfortunately, due more to the brevity of the form, rather than the ‘no-self’ philosophy behind it.

Unless haiku are linked, or are published together as a collection by a single poet, it can be very difficult to discern an individual voice. Most writers I know who don’t care for haiku tell me it’s because it doesn’t allow for “digging,” and thereby doesn’t provide enough of an emotional or intellectual hook for the reader. I would say that while haiku delves, it offers a flash of insight, or momentary refreshment--sometimes quite a glorious one--but doesn’t root around in the nitty-gritty, as that would require a longer form (either of poetry or prose). Again, it’s the brevity of the single haiku that serves as both its strength, offering the power of concision when written well, and its limitation or inability in such a short space to tell a story or dredge up a chain of associations.
It occurred to me that it might be worth distinguishing between the individual voice (or distinctive style of a poet) and the personal nature of that voice (whether that voices aspires to the ‘no-self’ ideal and thereby tends to disappear into its subject, or whether it’s deeply concerned with the personal self). A poet might have a distinctive and recognizable style, but a non-personal voice.

Penny Harter

One way to get haiku out of the “haiku ghetto” is for those of us who write all kinds of poetry (in my case free verse--or what some call lyric poems, prose poems, formal verse now and then, haiku and haiku sequences, haibun, the occasional tanka and/or tanka sequence, etc.), to put out books with multiGenres in them. Both my Recycling Starlight and my new book The Resonance Around Us, are combinations of genres, and they are in the mainstream because they contain “regular” poems as well as Japanese-related genres.

One problem I’ve run into by doing this, however, is that when I enter a contest, my books is the proverbial neither fish nor fowl. If I enter a haiku and related genres, judges ask is it a book of haiku or haibun (except for the online One Bowl which is all haibun)? Not exactly, though these genres are either sprinkled throughout or sectioned in the book. And if I enter a mainstream po-book contest, the book may be dismissed because it has haiku in it---many mainstream poets look upon haiku as not “real poetry”, mostly because they haven’t seen that many good haiku; they think of 5-7-5 treacle and/or spam-ku.

But that doesn’t stop me from trying to integrate genres. It’s all poetry, all on one continuum for me. And that may be the case for others of us who write in several genres, even fiction (and I’ve published a number of short stories over the years, too). I think it’s a good way to get haiku out of the ghetto and into the hands of poets and poetry lovers in the mainstream.
Thanks for your provocation, Peter.

None of what follows addresses your thoughts about the relationship between the larger literary world and haiku as when you say:

“Non-haiku poets don’t need, as some seem to think they do, to be educated about haiku but to be exposed to writers who have used it as a means to produce distinctive and significant work, writing which comes through a poet’s struggles with word, world, and self.”

I would be most curious to hear what others think about that.

What I immediately thought of was how the history of Japanese haiku is right there to demonstrate what you say about the individuality of many of its most loved poets. For example, for all the comparisons that could be made between Santoka and Hosai, their voices --the ways they embody a relationship to the world-- are clearly distinct from one another; for me, most obviously in their different senses of humor. (at least in the translations I have read).

A critic that has spoken of the “I’ in haiku is Barthes, according to Jon Baldwin in his essay, “Qualities of Haiku (from Roland Barthes)” published in MH 43:3. Barthes’ ideas of “Enunciation” and “Individuation” could be of interest here.

Quoting Baldwin, quoting Barthes about enunciation:

“[Barthes] proposes that the I or the ego is always present in the haiku to a greater or lesser extent, though it is often concealed. The haiku teaches the art of saying I, ‘but it’s an I of writing: I write I, therefore I am’ …”The enunciating subject is always there, present, and placing himself in the
picture. The body is present in the haiku even though the I (or me, or mine, or my and so on) might not be used.”

Quoting Baldwin, quoting Barthes about individuation:

“The irreducibility, singularity, specialness, and uniqueness of the individual is related to the given time and space of the individual. Barthes terms this “individuation.” He quotes Bashō’s definition that a haiku is simply what happens in a given place at a given moment. Barthes finds this insufficient because it does not include the presence of the individual. He wants to introduce the following nuance to Bashō’s definition: ‘that what happens surrounds the subject.’ “

(*The Preparation of the Novel* is the original source of Barthes’ comments-- a series of lectures delivered in 1979 and 1980, published in 2003 in France, recently translated into English.)

Barthes’ views here echo Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of how the body animates the world:  
“Perception takes place in me, not I perceive” — Phenomenology of Perception. We also find the idea of breaking down the easy distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity in physics. The Uncertainty Principle for one. I still don’t quite have a handle on the amplituhedron that George has introduced here, but it seems like a rich image to explore.

*Peter Newton*

Haiku; The Charming Art

Recently, I heard a radio interview with a famous actor. A good actor, in my opinion. Accomplished. The interviewer wanted to know how hard was it to talk in that
affected voice for so long, in speaking about a specific film. And what an impressive
and convincing performance he delivered with that memorable voice. Oh that voice
that voice, she went on and on, just drew me in . . .

The actor said: The voice isn’t acting. That’s technique. Like hair and make-up is used
to make me look a certain way. The voice is my way of fitting the structure necessary
for the role. But it’s not acting. Acting is what happens once all that’s second-nature.
No longer an obstacle to what I might discover.

Immediately-- I thought: haiku. Haiku is the voice I assume in the film called Poetry.
I have to be a poet first to attempt a role with haiku in it. Or, at least, I have to get
myself a fine haiku coach to limber me up for the role. A convincing haiku poet is
years in the making.

Mr. Yovu’s assertion that anybody can write a good haiku is arguable. Anyone can
speak German too after years of study but still to a native speaker the language may
sound infantilized. But he said good not excellent, I understand. And no wonder.
Haiku was introduced in America and it spread like wildfire. We’ve all counted them
out in 3rd grade. Probably not since then for most poets. But for those of us who
have pursued our studies of haiku in English we’re in a bit of a pickle. Betwixt and
between. To shout or whisper.

On the one hand, if we tout ourselves as haiku poets we are no longer visible to
mainstream poets. If we claim mainstream poet status the haiku community cries:

So what’s an old school word tinker to do? All he wants to do is write. Butt this word
up against that syllable make a lap-joint, a dovetail call it what you want--does it
hold together? Does it make you want to sing once its done?

In this regard, I agree with Mr. Yovu’s belief that non-haiku poets don’t care about
haiku as much as the heat of the language used by the poet. They are in search of the
stand-out poet. The fire-in-the-belly poet. A top-tier athlete/poet to use an Olympic
metaphor. Who cares what language they speak. (And as we see in the Olympics,
they can emerge from even the smallest villages with grit and guts).
Thing is: Given the relatively brief confines of the haiku form, the haiku poet must stick the landing every time. In fact, the haiku lands on the page all dismount and no running start. Haiku is not a passive sport, charming as it might be. The reader’s gotta be responsible for something.

The role of criticism in all this? I would say that non-haiku poets need to get up to speed on what’s happening in modern haiku these days. How do we assist them? Well if you want to attract a poet’s fresh eye you have flash a shiny new word their way or series of words. You basically have to fish with fire. No easy task. Excellence in poetry is achieved by individuals not genres. Absolutely.

If we are in search of greatness, let it be in the next poem we write. I agree with Mr. Yovu’s skeptical view of the promotion of certain sub-categories of haiku over, say, overall outstanding poems by specific poets. Traditional, Contemporary, Innovative. Yes, thank you, I’ll take elements of all three please. Not one over the other. Sometimes, I do feel like we’re in some super-socially responsible charter school where everyone gets a prize just for coming to school that day. Contests are tricky. Judges are human. Prone to specific tastes, etc, etc...

I have always contended that haiku is no different than any other kind of poem. Different rules, no rules. It’s the original language art. All the same mainstream poetry rules apply to haiku (no discovery for the writer, no discovery for the reader- -push push push push--go to the limit--some time-bitten coach screaming in you ear--That all ya got?!?) And, by the way, it must sing for itself, with all its innocence and experience intact, or risk being forgotten.

Eve Luckring

My post crossed at the same time Rebecca and Penny responded.

Penny, I just love Recycling Starlight--it is a great example of the bigger picture you talk about, and it is helpful to hear the “practical” issues that have arisen for you by mixing genres.
As Rebecca mentions, it seems like we might have different ways of thinking about “voice” here.

I believe that with any poet/any kind of poetry, you need more than a poem or two to get a sense of their voice, though certainly haiku has its own particulars in this. (I think this is in part what Peter Newton is saying, along with the issue of brevity that Rebecca mentions-- if I understand correctly.)

This is where perhaps criticism could be truly helpful. Jack Galmitz made this effort with Views.

Gary Hotham

Some comments for Peter Yovu’s 6 Feb thoughts:

1/ re: “In his [Michael Dylan Welch} contribution for FN5 above, he recalls Dana Gioia encouraging the “haiku community” to “champion its best haiku poets and its best haiku books to non-haiku poets”, and to “find and promote . . . excellent haiku poets”.”

I question the idea of a haiku community that can speak with one voice. Of course this is a suggestion from someone outside the haiku world and I would not be surprised that Gioia thought that because of the conference he was attending. I also don’t think there is one poetry community. I do a lot of reading of poetry and I don’t find a consensus of who are the best poets. Sure there are poets who are popular and those who win prizes but that does not mean the whole poetry world thinks they are the best. I would agree with Peter Yovu there is a problem with who do we promote as the best haiku writers.

2/ re: “He suggests writing ‘in-depth articles for leading non-haiku poetry journals.”

I suspect prose about haiku might be more acceptable than haiku. I think there are people in the haiku world who are skillful at prose and could write those in-depth articles. Of course what are “the leading non-haiku poetry journals.”
3/ re: “Put it this way: how many haiku poets are readily identifiable by their work? Only a few, I would say.”

I would say this is also true of the poetry world in general. How many distinctive bodies of work are there like William Stafford or Robert Bly or George Oppen or Cid Corman or Ezra Pound or Wm Carlos Williams – or any of your favorite poets.

4/ re: “It would seem that anybody can write a good haiku. That is often promoted as one of its charms, what sets it apart from the more “elitist” stance of poetry in general. “

I think all those MFA programs offered by many institutions also suggest that anybody can write a good poem with some training. So I don't think poetry in general these days is all that elitist. Unless you consider an MFA a necessary credential.

But I remain a bit skeptical about the possibility anyone can write a good poem whether a haiku or a non-haiku on the first try or second. OK, maybe one good haiku on the first try but what about numbers two or three or four or five…?

5/ re: “Haiku is often regarded as a purity which the writer attains by draining himself or herself of individuality or personality. The individual is equated with ego; writing as an individual, or with individuality and uniqueness is merely an act of self-expression-- of pointing primarily to oneself. “

OK, this idea that the haiku is some sort of transcendent experience or reflection of the divine or one-ness with the universe is also seen in the non-haiku world. So I don't regard that as detriment or drawback to the genre. I agree with Peter Yovu that poetry is a creation of words revealing the writer’s experiences of life or states of being.

6/ re: “Here’s the thing: I don’t think poets and readers of poetry outside the “haiku community” want to know more about haiku, but rather about writers whose language has been lit up by contact with it. … Non-haiku poets don’t need, as some seem to think they do, to be educated about haiku but to be exposed to writers who have used it as a means to produce distinctive and significant work, writing which comes through a poet’s struggles with word, world, and self.”
That’s a good point. I really don’t care to spend much time reading prose telling me what poetry is or what makes a great poem. I want to spend my time reading good poetry. I suspect most of us were attracted to writing haiku because we read some good haiku and wanted to do the same. Later, probably like me, we went to the prose about what a haiku is and the mechanics and elements of a well done haiku after we realized that writing a haiku wasn’t as easy as it looked.

7/ re: “I believe criticism can play a vital role in this. There have been very few in-depth critiques of individual writers. Such explorations, done well, can bring subtle or difficult elements of a poet’s work into the light, and serve to open doors to others.”

Excellent critics and well written critiques would be helpful if provides some self-conscious clarity about our process. But I think this is a rare skill and hard work even when one has it. There is not pay for such work so it turns into a labor of love. Then again how many good critics are there out in the non-haiku world? Who will we find and trust in the haiku world? As I said above I think there are some in the haiku world who have the prose skills. Do they have the mind of critic who will bring some penetrating insight into the work individual haiku poets? And help those poets with a better understanding of what makes an excellent haiku and how to continue their work? A grand challenge.

One last thought about this is that I hope writers of haiku are reaching for excellence. I think the conscious pursuit of excellence will create distinctive bodies of haiku by a variety of poets. A few years ago I discovered Donald Hall’s stimulating, thought provoking and raise the blood pressure essay, Poetry and Ambition. His first sentence was: “I see no reason to spend your life writing poems unless your goal is to write great poems.” Perhaps some currently writing do not have a desire to spend a life writing haiku. But if you do please take Hall’s advice: write great haiku. Take this work seriously. Make the critic’s life easy.
Paul Miller

I found this paragraph of Peter’s troubling: “For the most part, haiku itself, the idea of it, the ideal of it, has been promoted over the writer him or herself. Some poets considered among the “best” write haiku which could have been written by any number of others. It would seem that anybody can write a good haiku. That is often promoted as one of its charms, what sets it apart from the more “elitist” stance of poetry in general. The problem for me is that many of the poems one finds in the journals and anthologies have exactly the feeling of having been written by . . . anybody.”

I agree with Gary that the same could be said of “main-stream” poetry as well (as well as most of what Gary said in total) which makes me worry less about the ghettoization of haiku because I suspect most “main-stream” poetry passes unnoticed by even “main-stream” poets. And I disagree that one of haiku’s charms is that anyone can do it. As an editor I can attest that not everyone can. And while it may be true that anyone can learn to write a good haiku, one way I think we distinguish our better poets is by longevity, the writing of many good poems.

More so, I worry that in our search for an individual voice we don’t over-value uniqueness over quality. I have wondered aloud if Santoka and Hosai are perhaps overvalued because of their life story. This isn’t to say they aren’t good poets, but I suspect they wouldn’t have come to our attention if they hadn’t messed up their lives. Which of course begs the question: can a poet writing about their normal life ever be valued equally as one who had problems? It also asks if we aren’t opening the door to poets to write poor but “shocking” haiku in order to stand out from the pack?
Eve Luckring

Paul, I know what you mean about the romanticism and exoticism that surrounds Santoka and Hosai.

However, I chose them as examples because readers know more about their personal lives than many other poets’ lives. From a generalized look, their lives might be compared to be quite similar to one another, and yet they each have a distinct voice. You could choose any two other poets to make the point, but I chose these two for the very reason that the way they have been romanticized might make us blind to the specificity of each of their voices. I am not arguing for uniqueness in the way I believe you have interpreted it.

Which of course begs the question: can a poet writing about their normal life ever be valued equally as one who had problems? “their normal life”--normal is different for everyone, isn’t it? and don’t we all have problems?

I think history shows us that all kinds of lives can produce quality poetry and that is what is valued. It also asks if we aren’t opening the door to poets to write poor but “shocking” haiku in order to stand out from the pack?

This seems like a leap, Paul, if I understand you correctly. There is a sincerity and honesty to both Santoka and Hosai’s poetry; could you explain why you think they were writing to “stand out from the pack”? I personally don’t find their work shocking.

Everything written opens a door for people to write poor haiku.

Shock-value usually doesn’t last long.

That is not what I mean by an individualized voice; I am referring to the specificity with which one embodies life, any kind of life.

It is a shame though when things are dismissed as mere shock-value because the subject matter, or an approach to writing, is out of gamut of the tastes and/or experiences of the reader.
regarding haiku: Does success equal publication, and does excellence equal success? As Peter implies, I think, in his introduction to this installment of Field Notes, not necessarily. Are we being shaped by our desire to publish? If so, what does that mean these days? In this era of the internet, of webs woven upon webs, can any of us doubt that information itself has value, and corporate giants are battling to control its trade? Try as we might, can we remain free of those forces? And yes, in sharing this I’m guilty of participation in that trade. Certainly, I’m no critic, it’s just that as I read the comments on this thread to date, the word commodity comes to mind, and the following:

“An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.”
–Walter Benjamin, from The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936)

”Many have spoken of the fact that English-language haiku remains imitative, in diction, in subject matter, and form, of the Japanese. Gilbert writes: “A main element for constraint acting on haiku composition has emanated from Shiki’s ... compositional guidelines. [His] realist dicta for the beginner-poet regarding the composition of shasei (‘sketch of life’) haiku predominate.” This is no doubt true, but while Japanese haiku remains a powerful influence, sitting on the collective shoulder of the
English-language community and whispering in its ear, a louder voice seems to come from within: in the light of what Kacian has written, it may be fair to say that much of what we are producing is imitative of itself, resulting in what William J. Higginson calls “the increasingly fixed and limited notion of haiku that currently pervades much of the English-language haiku community.” It seems to have developed a momentum and mass sufficient to exert a kind of gravitational force. Essentially it means that what many value most about the “best” haiku, a quality of being mysteriously and unmistakably alive, is being pressured to fit into pre-determined and familiar forms, into the idea of what a haiku is. What results is something less like “sketches from life” and more like “sketches from haiku.””—Peter Yovu, from his review in *Modern Haiku* of *Big Sky: The Red Moon Anthology 2006*

“A Poem is first of all an amulet, an OBJECT bearing energy (c.f. the objectivist poem as object and Olson’s poem as “at every point a high-energy discharge”). The poem is first of all a charm, relic, medicine, compass, key. See, too, the ORACLE BONES of Shang dynasty China, scapulamancy as practiced even today by arctic peoples, and Marija Gimbutas’ The Living Goddesses. We are not talking about the poem sitting on a page like a jewel in a ring but the two inseparable, Eshleman’s THE ONE ART given its place. In this context, to “reproduce” (i.e. publish) a poem widely is to pass on as little of it as the “reproduction” of a painting or sculpture. We would speak instead of instances of a poem – think of the poet as writing down the poem again and again. The signed book carries a weak, memorial suggestion of this; those priceless books handmade by the poet in editions of twenty-six (Bob Arnold, Cid Corman, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Jeremy Seligson, Emily Dickinson) come closer, almost close enough. The next step would be to take up Vietnamese tu phap or find an American equivalent to Japanese sosho. We must learn how to write again, from the beginning. Inscribed by hand preferably on stone, wood, paper, that which bears an organic relation to the world wherein its power resides, a poem is an act of sympathetic
magic. Here we see Levertov’s organicism brought to the medium itself. Crude, yes brut, an arte povera, WITHOUT ILLUSION of being “above” anything (much less “it all”). The poem as medicine. And life today is nothing if not in need of healing.”—John Martone, reproduced/taken from The NEOLITHIC (re)turn in poetry, an article on his website

“my material is available in limited portions for noncommercial projects in the manner/spirit in which it was created. please ask for permission—out of respect for all artists who share our work. comments welcomed but replies are doubtful. in time relevant opinions will be posted if permission is granted.”—Marlene Mountain, from a request in her website’s Introduction.

Paul Miller

Hi Eve,

My comment re: Santoka and Hosai was not referenced toward your comments at all, rather they were convenient names to make a small point. Sorry if you felt it did so.

To elaborate on my “shock” haiku comment. Not directed toward Santoka and Hosai. Rather, Peter’s comment that many haiku seem like they could be written by any one of a number of good haiku poets seems a call toward creating stronger, more individual voices (a good thing). The goal (questionable thing) being to reach further (if at all) into the poetic main-stream. He also suggests that this main-stream will want poets rather than poems. I agree. How often do we see “based on a true story” in movies? That shouldn’t matter; the art of the movie should hold its own, not need to be propped up. To get back to my “shocking” comment. There is a painting in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art which is a red circle on a white background. It was probably intellectually shocking when it was painted (as a reaction to realism or whatever was in vogue those days), but in my mind it has no
lasting value, no art—just shock in an intellectual way. I worry that to get noticed by the larger poetic community poets will have to start writing “shocking” haiku rather than art. I’ve seen a lot of bad haiku that tries to shock through overt (but unnecessary) sexual references and language. My feeling is that the poet thinks they are writing cutting edge stuff because of the subject matter alone. Such poems may solve the ghettoization of haiku, but at a cost. However this is more a pondering than a real concern. I don’t think any genre (sonnet anyone?) will ever make much of a splash in the larger scene.

I like to think my haiku, being based on my life, and through my voice, have some individualism to them. But I worry less about that than if I am writing something I can be proud of. I will surmise, however, that the writings of a middle-aged accountant with no history of drug abuse or mental illness, who works hard and is happily married, will make for poor book jacket copy, and thus poor offerings to the larger market. Let’s be honest: hermits and addicts sell books.

Peter Yovu

Much of value to consider here. I for one find this encouraging, that people are willing to explore and inquire.

It may not be a universal problem, but when I think about questions relating to haiku, I quickly come up against the reality that “haiku” is not a single thing, but means different things to different people. This is not a problem so much when one is speaking about poetry in general. It seems to be accepted that poetry takes many forms. I’m not sure if that is the case with haiku; I suspect it increasingly is.

So when we talk about “excellence” in haiku, what are we pointing to? Here I would say that I believe that making distinctions has value. Making distinctions does not (necessarily) equal being divisive. I for one don’t mind talking about traditional, or modern, or innovative approaches to haiku. They give some needed vocabulary in looking at different things haiku do. They are starting points for understanding each as it is. But only starting points, which may be discarded as one goes further.
And of course, within those general distinctions, there are more distinctions that can be made. The “rules” that are often taught may apply to one “form” but not another. What is considered “basic” may not even apply in every instance, and there is the possibility that an “excellent” short poem which has few, or possibly none, of the defined “qualifications” for haiku might find its way into a haiku journal. (And that context might bring out otherwise unseen qualities).

It is why, forgive me for saying what I’ve said elsewhere, I don’t think of myself as someone who writes haiku, though for the sake of discussion it is often convenient to do so. I think of myself as someone who writes short poems which have unquestionably been influenced by Japanese poetics, but also by other things—aphorism, for example, itself something difficult to define and pin down and which has numerous forms.

For me, “excellence” resides in something on the page or spoken which is prior to haiku. I think there is something in us which initially responded—deeply—to haiku before we knew what it was. (It may have been, phenomenologically speaking, a bodily, or pre-cognitive response).

It was only later that we tried to grasp what qualifies a short poem as haiku. (And perhaps how to replicate the initial encounter). Doing so led different people in different directions, for good or ill, fluid or fixed.

I like the idea that writers of ELH (for the sake of conversation I’ll call myself one) can “metabolize” qualities associated with Japanese poetics along with those of Western poetry. (This would include prosody, the sounds and rhythms inherent in the English language).

If this happens, there may be a new possibility in one’s poetry whereby the poet “redisCOVERs” those qualities, as needed, in the process of writing itself.

That is to say, he/she doesn’t “apply” that quality, but encounters it as it makes itself known as a particular and necessary instance of the poem. The quality is individualized. This is perhaps when we can say that a poem is both personal and universal.
So qualities like “yugen,” or “scent” to give two examples, are not fixed or even definable, but particular to the writer and ever-different (and yet ever-the-same) things. And ever-new and always available for discovery, which may speak to the “individuality” of the poem and poet, which to me is a hallmark of excellence. A rare thing, because it seems to involve letting go of what you have learned as something you need to apply, and trusting not that you have something which you can use, but that you are something-- something discoverable by way of art.

Teachers of poetry, if they are honest, will say (as was said to me) they can’t teach anyone how to write a poem. They can tell you what not to do, but after that, you’re on your own.

Same for haiku, no doubt. But it often seems to me that a lot of writers hope that by applying certain principles (“rules” or techniques if you will) to haiku, they can come up with something “good” or publishable. And in truth, that does happen, though such work can seem generic, formulaic. But for me, excellence can only happen when something much deeper occurs, something mysterious and immersive, when those principles are met as if for the first time, by a writer encountering him/herself along the way.

I suppose you could say that is my ambition.

Mark Harris

I work at an art museum, where along with the other preparators I handle art, install exhibitions, set up for classes, frame pictures, that sort of thing. Occasionally, I’ll tackle an unusually complex installation or help plan the look of an exhibit from its early stages. Years ago, I went to art school to study painting. Art handling was a way to pay the bills at first; all these years later, here I am still doing it. It’s good work. To hold a Rubens, a Maya chocolate drinking cup, or an Albers in my hands can be a thrill. And to share them with the public, that’s also a thrill. On my breaks, I try to take time to peruse the galleries.
My coworkers and I witness a gamut of reactions to the exhibitions. Nudity can be offensive to some visitors. Others are shocked by, say, a painting of a lemon-yellow square against a larger violet-gray square framed by a square of a darker and more subdued yellow, a work by Joseph Albers who I mentioned earlier. It’s one of my favorite paintings in the collection, one of a series called Homage to the Square. Although to some it might initially seem intellectual and methodical, not so. Albers was passionate about color. It’s often been noted that color evokes emotion and, really, this painting is all heart. My description doesn’t do justice to the original because the painting explores subtle relationships of color and proportion--and our sensual reactions to them--which can’t be conveyed through words spoken or written. The painting is dated 1961, at what could be considered the height of the modern art era. Painting is dead, people have been saying ever since, and yet it never quite does die.

Albers taught at the Bauhaus art academy. When the school closed in response to the Nazi rise to power, Albers and his wife Anni emigrated to the U.S. where he was offered a job at Black Mountain College, a name familiar to those who associate the school with poets such as Robert Creeley, whose use of everyday speech and minimalism can inform writers of haiku as much as the work of his mentor William Carlos Williams. Creeley had his detractors, that’s for sure; the critic John Simon, commenting on his poems, wrote, “They are short; they are not short enough.”

As editor of Black Mountain Review, Creeley published the writings of Lorine Niedecker, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Jack Kerouac and others who were influenced by haiku and in turn influenced haiku in English. The review’s cover art is beautiful, spare and strikingly modern. The first four covers were done by Katue Kitasono, issue #5 is by John Altoon, and #6 by Dan Rice. #7 by Ed Corbett consists of a solid black rectangle, not quite square, and a few delicate linear marks.

I’m rambling now, I know, it’s just that my train of thought is taking me back to haiku and that wonderful way it has of being spare, specific, sensual, seemingly simplistic and yet able to inspire shifts to new ways of seeing . . .
Picking up on some things Michael Dylan Welch said about promoting ELH in the larger poetry community and the role criticism might play, the thread of discussion has followed the theme of “excellence” in haiku. To keep this moving, I asked panelists the following:

Say a few things about what excellence in haiku means to you. What elevates a haiku above the average, or brings it down to marvelous earth? Or both.

Are you willing to provide an example or two of what you consider excellent?

Richard Gilbert has responded to this with an important (I believe) essay. Cherie Hunter Day has offered up a poem by Philip Rowland which to her exemplifies excellence. I will add more responses as they come, and hope you will add yours. Here we go . . .

**Richard Gilbert**

Haiku and the perception of the unique

When talking about excellence in haiku, the larger context of what makes for excellence seems intrinsic to debates concerning art, and poetry, in general. From this wider perspective, it's possible to examine historical, aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural strands of evolving critique.

The main historical currents regarding excellence (in art, poetry, haiku) presuppose arguments (theory) related to critical judgment. To gloss the topic, in the US, poetic theory, from Imagism through the Beats, has swung through pendulum arcs between objective and subjective formulation. When excellence is critically objective, this implies that there are (provably) definitive elements of excellence apparent to the observer—un-reliant on and apart from subjective (personal) opinion. New Formalism is taken as a move in this direction. The violent reaction
of more objective-oriented criticism toward Ginsberg’s “Howl” reveals this polarity and a seminal moment in American poetry—perhaps the last time poetry can be said to have shaped the nation.

(Aside:) Of the 88 books selected by the Library of Congress in 2012 to define “Books that Shaped America,” six are poetry collections. Of these, three remain bestselling, those by Whitman, Dickinson, Ginsberg. Two being 19th century poets, Ginsberg’s Howl and Other Poems singularly tops the charts rivaling sales of Shakespeare’s Collected Works for poetry collections in the 20th century, to date.

If objective critique were to be perfected and agreed upon, artworks could be judged (ranked) in terms of excellence according to defined criteria. Objective critical theory would be then quantifiable; thus the “formalism” in new formalism. For this critical approach, excellence can be defined, objectively (i.e., formally).

Of late, science has studied human beauty, and via large-scale research studies, arrived at certain formal measures of facial structure which are statistically (multiculturally) identified as evincing beauty (e.g. formal features such as left-right facial symmetry, eye spacing). As within the field of poetics, this approach reveals an intriguing agon (tension) between qualitative, subjective impression (phenomenology) and formal (scientistic) verity— an issue fundamental to modernity.

Subjective criticism, on the other hand, is reliant upon “the person of taste.” That is to say we presuppose a few masters of taste (as there are master chefs), who due to their knowledge and experience should deservedly be seen as arbiters of excellence. Perhaps our most notable literary critics ultimately follow this line, in that objective criticism has foundered in its comprehensive program.

Seen this way, there exists a conundrum: we seek to arrive at formal determinants of excellence, and fail (though one may stump for partial success). We seek to find a critical view (a person/ those critics) which might provide the proper schema—yet do not find satisfaction.

The subjective-objective conundrum is a Cartesian duality which never completely resolves itself. We rely on critics for (subjective) personal insight, yet may also rely on (objective) articulations of formal determinants -- neither alone quite suffices. As a result, idiosyncratic brews (admixtures of both types of approach) are formulated.
Formulations such as these tend to be playful mutts. A majority of published criticism in haiku has been of this sort. For example, a haiku critic who does not understand Japanese language and has not lived in Japan, or associated themselves with Japanese poetry offers up Japanese terms and presents Japanese culture—and often feudal culture as well — as objective verity -- as “haiku-objective” knowledge. This represents just one critical boner in haiku studies, so it’s not surprising “haiku studies” outside of Japan Studies, are not found in the university. It was just a few years ago that Gary Snyder, well-aware of Japanese poetics and culture, in his Ehime Award Lecture stated that the term “haiku” should be limited in use to indicate Japanese-language-only haiku (I take issue, but also admit his rationale).

In any case, I first became acutely aware of the objective-subjective conundrum reading “Egalitarian Typologies Versus the Perception of the Unique,” by James Hillman (Eranos Lecture 4, Spring Pub., 1986), whose school of Archetypal Psychology is founded on the conception of psychological creativity (rather than pathology and/or the presupposition of a normative psychology). This small book of 59 pages contains examples from poets like Wallace Stevens, to help articulate its main points.

A typology is a schema, and presents itself as a formal basis for quality. Racism would be a non-egalitarian typology. An egalitarian typology, on the other hand, presents an equality of value among its “types” or groups. In personal and spiritual psychology some examples are Jungian typology (including personality types as determined by the “Myers-Briggs Type Indicator”) and the enneagram (created by Oscar Ichazo). Familiar historical typologies include the 12 signs of astrology, the I Ching, Qabalah (Sephirothic tree), and geomantic and cosmological concepts (e.g. Fludd, alchemy) as well.

Last year, in my book of haiku criticism, *The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A New Approach to English-language Haiku* (recently reviewed by editor and *Field Notes* contributor Lorin Ford), I proposed 24 “types” of techniques found in 275 haiku examples (presented in support). In composing this work I was aware of the problems inherent in objective critique. Nonetheless, if lacking any formal (objective) schema, one is left only with “persons of taste,” and opinion. That is, endless and generally fruitless debate regarding questions of excellence and quality.
Hillman interests me because he poses a deeper polarity or dichotomy, regarding excellence: egalitarian typology versus the perception of the unique. It may be that any critic (“person of taste”), in advancing a rationale for excellence, unavoidably presents a schema as part and parcel of a logical, formal argument for quality. For haiku, one can speak of yugen, shibumi, karumi, wabi-sabi, etc. These terms, taken together, form an egalitarian typology. Critics will say that this or that haiku possesses more or less of one and another.

What does this mean, to say that “this haiku is excellent because it possesses yugen,” or “this haiku is an excellent example of karumi”? Here the “person of taste” enters with their subjective judgment. We may agree conceptually with the definitional typology (those Japan-origin qualities), but can we agree on matters of taste? In fact, were we to agree as a community on a select group of haiku, say five per each representative Japanese-aesthetic category — we would then have achieved pure artistic totalitarianism. There is a real societal danger in combining egalitarian typologies with “persons of taste” who then dictate to the community – and one must either follow their pronouncements or exit (sometimes violently). In Japan, a study of Kyoshi’s role as totalitarian dictator of Hototogisu is a case in point. One understands that in the history of haiku in North America, this has been a social issue, one that has involved the exclusion of talented haiku poets from publication, and by extension, the publication of many atrocious haiku -- all in the name of (purity of) taste. That is, “taste” was defined or grounded in judgment by “persons of taste” (predominantly or entirely male at the time; haiku journal editors and book publishers) who claimed proper knowledge of the Japanese form and therefore the English-language form of haiku. They were right and if you took exception, you were wrong. A documented case would be some decades of rejection of Marlene Mountain’s thought, along with many of her haiku -- her work and thought are these days looked upon quite differently.

Hillman proposed an intriguing solution to the dichotomy of typology vs. the unique. He suggested a means of collapsing the duality, by shifting the basis of critical thought to “aesthetic arrest,” an embodied experience (of an actual human being). Implicit here are kinesthetic truths, a kinesthetic phenomenology. Hillman talks about the “in gasp” -- the sudden indrawn breath, from which we get the word “in-spiration.” We may not all agree on which experiences cause aesthetic arrest, but
have probably all experienced this at one time or another.

From this perspective some interesting ideas can be drawn. The first is that a “person of taste” in defining excellence in a particular poem, or group of poems, may provide intellectual understanding, and at the same time not in any way move you, the art participant, the reader, towards aesthetic arrest. As well, a poem may in fact be intellectually excellent, and provide new motifs in art, which is grand -- yet you may not be especially moved by it. From the perspective of aesthetic arrest, there exist varieties, diversities of excellence, according to the diversity of persons, within poetic community -- from the point of view of each reader or person.

The experience of aesthetic arrest is a personal experience. So it would seem subjective. But on the other hand, the experience itself is likewise archetypal, universal, Hillman would argue. One may not know why precisely a given experience occurs in a given instance. Aesthetic arrest may begin through moments of “stopping,” yet such an experience may also indicate a longer involvement in an artwork as an enriching contemplation, occurring over many years. Aesthetic arrest in this sense is not only that “moment” in which we in-spire, are arrested, it is also evolitional, subtle, complex -- interwoven into what we value in life, in art: aesthetic arrest as instigation, as subversion, seduction. As tantra, viral.

I muse that excellence must partly be related to taste, which itself is linked to aesthetic arrest (in both critics and readers). Aesthetic arrest, as savor, may likewise be evinced by the poetry of criticism. I was never so consciously arrested by the pleasure of the text, as and until I read “The Pleasure of the Text.” The pleasure of Barthes has never truly left me. Aesthetic arrest may be instigated by study, generating a heightened, embodied sensitivity towards the work.

Yet this is not enough. Aesthetic arrest implies something genuine in our experience, and suggests that arts (artworks) have the ability to touch what is deep, in experiential value -- yet the aesthetic does not necessarily reside in the artwork, any more than it resides in Basho’s “pine,” or a beautiful sunset, or a lover’s kiss. Aesthetic arrest cannot be “typed” or troped in this way. It’s never about what’s supposed to happen in engagement (or how a given poem is supposed to move you). Critics are fairly hated for their insistence in this regard. In fact, if an engagement is specified, arranged, predetermined, it’s as likely to diminish aesthetic impact, or confuse it. “I will read
this haiku to you, which is the best by Ms. X, and you should feel this from it and have such and so-and-so an experience” -- really won’t cut it.

Is aesthetic arrest up to us? I think this is the crux: the perception of the unique. The point Hillman made which launched me into contemplations of how to critically articulate works involves the perception of the unique, as cultural value. The unique, Hillman argues, is something that is continually devalued, forgotten, discarded, in art, in criticism, even in conversation, in society. The perception of the unique is invisible. Is the repressed.

Most obviously, the problem is that one's perception of the unique cannot be easily shared (a talent for articulation in this regard must be assumed crucial, for the critic). And perceptions of the unique do not necessarily organize themselves either normatively or intellectually. Hillman argues that, nonetheless, the perception of the unique is at the core of aesthetic arrest, implying that this should be a central concern of criticism.

In my own work, I designed an egalitarian typology in order to present modes of technical similarity between groupings of example-haiku. Yet my (subversive) desire was to present haiku to which I respond aesthetically, am moved by -- that are arresting in some way. It’s not too much to say that I love all the haiku I selected. Of course, it’s laughable to say that I love them, merely. So the typology was useful.

That said, my love is not yours, nor should it be. Nevertheless, in each haiku presented I find an abundance of what is unique: both beyond compare and beyond comparison. This is something beautiful. And the more you give voice to it, the less unique it tends to become, in its arresting dimension. In psychology, one way to diminish the impact of a dream is to explain the story away, through interpretation. For this reason I generally avoid definition, or those modes of interpretation which extract meaning from the poem, essentially to its deficit, as a primary critical move. “This haiku means this or that.” Stories (and poems) are often put to death when ostensibly resolved by meaning.

At this point I feel I’ve answered the first part of Peter’s question, when he asks: “What elevates a haiku above the average, or brings it down to marvelous earth? Or both.” (The answer must partly be your own, partly arrive from elsewhere, and partly
relate to matters of intellectual and poetic engagement with formal verities, to the extent they exist, or you take them as existent values: an excellent haiku surprises, is in some manner genuinely aesthetically arresting, and appears as a unique “face” of perception, existentially and essentially, incomparable in some way.) Now, as to the last: “Are you willing to provide an example or two of what you consider excellent?” In *The Disjunctive Dragonfly* are 275 haiku, all of which (I feel) are excellent. It would be against principle to select out some small number -- this would defeat the concept of an egalitarian typology, altogether. So I don’t feel I’m avoiding the question, or challenge, and would rather in turn challenge the reader to gather like-gems from sand all those works that move you, through their uniqueness.

The depth psychological move is to return in mind to those active dream figures, to treat them as alive, animate -- to open to those images (and poems, like dreams, are fictions, or halfway to such stars) -- in this way to become more receptive to their uniqueness, these unique faces of appearance, which stir or disturb. Unfortunately, critics like therapists tend to become too meaning-addicted. Though like love-making, interpretation can be done well.

When you walk around -- right now, in daily life -- how aware are you of the unique? This very single breath, your partner's face. A shadow, a tree. Aesthetic arrest can't be willed, yet for those into haiku, certain poems move us, deeply, and we experience -- what? Depth, emotion, presence, resonance are some of the terms in play.

What distinguishes haiku from other poetic forms most clearly relates to concision and “cutting,” formal notions. In particular, the various ways a given haiku “cuts” relate directly to aesthetic sensibility -- the landscape of aesthetic arrest. What would a criticism look like, which begins with the perception of the unique, leading the reader further towards considerations of the unique, towards its greater valuation? This move would raise the valuation of the unique, rather than discarding its power via explanatory meaning, as we might discard the power of the poem, or dream.
Five words. Five words that propel thought beyond logic to a preconscious state of awareness—a momentary glimpse of wholeness. It has lightning fast precision. I remember reading this poem in *R*r 11.1 (Feb. 2011) and instantly it became one of my favorite haiku.

I’m familiar with Southern California wildfires. One in 2007 forced us to evacuate our home because of immediate danger. Thankfully our house was spared and when we returned there was an inch of ash that needed to be swept up. Ash worked its way into everything—even under the gas cap flap on the car. Because of the wind the ash was able to penetrate the void in and around things. Breeze and ash are bound together in this give and take of definition. Some breezes can only be observed when the ash is disturbed.

A reader doesn’t necessarily need to experience a major wildfire to appreciate this poem. Think of an ash at the tip of an incense stick. The slightest breeze both feeds the fire that produces the ash and disseminates the ash. Air is both starting point and the end. This toggle between microcosm and macrocosm gives power to these five words. And its artistry doesn’t diminish through a hundred readings.

If we consider the poem from an aural perspective, the music of vowels and consonants, this poem is a gem. The movement from the long ‘e’ in ‘breeze’ through the staccato of ‘syn.on.ym’ to the open ‘a’ in ‘ash’ with the ‘sh’ at the very end is the trajectory of life. The initial breath in ‘breeze’ carries though the small encounters in ‘synonym’ (like the rain pinging down obstacles in Eve Luckring’s concrete haiku) to the final shush in ‘ash.’ We feel the subtle echo of this music beyond words moving outward and inward. It’s primordial and pure poetry! Thank you, Philip Rowland.
Tom D’Evelyn

Gilbert’s book is clearly a watershed moment in HIE criticism. Through analysis of form, he helps us see a variety of cutting moves in the haiku game. At the same time, his analysis may beg the question for those of us who don’t feel alienated from the ethos of Basho as articulated say by Pipei Qieu. In many short essays on individual haiku from basho to Mark Harris, I have shown how cutting relates to a meditative process. These essays are available at ecoku.wordpress.com

It may be of interest to some that this meditative process, brilliantly articulated by the traditional haiku cut, is not restricted to haiku. My essays on poems by many poets showing how this meditative process informs individual poems are available.

Finally, the cult of the unique has ideological roots that deserve close attention.

In my own poems, I explore cutting techniques in formats other than haiku. A recent lyric caught the attention of a major player in HIE because a segment of it struck him as suggestive of haiku. Does our fascination with very small texts precondition us to find larger formats lacking intensity? Do we forget that to be a good haiku, the text must be well written? Well written as prose, as Pound said, or just well-written?

Philip Rowland

Cherie – many thanks for your response to “breeze a synonym for ash”, much appreciated (esp. as one reviewer gave it as an example of my being sometimes “too cryptic” – which perhaps goes to show how subjective these things can be). I also appreciate that you quoted the poem as it first appeared, rather than in the misjudged, slightly revised form in which it appeared in my collection before music.
Chris Patchel

For better or worse I’m more obsessed with excellence than most (even other artists and writers find my level of perfectionism excessive). So my ears perk up any time the word is mentioned.

I could loop out trying to list the marks of excellence— surprise coupled with a sense inevitability, for instance, or an economy & elegance of material & form, etc. (though such qualities are not unique to haiku). So I won’t go there.

At the moment I’m thinking more about excellence as an ethic, and a passion (which I note in many of Peter's remarks). It’s not uncommon for writers to spend a decade on a single novel. Walt Whitman spent the last 42 years of his life writing and revising his poems for *Leaves of Grass*. How many are willing to spend years, if need be, perfecting a haiku? Not that time is the only measure of passion for artmaking but it’s one indication.

Haiku writers span the gamut from hobbyists (nothing wrong with that) to serious poets. For publishers I’m guessing it’s often a trade-off between democratic inclusion (which we all appreciate about the haiku community after all) and the showcasing of excellence (poems and poets), so I sympathize with editors who have to navigate those kinds of ongoing choices.

Enjoying the discussion.

Richard Gilbert

Haiku and “what thought is like”

I’d like to hear more about the “cult of the unique” mentioned by Tom D’Evelyn (“the cult of the unique has ideological roots that deserve close attention”), though don’t see a strong relation to “the perception of the unique” as a locus or raison of aesthetic arrest – would the young Pound would serve as a case in point? I find
nothing ideologically cultish here:

. . . and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child’s face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion (Pound, explaining the genesis for “In A Station of the Metro,” 1916).

The need to value the haiku genre, that is, raise its valuation, estimation, has been a central concern of recent criticism, seen in major anthology presentations such as *Haiku in English* (2013) and *Haiku 21* (2011). Reading Blyth, one sees how potent and even primary critical commentary can be for the genre. It may be useful to approach the critical structure of ‘poem + commentary’ again, grouping significant numbers of haiku into thematic sections. Aside from his idiosyncratic (and highly arguable) perspective, Blyth’s influence was bolstered by his comprehensive-encyclopedic approach. Much of the aesthetic savor in Blyth arrives from his commentary -- especially noticeable when it’s stripped out -- the bare translations are usually pretty dull. This begs the question of what, concerning Blyth, actually captivated the Beats, and thus caused “haiku” to become popular.

It’s interesting to consider aesthetic arrest, contemplate its power -- just as a phenomenon -- also as formative of taste, or impetus of it. Aesthetic arrest involves force and radiance: magnetism, numinousity, velocity. We use words of kinesthetic force to describe this experience: I’m pulled in, it grabs me, I’m absorbed, enter the poem, am moved -- captivated (captive), captured, taken (away, somewhere), thrown (into, out of); magnetized.

Pound’s marvelous storytelling explanation of his “Metro” poem includes zingers like: “Any mind that is worth calling a mind must have needs beyond the existing categories of language.” Hugh Kenner, quoting Pound, indicates the rapid evolution of Pound’s search for new language, in order to depict the aesthetic:
“An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”: and that is the elusive Doctrine of the Image. And, just 20 months later, “The image . . . is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.” And: “An image . . . is real because we know it directly.” (Kenner, cf. “Metro” url, above)

One may connote this experience as a form of violence – Paz, quoting Mallarme: “The poet does violence to language in order to purify the words of the tribe.” The wrestling of words, language, out of normative, habitual associations is a violence akin to natural force: volcanos, earthquakes. This is not the violence of aggression, yet the term speaks to instrumental destruction (and deconstruction) in creation: a rending of skin, or in contemporary terminology, chaos breakdown in stable systems.

Violence in this context is depersonalizing, as is the idea of natural force. Yet this idea of violence is likewise as intimate as consciousness. It's no wonder people feel strongly about certain works of art. Given this context, it may be that all forms of aesthetic arrest, for art, involve a wrestling of consciousness, and in this, loss. (Loss of habit remains a loss.) Unlike the sudden “wrestling” of romantic love, the “other” of the poem is non-human. A work is a thing forged, become autonomous, self-existent, existing separate from its creator, even if emblematic. Thinking back to Pound, Paz, and other philosopher-poets of modernism, I’m struck by their concerns regarding consciousness and poetry; the notion of the poem is intimately bound into a questioning of the aesthetic.

Reading Pound at the Modernist dawn (or at least morning) -- his adventurous drive to formulate new modes of poetic arrest makes for exciting reading. What he presents to the world as signal discovery seems relevant to haiku, in terms of the wrestling, rending, potency of superposition as fusional (emotional-intellectual) complex, vortex, etc. This does all sound rather macho -- both the rending and perhaps the ranting -- so it’s worth revisiting just a few paragraphs prior, to: “a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child’s face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had
meant to me” – which may be both Pound’s gentlest and best attempt at description – his longing and need to articulate – his own Ginsbergian Howl, if you will.

It seems that the violence and (therefore) creative power of aesthetic arrest was central to Pound’s conception of social relevance, at the time. Paz developed these ideas and enriched them greatly in his masterpiece (nearly forgotten by the critical mainstream), The Bow and the Lyre. In thinking of the perception of the unique as it relates to aesthetic arrest, there is on the one hand generic archetypal phenomenology. On the other, a specific exploratory drive towards new discoveries of the aesthetic, throughout the arc of modernism -- though which we see advance and agonistic overthrow (of previous concepts, schools, forms). Today we can leisurely appreciate these various “schools” of art which enrich our “emotional-intellectual” landscape. Yet, what of our own time?

When I read

> the galactic aquarium shatters
> our arms ending in starfish
> a case of bird skulls
> my ears torn by such
> little scissors

and

> sunlight through
> the thin white blouse she
> holds up folds and puts away

(Peter Yovu, *Sunrise*, (RMP 2010) qtd. in New Zealand Poetry Society / Te Hunga Tito Ruri o Aotearoa, book review by Sandra Simpson; Yovu reading from *Sunrise* (THF Readings, 2012))
I’m reminded of Perloff’s insistence that the original project of modernism remains incomplete, and is commandingly relevant to our new century. We advance and return, holding mirrors up to our world in its shattering brilliance. These as-if galactic oceans -- as arms at the limit; as “starfish” born; is it this moment fiction becomes reality: these oceans we now fish in according to sailors and whales it’s one vast ocean girdling our planet, currently being “torn by such little scissors” as “a case of bird skulls” seems arch enough, according to what I ‘ear. “There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure, but security enough to make fellowships accursed.”

When I find people ridiculing the new arts, or making fun of the clumsy odd terms that we use in trying to talk of them amongst ourselves; when they laugh at our talking about the “ice-block quality” in Picasso, I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like, and they are familiar only with argument and gibe and opinion. That is to say, they can only enjoy what they have been brought up to consider enjoyable, or what some essayist has talked about in mellifluous phrases. They think only “the shells of thought” . . . (Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, 1916)

sunlight through
the thin white blouse she
holds up and puts away

is for our time a relevant response to what thought is like, for haiku. If the search to articulate the aesthetic is a mountain climb, aesthetic arrest allows for the story.

1. Shakespeare, “Measure for Measure” (3:2, 102).
Max Verhart

in January last I read in Brussels (Belgium) a paper with the title ‘Haiku on the Fringe of Dutch Literature’. The last paragraph read thus:

“(…) the title of this paper sums it up quite adequately: haiku is at best a tiny spot on the fringe of Dutch literature. But should we be sorry? No - because our goal should not be to give haiku a higher literary status. That status, if it ever happens, can be no more than a side product of what our real goal should be: to write tomorrow better haiku than we did today. To be more critical of the haiku we publish tomorrow then we were of the ones we published yesterday. That’s the best we can do. Or stop writing haiku.”

Kala Ramesh

It was lovely to read this thread.

I would like to add my two paise of thought as seen from an Indian angle - which is what I’m most familiar with.

I connect up to ‘criticism’ through Indian music, for I have been a student of Indian classical since I was six years old. And I’ve heard my mother tell my sisters [who were Bharatanatyam dancers] that they need to stand before the mirror and practice their abhinaya – facial expression along with the whole body moving— thereby promoting that critical awareness about one’s own work. I feel this is the most important tool when stepping into any art form.

The first time I came across ‘a book criticism’ was when I read the massive introduction written by Vamanrao Deshpande, an eminent musicologist of his generation for the noted classical singer, Pandit Kumar Gandharva’s book, Anoop Raga Vilas (1965), and the ‘criticism’ on this introduction written by noted Marathi
writer and educationalist Sharadchandra Chirmulay.

What is criticism? I think, it’s all about bringing a thought into focus, so that readers are brought to notice things which they could have missed otherwise.

A rasika is one who can enjoy the rasa² brought about in any created work. There are treatises that deal with the rasa theory and how this interaction between the artist [one who brings out the rasa] and the listener [a rasika who enjoys the rasa] happens. I think this is the seed for the growth of ‘critical appreciation’

But here I would like to talk about individual criticism or the art of ‘Critical appreciation’ as I would like to call it. I do teach haiku, which is a 60 hour course, to under-graduate students at the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, Pune and one of their assignments is *critical appreciation* [as seen from my Indian roots], where they are encouraged to take any haiku poem they like, ranging from the Japanese Masters to the contemporary haiku poets and write a critical appreciation note on it. They came up with astounding and in-depth analysis.

After this and many such discussions on haiku I tell them to write their haiku. Quoting my favourite quote of the month, make it quote of the year: “The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, shit detector.” – Ernest Hemingway.

Don Baird

A Thought: Subjective cannot solve the puzzles of the objective; and the objective cannot solve the puzzles of the subjective - in a likely sense, objective (in the human realm) doesn’t exist - it cannot as long as the human being remains in the realm

2. The Sanskrit term for aesthetic emotion is Rasa.
of imperfection; where is the realm of perfection? Is a critique meaningless, in particular, imperfect - as meaningless as opinion? Naturally, if one gives an opinion power by submitting to it, then reality (for that individual) shifts quickly (as fickle as it is) and another set of circumstances occur to ponder - yet, none dealing with “truth,” per se.. Human perception is like a spaghetti sauce; it is an approximation at best - no two are the same even if the recipe is.

Scratching the Surface:

Critiquing (criticism) is a skewed skill that is incapable of rising above the subjective. There is no critique of any work that can possibly be an authoritative (cosmically accurate) voice that is lastingly meaningful (factual).. Opinion will never rise above itself. It will never be complete and it will never be accurate. Human perception and bias will remain obstacles to depth-critiquing or for that matter, worthy, memorable opinion. (I remember Beethoven; do you remember his critic?) The human character, in its own arrogance, remains oblique - minimally, wonky. And, critiquing is the “frontal lobe gone awry.” Neither will ever rise above their flawed existence because they simply cannot.

Digging Deeper:

Claiming “this or that” is excellent is frivolous with the exception of amusement. A critic and ensuing opinion seems to be nothing at all inherently; it is the recipient, surrendering power, that gives the critique salt. In a very real way, excellence doesn't exist - only opinions do; and opinions may or may not have value. Once again, that depends on who is receiving the notion (opinion) and whether or not they buy into it with psychological money.

A Story:

I’ve mentioned, over the years, numerous times - the story of Beethoven and “his” critic. Beethoven composed his first symphony. He gathered an orchestra for its premiere performance. A particular critic was there - one who writes for the local news (so to speak). The critic hated the music and dissed Beethoven’s efforts with the shrill of a cicada. He talked about the opening; he discussed thematic material, approach, development and the rest. Years later, Beethoven introduced his 5th symphony. The same critic was still working his harmonica of opinions saying
(approximately) that the symphony motifs are repetitious and boring, continuing on and on, how there was nothing worthy presented in this new symphony. His closing query was, “why is it that Beethoven cannot write something so profound as his first symphony?” The critic had forgotten his scribblings years back about Beethoven's 1st symphony and now openly celebrated it as a masterpiece - overlooking the petite fact that he said he hated the first symphony and was appalled. At least, the critic has left us with a humorous story regarding the painful approximation of reality and perception and the human’s ego thinking it has something important to say.

Almost a Summary:

At best, it seems that the things of life - all things - are illusionary on their best cosmic day. Is it that we, the humble servants of the All, can somehow tune into “this is judged to be great or miserable” and the opinion is miraculously true? Is there truth regarding the quality of poetry? Is there truth that this art is “good or lousy?” Throw paint from a ladder to a canvas; throw words into a poem; throw notes onto a page: is there an inherent, definable “this is good, this is bad”, “this is excellent, this is not?”

Jackson Pollack found himself the first American artist with an authentic international appeal. Was his art “excellent or not?” Did his tossing paint onto a canvas mean anything other than he could do it with passion? Was Debussy not Mozart? Was Schoenberg not Beethoven? Were any of them excellent? Does it matter? And if so, which critic, which critique is correct - the yea or nay of artistic efforts? Is it, at the finish line, that critiques will remain in the bondage of human imperfection and will never rise above it . . . as it cannot.

Final Thought:

The question is being offered, “what makes a poem excellent?” And I’m saying, who is to claim it is excellent or not?

Eve Luckring

Kala, thank you very much for introducing me to the concept of rasa/rasika. and I also really appreciate that quote from Pound that Richard has offered:
When I find people ridiculing the new arts, or making fun of the clumsy odd terms that we use in trying to talk of them amongst ourselves; when they laugh at our talking about the “ice-block quality” in Picasso, I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like, and they are familiar only with argument and gibe and opinion. That is to say, they can only enjoy what they have been brought up to consider enjoyable, or what some essayist has talked about in mellifluous phrases. They think only “the shells of thought” . . . (Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, 1916 [my emphasis]).

All of this makes me think that perhaps, it is time for Judge Grenier to make an entrance:

It fascinated me that Grenier was removed from the latest edition of Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology, presumably to make room for some new additions, or...

We celebrated here in Los Angeles by doing a reading of all the poets that were removed from this latest edition--47 in all-- including Charles Bukowski, Amy Gerstler, David Antin, Diane Wakoski, and Jerome Rothenberg.

Richard Gilbert

What, me worry? a comment on criticism

I’d like to comment on what Eve wrote (below quoted). Also, thank you Kala for adding to the conversation on aesthetic arrest -- you bring up the topic of self-critique also -- I recall that Denise Levertov advised (perhaps in The Poet in the World, 1973) for the poet the development of a “second reader” an internal as-if reader, as if autonomous and independent of the “1st author” -- who “reads” your work objectively, so to speak, as a critical move. (I think of this as a life-work -- it’s a
familiar concept in the arts, no doubt.)

Re-reading Grenier’s Scorpion Prize essay, I keenly feel the hole left by the Roadrunner Haiku Journal hiatus. Scott and Paul succeeded in soliciting notable literary figures outside of haiku to select and judge Roadrunner issues, brilliant! One witnesses the genre, reflected through their own biases, as well. Quite educational. Grenier’s humor is refreshing, in part because his playful pose at ignorance sparkles with gleaming insights, like Disney elves.

Something Eve discusses is the omission of Grenier and others in the “latest edition of Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology (2nd ed., 2013). I have the 1st ed. on my shelves, and was surprised to read this. Read the “Riposte” essay, addressing the matter. It’s wide-ranging.

This essay ably demonstrates not only excellent criticism, but also some of the reasons why criticism is vital in arts culture. Within are longstanding issues in contemporary criticism: canonicity, institutions (& -alities), academia, in-groups, posturing, poetry versus ideology. The critical voice and the scope of criticism determines, over an era (in 15-20 year chunks, lately), how we will learn as students, how textbooks will be created, whom will be included, whom and what left out. “Value” is ascribed, achievements are are lauded, and as seen in Robbins, critics along with poets are taken to task for their foibles, misfeasance, lack of talent or “taste.” I believe this would include Paul Miller’s first definition of “criticism,” of the two he quoted earlier -- so let’s not be too shy:

1) indicate the faults of (someone or something) in a disapproving way
2) form and express a sophisticated judgment of (a literary or artistic work)

Several posters in FN have commented that critics are problematic, doubtful in value, or even unnecessary. Nothing could be further from the truth, as a blanket statement. Consider the situational role and importance (anthologized, widely discussed, socially networked) of Helen Vendler’s notable 2004 Jefferson Lecture at the National Endowment for the Arts, “The Ocean, the Bird and the Scholar.” A
If the arts are so satisfactory an embodiment of human experience, why do we need studies commenting on them? Why not merely take our young people to museums, to concerts, to libraries? There is certainly no substitute for hearing Mozart, reading Dickinson, or looking at the boxes of Joseph Cornell. Why should we support a brokering of the arts; why not rely on their direct impact? The simplest answer is that reminders of art’s presence are constantly necessary. As art goes in and out of fashion, some scholar is always necessarily reviving Melville, or editing Monteverdi, or recommending Jane Austen. Critics and scholars are evangelists, plucking the public by the sleeve, saying “Look at this,” or “Listen to this,” or “See how this works.” It may seem hard to believe, but there was a time when almost no one valued Gothic art, or, to come closer to our own time, *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*.

A more recent example of the critic’s role in preserving cultural memory (and relevant to haiku studies) might be Marjorie Perloff’s short article, “Take Five” (April 2013), published on “the centennial of 1913, that annus mirabilis for avant-garde poetry.” I’m also reminded of Hugh Kenner. From his obit (2003) written by close friend William F. Buckley:

“[Kenner] was among the finest writers of critical prose in America. He was one of the few commentators whose books and articles cause delight and stand as literary achievements in their own right...” (*National Review*, 4 April 2008; print pub., December 2003)

From *The New York Times*: “Hugh Kenner, the critic, author and professor of literature regarded as America’s foremost commentator on literary modernism... [was best known] for his pioneering guide to English-language literary modernism and for his books “Dublin’s Joyce” (1956), “The Pound Era” (1971) and “Joyce’s
Voices” (1978) ... In these works and others he employed the techniques proposed by the writers themselves to define new standards by which to judge their work. . . . Over time his prose style grew increasingly graceful, witty and accessible, prompting C. K. Stead, writing in The Times Literary Supplement, to call him “the most readable of living critics.” (25 November 2003)

From The Guardian: “[Kenner] produced some of the most perceptive accounts of literary modernism ... Kenner adapted his critical style to suit the particular author under scrutiny, following Dr Johnson’s observation that literary criticism must be regarded as part of literature or be abandoned altogether. His work avoids academic jargon, and draws on a massive range of influences, seeing connections and parallels in unlikely places. In a Los Angeles Times review, Richard Eder said of Kenner’s proactive approach that “he jumps in, armed and thrashing. He crashes [literature], like a partygoer... You could not say whether his talking or listening is done with greater intensity.” (28 November 2003)

Sound exciting? It is! Great criticism is an art, is “regarded as part of literature.” Good criticism (like good philosophy, good love, the best learning or craft practice) can transform a life. Open you up, enlighten, inspire, ignite a passion for passionate understanding. Good critics (speaking here of rasa, as Kala states it) are not irrevocably to be placed a class separate from poets (Bashō himself made his fame as a critic, with Kai Ōi [The Seashell Game], “a judging of the Left and the Right,” at the age of 29, if it matters). Though (as with any art form) there seem few in a given era who demonstrate a sustained level of excellence. Fewer yet who vibe with you (as with poets, eh?) -- the patient difficulty is in finding them.

Vendler mentions Melville’s Billy Budd; the manuscript was discovered in the 1920s by Raymond Weaver, a professor at Columbia, of whom Allen Ginsberg, his student in the 1940s, said “was the only professor who had integrity” (American Scream, Jonah Raskin, p.xiii). In the 1980s-90s, Ginsberg, in multiple roles as world-traveling poet, scholar-professor, and critic, taught Melville -- which is to say, taught in the lineage of Weaver (cf. Expansive Poetics 11 -- Herman Melville and Mind, Mouth and Page 1 -- Williams). Poet/professor/critics are numerous; in North America, two recent luminaries would be Anne Carson (b. 1950; professor at McGill, Princeton; MacArthur Fellow, etc.) and A.R. Ammons (b. 1926-2001; a Cornell professor for 34 years).
Unless one has that experience of aesthetic arrest in reading a critic, has that experience of dwelling, contemplating, thinking new thoughts, deepening -- does the critic remain relatively superficial, a statuesque icon on an elitist stage? Some snobby book or movie reviewer let's say -- condescending or smarmy. Yet if one does delve into the near-canonical likes of Barthes, Benjamin, Kenner, Paz, Perloff, Vendler (some of the names mentioned in this thread), might something wondrous await in the form of illumination, fire, real heart? As Kenner puts it:

“'The life of the mind in any age coheres thanks to shared assumptions both explicit and tacit, between which lines of casualty may not be profitably traceable. . . . The life of the mind in any age -- there are common themes, and they have different languages.” (interview by Harvey Blume, Bookwire, March 2001)

Common themes -- different languages. Let’s stretch a bit. To be or not become, more well-informed. It’s irrelevant to me whether “learned” exists as a final goal or backstop -- what matters is the learner, and the learning. And if we are to live in a post-apocalyptic world, possibly (according to current entertainment media) populated with vampires and zombies -- said to be impossible but they may find a way -- that I might huddle in some tallow-lit hut, and talk about The Kenner and his marvelous ways, perhaps read from this page 259 scrap of his; you know, the pages that are left.

Chris Patchel

I have split thoughts (as usual) about the topic of haiku criticism. I often want more from it, and conversely find some of it a stretch (which comes off like overcompensation for a haiku inferiority complex). But reading the latest book reviews in the winter issues of Frogpond and Modern Haiku confirms another general impression. Though the haiku world sometimes feels small and self-contained we’re fortunate to have a good many excellent poets who can wear a critics hat
equally well, making conscientious assessments and providing insightful windows into haiku collections. There are exceptions on occasion—mismatched poets & reviewers, uncritical praise (love the Hemingway quote above), and reviews that miss completely. But even those are often corrected or balanced by other reviews.

J Galmitz

I’m reminded of the “seminal” (Seminole) essay by Hillman ‘Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World,’ (which claims there was no definition of the sentence per se until...) and of the many (17?) books of non-grammatical poems of Bruce Andrews: both of which and all of which were presumably written in the name of the proletariat or for the freeing of the purblind proletariat with its resignation to the misunderstanding of its language (a man/woman who speaks a language knows that language). There was no other occasion for this work and I have to admit that I was in graduate school around the time these guys were writing and studying neo-Marxist criticism and frankly no one ever mentioned any of their names (although this might have been an oversight).

All very fascinating and impressive to be sure.

But a 5’ tall basketball player cannot dunk; a 7’ player can.

One nail can join a number of pieces of wood (whatever) depending on how thick.

A box of nails or boxes can built a house.

All of the remarks are outstanding, but why do you seem to imply that they relate to haiku as opposed to poetry and if haiku needs a criticism, which it surely does, why doesn’t that come from the poems rather than be imposed upon the poems?

Can you place any of the haiku written in historical perspective or is haiku out of this world? I don’t mean a history of the changes or accretions added to the form. I mean is there a historical dimension, a social dimension to haiku or is it outside of time?
Views was written with Shirane in mind, who claimed that until ELH had developed a depth significant enough to warrant a criticism it couldn’t be taken seriously. Rather than doing individual readings of poets, or the opus of a poet, Views actually locates the socio-historical-psychological depths of the haiku extant. That was its contribution and unfortunately only Johannes Berg saw fit to review it. It was promised a review in one of the other “illustrious” haiku journals, with a 9 month wait (to give it the time it so richly deserved), but alas it was the editor’s fault, I was told, that kept it from ever being reviewed there. Seems to me I am not being pevish. Seems to me that a person’s art and their character are one and the same. Without a real character, what can we expect excellence in artifice.

In one of the last issues of *Rr*, the Scorpion Prize was awarded by Craig Dworkin, who, for my money, is America’s best living critic. He found all the neo stuff to be cryptic minimalism (which doesn't bother me, since this is how I take it) and awarded the prize to a haiku (please refer to his comments; I’m simply too lazy to quote).

As an aside: I thought of all the Daoists Zhuangzi was the relativist, believing that a human being being limited and knowledge being limitless, a human being could never hope to approach transcendence.

One last word, before the posse comes: The moderator of this site, one of the few who actually listened to my 2 hr diatribe about haiku, pointed out to me that while most people who used cameras took snapshots that did not disqualify those who practiced art with a camera.

I did not reply. What he had said was evident. And, I did not want to say that unlike photography, haiku had not produced anywhere near the number of masters of art as photography had, as this would have been an unhappy state or condition for both of us.

If only one, and the one most suited in my opinion, to step outside of haiku and find a publisher and establish the art as equivalent to any other poetry would have been John Martone (as he is a poet writing haiku, not a haiku poet), then and only then would others have been added in time, based on the standard he had set and things would have been different now.
So endeth my piece and I expect so sharpen the blades of those who believe in cutting. As I find ambiguity to be the one and most significant cut available in the English language, the one means by which to stop thought in its tracks, and as those who believe in Orientalism, regardless of the fact that the Chinese (I believe Zhuangzi was Chinese) have only, and in small degree, acknowledged some excellence in the work of Basho. It was not merely their hatred of the Japanese that kept them from this bestowal of approval- after all scholars are scholars- but perhaps it is because compared to the greatest of Chinese philosophers and poets the Japanese forms were renditions in the first instance and all qualified poets studied and wrote in the Chinese style and language first, before beginning their own practice.

I hope this last post of mine is not the kiss of death.

I say this, not as wish-fulfillment-but as my experience has been that whenever I say something it ends up being the end of the long line of thoughts that preceded it.

I hope that is not the case.

Gary Hotham

1/ re Galmitz last post: “I say this, not as wish-fulfillment-but as my experience has been that whenever I say something it ends up being the end of the long line of thoughts that preceded it.”

OK. I’ll let Galmiz not be the last for now. Unless he posts again. And then maybe someone else can save him from the end.

2/ re Galmitz: “Views was written with Shirane in mind, who claimed that until ELH had developed a depth significant enough to warrant a criticism it couldn’t be taken seriously.”

It does put the critic in the role of a god who has the last word. Not that we shouldn’t have them or that criticism is a bad thing but that their ability to discern is not necessarily of the highest standards. One should always listen to the critic with a grain of salt.
3/ re Galmitz: “And, I did not want to say that unlike photography, haiku had not produced anywhere near the number of masters of art as photography had, as this would have been an unhappy state or condition for both of us.”

But photography has been around much longer than haiku - haiku in English anyway. So why wouldn’t there be more masters of art in photography than haiku. Otherwise I thought Yovu’s comment about practicing art with the camera that others used for snapshots was a good one to remember about the English language haiku. The genre can be used to produce much better art than the haiku for a party snapshots one sees. So don’t give up on it.

J Galmitz

Thank you, Gary, for your comments and salvation.

As to photography being around much longer than haiku, it’s not quite accurate.

If we recognize Alfred Steiglitz as the man most influential in admitting photography into the modern art world, we can see some of his early “art” photography beginning around 1894.

Pound’s Station of the Metro was published in 1913. Not that great a difference in time from 1894.

And, I would say, without proof, that Pound’s poem Metro remains and probably will always remain the greatest English language haiku written.

As to haiku being a religion- something taken up by others and kicked into infinity- I can only say God help us. It seems to come mostly from non-Orientals, that is, those whose religious background comes from the monotheistic religions, because with their statements come a lot of sound and fury and in the East, well, the Dao doesn’t care.

Anyway, thanks bro. I still write haiku occasionally and enjoy doing so. Why not?
Just a short note without gloss:

when a poet, writing in whatever form or genre (hey, wait, I thought the idea of genre had been dispensed with decades ago {which would make this whole section obsolete} uses words and images that are so distinct and cannot be used again without recall of the original - BLACK BOUGH - for instance, you know something is going on there. I mean what else do we see when we look at trees in rain and snow and and and Black Boughs and u can’t use the phrase and you can’t find a suitable substitute.

So much like Williams’s “glazed with rain water.” Such a line will always be at your tongue in your hand at your penpoint and you can’t use it it belongs to someone else already. That’s poetry.

And for those with the temerity to have claimed that Williams’s first line “so much depends” was dispensible ought to go back to school or else study or read a bit deeper. The whole fucking poem depends on depends.

Much as “there was a jar in Tennessee” by Wallace Stevens.

Karen Cesar

In reading Jack’s comments, I found this site helpful.

In terms of history and the way our minds try to organize/find/ impose meaning, something I found interesting regarding ‘critique’ is that in dipping in here and there on the referenced site ( and I’m not sure which poem sparked this) one poem had the words ‘green’ and ‘mile’ in close proximity. My mind immediately went to the movie The Green Mile which would not have been in the poet’s frame of reference due to when poem and movie came out, but which was obviously in mine.How often do we automatically do this I wonder? And how resistant my mind is to ‘the breaking of the vessel.’ Thanks for an interesting & thought provoking thread.
1/ re Galmitz: “As to photography being around much longer than haiku, it’s not quite accurate. If we recognize Alfred Steiglitz as the man most influential in admitting photography into the modern art world, we can see some of his early “art” photography beginning around 1894.”

There was excellent photography before Steiglitz. Also in the early days of photography it was difficult to be an amateur. And the Civil War photographers created photos by moving bodies and weapons around. What would they have done with digital! Steiglitz had an easier technology to work with. Sort of like the haiku writers now don’t have to deal with 5-7-5 syllable counts. I suspect some don’t even know there was such an inhibition! Even without 5-7-5 it doesn’t make it easier to write a good one. Actually 5-7-5 makes it easy...

2/ re Galmitz: “Pound’s Station of the Metro was published in 1913. Not that great a difference in time from 1894. And, I would say, without proof, that Pound’s poem Metro remains and probably will always remain the greatest English language haiku written.”

Pound may have written Station of the Metro in 1913 but where did the English language haiku go in the next 50 years? I wonder if he was consciously writing a haiku at all. It is sort of a fluke. And I would certainly agree at this time there is not much proof for it being “the greatest English language haiku written.” I wonder when the Japanese realized Basho had written the greatest haiku of all time?

Peter Newton

What is excellence in haiku and haiku-inspired poems? And is this a useful question? It is always useful to talk poetry. Having said that, excellence is a subjective term. A judge’s ruling, so to speak. According to the laws of the land. There are many laws, rules in the land of haiku. To my ear, an excellent haiku is one I want to read again,
remember and live with for the rest of my life.
A talisman of words that are threateningly obvious. A discovery of an unrealized reverence for life:

    low tide:
    all the people
    stoop

― Anita Virgil

Prayer beads of syllables. An instant appreciation. A visceral knowledge:

    gone from the woods
    the bird I knew
    by song alone

― Paul O. Williams

An excellent haiku needs to possess a certain clarity. Don’t know about others but I find overly intellectualized dense wordliness inscrutable as stone soup. A bit too tricky for my taste. See what I mean. No accounting for taste.

But others who admire hidden riddles and crossword puzzles might have a mind for a different kind of excellence. Excellence is when 9 out of 10 readers say: oh or wow or cool. Of course, who are the readers? You see the trouble with excellence. If we have a group of generally agreed upon arbiters of excellence then maybe we can agree on the best of the best. Plenty of arbiters to go around. But I think a poet knows when he’s on the mark. Or at least within striking distance.

More practically speaking, maybe another approach to asking one big question in haiku: what is excellence? It may be useful to break it down into a series of smaller questions which when addressed individually to individual poems might contribute to an overall outstanding poem.
The overall question then becomes not what is an excellent haiku but how do we make our haiku excellent?

An excellent poem doesn’t forget the basics but exhibits an accumulation of talents and skills. I found this list below helpful when I came across it online years ago.

9 QUESTIONS TO ASK OF YOUR HAIKU:

(Taken from Anita Virgil’s interview on the blog, *Haiku Chronicles*, Episode 8, “The Crafting of Haiku” The interview was conducted by Donna Beaver and Al Pizzarelli)

#1. Is it one particular event in the present?
#2. Is it a moment in which the poet views with fresh insight and awareness? Some common occurrence that points out the interrelatedness of man and nature?
#3. Is it objectively presented? Does it allow the reader to experience the emotion, or does it tell the reader what to feel?
#4. Does it avoid simile, metaphor, personification, clichés?
#5. Does each word serve a vital function in re-creating the poet’s moment of deep response? Has your selection of words, the order in which you placed them, their sound, their tempo captured the quality of the experience?
#6. If the poem allows for more than one interpretation through choice of words or punctuation or line breaks, does this add to or detract from the poem?
#7. Has it growth potential? Does it convey more emotion than is experienced at the first reading?
#8. What is the value of what the poet conveys?
#9. Is this one of the very few poems that can be said to contain universal significance?

I sometimes refer to these questions when revising a few of my haiku. Most poems
I write tell me where to go next. At times, it's helpful to interrogate a poem. Make it stand up for itself. If it can do that, it has a chance at making something of itself.

An excellent haiku shows no sign of having been put through its paces. The ones above or any other rigorous renovation of words. Oh and then there's the magic and the mystery. Key ingredients there's no accounting for. But overall, an excellent haiku is an accurate reshaping of “the poet’s moment of deep response” as Virgil puts it above. It's personal to the point of relating to us all.

J Galmitz

While there were photographers who might be called artistic before Steiglitz, I think it is historically indisputable that he was responsible for the creation of photography as a medium capable of art as much as painting and sculpture. With the aid of Edward Steichen, they created 291, on Fifth Avenue, an art studio that contributed towards the acceptance not only of photography as a legitimate art form, but also championed the modern art movement, which was in its beginning stages. It was at 291 that the works of Picasso, Rodin, Brancusi were exhibited. It was through the offices of Steiglitz that photography and modern art gained credence in the early 20C.

As to Pound’s Station of the Metro, it was no fluke. He was working on theories for imagism and vorticism and it was through, at this time, the (perhaps poor) translations from the Chinese of Ernest Fenollosa and his work The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry that Pound came to write the poems of Cathay (which WCW called amongst the most beautiful poems every written in the English language) and his haiku- The Metro.

As to not giving proof, well, I am really much too tired to have to convince anyone of anything they won’t be convinced of anyway. Let us just say that the haiku “the apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet black bough” is so fraught with a veil of ambiguity, undecipherability, as well as clarity and precision and that that contrast is repeated incrementally and variously in the second portion of the
poem, not to mention that forever after “black bough” has belonged to the man, it didn’t seem necessary to have to justify the statement I made.

Actually, it was through Pound and this poem that Pound released the ideals of modernism on the world: “to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.”

The poem and its relationship to imagism inspired the writing of WC Williams, H.D., amongst others too numerous to mention.

As to the next fifty years, I think there was Paul Reps and then the Beats and after, well, that’s up to you how you see it. But, as to the use of concision and parsing of language to the bone in Metro, not to mention the absolute exquisite beauty of it and the comparison of the vague faces with fallen petals and the darkness of the station and the wet black bough, well, tell me pal what isn’t there to like and what poem can you find to put up against it?

As to Basho, well, he wrote in Japanese, so as to whether his poems were equivalently beautiful is beyond my ability to say, as I do not read Japanese.

Newtonp and with all due respect, perhaps I am a culture vulture and nothing more, but Anita Virgil’s rules for haiku lack the substance and insight of the lineage of poets and critics since Ezra Pound’s Metro and their assessment of it.

I mean if we compare the poem Virgil is offering a variation on, that is, Chiyo-ni’s

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things picked up
all start to move
low-tide beach
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I think we can see that “everyone stoops,” is kind of funny and ungainly and hardly in keeping with the original. Especially when one considers that besides bending the word “stoop” also implies a loss of dignity (it doesn’t seem a well-chosen word).
Philip Rowland

Richard cited Helen Vendler among other inspiring critics; problems with anthologies have also been mentioned—omissions from the new edition of Postmodern American Poetry; in an earlier thread, HIE. Peter Yovu also said something interesting (though I can’t find it now) about Craig Dworkin’s reading of a haiku by Cherie Hunter Day (looking “into” her words). All of which reminded me of some comments on Vendler’s editing of The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry, by another fine critic, Charles Bernstein. His argument (against, in part, complacency in the judging of excellence) seems relevant to some aspects of the discussion here. This is from his verse-essay, “Artifice of Absorption” (in A Poetics, Harvard University Press, 1992):

... As Vendler puts it,
“When we first read a poem we read it
illusionistically; later we may see its art.”

Vendler’s selections, insofar as they
do display linguistic self-consciousness, are
restricted to doing so in terms of discursive
stylistic practices. Disjunction
is almost entirely absent from the poems selected.

... Vendler is very much under the spell of
realist & mimetic ideas about poetry. In this
sense, she still has much to learn from Stevens &
Ashbery. ...

... But perhaps the most irritating thing about
Vendler’s manner of argument is that it is always
referring to what “all” poems do, making it
impossible for her to even consider that some poems
may come into being just because they don’t do what
some other poems have done. Vendler says
she hopes readers will be provoked by some of the anthologized poems to say—“‘Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!’ It is the effect every poet hopes for.” I would hope readers might be provoked to say of some poems, “Hell, I don’t recognize the place or the time or the ‘I’ in this sentence. I don’t know it.”

Earlier in this thread, Michael Dylan Welch and others argued for promoting the work of the best haiku poets so as to reach a wider audience. I’d add that it might be as important for the poets themselves to reach other audiences by reading and submitting their poems to publications that don’t specialize in haiku (but might, judging from the poet-reader’s interest in the work published there, be interested), despite the reduced chances of acceptance. This process could also be seen as a useful kind of criticism, especially if one agrees with the idea that “Poetry has no intrinsic categories,” as Laura Riding and Robert Graves state in their Pamphlet against Anthologies (1928).

Now I can’t resist sharing a provocative passage from their closely related Survey of Modernist Poetry (1927), in which they present their idea of an “ideal” or “genuinely modernist” poem:

“The ideal modernist poem is its own clearest, fullest, and most accurate meaning. Therefore the modernist poet does not have to talk about the use of images ‘to render particulars exactly,’ since the poem does not give a rendering of a poetical picture or idea existing outside the poem, but presents the literal substance of poetry, a newly-created thought-activity: the poem has the character of a creature by itself. Imagism, on the other hand, and all other similar dead movements, took for granted the principle that poetry was a translation of certain kinds of subjects into the language that would bring the reader emotionally closest to them. It was assumed that a natural separation existed between the reader and the subject, to be bridged by the manner in which it was presented.”
The didactic (could it be?) poem by Bernstein is interesting, as is the essay by Graves and Riding, but just a few words about them.

Naturally, or unnaturally to be more accurate, language and world never meet, so it is “true” that the “ideal” modernist poem would not refer to nor need confirmation re relativity towards another world than its own.

However, the problem, at least as I see it, is that language, the new language-event, the creature in itself, however framed and referenced always will reference a world that while self-referential nevertheless refers to an image-idea of a world for which and from which it derived. In other words, while language never reaches a referent it always has a signified, a reference to such.

So, the use of their word “subject,” for instance, really means “object,” doesn’t it? The “dead” idea of a subject; but subject is interior? or does it mean subject as in object, that is, what something is about?

Funny, but if you read some of the poems of Riding and Graves you will find that they must- there is no other recourse in language (because it has “meaning”) always mention, refer to a subject that is both in the poem and something thought of (meant- referent) outside of the poem): example, “dream” or “the world and I” or in “due form,” whatever. In short, though the modernist poem may be referring to itself and language and events within the poem alone, it cannot help but, it cannot separate itself from what I take, perhaps incorrectly, as the basis of language, its reference, even if abstractly and not precisely, to things. Though each word may have only a sound mental-image and a meaning ( a reference) and no referent, nonetheless all words seem to yearn ( is that not what Riding writes in The World and I?) for such a relationship.

As to calling those who wrote high modernism, Pound for instance, writers of dead poems, if there was any fairness in the evaluation and not an attempt to usurp the time to themselves and their writing- think of pan here and how he became the devil with the advent of christianity- well, they would merely apply their own standards,
as would Bernstein, and show that in Pound’s/Eliot’s poems, whatever the prejudice they claim existed in these poets, they would show, repeat, how the poems worked as poems only can work, that is, just the way they say they do and that these high modernists’ works were new word-thought events, too, did not refer to a separate subject, etc.

As to Stevens, why yes, indeed, he makes it quite clear that human creation is not natural but brings nature to order, as in In Jar and The Idea of Order, and The Blue Guitar, et al. But just look at those words— are they not sounds, i.e., mental-images, with reference and meaning, though lacking in a referent (an outside object; words as mere approximations always yearning for their imaginary solids).

So, interesting quotes indeed, Philip, and interesting thoughts, and thanks for that.

Not to kick a dead horse, but we shouldn’t forget that while language (never mind the exclusiveness of poetry, since, at least according to the philosophy of Bernstein and Riding and Graves, what they say about poetry applies equally to all language) may never be about things, it sure does help in the language loop (besides the fact that Bernstein et al are speaking in the Swiss, French tradition, not the Anglo tradition).

WC Williams, for instance, a writer surely of dead proportions— NO THOUGHTS BUT IN THINGS— god what an idiot, was a doctor and it certainly helped to have words refer to body parts and not just be sprung newly minted creatures in themselves on pages, else he wouldn’t have been able to deliver Allen Ginsberg and serve all the sick in Paterson, N.J.

All this is not exactly in keeping with Wittgenstein either is it? A man who speaks a language knows the language— enough said. Bernstein could learn something himself from Williams— the world is built upon these non-existent, non-referent bearing things called words. There would be no world to be separate from words if not for words (which built the world).

Dead of not, modernist or not, obsolete or not, Pound’s Metro is still the greatest haiku ever written in the English language says I.
For the ancients, excellence is another word for virtue. Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Apply this to poetry and you see that a poem comes about because of habits of perception and expression, and these habits are acquired by repetition, practice. Poets practice poetry.

The name haiku sticks to lots of different kinds of verse. We need a taxonomy of haiku. Looking at the world-wide phenomenon of haiku-in-English, it seems that there are basically two practices of haiku: one that goes back to the Japanese form, and one that departs from this form. It “seems” this way from the look of the poems on the page. The more traditional haiku, which I shall call hokku, look like what we have been taught a Japanese haiku looks like. The other kind – let’s call it ku -- doesn’t. I have already discussed a number of “ku” as found in volume 8 of NOON. I shall be posting more pieces on such “ku” at formsofauthority.wordpress.com

Hokku reflect traditional practices that have roots in Chinese Taoist culture (see Pipei Qiu, Basho and the Tao). The practice of Taoism is very complex but not impossible today. There is a vivid scholarly debate on just what beliefs Taoism entails; see especially now Brook Ziporyn (Ironies of Oneness and Difference, SUNY 2012). The central belief is that of the Tao as “Mother,” the fertile void. Modern interpretations of “Mother” as Nothingness need revamping, according to Ziporyn; Taoism is not to be confused with modern nihilism. Nothing is a relative matter; the Taoist is a relativist. Well, it’s complicated, and eventually Taoist coherence is ironic, according to Ziporyn.

The practices that promote hokku may be seen in Mark Brager’s piece I found it on the Simply Haiku Winter 2013 website: Brager is a featured poet there.

pale blossoms . . .
the first of many
blackbirds
The way this hokku taps into the fertile void is not as simple as it looks. Essential to the fertile void is finitude: this is nicely touched upon in the “kigo” “pale blossoms.” The paleness suggests the finitude of the blossoms: they are almost beyond the pale of the life that they express. The two-line base of the hokku reaches into the contemplative sources of understanding. Within the strictures of temporal existence, pale things, seen in their abundance, almost make one forget finitude, almost give one the feeling of oceanic infinity. This joy is sourced in the fertile void. It has no other ground.

The irony of the poem is that the reference in the base is not to the multitude of pale blossoms but to another multitude, this time one less endearing, perhaps, and certainly marked by difference: blackbirds!

The swerve caused by “blackbirds” reframes the image that had been aborning in the reader’s mind. We now know from Ziporyn that this kind of irony is essential to Taoism. That is, the kind of coherence Taoism trains us to “see” is ironic. It is not Confucian; it is not “ideological.” It depends on a further, transcendent source of truth, the truth we can never possess but in our best moments may feel truthful to. Hokku is truthful or mindful of such ironic truth.

But without the firm establishment of the community of creatures under the sign of the fertile void, the poetic image is no sign but a sort of echo of a subject, perhaps of the poet, perhaps of a persona the poet assumes when being a poet. At least for the hokku community – and self-awareness regarding these roots is limited by circumstances-- community is rooted in practice, the practice of the Tao.

Gary Hotham

Re Galmitz: “Pound’s Metro is still the greatest haiku ever written in the English language says I.”

Yes, I think it would be good to provide some evidence for the judgement about Pound’s Metro in a critical essay. Have you read the essay, “Ezra Pound and In a Station of the Metro,” by Nick Avis? Right here on the The Haiku Foundation
J Galmitz

Sorry, Gary, but I think I’ll pass on Nick Avis’s opinion about Ezra Pound.

Gary Hotham

Take the Challenge

re Philip Rowland’s: “Earlier in this thread, Michael Dylan Welch and others argued for promoting the work of the best haiku poets so as to reach a wider audience. I’d add that it might be as important for the poets themselves to reach other audiences by reading and submitting their poems to publications that don’t specialize in haiku (but might, judging from the poet-reader’s interest in the work published there, be interested), despite the reduced chances of acceptance.”

I would strongly second this as a way of creating a wider audience for haiku. I think most haiku poets enjoy poetry in general and probably subscribe to and read various literary and poetry journals. I encourage those who are writing the excellent haiku that we see in the mainstream haiku journals to take the challenge and submit their work to those other poetry and literary journals. I have done this for many years now. It can be rather discouraging - especially if one’s work is usually accepted for publication in those mainstream haiku journals. My haiku have showed up in various non-haiku journals but mostly the experience is one of form rejection slips - or form e-mails now. Sometimes one receives an actual comment by the editor for the rejection - such as: we never publish haiku; haiku are too short for us; haiku don’t fit our format; appreciate the craft of haiku but we don’t publish them; I don’t have a way to judge good ones from bad ones. The comments don’t tell one anything about the quality of the submission. But by submitting one’s best work, if
nothing else, the editors will become aware that there is another world of haiku out there than the one they think they know.

Peter Yovu

REQUEST
I posted a request yesterday whose language, it was pointed out to me, may have been misleading.

Here it is again, clarified. I’ve been looking into ways to build a greater degree of coherence into Field Note’s discussions. It is inevitable that several topics get picked up at once, and at times get tangled.

For now, what I request is that posters make it as clear as possible which previous post or topic they are following at the beginning of their posts. How does it relate to the overall subject of FN5: criticism?

One focus of this discussion was taken from Michael Dylan Welch’s initial post, part of which brought up the issue of promoting and demonstrating excellence-- in individual poems and poets-- in the greater poetry world. Which led me to ask: what is excellence as it relates to haiku? What is the role of the critic in this regard? What are some examples of poems you regard as excellent? Does the question have implications which trouble you? Etc.

As I said, other topics have emerged. But again, if possible, please identify the conversation you are having at the outset. Locate us in your lineage.

This post follows Gary Hotham’s recent post above re: “promoting the work of the best haiku poets so as to reach a wider audience” as stated by Philip Rowland.

Philip goes on to say: “it might be as important for the poets themselves to reach other audiences by reading and submitting their poems to publications that don’t specialize in haiku (but might, judging from the poet-reader’s interest in the work published there, be interested)”
I think that last part is important. I take Philip to mean here that one may be able to determine the possibility of a journal’s willingness to look at haiku by what it has already published. It seems to me a journal which publishes minimalist poetry, for example, might be more inclined to accept haiku than would say, *American Poetry Review*, or *Ploughshares*.

However, there are reasons a number of journals put out the “no haiku” sign. One, quite frankly, is that they are looking for poetry. A lot of what is published in haiku journals does not look like, or appear to be poetry. It looks like haiku. In a haiku journal, that may be fine; in a poetry journal, haiku are likely to stand out as something akin, at best, to translation, as something requiring context.

Qualities that are typically considered to be elements of poetry are often absent in haiku, even what is considered “excellent” haiku. Qualities such as attention to the sounds and rhythms of words or to the image as act of imagination rather than reported picture, while not exactly universals in poetry in general, are rare in haiku. There is a feeling one gets, bolstered by statements made about haiku, that many writers do not see haiku as poetry. If one writes from that point of view, which I am not saying is a bad thing, perhaps one should not seek publication outside the haiku journals.

I suspect many editors are most open to work that, while it may have a clear form, plays with that form and also tests it. In a sense this is what poetry (or any creative act) is— a pushing against (womb, world, reality) until something is born.

Haiku, wrongly or rightly, are likely to be seen as asserting and maintaining form. If the energy of creation is reduced to maintaining form, the best one can hope for is a closed system, something which pre-exists and is now replicating itself.

Scott Metz and John Martone are two writers whose work does not announce itself foremost (form-most) as haiku. Gary Hotham’s well known poem

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fog.
sitting here
without the mountains
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is included in *Succinct The Broadstone Anthology of Short Poems* which also includes work by poets such as Robert Creeley, Galway Kinnell, and Jane Kenyon. I don’t believe the word haiku comes up anywhere in the book. I am reasonably sure that many readers coming upon this poem for the first time and in this context would not decide, upon first or even tenth reading that it is a haiku.

In the context of *Modern Haiku*, though, one would clearly and happily accept the lineage. In the context of say, Otoliths, which has published some of Metz’ work, one is more likely to see very brief, or minimalist, or even avant garde poems.

The haiku community, (roughly defined by someone on this forum I believe as the group of people who publish in the haiku journals), to a large extent provides the context which determines what haiku is. There are certain parameters beyond which a poem is not likely to recognized as haiku by that community. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing-- but it’s certainly a deeply influential thing. The “ghetto”, as Michael Dylan Welch calls it, pretty much maintains itself.

All of which may be less true in the past ten years than it was earlier. The “community” appears to be more porous, which delights some and disturbs others. But I believe that if one is serious about bringing haiku into the greater community of poetry, one essentially risks change. Attempting to publish, in a “mainstream” poetry journal, something which one holds onto dearly as haiku first and foremost and wants to have embraced as such, is in my opinion bound to result in rejection.

If one wants to publish haiku in any of its currently accepted forms, there are numerous journals available-- and I’m glad for that, truly. But seeking publication in other journals requires a degree of exposure to them which may result in one’s being influenced by what’s beyond the ghetto.

There’s a question most of us have no doubt asked at one point or another, perhaps as teenagers: can one be oneself and at the same time be open to other? The more mature question becomes, can one be oneself if one is not open to other?

The paradox, I believe, applies to haiku.
To respond, first, to Jack’s thoughts on the Riding and Graves extract from A Survey of Modernist Poetry: when they write (disapprovingly) of “a natural separation” being assumed (by Imagists and the like) to exist “between the reader and the subject,” by “subject” I think they just mean “what something is about.” Yes, they were proposing an alternative “modernism” (though keep in mind that this – in 1927 -- was an early use of the term); and they do discuss poems by Eliot, Pound, et al critically in light of their view. Needless to say, in quoting I’m not subscribing to their view of other modernist movements as “dead” (valuable as it is to critique their limitations, as did the Objectivists with respect to Imagism, for instance) or to the ideal of poetry as purely self-referential, though don’t we always try to let a poem as far as possible “interpret itself” (as R & G suggest) in trying to make sense of it? Isn’t the extent to which, in dwelling on a poem, we keep finding layers or webs of interrelated meaning one measure of its excellence?

At any rate, it’s an interesting “ideal” (as well as a kind of antidote to Imagism etc.) to which some of Riding’s poems in particular come close. Hard to locate, for instance, much “outside” reference in the poem of hers they quote as an example of “what might be called a modernist poem,” “The Rugged Black of Anger” -- which, they claim, seems difficult only because it so straightforwardly “says what it means.” Here’s the first stanza:

The rugged black of anger  
Has an uncertain smile-border.  
The transition from one kind to another  
May be love between neighbour and neighbour  
Or natural death; or discontinuance  
Because, so small is space,  
The extent of kind must be expressed otherwise;  
Or loss of kind when proof of no uniqueness  
Confutes the broadening edge and discourages.
I suppose part of my point in quoting from Riding and Graves was (on the topic of criticism) to raise the question of whether “the principle that poetry was [merely] a translation of certain kinds of subjects into the language that would bring the reader emotionally closest to them,” which R & G consider to have been taken “for granted” by “dead movements” such as Imagism, has tended to be taken too much for granted by writers of haiku in English. Perhaps one could say (to adopt R & G’s terms) that an excellent haiku does much more than “render a poetical picture or idea existing outside the poem”; that it has more of “the character of a creature by itself.” Examples, examples, I hear Peter say… so here, on the basis of this rather eccentric criterion for excellence, are a couple of haiku that spring to mind (from the latest issue of NOON), by Peter Yovu and Cherie Hunter Day, respectively, both of which seem more creaturely-by-themselves (and more self-referential) than most:

words furred over my awkward animal toward you now

an ashen language in the drive-by of our bones

And here are a couple of excellent ‘oldies’ in the same line of the tradition as the above, by Martin Shea and Robert Boldman:

Moving
  through the criteria –
    a breeze

leaves blowing into a sentence

Then I think of Mark Harris’s “burl bark grown into a wound a word”… Eve Luckring’s “the metallic taste / of what / I can’t imagine / negative tide”… (It seems there’s been more recurrence of language “itself” as subject-matter in contemporary haiku over the past 10-15 years, giving the impression that it’s been catching up, as it were, with developments in the wider scene of postmodern poetry.)
Jack also commented on WCW’S “no ideas but in things,” an idea that relates closely, of course, to haiku. To follow up briefly, here’s George Oppen interpreting it in a way I find helpful:

“I have always wondered whether that expression didn’t apply to the construction of meaning in a poem—not necessarily that there are out there no ideas but in things, but rather that there would be in the poem no ideas but those which could be expressed through the description of things.” (from an interview with L.S. Dembo in 1968).

I’ve just seen Peter’s latest post; very much agree with his statement: “I suspect many editors [of publications not specialized in haiku] are most open to work that, while it may have a clear form, plays with that form and also tests it. In a sense this is what poetry (or any creative act) is – a pushing against (womb, world, reality) until something is born.” Surely “excellence” is hardly possible without some sort of “testing” of the genre in which one is writing.

Speaking from my own little patch, certainly these are qualities that I’m looking for in choosing what to include in NOON: journal of the short poem, in which none of the haiku are labelled as such; nor, in my opinion, need they be. I want readers to encounter them as poems; and it’s always pleasing when poets and readers who have had, to my knowledge, little or nothing to do with the haiku scene, mention having found certain haiku from an issue particularly interesting and want to seek out more of that poet’s work.

Also good to find Peter’s “answer” to the question I mentioned hoping to raise in connection with the Riding and Graves passage, where he suggests that “Qualities such as attention to the sounds and rhythms of words or to the image as act of imagination rather than reported picture [the latter akin to Riding’s and Graves’s “rendering of a poetical picture … existing outside the poem”] … are rare in haiku.” I would hope, however, that many of the poems in Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years do show “such attention”; likewise, some “testing” (even, subtly, in many of the more “normative” haiku therein).
Phil’s post above offers much to think about. My post follows as divertissement, from Don’s, “Claiming ‘this or that’ [work of art, haiku] as excellent is frivolous with the exception of amusement.” Charles Bernstein might agree -- he critiques with both frivolity and amusement (though with relevance, bite and depth). My post draws on various additional statements made, for example:

“Michael Dylan Welch and others argued for promoting the work of the best haiku poets so as to reach a wider audience.”
“A lot of what is published in haiku journals does not look like, or appear to be poetry. It looks like haiku.”
“Sometimes one receives an actual comment by the editor for the rejection ... I don’t have a way to judge good ones from bad ones.”
“self-awareness [for ELH] regarding these roots is limited by circumstances”
“An excellent haiku needs to possess a certain clarity”
“I find overly intellectualized dense wordliness inscrutable as stone soup”
“haiku is at best a tiny spot on the fringe ...”
“[T]hey do not know what thought is like (Pound)”
“[Is] haiku written in historical perspective or is haiku out of this world?”
“... this last post of mine is not the kiss of death.”
“ELH should take steps to break out of the “haiku ghetto” and position itself, by various means, in the larger poetry community.
“... it’s a good way to get haiku out of the ghetto and into the hands of poets and poetry lovers in the mainstream.”
“Such poems may solve the ghettoization of haiku, but at a cost.”
Is haiku really in a ghetto – or is it a ghetto? It may be worth unpacking this image, tweeze out some of the thinking and assumptions behind it.

A ghetto is a place a minority group lives, especially “due to legal or economic pressure” (wiki). Is an implied sense of oppression appropriate here? Perhaps these synonyms are more fitting: shanty town, skid row, slum. “Gay ghetto” (wiki) is less of a stretch. We are all of a certain color (color me haiku) “with generally recognized boundaries,” yes.

Reading some of the above-excerpted posts (only back to page 2), expressed is the notion that acts of negative discrimination (ignoring, willful ignorance) rain on our parades, our notorious? bookstores and boutiques. Even if a friendly oasis (e.g. “Otoliths -- a magazine of many e-things”) or two exists, will our “difference” ever be understood, much less condoned? Will the power-hungry-money folk of city centers deign someday to stroll further than our outskirts I hear you say?

Is there lurking in this imagery of castigation and oppression a sense of victimhood, a resistant pride?

Do you want this genre to be different or not? Is to me an important question. If haiku (say for the sake of argument it exists) is a style of short-form poetry, a stylism – with its peculiarities yes, yet all told, of a piece as a province of the short form – then we have really hardly handy the stuff of identity politics. So let’s face it, the question of “placing” haiku as genuinely (generically) different, whether as a ghetto or as the rejected, lands squarely in the gaping maw of ideology, in that we are dealing with hidden biases and assumptions regarding the politics of self, poetry, art, society.

But, we do dare to be different and insist upon it, yes? Critics and pundits write about “the [haiku] tradition.” Even if ideological fallacy, this is one way identity “becomes.” Our becoming draws upon the stepping stones of cultural myth, mistranslation, a brooding even haunting sense of esoteric knowledge (as mostly Japan-feudal stories of enlightenment, purity, truth).

More, aesthetic terminology like wabi-sabi or yugen is assumed as central to haiku “difference.” By corollary, this means we shall not apply such terms to other poetic genres. So who’s doing the ignoring here?
glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Yugen jya nai!” trans. “Yugen, NO WAY!” (Note. If you don’t know what yugen is, you can’t claim to write haiku, by some accounts.) Yes we hoard our terminology. Perhaps there’s some crossover to ikebana, kyudo, some additional Japan-based contemplative arts, that’s about it.

It’s odd to think of a ghetto, when it’s our own method which not only creates difference but seemingly recoils from trans-genre similitude. If there is no phobia (specific pathology) which has been named for this disorder I would suggest Generaphobia (nearly a googlewhack).

So you want to join the crowd, but also stand tall and be proud. Find haiku in The New Yorker and also in the latest, greatest literary journals and anthologies? Best educate the masses. No, that can’t be right!? Best educate editors and critics. Poetry isn’t really popular anyway.

Let’s imagine then there is seduction and education. If haiku is “poetry with a difference” (for argument’s sake) then it must and readers must necessarily be reminded of this fact (in print). So must we then find in the general anthology a poetry section, perhaps a short-form poetry section, and absolutely a “haiku” section. Is it reasonable to expect haiku to be lumped in with (often similar) short-form poetics, when everything about our banner “THIS IS HAIKU” screams “THIS IS DIFFERENT”?

Excerpt from HNA Seattle 2011

The Imagining of Japan
The history of haiku in English in terms of its use of, and approach to language has less to do with Japan, than modernist movements – haiku
in English, from Blyth to the present has taken genre-defining concepts from the Japanese haiku (such as kire, ma, kireji, kigo, disjunctive compressive phrasing), but their application has always involved a transmutation and integration (for North American haiku) into the Modernist continuum. The Japanese haiku is something we imagine as a modality of and impetus for exploration and inspiration – we exist in a modern literary continuum. (Gilbert)

“… A poem isn’t just some abstract letters on a page; it exists within its social environment. And not just the given historical world of jobs and states and family, but the ones we make through our writing, our publishing, our exchanges. The value of poetry is also the value of articulating specific, yet contestable, aesthetic values. . . .

[W]e tried to focus our work more on an acknowledgement of the structures of language, forms, styles, and also the relationship of ideology to syntax, you might say, ideology to grammar, ideology to rhetoric, with the recognition that language is never neutral . . .” (“Charles Bernstein Interview with Romina Freschi,” 2005)

done you know and

it comes again for a moment

you thought what was you knew

There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. If we wish to make it louder, we will bring up the volume. If we wish to make it softer, we will tune it to a whisper. We will control the horizontal. We will control the vertical. We can roll the image, make it flutter. We can change the focus to a soft blur or sharpen it to crystal clarity. For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all that you see and hear. We repeat: there is nothing wrong
with your television set. You are about to participate in a great adventure. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to . . . (“The Control Voice,” Outer Limits, 1960s).

An aspect of hidden ideology for haiku has to do with value, esteem, estimation, by comparison to other genres. Negatively expressed, generaphobia may be indicated. What is this implied demand for recognition (of haiku) based upon? Thinking normatively, critics and scholars expect to find 1) group of excellent poets with 2) excellent books 3) presented to the world. Show me the money. List these award-winning books (generally recognized as excellent, not “haiku-recognized”). Name the authors. In Japan, excellence in haiku requires of an author several books each containing minimally 200 haiku, critically reviewed and recognized, plus at least a few published critical essays of excellence (published in important journals, read by various national haiku groups and schools). One’s professional reputation is based on such credentials. What does it say that we choose not to follow Japanese haiku culture in this regard? By this high standard could it fairly be argued that haiku in English has not yet achieved much as a literature? Our critics on occasion praise books of 60 poems, only a few of which may be really fresh -- very few haiku poets are studied enough to competently publish a critical essay in the field. This comment is offered objectively, as cross-cultural comparison, I hope you take it that way. Yet isn’t the standard of contemporary poetry in English more or less similar to that of the haiku world, in Japan? You may argue that a poet needn’t write in prose, and yet still be acclaimed. The trouble is, over the last century it’s hard to find one. (Even Billy Collins writes essays; flat and droll as death in Kansas, that man. Collins by example presents a cogent argument against popularity and acclaim -- a one-man wrecking ball. Many haiku are “Collins ku” unfortunately.)

The question of critical standards aside, let’s say haiku ideology demands that haiku be ghetto enough that the individual poem (and poet) can never be claimed as a true center. That it takes an anthology “to make a village.” This would be an interesting approach. Pursued for a paragraph:
Haiku in English remains a tenuous proposal – it may be that some find this very tenuousness related to excellence. There was a negative comment offered previously, that a given author cannot be determined from a given haiku. An old, old story for haiku, and no myth. Haiku an extremely short form, is distinguished by its fragmentary, non-narrative nature. How can there remain any question as to why authorality cannot be reliably determined? Who are we kidding? In rock music, one instantly knows the name of a great guitarist (singer, etc.) from one or two notes of any phrase or lick. Popular music! How much less possible for haiku. I think this will never be true for the genre. And a lick or two is really at most what we have to work with: we are calling it our song. This is a social-literary problem. There may be a phobia. A defensive resistance to the obvious. Ghetto pride?

Bernstein’s literary politics, ideological arguments, nearly insane yet lucid rants, attracted a large Gen X crowd to U. Buffalo to study a new (ideological) school of writing. Some of the vaguest stuff, Language poetry (as John Cage never said, “Everything you hear is language”). His encouragement was to take back public spaces – Bernstein urged poetic radicalism, urged that the art of the poem and the desire to reform and reframe society was a relevant synthesis. Voices that speak to this issue with authority have spurred new movements in poetry for quite some time. Might we re-orient critical acuity to the question of haiku and social engagement as a central feature of excellence.

I have little interest in The New Yorker, regarding haiku and social presence. Rather, YouTube, public parks, subway walking tunnels, graffiti, museum eateries, penetrations of the flaccid walls of industrial ugliness, mixed media -- modes of presentation and spaces stolen from us (the demos), by advertising and other propaganda; even LOL cats (though they are amazingly cute). How to use the power of haiku to reach those with open minds. Take back our (virtual) streets!

or as was what one was
comes rolling in
as a you and a huge!
I can’t get there, maybe you can.
Peter Yovu

This follows the immediate topic centered (more or less) on the last several posts related to criticism-- “excellence”-- promoting haiku beyond the “ghetto etc."

Because I heard my high pitched name whistled in a tree in Richard’s post, I will go there before saying anything else (and anything else requires of me that I study the past posts a bit).

Richard says:

“There was a negative comment offered previously, that a given author cannot be determined from a given haiku”.

I think what I could have said, though it may be no more pleasing, is that many haiku poets often seem to be writing versions of the same poem. Why is this?

It would be hard, in most instances, to determine authorship from one or a few poems. But for some who write haiku, look at a dozen of more of their poems and one can be more certain. I think this is true not because they have promoted their individuality or sought to be different but because they have not denied it.

Again, I don’t equate individuality with ego, but more as what I tried to present in my past post: being oneself is being open to other.

But here, for me, because I am not skilled at it, (I shy away from agoric hubbub) is where things become potentially sticky and where a patience almost impossible to find on a “forum” is required: many of us have come to very different views about what “the individual”, “the author”, “the self”, and “ego” are.
Karen Cesar

A question I have had for sometime regarding the notion of a “haiku ghetto” and the perceived desirability of promoting haiku to a wider audience is this: Such books as ‘Baseball Haiku,’ ‘The Essential Haiku,’ Haiku Moment,’ ‘The Haiku Anthology,’ ‘The Haiku Handbook,’ etc etc etc have been published by publishers such as Harper Collins, Norton & Co, Tuttle etc. These books and scores of others over the years are presumably intended for a wider audience than “the haiku community.” Would these publishers continue to publish haiku were it not being bought and read?

Consider also:

“Roberta Beary (www.robertabeary.com) is the haibun editor of Modern Haiku; she tweets her photoku @shortpoemz. Her book The Unworn Necklace was awarded a William Carlos Williams finalist award by the Poetry Society of America in 2007, the first such honor for a book of haiku.” (Haiku Foundation Site)

Seems like pretty good recognition for haiku from the wider poetry community to me.

Blue tiger
Because life is suffering,
We need one another
— Jack Galmitz, (Driftwood)
Karen Cesar rightly points out that the haiku anthologies published by commercial publishers are reaching a wider audience. But perhaps a distinction needs to be made between attracting a popular audience (to a small but presumably not unprofitable extent) and serious recognition by “official verse culture” (as Bernstein has called it). How many reading lists for higher educational courses in modern and contemporary poetry are any of those haiku anthologies on, for instance? Which poetry journals, other than specialist haiku ones, have they been reviewed in? Where are the haiku in other, widely respected poetry anthologies – except perhaps the token sample by poets represented mainly by the other kinds of poetry they wrote? Haiku does sometimes put in an appearance under broader cultural headings, e.g., *What Book?! Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-Hop*, and occasionally a sequence of haiku by a poet whose take on it bears little resemblance to that esteemed by the “haiku community” makes it into the pages of *The Best American Poetry* or the like. Whether any haiku that has come out of the community merits inclusion in anthologies like *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* or *The Oxford Book of Short Poems* is another question. (I do think an anthology such as the latter – which was reissued, unrevised, in 2003 – should have included some haiku, by the way.) My guess is that haiku – perhaps groups or sequences of haiku that resemble average-length or longer poems – will creep in to such anthologies where it forms part of the work by poets who write in other forms as well. But the more immediate, desirable thing, in my view, is simply the wider appreciation of the best of haiku in English by other poets and readers of poetry, even if that’s mostly in the realm of little magazines and small press publications (as is the case for most contemporary poetry).

Ron Silliman’s recognition (as judge of the William Carlos Williams award for that year) of *The Unworn Necklace* was great news, though it seems to have been a bit of a one-off. It’s not as if Silliman has followed through by promoting other fine collections of or with haiku, though he did post a joint review of *Haiku 21*, Jim Kacian’s *long after* and John Martone’s *Ksana* on his blog. So perhaps I’m being unfair: that’s a fair bit of interest shown by a critic who covers such a wide range of work. But where are the others?
Revisiting Silliman’s comments on *The Unworn Necklace*... the following paragraph sums it up:

“If slam poets & visual poets go around thinking that nobody takes their genres seriously as literature, haiku poetry has been off the map altogether – a genuinely popular literary art form that receives no attention whatsoever from what Charles Bernstein would call Official Verse Culture unless it is for a new translation of one of the classics, or work by a poet, such as Anselm Hollo, already widely known and respected for writing in other forms.”

Richard Gilbert

Phil writes:

Whether any haiku that has come out of the community merits inclusion in anthologies like *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* or *The Oxford Book of Short Poems* is another question.

Phil, could you say something more specific, in terms of the question you raise, concerning inclusion in such anthologies? How do you scope out the situation?

Phil writes:

(I do think an anthology such as the latter [the Oxford] – which was reissued, unrevised, in 2003 – should have included some haiku, by the way.) My guess is that haiku – perhaps groups or sequences of haiku that resemble average-length or longer poems – will creep in to such
anthologies where it forms part of the work by poets who write in other forms as well.

Are you thinking of someone like Martone here? Ashbery is a given, though it’s doubtful his haiku (as so-titled) have but a glancing relation with “the haiku community”? Adding to the confusion might be Ginsberg’s “American sentences” which do appear in a few major anthologies -- he referred to them as haiku, didn’t he? And there’s Kerouac (to the extent he’s recognized as a poet). Would you consider these three luminaries most representative of haiku (experiment) today, from the viewpoint of wider literary culture? If so, haiku, where it appears as experiment, seems to bear little relation to “haiku tradition” or “haiku community”?

Phil writes:

But the more immediate, desirable thing, in my view, is simply the wider appreciation of the best of haiku in English by other poets and readers of poetry, even if that’s mostly in the realm of little magazines and small press publications (as is the case for most contemporary poetry)

I appreciate what you’re saying -- your thought seems to follow from the problematics of “wider audience” reception. But how to get the word out? Would it be possible -- here (or elsewhere on the THF site) -- to present a cogent shortlist of those online and print magazines you are thinking of? There’s a plethora of materials; ceaseless research is required to follow them -- not to mention, an ongoing interest in non-haiku-associated poets and works. Your list might be good, for a start -- could you present some concrete recommendations?

Phil writes:
It's not as if Silliman has followed through by promoting other fine collections of or with haiku, though he did post a joint review of Haiku 21, Jim Kacian’s long after and John Martone’s Ksana on his blog. So perhaps I'm being unfair: that’s a fair bit of interest shown by a critic who covers such a wide range of work. But where are the others?

Right--. My chewing on this conundrum of haiku and wider audience reception has moved in a different direction. In my last post, toward the end: “Might we re-orient critical acuity to the question of haiku and social engagement as a central feature of excellence. I have little interest in The New Yorker, regarding haiku and social presence. Rather, YouTube, public parks, subway walking tunnels, graffiti, museum eateries, penetrations of the flaccid walls of industrial ugliness, mixed media -- modes of presentation and spaces stolen from us (the demos), by advertising and other propaganda...”

My perspective has been most directly inspired by Bernstein’s lectures and essays. This led me to propose (to Red Moon Press) the The Natural Night Haiku Anthology -- which represents a move away from literary community, as primary audience -- particularly if an ebook (amazon, etc. downloadable) is envisioned, as an aspect of the proposal. The sky is (or was) a kind of ultimate public space--rather larger than a park. It’s my feeling that the power of haiku may be limited by those contexts they are typically presented in: the journal, and small-press haiku-only collections (presenting basically the “self” of the poet). I feel that haiku often speak to a larger context, but are not being placed into these contexts, for the reader. Haiku of excellence are potent messages, provocative and deepening. You mentioned the “sequence” (in relation to anthology inclusion creep) -- I’m interested in how haiku might be “sequenced” within stories (like the story of the night sky) which contain “non-poetic” information (scientific, photographic, etc.) and, with a very loose approach to the meaning of “haiku.” (You can check out the concept in detail from the link.)

Another decision with “Natural Night” was to retain “haiku” in the title. In my opinion the term retains social value and a sense of history--when aligned with non-haiku topics (e.g. night sky issues with lighting; issues related to ecological
awareness). The conflation has aroused curiosity. It strikes me that there are any number of topical issues in which haiku could play a powerful role. We need to step out of brick wall thinking, regarding haiku and “official verse culture.”

*Alan Summers*

On two side notes but I hope prove useful:

Roberta Beary’s award-winning collection was edited to be as close as possible to a verse novel as possible. This further brought the collection closer together than even a well thought out collection, and would engage readers, and judges alike, in my opinion.

Verse novels can be popular like the haiku titled The Monkey’s Mask which was also made into a movie.

Narrative seems to be a strong feature in poetry which is why it so successfully translocated to HipHop and Rap for instance with Eminem, The Streets, Tupac, and slam poet/rapper Polar Bear. A public can identify themselves with these narratives, and perhaps where haiku is often seen as ‘extreme brevity’ and anti-narrative within each poem and in some collections, it struggles beyond being recognised as bodies of work.

Regarding fairly new *The Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry* it has broken away from the predictable and sometimes stuffy other poetry awards. This year the shortlist includes well-known Hannah Silva (performance poet etc... who studied at the same university as myself).

A weakness I’ve observed is that unlike other page poets, haiku writers are often not engaged with performance poetry skills, which are more and more vital nowadays to communicate and connect with an audience.

American Poets Laureate often come over to the City of Bath, England, next door to my town, and know how to perform their poetry and engage in a narrative around their work, and include humor, and capitivate a very discerning audience often
made up of published poets, and editors of small presses, and even larger presses.

Hannah Silva has worked long and hard at her craft, and though some may consider her young she is an award winning writer and theatre maker, described by The Times (British newspaper) as ‘one of the most ambitious and entertaining poets in the country’.

Many poets are expected to have at least some performance skills, perhaps written a play or two, a novel, a collection of short stories. It’s becoming rarer that a poet just writes poetry ‘off stage’.

Quote from: Philip Rowland on March 02, 2014, 08:05:07 PM

Revisiting Silliman’s comments on The Unworn Necklace... the following paragraph sums it up:
“If slam poets & visual poets go around thinking that nobody takes their genres seriously as literature, haiku poetry has been off the map altogether – a genuinely popular literary art form that receives no attention whatsoever from what Charles Bernstein would call Official Verse Culture unless it is for a new translation of one of the classics, or work by a poet, such as Anselm Hollo, already widely known and respected for writing in other forms.”

Slam poets, of which I’ve been a judge on a few occasions, have moved on and attract big audiences for their work. And often cut their teeth or maintain those teeth in challenging festivals as the world-wide famous Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I think some British haiku poets attempted the Fringe, a couple of years back, perhaps it’s time for an international group?
To attempt to answer Richard’s questions in reply #64:

I’m afraid I can’t really “scope out the situation” re mainstream anthologies and haiku (at least, not without more thought than I’m capable of right now), though when it comes to anthologies focused on short poems, tend to think that the omission of haiku is largely due to lack of awareness on the part of the editors, or their being biased towards recognizable (well-known) names.

When I wrote,

“My guess is that haiku – perhaps groups or sequences of haiku that resemble average-length or longer poems – will creep in to such anthologies where it forms part of the work by poets who write in other forms as well”

I didn’t have any particular poets in mind, was thinking of possible future scenarios, though yes, Ashbery first published his “37 Haiku” as a group in the magazine Sulfur, and Martone tends to present his poems in clusters. I guess I was also thinking of how some poets, notably Rae Armantrout, often construct poems from several very short pieces separated by asterisks or such, that connect in ways that are quite oblique.

Where I wrote of the desired

“wider appreciation of the best of haiku in English by other poets and readers of poetry, even if that’s mostly in the realm of little magazines and small press publications (as is the case for most contemporary poetry),”
you asked,

“Would it be possible -- here (or elsewhere on the THF site) -- to present a cogent shortlist of those online and print magazines you are thinking of?”

This will be eclectic rather than cogent – I tend to follow my nose, and to think that poets who write haiku should try submitting to whichever magazines they enjoy reading or are interested in (after all, if you like some of the work that the editor has chosen, perhaps s/he might like yours as well) – but off the top of my head, some poetry mags that have been or might be open to haiku (though don’t quote me!) are:

Print: Shearsman, Versal, CLWN WR, Poetry Salzburg Review, HQ Magazine (not sure if that’s still going), Longhouse (prolific publishers of booklets), Inch, Bongos of the Lord (defunct?), Vallum, Hummingbird, Lilliput Review, Poetry Kanto Online: Big Bridge, Ekleksographia, Otoliths, Oyster Boy Review, Cordite and of course there’s always (touch wood) NOON: journal of the short poem…

As for ‘how haiku might be “sequenced” within stories which contain “non-poetic” information’ as compared to more traditional modes of presentation, it’s a case of both/and, if possible, I hope.

Richard Gilbert

Phil, Thanks for your further thoughts -- and for the eclectic list! Each new name will be an exploration. I’ve commented to you before that one of the aspects of Noon that has influenced me is the sense I feel of content-selection as “community” (I think of a forest) -- with a sense of reader-journey. As well, to an extent there are (with a light touch) thematic issues woven through the pages -- one might opine this approach, intentionally or not, intriguingly addresses issues of narrative and
“story” vis a vis haiku. I appreciate the editorial vision and clarity. This may sound like flattery, but what the hell.

I mention this because I too feel potential in the sequence, or strands of sequences. I was not exactly joking with “let’s say ... that haiku [are approached as] ghetto enough that the individual poem (and poet) can never be claimed as a true center. That it takes an anthology ‘to make a village.’ This would be interesting...” For sure, there have been some powerful single-author collections of late. I don’t want to imply a diminishment of the importance of personal achievement -- on the other hand, the fact that haiku can “speak” to each other, via editorial placement -- I feel this potency in the genre is critically under-appreciated. That Noon blends what are considered haiku with more extensive poetic forms is likewise provocative.

I doubt that readers or critics (or authors, perhaps) are quite prepared for the idea of an editor “cohering” multiple works of a variety of authors into a single co-authored work -- I’d like to see a book like this. Reader-journey: I think about this, and I imagine you also consider this aspect deeply, within the process of developing a Noon issue?

(The mea culpa here for going off-topic is that editorial excellence, in terms of presentation, may perhaps be relevant to the future of haiku as a genre.)

J Galmitz

Response to P. Rowland re me and the 1927 commentary of the language orientation of language:

I have to say, Philip, that I am all too well aware of what Riding and Graves were speaking of: after all, in the early 1980s I had already read F. De Saussure’s lectures, and if I might be so bold, if anyone had been paying attention to my ouvre (dare I?) they would have noticed that around 2005 or so I was already moving in the direction of language poetry in haiku (with Driftwood, A New Hand, For a Sparrow),
to be followed by nothing but language poetry haiku. Well versed in semiotics, as well, and the entire language philosophy and self-referentiality mentioned as early as 27 by R & G.

So, it was surprising, me thinks, that as usual all that could be found to represent my contribution to haiku in the recent anthology and even the H21 was one poem and then a few that were hardly representative.

My problem with the quote from R&G was its speaking of Pound et al as dead letters: what nonsense and self-promotion. After all, language either does or does not refer and though it always has a meaning, a referent, it does not have a reference (directly) to a world, given that language is non-motivated, negative in so far as words do not bespeak things, negative insofar as non-mirroring is its ambience.

So, whether or not, say Pound and the Imagists, including WCW, thought there was or was not a world to which words referred and could come closer to, the very nature of language kept their language self-referential and non-enclosed and finished re interpretation.

Whether there is realism or not does not matter given the self-signifying nature of language, right? It is always language speaking itself, never achieving a cinch with the world- even the basic premise that language is abstract and cannot refer to individual existences should suffice to close the argument on realism.

Anyway, thought I’d champion myself, since I’ve always felt, and not with delusion, slighted and underestimated and over-looked in the slums of haiku. Thank God for Karen Cesar!!

and to light the molotov cocktail
I would add that the cut
does not the thing make
that I have used ambiguity
the indeterminacy of language
as the american way of stopping
the mind- what someone called aesthetic arrest ( i thought that was joyce's).
To think that the dash, ellipsis, whatever take your choice brings us before the Almighty, the Void, the Supreme, etc. is the most presumptuous thing I have ever in my long life heard; what audacity to think that this particular between- as if every single letter beside what it is not is not how we distinguish difference and identity and this dash dot dot is the Ultimate bespeaks a naivite that I cannot fathom. to speak of the dao god help us there is a leap between every letter and every word so I don’t write haiku anymore- turned to short short fiction and free verse just to get away from the sledge hammer of this tiny tiny little bitsy poem

Peter Yovu

I am a reluctant moderator-- but nonetheless want to say here that it is important to stay on topic as much as possible. This does not mean that topics introduced are to be abandoned-- they can be picked up (by anyone) in a separate thread if so wished. That can be done in the In-Depth Haiku: Free Discussion Area.

The subject of language, in the way it is being used here, is an important one, and I hope it will be looked at, either in the aforementioned way, or as a Field Notes subject in the future. I realize that in many respects the subject relates to criticism and “excellence”, but it feels to me to be a subject which requires its own base.

Richard Gilbert

Jack, I think you are way off topic -- we could start a different thread in the “in depth discussion” section of the forum on this (your focus and brief).
That said I know what you mean. You wrote “Thank God for Karen Cesar!!” (Two exclamation points, my god.) You wrote:

Whether there is realism or not does not matter given the self-signifying nature of language, right? It is always language speaking itself, never achieving a cinch with the world- even the basic premise that language is abstract and cannot refer to individual existences should suffice to close the argument on realism.

So as Karen wrote:

A question I have had for sometime regarding the notion of a “haiku ghetto” and the perceived desirability of promoting haiku to a wider audience is this: Such books as ‘Baseball Haiku’...

Do you then place “baseball haiku” (being as language-self-referential as anything else) into a similar arena as, well, the kinds of things you aren’t recognized for? (And really, who is recognized for any haiku?) I think your notion of a fait accompli concerning realism misses the point: the problem of, and assumed stance, of literalism.

Now tell me literalism is a language feature, and I’ll ask you about paying the rent. As per Peter’s post, above? We do move now away from excellence in haiku. So let’s move back into it. Jack: can you speak directly to what strikes you as valuable, in terms of excellence in haiku -- succinctly, as possible. As you know, I think (mono-dimensional, fixated) literalistic thinking is a kind of pathology, and it’s a problem vis haiku and excellence, for me. What resonates with you?

A further goad. pnewton posted Anita Virgil’s “Do’s.” Here is

#4. Does it avoid simile, metaphor, personification, clichés?
False, false, false, true (if cliché is merely that, lacking deformation, irony or what have you). It’s also hard to think of haiku as an “it” -- but I quibble.

J Galmitz

Well, Richard, off topic or no, I couldn’t imagine going to another site when what I wanted to talk about was referenced (literally) in this thread.

Now, as for Karen Cesar: the !! is because nothing more than Karen acknowledges my existence, quotes a poem I wrote and all in all knows my work.

As to literal, well, there’s an interesting problem, because the original meaning (and that’s all we have isn’t it?) of the word is reference to what is said in Scripture (as opposed to interpretation of it, allegorical readings, mystical readings, and I would add exegesis), and also refers to what is literary, belonging to letters or writing, and in this etymological sense, yes, I have no problem with the literal.

On the other hand, I take what you mean to be that realism as a form of literalism means the vacancy of language when used or the transparency of the world and what is referred to in the use of language and no I do not hold to that view.

Yet, if you know, as you know, that words always refer to words and more words and never reach finally their destination in the thing referred to, but only in a referent (meaning) and not the “thing,” yes I agree with you. But, interpretation is available, I am saying, even in realism to something non-literal, but let me not be too coy here.

As to baseball haiku, no I don’t recognize its excellence, yet there is in it- intertextually- reference to Coover’s Universal Baseball Association, Inc., and perhaps Shoeless Joe Jackson, and all the narratives that combine in the give and take of announcers doing a baseball game. You have a literal book about baseball in the greatest book of haiku about baseball ever written (the only one of course) and does it not bring with it the entire history of the game and the history of history that was coexistent with it?

Or am I playing too much here.
Would it be too far off topic of excellence if I mentioned my father’s telling me as a boy that Ty Cobb was so disliked that at his funeral only 2 men showed up. And, if my wife, who is 8 years older than me should pass away before me, then there will be no one at my funeral- so so much for Ty Cobb and determination and kindness.

Richard Gilbert

Jack, you said

As to baseball haiku, no I don’t recognize its excellence . . .

Why not? What’s the issue? The topic is haiku and excellence. Could you quote say 2 or 3 haiku (not your own) that you feel have excellence, by contrast?

Philip Rowland

For what it’s worth, Jack, I wasn’t presuming anything about what you were or weren’t aware of, in connection with the Riding Graves passage; just took a thought you posed as a question as such. And as I wrote, in quoting I wasn’t subscribing to their view of “dead movements” -- agree that there’s nonsense in that -- but was trying to focus on what struck me as interesting rather than nonsensical in their argument. Okay, what was meant as a side-note has taken us off-topic, so enough of that.

J Galmitz

Thank you Philip for the gentlemanly response.
Frankly, the only reason I felt some ire was because I had just been discussing Pound and what I took as his Excellency’s haiku in the Metro.

And, I have to admit to having miffed the fellow who wanted me to read a haikuist’s essay on whether or not Pound’s poem was “actually” a haiku.

So, I took your remarks as further flurries of bullets over my head.

Actually, I was glad to read Riding in particular— you are quite right, she does illustrate her point the better of the two.

Philip Rowland

I’d add to Richard’s mea culpa, in reply #67, re editorial style of presentation of haiku having perhaps to do with to its future as a genre, that this can be seen as a (creative) kind of criticism -- with a role to play in haiku criticism. Whether, for instance, a normative 3-line haiku appears among similar haiku or juxtaposed with a long-lined short poem in stanzas with a title may affect the kind of attention you pay to it. The change of pace will give you pause; the formal differences might make you consider the choice of form -- its appropriateness or limitation -- more carefully than you would otherwise; at the same time you might read with a keener eye for what the two poems have in common, how they relate thematically and play off or deepen one another. On a larger scale, this may touch on a new sense of poetic community (or commonality), which may in turn shift the critical mindset or frame of reference.

Don Baird

I would greatly appreciate keeping the topic “on topic” and in particular, to refrain from personal attacks and/or sarcasm. I understand that it can be quite easy to become a bit riled up in the heady game of differing opinions. But, honestly, we
cannot (and shouldn’t) “go there”.

The posts have been amazing; your opinions have been carefully structured and well thought out. And, I’m positive that the folks following along are enjoying your diverse opinions and posits - enough for someone to ponder for years (already).

Thank you all for the tremendous efforts you have offered. But, lets rein in just a bit to keep this at the professional level we’re used to.

J Galmitz

At this juncture, after all is said, which excellence are we discussing. The Greek and Roman conception? The Japanese, referred to I believe as Shibui. Since we are talking about an art that many or some feel should be modeled after the original wouldn't it be wise to differentiate cultural, historical standards for what excellence would mean in the context of a 21 Century Japanese poetic form and what its original meaning was for the Japanese in the 17th Century and earlier? Or is it perfectly fine to simply use our discretion and our personal understanding of what is meant by excellence to address excellence as an issue? Will the starting point not wholly influence the result of the response? What do you think?

Just one further observation. And this is on point, on all fours as they say.

If we take the prominent theory of language as propounded by De Saussure in the early part of the 20th C and continued as ground for the writings of Derrida, Barthes, et al, how are we to ever define excellence or rather recognize it outside of a language system.

Okay, so we stay within language. That’s fine.

But the most telling thing De Saussure said was that language was arbitrary, unmotivated, meaning there was no natural relationship between the sound-image, the idea, and the thing referenced thereby.

Words were negative; that was their essence. What he meant was that all words and
their components are what they are because they are not something else. When we read or hear we distinguish difference, not sameness. What this entails is that language has no positive existence.

If there is no positive existence to language and its components, then we can only understand excellence as not not excellence. Which is fine, but different than giving a positive spin to excellence and then finding positive examples of it.

With this in mind is excellence in haiku whatever is not not excellent and if so we would have to have examples of the not excellent, but this would lead us, would it not, in a circle, because not excellent derives its meaning from what it is not, which is excellence.

So? Please continue on with your examples, examinations, opinions, judgements, and so forth.

Richard Gilbert

Phil, an intriguing series of thoughtful steps, from:

... re editorial style of presentation of haiku having perhaps to do with to its future as a genre, that this can be seen as a (creative) kind of criticism -- with a role to play in haiku criticism.

To:

Whether, for instance, a normative 3-line haiku appears among similar haiku or juxtaposed with a long-lined short poem in stanzas with a title may affect the kind of attention you pay to it. The change of pace will give you pause; the formal differences might make you consider the choice of form -- its appropriateness or limitation -- more carefully than you
would otherwise; at the same time you might read with a keener eye for what the two poems have in common, how they relate thematically and play off or deepen one another.

To:

On a larger scale, this may touch on a new sense of poetic community (or commonality), which may in turn shift the critical mindset or frame of reference.

This last especially interests me, in that you are grounding the “larger scale” of “a new sense of poetic community” and potential “shift [in] the critical mindset” in the particular: the smaller-scale experience of reading poems -- qualitatively unique experiences of aesthetic savor or arrest (e.g. “the change of pace will give you pause”) -- something mentioned earlier, in determining excellence. An editor may (with permission) willfully re-arrange lineation and layout (and create sequences), as a creative act. This has rarely been done in the haiku genre.

Earlier quoted was “glazed with rain/water/ /beside the white/chickens” whose layout remains striking (sense of breath and space, objective breaking of syntax). Today, was reading WCW’s “Young Woman At a Window” A) as part of a two-poem series; then examining the two published versions of the poem: 1) Version 1 and 2) Version 2.

How charged the same poem becomes when it follows “The Raper From Passenack” (pub. 1935; definitely not a “chicken” poem) in A) (and note the 3-line/disjunctive “haikuesque” style of “The Raper’s” stanzas); how differently 1) & 2) read from each other. Each its own universe. (I note WCW’s signature lineational style -- one rarely applied to haiku/sequences. Martone sometimes lineates similarly -- I often reflect on WCW, reading him.) This, by way of example.
In the visual arts this “(creative) kind of criticism” that Phil and Richard are talking about is called curating.

A curator absolutely shapes how individual works are understood by controlling the context in which they are seen. A curator is analogous to the role of an editor in literary terms. Though, very often, in the visual arts, curators write catalog essays for their exhibitions, so they in fact function overtly as critics. I can recall several exhibitions that have entirely revamped how a particular artist’s work is seen historically.

Curating is an art-form in itself, more difficult than it might seem. Inspired curators make connections between works and between artists that highlight the intrinsic properties of individual pieces or, of one artist’s oeuvre in relation to another’s. Or as Phil says, “shift the critical mindset or frame of reference.” I think NOON and Lilliput Review are great examples of this for the reasons Phil and Richard have commented. The editorial/curatorial process of a group of poems/artworks always shifts the connotations of individual works, as in the example that Richard gives of placing two WC Williams poems side by side.

Unfortunately, there has been a trend in the visual arts for curators to want to take center stage for career building purposes—the curator’s name is increasingly the first thing one reads on an exhibition announcement. So, on the flip side of thoughtful curating are shows that are more about building a roster of art-stars organized rather lazily around some trendy topic. In other words, the driving force is not really the work itself and the curator has not done the research, or does not have the background, to justify their curatorial premise. When done poorly, it seems that curators are frustrated artists who want to have their own show. Of course one can decide not to submit work to a given journal if one feels the way things are put together are lower than one’s quality standards, though in the visual arts, curators often become the gate-keepers to all kinds of things like grant funding, access to collections, etc. etc. So, I have mixed feelings about this whole thing, because curators—and many editors—in the end, have the upper hand in a power
relationship.

However, that said, I would so welcome more journals--or presses-- that concentrate on short poetry and include haiku and tanka as part of a diverse mix of approaches. Perhaps these efforts could produce issues that juxtapose a handful of poets along with a critical essay, or pick a theme to curate around, again with a critical essay examining that theme. (Richard, your Natural Night).

Mark Harris

I’m continuing some ideas offered by Richard and Phil on frames of reference, and Eve’s more recent comment posted on 3/4/14:

Eve’s analogy with visual arts curation provides a lens through which we can examine the topic of authorship and readership. Yes, the way curators, and the institutions behind them, frame the scholarship that accompanies an exhibition speaks volumes. And the way pictures are arranged on the wall, the juxtapositions chosen--as a museum preparator, that process is familiar to me. We seldom have much time to install exhibitions. Years of planning end in a motley crew hanging and lamping the production within a few days. Despite the power relationships, which are of course real and sometimes grudgingly accepted, something wonderful happens then. When it comes to the layout of the art, the best laid plans are usually discarded, at least in part. We’ll look at a wall, say “this isn’t working” and then change it, as a group, each of us playing a greater or lesser part.

Who is the author? Where does the power reside? Not so clear.

All that brings my mother to mind. When my sister and I were young, she used to read aloud to us. From picture books at first, and later novels, trilogies and longer series. She’s a born performer and had a way of inhabiting the characters and also the authorial voice. She made those books come alive! I remember listening with bated breath, experiencing whole literary worlds through her adult, slightly alien perception. Disbelief was not entirely suspended; I would read along over her shoulder, and my own interpretation paralleled hers.
When I read work by critics and editors with a talent for sharing their love of poem and text, I feel I’m being read to (and read along). Criticism as creative act: I can only imagine that’s not easy to accomplish without taking too many liberties, and yet the results of picking “a theme to curate around,” as Eve puts it, can be stimulating and fun. If we’re looking for a model of a critical work curated around a theme, my first thought is of Hiro Sato’s One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English(Weatherhill, 1983).

Richard Gilbert

‘Literature and Society: The Vanished Debate’

Continuing on the theme of criticism in relation to the poem, the self (oneself), the author, institution, canon (&c.). With a focus on the question of talent. Just below, are seven prescient paragraphs by Martin Amis, elucidating Robbbins’ perspective, though with greater scope (from a British perspective it hardly needs mentioning). I’ll place the “FN5 ‘linking’” replies after the Amis quotation, to illustrate connections within this ongoing thread. Do you find Amis accurate, relevant, illuminating here?


[The 1970s] now seems unrecognizably remote. I had a day job at the Times Literary Supplement. Even then I sensed discrepancy, as I joined an editorial conference (to help prepare, perhaps, a special number on Literature and Society), wearing shoulder-length hair, a flower shirt, and knee-high tricoloured boots (well-concealed, it is true, by the twin tepees of my flared trousers). My private life was middle-bohemian — hippyish and hedonistic, if not candidly debauched; but I was very moral when it came to literary criticism. I read it all the time, in the tub, on the tube; I always had about me my Edmund Wilson — or my William Empson. I took it seriously. We all did. We hung around the place talking about...
literary criticism. We sat in pubs and coffee bars talking about W.K. Wimsatt and G. Wilson Knight, about Richard Hoggart and Northrop Frye, about Richard Poirier, Tony Tanner and George Steiner. It might have been in such a locale that my friend and colleague Clive James first formulated his view that, while literary criticism is not essential to literature, both are essential to civilization. Everyone concurred. Literature, we felt, was the core discipline; criticism explored and popularized the significance of that centrality, creating a space around literature and thereby further exalting it. The early Seventies, I should add, saw the great controversy about the Two Cultures: Art v. Science (or F.R. Leavis v. C.P. Snow). Perhaps the most fantastic thing about this cultural moment was that Art seemed to be winning.

Literary historians know it as the Age of Criticism. It began, let us suggest, in 1948, with the publication of Eliot’s Notes Towards the Definition of Culture and Leavis's The Great Tradition. What ended it? The brutalist answer would consist of a single four-letter word: OPEC. In the Sixties you could live on ten shillings a week: you slept on people’s floors and sponged off your friends and sang for your supper — about literary criticism. Then, abruptly, a bus fare cost ten shillings. The oil hike, and inflation, and then stagflation, revealed literary criticism as one of the many leisure-class fripperies we would have to get along without. Well, that’s how it felt. But it now seems clear that literary criticism was inherently doomed. Explicitly or otherwise it had based itself on a structure of echelons and hierarchies; it was about the talent elite. And the structure atomized as soon as the forces of democratization gave their next concerted push.

Those forces — incomparably the most potent in our culture -have gone on pushing. And they are now running up against a natural barrier. Some citadels, true, have proved stormable. You can become rich without having any talent (via the scratchcard and the rollover jackpot). You can become famous without having any talent (by abasing yourself on some TV nerdothon: a clear improvement on the older method of simply killing a celebrity and inheriting the aura). But you cannot become talented without having any talent. Therefore, talent must go.
Literary criticism, now almost entirely confined to the universities, thus moves against talent by moving against the canon.

Academic preferment will not come from a respectful study of Wordsworth's poetics; it will come from a challenging study of his politics - his attitude to the poor, say, or his unconscious ‘valorization’ of Napoleon; and it will come still faster if you ignore Wordsworth and elevate some (justly) neglected contemporary, by which process the canon may be quietly and steadily sapped. A brief consultation of the Internet will show that meanwhile, at the other end of the business, everyone has become a literary critic — or at least a book-reviewer. Democratization has made one inalienable gain: equality of the sentiments. I think Gore Vidal said this first, and he said it, not quite with mockery, but with lively scepticism. He said that, nowadays, nobody’s feelings are more authentic, and thus more important, than anybody else’s. This is the new credo, the new privilege. It is a privilege much exercised in the contemporary book-review, whether on the Web or in the literary pages. The reviewer calmly tolerates the arrival of the new novel or slim volume, defensively settles into it, and then sees which way it rubs him up. The right way or the wrong way. The results of this contact will form the data of the review, without any reference to the thing behind. And the thing behind, I am afraid, is talent, and the canon, and the body of knowledge we call literature.

Probably some readers are getting the impression that I think these developments are to be deplored. Not so. It is the summit of idleness to deplore the present, to deplore actuality. Say whatever else you like about it, the present is unavoidable. And we, in the Seventies, were frequently ridiculous, too, with our Fallacies and our Seven Types (and Leavis's besieged intensity was ridiculous. His shaping embarrassment, however, was to nominate as his model for sanity the person of D.H. Lawrence). Emotional egalitarianism, for example, looks hard to attack. I honour it, in a way, but it has to me the pale glow of illusion. It is Utopian, which is to say that reality cannot be expected to support it. Then, too, these ‘feelings’ are seldom unadulterated; they are admixtures of herd opinions and social anxieties, vanities, touchinesses, and everything else that makes up a self.

One of the historical vulnerabilities of literature, as a subject for study, is that it has never seemed difficult enough. This may come as news to the buckled figure of the
book-reviewer, and to the literary critic, but it’s true. Hence the various attempts to elevate it, complicate it, systematize it. Interacting with literature is easy. Anyone can join in, because words (unlike palettes and pianos) lead a double life: we all have a competence. It is not surprising, therefore, that individual sensitivities come so strongly into play; not surprising, either, that the discipline has rolled over for democratization far more readily than, for example, chemistry and Ancient Greek. In the long term, though, literature will resist levelling and revert to hierarchy. This isn’t the decision of some snob of a belletrist. It is the decision of Judge Time, who constantly separates those who last from those who don’t.

Let me run, for a while, with an extended simile. Literature is the great garden that is always there and is open to everyone twenty-four hours a day. Who tends it? The old tour guides and sylviculturists, the wardens, the fuming parkies in their sweat-soaked serge: these have died off. If you do see an official, a professional, nowadays, then he’s likely to be a scowl in a labcoat, come to flatten a forest or decapitate a peak. The public wanders, with its oohs and ahs, its groans and jeers, its million opinions. The wanderers feed the animals, they walk on the grass, they step in the flowerbeds. But the garden never suffers. It is, of course, Eden; it is unfallen and needs no care.

Thematic links, back through this thread:

Eve Luckring wrote (Reply #1 on: January 25, 2014):

“I appreciate criticism that makes me think about an artwork/poem, or an artist’s/poet’s body of work, in a new way. Usually this is because the critic puts the object of discussion in context of something bigger:

--the histories that surround the work,
--the formal attributes of the work in relation to other poetry/art (of the past or present),
--the social/cultural context that the work intersects with
--the life experiences and artistic/philosophical inquiry of the artist/poet

A good critic has to be very well informed.
...
I think only a very small percentage of the “haiku community” has interest in the type of more scholarly criticism I crave. This makes me sad because I feel this type of reflection and contemplation--thinking about how something works and the contexts that surround it--can help deepen our relationship to what we do.”

Mark Harris wrote (Reply #27 on: February 13, 2014):

“Years ago, I went to art school to study painting. Art handling was a way to pay the bills at first; all these years later, here I am still doing it. It’s good work. To hold a Rubens, a Maya chocolate drinking cup, or an Albers in my hands can be a thrill. And to share them with the public, that’s also a thrill. . . . Painting is dead, people have been saying ever since [cf. c. 1961, Albers, the height of Modernism], and yet it never quite does die.”

Eve Luckring wrote (Reply #36 on: February 19, 2014):

“It fascinated me that Grenier was removed from the latest edition of Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology, presumably to make room for some new additions, or…”

I commented: “This essay ably demonstrates not only excellent criticism, but also some of the reasons why criticism is vital in arts culture. Within are longstanding issues in contemporary criticism: canonicity, institutions (& -alities), academia, in-groups, posturing, poetry versus ideology.”

Mark Harris commented (Reply #83: March 07, 2014) (“...continuing some ideas offered by Richard and Phil on frames of reference, and Eve’s more recent comment posted on 3/4/14”):
“Who is the author? Where does the power reside? Not so clear.”
field notes
For Field Notes 6 panelists were asked to talk about the importance of sound and rhythm in haiku, or simply about what sound means to them as writers and readers of haiku. As always, they were asked to offer examples of poems notable for these qualities.

Please note that panelists, prior to their work being posted, do not read each others’ contributions. They are posted all at once and appear here, for the most part, in random order. No attempt is made to create a progression of thought. Nonetheless, because all are responding to the same subject and prompts, there will inevitably be unexpected and felicitous connections or contradictions.

This means that readers (and those of you who will wish to add your own voices) should not feel constrained, as you might in a typical forum discussion, to read this material all at once or in sequential order. Some entries are quite long. Take your time, read here and there as you would a magazine. Or in sequence if you wish.

Once comments begin to be posted, it may be somewhat different. This is a second of phase of Field Notes where discussion is encouraged. A couple of us will act as moderators, mainly to remind people to stay on topic, but it is our wish that any discussion will be primarily self-moderated.

— Peter Yovu

Allan Burns

A touchstone for the discussion of sound in haiku is Kenneth Yasuda’s “Crystallization,” the fourth chapter of his classic study *Japanese Haiku: Its Essential Nature and History* (1957). Among other things, Yasuda helps us to recall or realize just how important sound often is to classical haiku, as we can see and hear if we linger a bit over these examples, even if we don’t know much or any Japanese:
Robert Frost famously noted that “Poetry is what gets lost in translation,” and so there is no truly adequate way of rendering these haiku in English. We can convey their sense but not the three-dimensional crystallization that makes them great poems. Much is lost when we present them as something like:

on a bare branch a crow has settled . . . autumn nightfall

the springtime sea all day long tossing and tossing

Frost’s point should hold true for our haiku as well. They should operate on more than just the level of sense or meaning. They should draw upon the full aesthetic and expressive resources of language, like those of Bashō and Buson. They should be untranslatable.


Few haiku poets have attended so skillfully to sound as [Peggy Willis] Lyles did in her finely crafted poetry. She has noted that “Sound enhances meaning. Every nuance contributes to the total effect.” The haiku “marsh lights/ the owl’s cry dilates/our eyes” provides just one example, with its unifying long “i” sound, repeated no fewer than four times, resting in the soft bed of liquid /r/ and /l/ sounds. These sounds underscore the sensory information and convey the feeling on an equal basis, making for a memorable organic whole. Christopher Herold justly praises Lyles’ work for its “marvelous rhythm and lilt.” We see rhythm in
action particularly in a haiku such as “thunderheads offshore,” in which the last two lines [“the osprey coming early/ to its nest”] form a perfect iambic pentameter unit, the alternating unstressed and stressed syllables suggesting the steady wing beats of the approaching osprey.

Elsewhere in the book, I discuss sound and rhythm in the work of haiku poets such as Nick Virgilio, Robert Spiess, John Wills, Ruth Yarrow, Paul O. Williams, Wally Swist, vincent tripi, Paul Miller, Matthew Paul, John Barlow, Ferris Gilli, and others.

Since we were invited to do so, I’ll close by looking at these elements in one haiku of my own:

coyote choir
we wake beneath
next season’s stars

This haiku has four syllables in each line, two stressed and two unstressed, in iambic patterns (which tend to occur quite naturally in English). Horizontally, each line is dominated by an alliterative pair, the hard “c,” “w,” and “s,” respectively. The third line also contains three instances of a related /z/ sound, even though in each case it’s represented, as is typical in English, by an “s” rather than a “z.” Vertically, the haiku is bound together by assonance based on the repetition of the long “e” sound, which first appears at the end of “coyote” and then recurs in “we,” “beneath,” and “season’s,” as well as by the /n/ sound in lines two and three and the near rhyme of “choir” and “stars.”Attentive readers respond to the careful modulation of such sounds and rhythm whether they stop to analyze them or not, and even a poet often discovers such patterns only after the act of composition, during which what matters most is an intuitive sense of rightness. I think the sound of this haiku is just as important as its meaning and that it’s one of the better examples of “crystallization” that I’ve yet achieved. I’ll give Yasuda the last word:
In and around the words through which the haiku poet attempts to form the world of his [or her] aesthetic experience, must flow the feeling of the experience. It alone will control the election of words, their order, sound, rhythm, and cadence. When all these elements within a group of words are bound in and with the emotion, the resulting haiku is a crystallization.

TOM D’EVELYN

The Sound of Silence in Haiku

The problem of sound and meaning in poetry is vexed with issues rooted in cognitive resources. As Samuel Johnson knew, the imagination tends to fuse experiences in ways that defeat analysis and leave us vulnerable to self-delusion. We can read a poem about horses and if it is convincing we may well feel it sounds like horses.

So this question of sound in haiku needs to be handled mindfully. Especially haiku: being so short on words, and often depending on subtle semantic connections between those words, this form may be more deluding in this regard than longer genres.

But haiku has one distinguishing formal feature that makes a big difference in how it is heard: the cut. The cut is a pause in sound, as well as a pause in cognition. I like to hear the silence in haiku as it wells up from the cut.

The artist known as polona (Ljubijana, Slovenia) writes haiku that draw on this resource peculiar to haiku:

    city lights
    the names of the stars
    i used to know
These names, being forgotten, cannot be spoken; in a sense, the mind has been emptied of the presences named by the names of the stars, a deeply rooted presence now blocked. Such presence had been available to poets for millenia. Now there is an interior silence, compounded, given the narrative, by shame. In place of the cognitive naming of stars, there are city lights. The city lights, and any noise associated with them (sirens?), rush into the cut between the two images.

I value this haiku for the same reasons I value a much longer lyric. It connects me to depths of historical and personal awareness that would otherwise escape me. It renders a judgment on experience as only a poem can.

Peter Yovu

A Word from My Childhood

I grew up in the ’50’s and ’60’s on Staten Island. There was, needless to say, a lot I didn’t know. Or at least, a lot I didn’t know I knew. For one thing, that we were poor.

We played a lot of pick up games. Precede the word ball with foot, soft, hard, kick, stoop, dodge and stick and you get the picture. The last of these was perhaps the cheapest enterprise. You only needed a cast off broomstick and a ten cent rubber ball to play. These balls were usually yellow or pink. They were, to repeat myself, cheap.

Cheap compared to a Spaulding. The word was written right on it. If you’re not from New York, and maybe even if you are, you probably pronounce that something like SPOLL ding. That’s not the way we pronounced it. We paid no attention to the name on the ball. Who reads a ball anyway? We pronounced it spawl DEEN. Because that’s what it was.

Sometimes one of us was willing to cough up a whole quarter to buy one. They were pink, but not the lifeless chewed Bazooka bubble gum pink of the cheap balls. They were a kind of powder electric pink a kid could be proud of, though certainly none of us would have said so. They had heft and were made of denser rubber. They
snapped off the sidewalk when you bounced them.

Spaulding was not a word in my vocabulary. It has, as I say it now, a gray sound, a sound that trails off into a sneer. If you were to hit that name hard with a stick, it would split in half, its dull syllables skittering off like the two hemispheres of a ten cent ball to be left behind and forgotten.

But spawlDEEN has spit and awe in it, awe which gives way to emphatic excitement, the EE of anticipation, the glee we felt to hold one in our hands. It did not squeeze easily. I’d have to look, but it wouldn’t surprise me to learn that a lot of my poems have awe sounds in them. Awe giving way to EE.

A Few Thoughts about Sound

I think it may be that the delight, even the delightful disgust, of how language sounds and is felt in the mouth and body directs what we have to say in ways the conscious mind cannot know. It may lead us to say this and not that. Which is going a little further than saying it determines how we say something.

What a poem means is what you say.

How it sounds is who you are.

Go to the pine to learn its sounds.

Go to your body to discover new ears.

A change of sound is a change of perception, like getting onto a different train

The eye has a direct pathway to the mind. The ear is more labyrinthine, like a rose, and leads to the heart.

Some sounds may get lost in the labyrinth of the ear. These are sounds that need to get their meaning across. They tend to get repeated in arguments. In a poem, lost sounds are more patient, they know from ancient experience that other sounds will soon call out to them, meet them, transform them, and continue the way.
Red alone on the canvas. Red with violet. With black.
The black of a black horse breathing. The black of a galloping black horse.
We tend to lap up the voluptuous. By cuddling up to a word like cuttlefish, we acknowledge kinship through the body of sound.
In a poem, a short poem like a haiku in which sounds are not easily muffled, we may slide along the floor with a spider, the diphthonic aye-ee our own inner cry, our fear that what is imaginatively true may be actually true; that we are, in part, spider.
Sound is the body language of a poem. It tells the truth, which sometimes is that a poem is not well-fed.
Sound reveals what you didn’t know you wanted to reveal. It exceeds intention, or reveals its limits. It can even make fools of us.
Sense is an echo of sound.
What a poem says is known to the leaves. How it says it is taken up by the roots.
How can the word gray feel dull? It uses one long high pitched vowel. Like all the high pitched vowels, the diphthonic A sound when sung or chanted creates a buzz in the head. That is not what one would think of gray. Or of rain.
We don’t master sound. It masters us, though undoubtedly some honest work can result from resisting that.
Jane Hirshfield speaks of metaphor “ghosting past the logical mind”. Sound and rhythm work that way too, but with a more substantial ghost.
Poets are too often eager to get their meaning across and not allow the poem to mean something beyond them. Sound is both of and beyond us.
The music of language is always one moment ahead of meaning.
Using words like assonance, dissonance, alliteration and so on may be useful up to a point. I don’t know of a name which speaks to how sounds relate to each other, how they transform and inform each other, how they emphasize and undermine and toy with meaning, how they synthesize being and doing . . . unless that name is music.
Better to say that each poem names it in its own way. Each poem is its own name, its own namelessness.

“But words are also biology. Except for a handful of poets and scholars, nobody has taken the time to consider the feeling of verbal sounds in the physical organism. Even today— despite all the public reciting of verse, the recordings, the classroom markings of prosody— the muscular sensation of words is virtually ignored by all but poets who know how much the body is engaged in a poem. [W]ords are physical events for the organism, even when experienced in silence . . .” —Stanley Burnshaw, The Seamless Web

“. . . [T]he only kind of meaning poetry can have requires that its words resume their full life: the full life being modified and made unique by the qualifications the words perform one upon the other in the poem”. — R.P. Blackmur, quoted ibid.

“[Merleau-Ponty] wrote at length of the gestural genesis of language, the way that communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gestures by which the body spontaneously expresses feelings and responds to changes in its affective environment”.

“Active, living speech is just such a gesture, a vocal gesticulation wherein the meaning is inseparable from the sound, the shape, and the rhythm of the words. Communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective . . . born of the body’s native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole”.

“We thus learn our native language not mentally but bodily. It is this direct, felt significance— the taste of a word or phrase, the way it influences or modulates the body— that provides the fertile, polyvalent source for all the more refined and rarefied meanings which that term may come to have for us”. —David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous
“There is, [Merleau-Ponty] argues, an affective tonality, a mode of conveying meaning beneath the level of thought, beneath the level of the words themselves . . . which [is] much more like a melody— a ‘singing of the world’— than fully translatable, conceptual thought”. — James Edie, quoted ibid.

“When we sit down to write, we often imagine that thoughts are coming, or feelings are arriving. But actually what are arriving are syllables, each a marriage or affair of vowel and consonant . . .

But it is another thing to take part in their arriving— to put out a call for sound friendships, to decide to encourage certain ones. The we are awake by one more degree. To be awake as a writer is to take part in sound friendships and welcome them”. — Robert Bly, *The Thousands*

“The ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face”. — Bob Dylan, “Visions of Johanna”

Here are a few poems which have qualities of sound and rhythm I would like to explore.

reaching for green pears
the pull
of an old scar
   — Peggy Willis Lyles

distant virga
the ranch dog’s eyes
different colors
   — Allan Burns
intact zero fighter
at the Smithsonian
cherry blossom rain
  — Fay Aoyagi

the long a of gray
the long a of rain
the shortest day
  — Adam Traynor

the high fizz nerve the low boom blood dead silence
  — Jim Kacian

I’ll start with a poem by John Stevenson and return with thoughts about the others later.

first things first forsythia

This poem plays with a familiar theme in Stevenson’s poetry: the limits of mind. At least the limits of the mind which attempts to grasp and measure when confronted with mystery.

The poem is simple enough, speaking to the observable fact that a forsythia is a shrub whose flowers bloom early in the spring. You might say that the observer is pleased with this observation: it speaks to a degree of order, and being able to observe order is to partake of it.

All is well.

At another layer down, the sense of order is tested a bit, since the blooms appear before the leaves, not the typical progression of botanical growth. That fact resides in the poem like a phantom question mark. The mind which likes to be certain about things is tested by the very things it relies on: facts.
Being tested by facts may only serve to spark the mind to further observation and thinking. Which is fine, and a basis for science. But something else is happening here, located in the body of the poem.

To get to it, you have to take the poem in your mouth and play with it—speed it up, slow it down—mostly slow it down. “First things first!” The force of that expression, the certainty of it, the two stressed firsts bursting out of the mouth. It is as if being first has more importance than any thing. Order is the ticket. “First things first” is something bosses and parents get to say. The rest of us may swear under our breaths, retaliating with another forceful, felt if not heard, expression.

Spoken in a natural, conversational way, the change in pitch and rhythm from first things first to forsythia will probably be noted, but perhaps not on a conscious level. Spoken or simply mouthed more slowly, emphasizing the vowel sounds, brings out what for me is the key to this poem, which relates to the theme I mentioned: order giving way to mystery, or to the immeasurable.

It happens in feeling the change from the rather high pitched, vibratory er sounds transitioning into the unstressed, low-pitched or of forsythia: a sudden slowing down. That sound, close to aw, takes the reader/listener to another place, which can be felt, if intoned a bit, in the chest. The effect, the shift from the repeated er sounds to the or sound, is one of letting go. It comes as much from the felicity of language as it does from the genius of the poet’s ear.

The felicity may be noticed in multiple places, including the somewhat off-mirrored sounds FIRST things/forSYTHia, but also in how the emphatic T stopped sounds of firsT give over to the open final vowel of forsythia.

Eve Luckring

I find this topic very timely since I’ve been thinking a lot about what it means for me to read, or perhaps it is more appropriate to say “perform,” my poems for an audience. I like feeling the “presence” of a poem--its breath, pitch, tone, tempo, rhythm (the way it makes my feet and arms move as well as my diaphragm and
tongue), the places it quiets, the way it vibrates in my chest, on my lips, in my ears, and flows through my whole body. I like how the sound of a poem floats between me and the audience, and connects us physically. Often what appears on the page is more straightforward than how I “read” it. Kind of like playing Bach, so much is in the interpretation.

There are many ways to interpret the sound of a poem from the page. Lorine Niedecker, whose poems are quite musical, never read her poems aloud (if I remember correctly, I think she did let Cid Corman make a recording once at the end of her life) because she felt that poems should be read silently, so that each reader could hear them in their own way. The British poet, Alice Oswald, on the other hand, doesn’t like other people to read her poems aloud because she says they get the “tunes” wrong most of the time, typically reading her poems in an iambic pattern rather than the dactylic that she intends. She recites her poems from memory to an almost incantatory effect.

Sound is extremely important to me, not only in my poetry, but for my video work as well. And so, I really enjoyed the chance to immerse myself in the specific questions Peter posed for this FN. That means this is really, really long.

(You might want to just read the poems.)

Do you write haiku with the sound of words in mind?

John Cage, the 20th century American composer and poet, believed that there was no such thing as silence, only unintended sounds. (He had this epiphany after an experience in an anechoic chamber at Harvard.) If I am quiet enough, sounds “arrive” and then I try to “listen” for what other words these sounds call forth in tone and rhythm. Many times my head intervenes too much.

Do you revise according to sound and rhythm?

Yes, very much, although I am not always able to achieve something that works to my satisfaction.

In fact this has led me to writing sequences and longer poems because there is more to develop in terms of rhythm.
We speak of juxtaposing images in haiku. Do you know a haiku, yours or another’s, which juxtaposes image and sound? A haiku whose sound and content are disjunctive?

Great question. I think this is really difficult to pull off and so I can hardly think of any examples.

And it obviously depends on one’s interpretation of both the meaning and how one might sound the poem out rhythmically.

A poem by Paul Pfleuger Jr.’s from *a Zodiac*, (Red Moon Press, 2013) comes to mind:

```
isms with our clothes on
```

This poem stands out to me for its use of disjunctive sound.

While I interpret it to speak about how categories and ideologies keep us in neat little boxes, proper in the appropriate attire, the sound of “isms” is so visceral a sound (and suggests jism in the raucousness of my mind) that the poem ends up evoking a rather raunchy feeling. The way I read the sound of this poem, the stress on the first syllable of “isms”, vibrating “iz” into “mz”, creates a harmonic overtone that closes the mouth and rolls through the next two unstressed syllables. This is then balanced symmetrically by the last words “clothes on”, which I read as a spondee. In contrast to the short “i” sounds of the first two syllables, the “o”s of the last three syllables open the mouth, with the final “n” closing things again. The sound as a whole somehow makes me want to rip the clothes off the poem and free things back to their natural state before they became trapped and degraded.

Are sound and content two separate things? In what way yes. In what way no?

If a poem could be described as a bird in flight, sound is its wings.

Given haiku’s brevity, there are clear limits to what can be developed in terms or sound and rhythm. But are there aspects of prosody which brevity can put to good use?
Well, there is hardly enough time/space in haiku for any metrical pattern to establish its music.

1. I believe pauses (kire), or to use a musical term, ”rests”, play a key role in poems of brevity.

Cherie Hunter Day demonstrates great versatility in how she uses everything from 5/7/5 to one-liners.

This 3/5/3 is an example of her masterful skill with highly structured sound using a notated cut:

```
starlings molt
to a new spangle—
wolf whistles
```

*Apology Moon, Red Moon Press, 2013*

The first two lines are strongly connected by their consonant sounds, and then we feel something new with those repetitive “w”s after the cut. The inversion of the syllabic structure of the first line in the third line, and the reversed order of the “o”s and short “i”s, (starlings molt/wolf whistles) create a remarkable mirroring effect supported by the “l” sounds. The word spangle in the second line acts as the fulcrum of the poem and sound-wise it jumps out joyously to announce the shift.

This one-liner does something different:

```
dawn crows the scuffle of nomenclature
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*Apology Moon, Red Moon Press, 2013*

First of all, the cut/s can be placed in different places, creating an indeterminate rhythm for the poem. Depending on where I place the cut/s, I change the pitch and lilt with which I say the words “crows” and “scuffle”. I hear the hard scrabble of this poem more than I think it. I want to read that last word, no-men-cla-ture, well
enunciated, slowly, syllable by syllable, like a scolding teacher.

2. Short poems can encourage a poet to use sound in how s/he collocates words.

For example, in the following poems, “hard house”, “finned word/ minnows”, “knife patrols”, “ crow wing”, and “starlice” create a variety of playful and stunning effects:

coming out of
the hard house
the flowering dawn

and

in and out of meaning
a finned word
minnows

and

between our countries
a knife patrols, sharpening
its only thought

and

crow wing over us
but starlice drinking, drinking
unblack the sky
All of the above by Peter Yovu from *Sunrise*, Red Moon Press, 2010.

Incidentally, Niedecker (who read haiku and wrote many, many short poems) does beautiful things with words like petalbent, adark, jellying, smoke dent ....

3. Though we tend to think of it primarily in visual terms, organic-form haiku can do amazing things with sound to perform the meaning of a poem. There is a long history to this kind of thing (think of LeRoy Gorman’s work, or marlene mountain’s brilliant poem, “on this cold/ spring 1/ 2 night 3 4...”) , but here I will focus on some poems by Roland Packer who uses syllabic play, rhythmic allusion, and spatial arrangements to create complexity out of brevity, sometimes extreme brevity.

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c l a y
2012 Haiku Now! Innovative Category--Commended

styx and bones the sound of a stone
*Frogpond* 36:3

latch of the newborn dawn
*Frogpond* 36:1

rush
hour
a
pop
song’s
a t t i t u d e
*Frogpond* 37:1
```

“icicle mind/wind”—see *MH* 44:1 for this poem’s presentation which relies on layout for a shift from long to short vowel sounds and flip-flopped consonant sounds.
It is fun to play with these aloud.

In *Haiku: A Poet’s Guide*, Lee Gurga wrote (in 2003): “... the judicious use of aural devices in haiku can help focus the reader/listener’s attention on the important aspects of the verse”. This seems to give sound (“aural devices”) a secondary importance, a “helping” role vis-a-vis what is “important” in haiku. How do you respond to this?

There are many poems I love where the sound seems to be in a supporting role rather than a primary role. However, when sound does not seem considered enough in a poem, it is difficult for me to engage. Lately, I tend to respond most strongly to poems where the sound is primary, though I often struggle to achieve this in my own work.

Martin Lucas, in his essay *Haiku as Poetic Spell*, has offered what appears to be a different approach: “That’s what I mean by Poetic Spell. Words that chime; words that beat; words that flow. And once you’ve truly heard it, you won’t forget it, because the words have power. They are not dead and scribbled on a page, they are spoken like a charm; and they aren’t read, they’re heard”. How do you respond to this?

I think of reading *Beowulf* in high school and learning how to attune my ear to the music of the Old English so I could “understand” better. The traditions of oral poetry are good reminders of this; their typically longer length allows time for their spell to be woven. The bards of Hip-Hop have much to teach us about this. One of my favorites from Lauryn Hill, *The Mystery of Iniquity*.

In terms of haiku, I think of

```
as an and you and you and you alone in the sea
Richard Gilbert, R’r 12.3)
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With its lilting rhythm it works like the refrain of a folk song, undulating waves.

heart
wood
her echo
lalia

opens her mouth to speak
the severed shoot grows
one finger, one leaf

her perfect face
under the loam
a leaf in stone


For me, the first here is a highly compacted poem that uses words “like a charm”. The second and third produce exquisite flowing music with their rhythms based in iambic dimeter, slant rhyme, and the overall orchestration of consonant and vowel sounds.

I find Susan Diridoni’s poems extremely lyrical, luscious mouthfuls:

step back into the fragrance our histories mingling
the Yukon in her dry high air streaming
come fall with me languor’s slant
the grain in his song tessellating night
vows jump their past-present membranes Eastertide
And to close, considering sound in relation to translation,

I also think of how well Jerome Rothenberg’s translation work exemplifies this idea of words “spoken like a charm” (or sung like a charm). For example, *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas* (Univ. of New Mexico Pre. Rev Sub edition (1991) and *Writing Through: Translations and Variations* (Wesleyan, 2004).

If I understand correctly, earlier writers of American haiku debated about how much “music” the language of haiku should allow. I wonder if this was due to early efforts at translation into English that added rhyme and forced syllable counts, emblematic of the vast differences to be navigated between the English and Japanese languages. Though we tend not to think of haiku as having the same strong “song” tradition of waka/tanka, when I listen to Japanese haiku it is crystal clear to me that sound is crucial. For example, there is the common use of 5/75 phrasing inherent to the language, but also the fanfare of vowel sounds, the embrace of onomatopoeia, and the love of punning where double meaning is produced purely through sound.

Bruce Ross

In Japanese there is a built in rhythm of 5 and 7 unit sound phrases in most poetry. It has been suggested the rhythm so produced dates back to early spoken language as in proclamations. In Japan haiku are recited with a kind of gravity as in a No play. Attention has been drawn to the frequent use of onomatopoeia in Japanese haiku. The mandated vowel in each sound unit of Japanese adds to the built-in musical quality. Moreover, Basho in talking about renku linking suggested making links by smell, by which he meant all the senses, setting up a system of poetic connections that suggests by analogy notes and phrases in music.
In English by comparison to Romance languages like French or Spanish, there are shorter syllables and fewer vowels. Thus the latter have more built-in sound values and thus come closer to Japanese than English as expressions of sound in haiku. In Japanese kanji (Chinese characters) there are also deep structures that contribute to a haiku’s complexity.

Susumu Takiguchi, editor of *World Haiku Review*, in his call for winter 2012 haiku submissions lists “good choice and order of words, good rhythm, and pictorial or musical feel” among the qualities of superior English haiku submissions. The “rhythm” and “musical feel” qualities offer haiku in English a chance of the melos (music) function of poetry. Figurative devises like alliteration, as well as other poetic devices, could overpower the small haiku form. Yet Japanese 5-7-5 sound units in poetry is essentially lyric, usually human feeling connected to nature.

Poetry in English is reliant on accent and metrical foot, aside from free verse, so the haiku in English cannot easily rely on them in its short form. Basho’s advise on linking, however, and Takiguchi’s “rhythm” and “musical feel” offer analogies to outright musical expression and are useful in English haiku to contain the mental or lexical function of the words in a haiku. In a sense the poet’s sensibility, their phrasing containing “rhythm” and “musical feel,” replaces the logical order of phrasing as language, however embedded with symbols, deep structure, or subtle metaphors.

One of my haiku which placed in the 2012 66th Basho Festival, Iga City, Japan international haiku contest perhaps carries some of the lyric values mentioned here, as well as an internal rhyme in the second line:

```
old growth mountain
I breathe deeply
a cloud
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I see this kind of lyricism in the haiku of Tom Tico, as in this from *frogpond* XXVI:1 (2003), 5, which contains clear rhyme in the third line:
after a haircut—
light-headed
with spring wind

Such an understanding of sound in haiku in English is like hearing a silent melody in someone’s expressed exuberant joy.

David G. Lanoue

Issa loved exploiting the sound properties of the Japanese language in haiku. In 1809, for example, he wrote,

鸚がさくさく歩く紅葉哉
uguisu ga saku-saku aruku momiji kana

the nightingale struts
crunch crunch...
red leaves

In addition to making use of the wonderfully alliterative and onomatopoeic phrase, “saku-saku,” Issa exploits the assonance of the repeated vowel sound, “u,” in seven of the first twelve sound units. In my translation, I make an attempt to imitate this consonant/vowel play with the words, “struts crunch crunch.” In other cases, carrying over into English Issa’s remarkable sound play has been more challenging, as in this undated verse.

夕月や鍋の中にて鳴田にし
yûzuki ya nabe no naka nite naku tanishi
evening moon--
pond snails singing
in the kettle

The alliteration in my translation ("snails singing") is pitifully inadequate to reflect Issa's tour de force repetition of the "n" sound times six. In a poem such as this one, Issa is clearly having fun with language's musical effects. He is a master at this and, for me, a master teacher.

Personally, I don't decide that a haiku of mine is finished until and unless I've said it out loud and approve its ear-feel. I strive to use sound, rhythm, and silences in all my compositions. As a reader, consequently, I favor haiku that sound good when read aloud. Concrete poems that derive their impact strictly by the ingenious visual patterns they create on the page move me far less. I find such works interesting, but I don't value them the way that I value haiku in which sound matches sense. That's just who am, not a criticism of concrete language poets. As I write these words, I'm sitting outside listening to a mockingbird gushing in a nearby tree. For me, and certainly for him, song (and I include haiku in this category) must be heard.

no heaven
no hell
just the whispering rushes

Cherie Hunter Day

The Sound of Silence

One need only to look at recent winners of the contemporary category of Haiku Now! Contest to notice that sound takes center stage in contemporary haiku. Perhaps even more powerful is the lack of sound. Take a look at the following two haiku.
the river freezes…
silence is also
an answer

Francine Banwarth  [2011 Haiku Now! First Place Winner]

nagasaki
in her belly, the sound
of unopened mail

Don Baird [2013 Haiku Now! First Place/2013 Touchstone Award Winner]

The first haiku contains a scene common in winter. In bitter cold weather the surface of the river freezes. With this as a metaphor we are invited further into Banwarth’s personal narrative. Relationships can also freeze. The poet is patient as she waits for a thaw. Whether an attempt at reconciliation takes place is left to our imaginations. But the answer she expects doesn’t come, and she is greeted with only silence. The death of a loved one creates a deep gulf of silence. She must be content that silence too is a valid answer. It speaks volumes in the human heart.

In the second haiku what is the sound of unopened mail? A logical answer would be there is no sound. But consider that the message has already been crafted and sent. It doesn’t feel as passive as the first haiku. The message stalls without a receiver. It is similar to the philosophical question: if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound? That’s not exactly silence. The ears aren’t the intended target for this sound. Or maybe the media through which the message travels is not air but the ground of being. The power in this haiku comes in the way the words send the mind reeling through thoughts/feelings for a satisfying conclusion. This haiku sets fire to our imaginations. We wait for more input so we can respond. But the answer is already inside each of us. History is frozen for a second in that moment of impact on August 9, 1945, but it doesn’t remain frozen. There is a sound to unopened mail.

Tinkering with Words

Literture devices like rhyme, particularly end rhyme, and heavy metrics tend to
overwhelm the short form. Haiku relies more on word choice (monosyllable or polysyllable words), different line lengths, cuts and shifts in subject matter, along with word repetition to provide cadence. Elizabeth Searle Lamb was a master of controlling the pace of words to enhance the word/pictures. Listen to the surge in the following haiku.

the sound
of rain on the sound
of waves

Elizabeth Searle Lamb [in this blaze of sun, From Here Press, 1975]

With so few words she manages to mimic the lapping of the waves. Nothing in the word choice is associated with what is named, the literary device known as onomatopoeia. For comparison consider this haiku.

machine shop
the mechanic hums along
to a florescent lamp

Alan S. Bridges [The Heron’s Nest XV: 1, 2013]

The verb ‘hums’ sounds like a person or a lamp humming and is an example of onomatopoeia.

mosquito she too
insisting insisting she
is is is is

Peter Yovu [Modern Haiku 35:1, 2004]

This is a 5-7-5 haiku. Even with three sets of repeated words, it feels effortless—‘she’
and ‘insisting’ appear twice and ‘is’ appears five times. The pace is slowed in the second line by the repetition of the three syllable word ‘insisting.’ And the pace is sped up double time with the single accented syllable repeated five times in the last line. It conveys urgency, the demand of life, of existence and ego. A single ‘is’ would not be considered onomatopoeia but the buzzing sound created by ‘is is is is is’ sounds like a mosquito and the re-experience becomes visceral.

Sound Country

Further out on the continuum of granularity are the individual sounds in language. Phonetics is an area of linguistics that focuses on the physiological production, acoustic properties, and auditory perceptions of the physical phenomena of speech. The subject is far more technical than this short discussion allows. For a poet it is interesting to note how these different sounds enhance the meaning of individual words and color the perception of nearby words.

shore of the loch—
wavelets lapping
the fallen larch

Martin Lucas [Snapshot 6, 1999]

The inclination when reading this haiku is to enunciate each word. The pace is slowed. There is something lovely and sensual in the balance of the sibilant [sh] in shore, the velar stop of k sound of [ch] in loch, the fricative [v] in wavelets and [f] in fallen, layered with the liquid [l] sounds in: loch, wavelets, lapping, fallen, and larch. The [l] sound creates flow and mimics the gentle movement of water. This haiku begs to be read out loud.

Formation of consonant sounds depends on the degree of stricture (partial or complete stops made by teeth, lips, or tongue) or alternative airflow (passage of air through the nose). Vowel articulation relates to where the tongue is positioned relative to roof of the mouth and the opening of the jaw. Raised vowels such as (u) and (i) are formed high in the mouth and low vowel such as [a] is formed when the tongue is relative flat and low in the mouth. There are a number of variables to
consider. Again, the science is very precise. But the mechanics of how sounds are made cuts across all languages.

an ashen language in the drive-by of our bones
Cherie Hunter Day [NOON 8: journal of the short poem, Jan. 2014]

How do the different sounds add enjoyment to this one-liner? The consonant sounds are: the sibilant [sh] of ashen and (s) in bones, the liquid [l] of language, the velar stop [g] in language, three plosives (d) (b) (d) in drive-by and bones, and three nasal [n] in an, ashen, and bones. The poem has a variety of sounds and a pleasing cadence of stressed and unstressed syllables that establish an even pace. For the vowels there are three [a] sounds in an, ashen, language followed by two different (i) sounds in in and drive followed by three (o) sounds in of, our, and bones. There is a vowel progression (a) to (i) to (o). I didn’t set out to micromanage sounds when I wrote it. I picked word sounds that pleased my ear and had a good mouth feel. There is a physical component that accompanies the processing of this poem. As the subject matter becomes more speculative, sound choice becomes increasingly important.

Peter Newton

A Useful Beauty: Sound Construction in Haiku

Some poems require a good listen. They demand it. That’s why orators of old spoke their verses to the assembled crowd. On a street corner or in amphitheatres. Even today, I remember speaking to a poet from Kashmir. He said, “In my country a good poet can fill a stadium.” Now that’d be something.

But more to the point: what is the importance of sound in a haiku? This question answered a related question I had: why can’t I ever pick out a greeting card quickly? It’s the sound of them. Each one sounds like a poem. An attractive turn of phrase or
some clever use of alliteration. It takes awhile to sort things out. How many times have you heard someone reading the words inside each card out loud to help them choose which appeal to the ear.

Of course, haiku has often been mistaken for a kind of quasi-greeting card salutation instead of the thoughtful thing it really is. But hey, why flog a flea. The use of sound determines the skill of the poet (or Hallmark card writer). The difference in a well-sounded haiku is that the reader is transported through the nether regions of the brain where sound resides, echoing from the canyon walls where even a whisper can travel miles. Certain sounds can trigger multiple associations. Sound expands the poem beyond its physical dimensions.

Take, for example:

Silent Cliffs
   letting go
   our if if ifs

Or, here's a more subtle example:

moss-muffled
the woodland stream
a whisper

The use of sound is as important as one's vocabulary as a poet. It's not how many words you use in a poem but their construction within it. Dovetailing versus a simpler butt joint. Both do the trick. One with more finesse. A useful beauty. That might well be the best way to describe the importance of sound in haiku. Not just sound for sound sake.

In the above poem I was after a scene both visual and auditory. Walls of soft green under a canopy of greater green. Also, I wanted to convey the sense of magic felt
in this place. The secret sacred place of nature, often just a few steps from the trail. Sound helps economize the use of words. Hyphens are also useful as in “moss-muffled” that offers the wedge of soft fern growth where run-off make its way through the uneven terrain down to the river. There is an unbroken quiet here that I wanted to remain intact. No hard sounds to break the silence, woo-, -eam, whi-

Haiku are saved sound scraps dubbed, over-dubbed, mixed and re-

In writing and revising any poem, especially haiku, I find it essential to read the words out loud. Even sing ‘em if you want. It’s one way to break it down. Something happens when the words hit the air. They either fly or fall flat. A poet who trains his ear to recognize the difference is bound to improve. And possibly make something memorable. Resonant is the word I believe. You gotta go with your gut. Listen to yourself. Each poem is a new language. Sound it out.

Billie Wilson

While memorable word-sound and rhythm are the heart of all poetry, the challenge for me in bringing them to haiku was the admonition to avoid poetics. Before discovering haiku, I was drawn to sonnets so skillfully written it was easy to forget they were sonnets. The first that comes to mind is Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “What lips my lips have kissed, and where and why”.

The spareness of a well-written haiku can have an even deeper impact. Just as the sonnet’s strict format can vanish with the right words and rhythm, the haiku’s tinyness can go unnoticed as it pulls a “wow” from our lips and plants itself in our memory. Maybe not always word-for-word, and maybe we won’t always recall the poet, but the poem imbeds itself, seemingly forever. And the ones that do that most often for me are the ones that nearly beg to be read aloud.

When the right word-sound and rhythm come effortlessly for me with the first draft, life is good. One that comes to mind is:
pink lemonade—
the taffeta rustle
of cottonwoods

_South by Southeast_ 10:2 (2003)

But many require tinkering before settling on the sound/rhythm combination that seems to best suit the subject matter and the moment.

Richard Gilbert

On the sound

life is poetic, while i am not
darker shadows falling deeper among trees
reflect elegance and tragedy

as the Hasidim danced ecstasy
to be slaughtered in the Holocaust
their very regions, roads, names

wiped out. while waiting to do
something or die, the dream world opens
to offer a pearl

make a mental note: falling takes you
far past literalism, right through actuality
and gravity’s rainbow

measures imaginal velocities of an outside
world, which clearly feels its moments
in leaf-bends towards sun, insects busy
embodied in heat or cold, and we enter with tropisms craning, jostling nearer or farther to what is success among flowers

the poetry is outside, where there is life all ecosystems made through eons of this spring as the bamboo invade

without cutting they’ll surround and kill the cypress, so I walk each day with a 270mm serrated blade, searching, clearing

poetry, when and where the world comes by, roots with new surprise if by subtlety rather than ascension.

that we need something. to behold, which allows a poetic world to be, without compunction towards oneself “to be” poetic: the world

is enough. in a few minutes of Sunday gazing from a chair through a window plausibly see or hear something of trees grown

undergrowth hovering raincloud or sunlight shadow nothing more than what life is there witnessed as a kind of speech

if indecipherable. poetry isn’t languageless perhaps it’s the most crucial connection possible to be made between human lives.

doubtless with the talents of builders the distractions of entertainments and cares
experiments of science, absolutely distinct
from the old trees which grow. your child
listens to rocks in the nothing that returns
memories of shells heard of the sea
the disbelieving ear left with monograms
of singular sonar sewn into evident impossibility.
there is enough talk of lives
and where and what to eat, to tire
of solutions. we no longer grow with seasons
but construct them, if seasons comfort.
today a day in which deeper shadows
indicate death in their tragic knowledge
those ecstasies not my own.

Postscript.
The sound of memories erased.
The sound of all that’s missing.
The sound of the “not” that is.

As usual, I find it hard to single out a few haiku, when I have a book with 275
all with interesting things happening with sound -- don’t like to pick favorites.
It’s quite difficult separating sound from sense in any line/poem. What I turned to
was a theme I’m concerned with. The sound that is missing, sound that’s missed,
lost sound, absent sound. I think of memory as sound, in this sense. I think of the
erasures of sound. I think of the past as something like sound or sound or like a
sound.
Mark Harris

The brevity of haiku in English can be both strength and weakness. With so few words, often fewer than ten per poem, the reader is especially sensitive to the sound of each word, to enjambment, to repetition. Unbroken meter, whether through a one-line or multiple-line haiku, holds too rigid a sway--this is true of long poems as well.

Rhythm is another matter, and sound/song. Prosody is such a lovely word, with ancient roots in utterance that nourish our own mother tongue.

If you have songbirds in your part of the world, you might be familiar with the abbreviated snippets of melodic line they often sing. They will reel out a series of notes, pause, and then repeat the line with a slight change. The practiced ear (I'm no expert) can place those snippets within longer lines that belong to the repertoire a particular species uses to communicate. I know it's a reach—bird calls and human language have little in common—but birdsong puts me in mind of the way we intuitively place snippets of compelling texts within the sea of our human song, the word-net that permeates our languages and literatures. I don't mean to imply some sort of secret knowledge. Anyone reading this has already cracked the code of language.

Moments of silence are integral to the music of a poem. In contemporary haiku, punctuation ranges from absent to sparse. I usually hear the word “space” used to describe a semantic or indicated “cut” in haiku. Silence, also, accompanies that space. The silence we honor with a pause in our reading, along with a vaster one that continues after, the way the words keep working within us. (What lies beyond “cuts” and related devices is too involved for me to tackle here…)

Before modernist poets began to disjoint line formats to generate alternate readings and expose words as themselves, people knew to pause at the end of each line of text. End-stopped lines are rarely assumed in poems now, and this holds true for haiku in English. How, then, do we sense when to pause while reading or reciting a poem, or any text? I remind myself to listen for nuance suggested by line and word placement. I try to be sensitive to regional variation in rhythm and pronunciation,
to notice when my mouth needs time ending one word and shaping another. This leads to surprises. A poem can reveal itself through sound.

Peter has asked us to share some poems that engage in different ways with the topic at hand. Here are a few. The first two are by me, the others credited:

only a drawing
of a labyrinth, only
the moon’s pull

deep snow
in a dream, I find
her password in

the river
the river makes
of the moon


reaching for green pears—
the pull
of an old scar


mosquito she too
insisting insisting she
is is is is is

Peter Yovu, *Modern Haiku* 35.1
George Swede

Here are 20 of my ear-ku (in terms of content and/or technique) from five years in the 20th century (1977-1981). They were appreciated during their time, but literary history suggests most will end up in dark and silent places while only a few might continue to speak to the imagination. Perhaps some of you will speculate on how this occurs, and possibly predict the fate of some of these poems (under each is its abridged publication record).

for the fat green frog
crouched on the log
time is flies


fresh snow on the fence
two more inches against
my neighbor’s eloquence


in one corner
of the mental patient’s eye
I exist

(10 times: *Cicada*, 1978 to *Deutsche Haiku Gesellschaft*, 2005)
in the howling wind
under the full moon
the snowman, headless

having to guess
from the footsteps:
evening fog

long after
the leaping buck the quiver
of the fencepost

During discussion
on the meaning of life the crunch
of a student’s apple


(7 times: Cicada, 1977 to Haiku Journey, Hot Lava Games, 2006)


a bottomless well within me    no sound from my fallen pride

(8 times: Amoskeag, 1980 to I Want To Lasso Time, 1991)

night game
crack! the outfielder circles
under the full moon

(4 times: Driftwood East, 1979 to Almost Unseen (Brooks Books, 2000)

cool forest lake…
as I slip off my shorts, the snort
of a bull moose

(5 times: Gusto, 1978 to Simply Haiku, 2006)

in each eye
of the cat by the window
the singing robin


Mingling
with the bird songs
our dawn cries

(7 times: Endless Jigsaw, Three Trees Press, 1978 to micro haiku: three to nine syllables,
my wife and I fight over
how to stop our sons
from fighting

calmly talking divorce
underfoot the crackle
of fallen leaves

dropping stone after stone
into the lake I keep
reappearing

falling pine needles the tick of the clock


(5 times: As Far As The Sea Can Eye, York Publishing, 1979 to Frogpond, 2001)


(7 times: Cicada, 1980 to micro haiku: three to nine syllables, Inšpresso, 2014)
hum of the fan
cigarette smoke streams
through our silence

(5 times: Modern Haiku, 1980 to PhD thesis by Tom Lynch, An original relation to the universe: Emersonian poetics of immanence and contemporary American haiku, U of Oregon, 1989)

pond
a frog Picassos
my face

(10 times: White Wall Review, 1981 to micro haiku: three to nine syllables, İnşpress, 2014)

rising like birds
from the bottom of the canyon
the children’s cries


tap
d
r
i
p
s
When we talk about sound in a poem, we're usually talking about “harmonised vowels and consonants,” in Robert Frost's phrase. But what about the sound of sentences, and the runs and pauses of speech? These sounds are part of what Frost was talking about in his idea of “the sound of sense.”

For example, a poem can use sentence rhythms as a counterpoint to the conventions of haiku.

```
moths have come
around the one light left
forgotten, on
```

Martin Shea

This poem is a wandering sentence in search of a final word. I’ve spoken like this when I began a sentence without knowing what I wanted to say, then found the subject elusive and discovered it at the end, making a hash of normal syntax. In the poem, the sentence wanders across the three lines typical of English-language
haiku, but not in the conventional fragment and phrase structure. At the same time, the poem is bound together by the assonance of “moths,” “come,” “one,” “forgotten,” and “on.” The final word is as ordinary and incandescent as a light bulb and the brief lives brought together in the poem.

Haiku that use sentence rhythms in this way are probably the exception. The omitted words and the cut in most haiku makes them sound different than normal speech . . . or do they? When I read haiku aloud, the cut often sounds familiar, like a sudden shift in thought.

```plaintext
caboose light
lost in fog
sound of carillons

Nina Wicker
```

Here I must pause to confess my love for the sound of the word “caboose” -- the hard “k” sound, followed by a “b” sound and a double “o,” ending in a soft hiss. It’s a fun word; nostalgic too because most trains don’t have cabooses these days. So, the light of the caboose disappears in fog . . . or is it the sound of the carillons that disappears? The fragment and phrase are ambiguous. There’s a kind of equilibrium among the sound and images of the caboose light, the fog, and the carillons; among the words and the phenomena they describe.

If “The sound is the gold in the ore,” as Frost said, maybe we should look beyond the music of individual words for that gold.

**John Stevenson**

This topic deserves much more attention than I am able to give it. The aural qualities of a poem have always been important to me. I’ve had many ideas about poetry over the years. One of my first was that it was “musical speech.” In addition to time
constraints holding me back, there is the overwhelming task of choosing poems to appreciate in this way. Here is one of about five thousand English-language haiku whose aural qualities seem well crafted to me:

    gunshot the length of the lake
    Jim Kacian

For me, this is all about echoes and the timing of echoes. The first word consists of a stressed syllable and a slightly less stressed syllable. The next two stressed syllables (length, lake) are weaker but also have the added weight of alliteration. I tend to recite this quickly. In this way it registers, for me, an additional wave of not quite audible sound, which, since it is not there, produces a sensation of incredulity - did I just hear what I thought I heard?
field notes
It is both inevitable and desirable that Field Notes should stimulate discussion, some of it “off-topic”. To foster such conversation, I’ve opened a separate (but related) subject area. If you wish to open a discussion prompted by but not directly relating to the main subject-- challenge-- this is the place to do it.

I have copied a conversation between Paul Miller and Alan Summers below. It was prompted by Paul's post in FN 7: Challenge. It is an open conversation. As always, you are welcome to participate.

*****

ALAN SUMMERS

Hi Paul,

I just wanted to say that this “verse” really moved me when I first read it. In Britain the remembrance of the First World War (where Japan were allies with Britain) there was were many cold mathematical calculations by British Generals to burn a few thousand British soldiers for the sake of a few feet of earth won.

war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
— Sugimura Seirinshi (trans. Richard Gilbert and Ito Yuki)

I have pondered and pondered this haiku, approaching it from a number of angles, and I think it fails. It is a bunch of twenty-five cent words when five cent words would have done. One challenge in this poem is to stand up to the new orthodoxy and point out its lack of pants.
The Second World War was a different set of mathematics e.g. the Nazi experiments with killing large numbers of Jewish, homosexual, Gypsy, and mentally ill people from those first dark bikes to showers and ovens. Whatever Sugimura Seirinshi meant, I don’t know, but it strikes a strong chord with me, whenever I read this haiku.

New Rising Haiku:

戦死者が青き数学より出たり
sennsisha ga aoki suugaku yori detari
war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics

Nazi Euthanasia

Each expert placed a + mark in red pencil or - mark in blue pencil under the term “treatment” on a special form. A red plus mark meant a decision to kill the child. A blue minus sign meant a decision against killing. Three plus symbols resulted in a euthanasia warrant being issued and the transfer of the child to a ‘Children’s Specialty Department’ for death by injection or gradual starvation.I am sure the blue pencil was utilised for various record keeping and mathematics on more than one side of the war, for example:

Stalin’s Deadly Blue Pencil

The editor is the unseen hand with the power to change meaning and message, even the course of history. Back when copy-proofs were still manually cut, pasted, and photographed before printing, a blue pencil was the instrument of choice for editors because blue was not visible when photographed. The editorial intervention was invisible by design.
At a meeting with Winston Churchill a few months later, the British prime minister watched as Stalin “took his blue pencil and made a large tick” indicating his approval of the “percentages agreement” for the division of Europe into Western and Soviet spheres of influence after the war.

Of course I’m seeing this subjectively, and emotionally. As a child I watched many war films including several dealing with the Nazi Concentration Camps.

Only a couple of years ago, I discovered that a relative, although not blood related as I’m adopted, died in a concentration camp. Not being Jewish I never felt I’d come to know a relative died there, it touches us all, as does 9/11 despite not being American.

I just wanted to say how much, however much I misread that haiku, it has touched me to the quick.

Alan Summers

p.s.

I just want to [end with a] quote from Michelle Tennison’s post as it moved me so much:

war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
Sugimura Seirinshi (trans. Richard Gilbert and Ito Yuki)

This last haiku is in itself an effective argument for experimentation in art. Didn’t the French Surrealism of the 1920s grow, at least in part, out of the existential insanity of WWI, which many of its originators had experienced first hand? They were witness to the extremes of the “mathematics” of our rational minds, that has everything neatly identified, categorized, and tied up, i.e. our linear, left-brain culture run amok, that can lead to such violence upon ourselves and our world. The harsh light of war can help us to recognize that we are perhaps never more dangerous than when we know everything there is to know.
This kind of radical experimentation, although demanding for the reader, is healthy and has infused contemporary haiku with new vitality. It often forces us to engage more intuitive channels in order to relate. There is value, and life, and courage in tripping up the habitual mind (and habitual form) just enough to bypass ego and reason, if only temporarily, so that new realities can be allowed to penetrate awareness. The intelligence of the heart can recognize truth even when the mind cannot (and can help us transcend the sometime arrogance of reason).

To sum up, “We don’t see the world as it is, we see it as we are.” (Anais Nin). I live for that moment when observation, external and internal, is allowed to newly inform my being-in-the-world. What about the moments when we do see the world a little bit more as it is, and it raises our consciousness, lifts us up and informs our choices and perceptions? What happens when we take the risks necessary to see something new that might actually change us? This is a personal challenge, and it is one of haiku’s greatest gifts.

PAUL MILLER

Alan, thanks for commenting. I get a meaning from the poem, and can understand how someone with a history with war could find it emotive, but it is essentially a rewrite of:

    war dead
    killed from calculations that I find sad

where “calculations” stands for the decisions of bureaucrats and generals.

I understand what the poet is trying to say (or I should say I get something from it) and his view is valid.

However, when I say it fails I am detaching the meaning of the haiku from its execution. I believe the writer fell in love with the phrase “blue mathematics” and wasn’t prepared to get rid of it. I think we are supposed to think it cool and clever and overlook its use. It is an awkward attempt at symbolism.
ALAN SUMMERS

True, that blue mathematics has a zing, but then a lot of haiku poets do use blue other than for its natural image in nature.

It’s possible many of us are influenced by the blue period of painting perhaps:

But it’s intriguing how, pre-computer, the blue pencil has been an instrument for what a computer user might now use strike-out or blue text etc... in a word.doc or spreadsheet etc...

True, we shouldn’t be emotional when it comes to haiku, and war is business pure and simple. Perhaps that’s why Mrs Bush dealt with so many anti-Gulf War poets and their careers.

I must admit I don’t know:

    war dead
    killed from calculations that I find sad

I must admit that a large number of haiku leave me disinterested on any level, but I am interested in these short verses that somehow carry more than they should. When they act as a cipher beyond just a few conveniently placed words.

I must admit ‘blue mathematics’ is striking, but for me that would fail after a few readings.

I tend to multiple read a haiku when I first come across it, and multiple readings over the weeks and months.

A haiku has to go way beyond a gimmick to hook me. But then what might leave me indifferent, or sufficiently enticed into multiple-reads, might work for someone else.

    war dead
    exit out of a blue mathematics
war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad

For the Japanese the New Romantic notion of only originality is something that is quite alien I would think. Yet do non-Japanese poets go for total originality?

Bill Manhire’s poem:

I was lucky enough to see him at a Bath Spa University Summer event for BA and MA students. He was one of the best speakers and despite almost all BA students studying novels, he was far more interesting, and amusing for them.

But it’s just my personal viewpoint, perhaps seeing blue pencil in action for something I cannot recall now might have influenced me.

PAUL MILLER

I may not have been as clear as I should have been. I think having an emotional reaction to a poem is the first and most important reading you should have, so for you the haiku succeeds. But for me the abstraction distances me from a real event. The advantage realism has is that the reader is forced into a real situation that they must grapple with. “blue mathematics” is just too cute and clever for me to deal with. It also makes the poem intellectual rather than emotional — for me.

Now not all haiku need to be realistic. I find Metz’s blowhole haiku to be wonderful because there are so many great links between the parts that reverberate back and forth (sea = space; blood = stars; etc). I don’t get those same parallels in the war dead haiku. The “blue mathematics” feels out of place, tacked on.

The reading:

war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad
is mine. That's what I think he is trying to say. I just think he is doing it in a poor way.

Richard Gilbert

Dear Agent Provocateur,

Whomever you are. We kiss the golden apples that fall from your ass.

As a note, on the translation of 青き “aoki” into English. It is quite impossible. “Blue” here might actually be “green” or “natural” or “nature” or “as nature” -- we may continue to tease it. Go back far enough in haiku/Japanese poetic history, and there was no “green” only “blue” for nature. Recall even the recent “aoi yama” (green mountains -- literally, blue mountains) from Santoka. You might ask why we purposefully chose “blue” here.

We remain impersonally yours, for the blue are counted dead. You are not wrong to chose otherwise. As well you are not. Pathetically so. It’s good we are not at war. Is an ocean blue? Or the sky? There is actually more in Japanese than meets the eye; no accounting for taste.

“This last haiku is in itself an effective argument for experimentation in art.” (M.T.) We concur.

Alan Summers

Thanks Agent Provocateur (and Richard Gilbert)

It’s been great to dialogue with Paul Miller, and that our last two emails are posted here. I have to say I am still deeply moved by the blue mathematics haiku. True, we have an intense public season of mourning and examination regarding the First World War, and how calculating British Generals and politicians were in disposing of British troops. I’d say it was the equivalent of Corporate Manslaughter at the very least.
Here’s the last email I sent to Paul:

Hi Paul,

Dealing a hand of emotive cards in such a short verse as haiku with all its demands is not an easy task.

I think Richard Gilbert’s *Poems of Consciousness* made me broaden my appreciation of haiku styles, although it was fairly broad before, but being a Virgo, my perfection is being forced open. His book really pushed me, and also I’ve got to see more Japanese haiku in translation.

I’m often sensitive to too much architrave, it really has to earn its right to embellish. As a former Painter and Decorator I’ve painted or restored a few architraves in my time.

I have seen a lot of haiku adopt the color blue, from the famous blue apple series:

```plaintext
    deep underground--
        the blue apple reflecting
        billions of suns
Scott Metz *Ginyu* 42 (2009)

    blue apple
    it gives birth
    to a mirror
Scott Metz *Ginyu* 42 (2009)

    cloudless
    a day balanced
    on the blue apple
Scott Metz *Ginyu* 42 (2009)
```

And other ways of using blue, or subverting the accepted order of syntax/semantics
The influence is probably all Belgian, even from the Japanese. :-)

I can’t say academically why the blue mathematics connects to me, or why the blue sharks of Kaneko, or the blood group (although I’m B Rhesus Positive, and very much a loner and outsider at times) and perjury haiku of Fumio means so much to me.

*ni-ju oku kônen no gishyô* *omae no B-gata*
twenty billion light-years of perjury: your blood type is “B”
Hoshinaga Fumio

It might hinge on injustice born out of reading DC and Marvel comics as a child, alongside Dickens and Shakespeare. The sense of right and wrong in mythical places, Victorian Britain, and Italy perhaps. I’m wired both wrong(ly) and differently.

kindest regards,

Alan

p.s.

Also inheriting depression from my blood mother who I met just a few years ago (explaining so much) might explain my connection to the hue of blue.

Quote from: Richard Gilbert on August 07, 2014, 04:35:56 AM

Dear Agent Provocateur,

Whoever you are. We kiss the golden apples that fall from your ass.

As a note, on the translation of 青き “aoki” into English. It is quite impossible. “Blue” here might actually be “green” or “natural” or “nature” or “as nature” -- we may continue to tease it. Go back far enough in haiku/Japanese poetic history, and there was no “green” only “blue” for nature. Recall even the recent “aoi yama” (green mountains -- literally, blue mountains) from Santoka. You might ask why we purposefully chose “blue” here.
We remain impersonally yours, for the blue are counted dead. You are not wrong to chose otherwise. As well you are not. Pathetically so. It's good we are not at war. Is an ocean blue? Or the sky? There is actually more in Japanese than meets the eye; no accounting for taste.

“This last haiku is in itself an effective argument for experimentation in art.” (M.T.) We concur.

Richard Gilbert

Dear Agent Provocateur,

It is rather presumptuous to use 50-cent words where 5-cent words would do. This little epithet could be made much cheaper:

*Quote*

We kiss the golden apples that fall from your ass.

We are talking about words. About the cost of them. We shall rate them on a cost-benefit analysis, in terms of value.

At the same time, there are complications. Let’s ignore such for now, and add up the word values. Our analysis runs like this:

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war = 5
dead = 5
exit = 5 (possibly 10)
out of a = freebie
blue = 5
mathematics = 25
Total word cost = 45 cents (later revised to 50 cents, see below)
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Analysis: We wonder which words could be cheaper than war and dead and blue. Each monosyllabic. The cost of war is high, but war itself? This is a high-frequency common noun (and historically rife, to the present). Same with the others, really.
For exit: two-syllables--should we revise 5-cents upward? Call it 50 cents. This still has to be one of the cheapest haiku around. Also it’s English-typical at 12 syllables. But someone might want to cheapen it a bit, as the word-cost appears -- how can we put this delicately? Effete, elite, arrogant, in some way?

My translator chimp (I mean Gilbert) seeks a suitable primitivism, for “suugaku” (hint: mathematics) in translation. He’s rather limited in symbolic vocabulary (being a chimp), but even with his lame Japanese he knows that “suugaku” means only one thing. The Faculty of Mathematics in a university has a name, “Suugaku.” (As the Faculty of Letters is “Bungaku (literature+study)”)

数学 = suu+gaku. You can find it in the haiku in question. Now let’s visit Google Translate. Enter the kanji 数学. The cheapest and only answer = “mathematics.” See this: 計算 it is the kanji for “calculation, reckoning.” These kanji are not in the haiku. Actually “suugaku” can mean “mathematics” or in the appropriate context “faculty of/study of mathematics.” Either way there is no other word for translation which is more literal and direct than “mathematics” for this haiku. The chimp cannot find any way around it: this is pretty much exactly what the poet said in the original. The only conclusion is that the most expensive word in this haiku is the cheapest possible.

Suugaku then, is abstract, isn’t it? This is not “applied mathematics” or any sort of reckoning. That would be left to the cost-benefit analysis of the reader, concerning the war dead. Perhaps there is more than a hint of semantic brutality, in a natural/blue/simple/pure mathematics. You can mess with “blue” but not with “mathematics.” Unless you want to make up your own poem, just through ignorance.

So we have a very cheap haiku. Though the abstraction “mathematics” costs us dearly. But it’s really worse, much, much worse. Because there is collocational neologism (an original terminological coinage, never before seen in print). You know, one of those things Shakespeare and Dickens and a (very) few other artists of repute are noted for.

戦死者が青き数学より出たり
sennsisha ga aoki suugaku yori detari
war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
Literally, in given word order:

戦死者 (sennsisha) = war dead (KIA)
が (ga) = (concerning [subject]: war dead)
青き数学 (aoki suugaku) = blue/natural/of nature
but! also:
unripe/unnatural (e.g. “This fruit is still “green” [unripe, not yet ready])
+ mathematics
より (yori) = showing “like”| comparison | connection
出たり (detari) = to come out of / exit

What can we determine in our cost-benefit analysis?

青き数学 = blue mathematics. This is in no dictionary, because this collocation is the poet’s neologism. If anyone wants to cheapen this poem in English, they would be wise to do away with the neologism, which is basically the same in English as in Japanese. It is true that “blue” has many added meanings in English. But then, “blue” (as “aoi”) has many different meanings in Japanese, as well. In English, blue is a color of nature (ocean, sky) but also the “blue” of the blues, of sadness, tragedy, depression. In other words it (like “aoi”) offers contrary, contrastive or contradictory meanings. so the use of “blue” for “blue” in Japanese is actually the only interpretive move, in the translation. The signifiers differ yet in both languages they are semantically complex and paradoxical or agonistic (polarized); a different poem is created, yet with a similar sense of agon, tension (if you can do better, talk to the gimp err, chimp).

The suggestion: “killed from calculations that I find sad” has many expensive semantic assumptions and misses entirely the creative collocation at the core -- the cornerstone of this haiku (in either language). Even a chimp can say that it is this bizzare, abstract neologism which catalyzes this poem, makes it “experimental,” challenging and spare, in both languages. However in the original, it would have the added danger of alerting the Secret Police to your person, and we know the mathematics, counted in haiku poets for one, of this human cost. The poem has no “killed” (as a verb), no “calculations,” no “from,” no “I,” and DEFINITELY no “sad.”
So the suggestion of

“war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad”

Is something even a chimp finds dumb. Such mistakes are expensive when it comes to recognizing the genius of a noted poet from a foreign culture. Who would turn such a work into their own kind of animal? This would be both presumptuous and aggressive. It is right and proper to question the translation. But this has not been done. There has been no questing after veracity, no attunement to questions of emulation of genre qualities or semantic or syntactical realities across cultures and languages. This is what chimps do. They work hard for the bananas.

Dear Agent Provocateur, whomever you may be, please show us your next new addition.

No speak, no see, no hear: Three monkeys
(Apparently, it’s what we do.)

Philip Rowland

As perhaps first publisher of the “war dead” haiku with English translation (first Japanese publication sometime between 1937 and 1940, according to Ito Yuki), thought I’d chip in… In 2006 I found this haiku challenging and compelling, and still do. That “we are supposed to think it cool and clever” seems unfairly dismissive, as does reducing it to a paraphrasable message. Granted, it has been presented here in English, but some acknowledgement of its being a Japanese poem -- of the challenge of translation and what might have been lost (and gained) in the process -- is in order, as Richard has just indicated.

Probably most Japanese readers - unless they have a strong interest in modern poetry -- would be baffled by the poem; it’s undoubtedly towards the abstract end of the spectrum. But “blue mathematics” doesn’t seem at all “tacked on”; its cool
abstraction (complicated by other connotations of “blue”, in Japanese and English) is anticipated by another coolly neutral, Latinate word: “exit”. “blue mathematics” strikes me as an idea-image of the kind David Porter considers in his essay on Emily Dickinson’s “strangely abstracted images” (in Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice Hall, 1996). His essay begins by acknowledging a view akin to Paul M’s on “blue mathematics”:

“Abstraction, we are told repeatedly, is inimical to poetry. Yet in images that are so abstract they have given up their sensuous immediacy to pure meaning, Dickinson asserted her poetic individuality. … these peculiar figures with no light-catching body perform in her poems on occasion so audaciously as to reveal the interior moment when for her events became apprehended by language.”

He later cites Archibald MacLeish’s attention to her “drained images”:

“Amethyst remembrance,” “Polar expiation,” Neither of these exists upon the retina. Neither can be brought into focus by the muscles of the eye. … And yet all of these present themselves as images, do they not? -- act as images? Where can remembrance be amethyst? Where but in the eye?”

Whether “blue mathematics” succeeds as an image of this sort, in the context of Sugimura Seirinshi’s haiku, is bound to be a more subjective matter than most, because it’s a more audacious image than most in haiku -- an image that (for me) succeeds in apprehending the nearly inexpressible thought of the “war dead,” and in evoking a feeling of anger or hopelessness coupled with horror.

Paul Miller

Dear Richard, (or Agent Provocateur or chimp (I kind of got lost in there somewhere)

Thanks for the better understanding of the translation. I was reading “blue” as from “the blues” so you can see where I got my sense of sadness. It seemed fitting given the war context.
That said, I have every right to question the “genius” of any poet, foreign or not. And since haiku are considered unfinished until done so by the reader (another foreign genius said that) the turning of the original into an animal of my own making is expected.

Perhaps, in this case, the matter comes down to my desire to have an immediate shared experience. Some form of communication. The phrase “war dead” to me asks for a serious reading, not to instead make those bodies into an intellectual curiosity or puzzle. Maybe that’s why I find it clever instead of heartfelt. I simply wonder if the “blue mathematics” haiku couldn’t have been written better to give me that. This is something I struggle to say because there are times when I like an abstraction, when I welcome them. A glance at my short tenure at Modern Haiku will hopefully attest to that. So I don’t have an objection to them per se.

Sometimes, however, they seem out of place.

A: “I’m a Sanitation Engineer.”
B: “So you create studies of waste usage and design better methodologies for its management?”
A: “Uh… no”
B: “What do you do?”
A: “I pick up the trash from in front of your house.”

Yet, I could understand Suugaku’s possible reluctance to engage the “war dead” at face value, and perhaps wish to insert a metaphor in-between for comfort… distance. To borrow from Mr. Rowland… to deal with “the nearly inexpressible” thoughts… the feelings of hopelessness. That distance is something I try to avoid in my poetry, so my reading is obviously subjective. And I recognize how easy it is for me to say that, not being in a war. However I don’t know the circumstances of this poem’s composition.

Respectfully,

Paul
Hi everyone,

Since this is the off-topic place, I’m just going to head off-topic for a moment!

“Amethyst remembrance” could very well be read as making perfect sense, if one were to consider Victorian England’s mourning rituals (for the upper-classes at least).

If a woman’s husband were to die, she would wear black dress and no jewellery for 18 months. There were various other rules for other members of one’s family, including children, siblings, parents and in-laws. (And, of course, different rules for men!)

After 18 months, the widow could move to the “second stage” and add jet (black) jewellery and diamonds if in wedding rings. Dress was still black and without lustre. This lasted for nine months. BTW this stricture on black meant she wore black from her skin to her outer clothes, everything!

The third stage of mourning - three to six months long - saw a move back into fashionable clothes and into dull colour, often shades of purple (starting at the darkest end and moving through into lighter hues as time passed), or black with lustre. Jewellery was once again allowed and stones such as amethyst and garnet were popular as “half-mourning” jewellery.

Queen Elizabeth owns at least one set of amethyst jewellery (the “Kent amethysts”) but doesn’t often wear the larger pieces. It has been passed down to female monarchs or consorts from Queen Victoria’s mother. Queen Mary’s gorgeous amethyst tiara was sold, reputedly by the Queen Mother, and it is often recorded that neither she nor her daughter are fans of the stone. (Right, way, way off topic.)

I have read that Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 was the last time that these excessive rituals of mourning were observed - the massive casualties of World War 1 put an end to the etiquette.

So, amethyst can = remembrance in a very literal sense.
Dear Paul,

I understand that you do not like the poem. You threw down the gauntlet when you wrote: “I have pondered and pondered this haiku . . . I think it fails. It is a bunch of twenty-five cent words when five cent words would have done. One challenge in this poem is to stand up to the new orthodoxy and point out its lack of pants.”

You then re-wrote the haiku, into what struck me as a text having little to do with the original poem.

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war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
Sugimura Seirinshi (trans. Richard Gilbert and Ito Yuki)
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“war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad”
(English-translation, adapted, Paul Miller)

I can’t consider your adaptation as haiku, as there is no cutting. You’ve penned an epithet, and as was pointed out, had seemingly complete disregard for the original text. We are entitled to our taste, but your critical comments: “it fails,” “five cent words would have done,” “lack of pants” this is another matter. It seems you are proposing your adaptation as a preferable haiku to “blue mathematics,” as a way of revealing your taste and editorial position. As well, the reach of your mind, or sensibility, with regard to certain varieties of haiku.

Any negative critique, particularly of a notable haiku (or poet), needs to be informed. It would be unconscionable, to my mind, to have the reader of your adaptation find that it in any way had to do with the original haiku. That you have put it forth as an
interpretative translation -- even as haiku -- this is a matter needing to be addressed, and we have done so, above.

I’d like to briefly comment on another matter. You write: “And since haiku are considered unfinished until done so by the reader...” The experience (reader phenomenology) of a haiku is a different matter than what exists as published text. The text itself is in black & white on the page. Because this haiku appears in English with Japanese kanji/romaji, and is penned by a noted poet, the text, in terms of translation, is treated as finished. I hope you grasp the difference.

You find this poem “clever instead of heartfelt.” Others strongly disagree with you. In that there are strong polarizations of opinion on this poem, it may serve as a worthy example of important differences not only in taste but in genre-sensibility -- a broader issue than this poem in particular. Recently, I read Avant-Garde Community and the Individual Talent -- The Case of Language Poetry, by Marjorie Perloff (2004).

The first half of this essay contains a comprehensive discussion of the modern literary history, and types, of “avant gardes.”

Reading down to the section, “Word Order = World Order”?, the irruptive syntax and intellectual and sociopolitical intent of Language poetry is described. Perloff begins by providing a quotation of an insipid poem, as contrast (“Haitian Suite” by Orr); it seems about as hackneyed, to my sensibility, as your “adaptation.” Several paragraphs down, we find:

Bernstein had studied Wittgenstein with Stanley Cavell at Harvard, and his notion that “there are no thoughts except through language,” is a version of Wittgenstein’s “The limits of language mean the limits of my world” (1992:§5.6), that “Language is not contiguous to anything else” (1980: 112). The articles of faith of 60’s poetry—Olson’s “Form is never more than the extension of content” and Ginsberg’s “First thought, best thought”—were thus overturned in a new call for poetry as making, construction—the importance of each and every word and especially of word order. But unlike the New Criticism, which demanded unified and centered structure, the “aura around a bright clear centre,” as Reuben Brower called it, the constructivist aesthetic of Language poetry insisted
on the making process itself, in all its anti-closure, incompletion, and indeterminacy.

and

Here, in a nutshell, is the animating principle of much of the poetry to come: poetic language is not a window, a transparent glass to be seen through in pursuit of the “real” objects outside it but a system of signs with its own semiological relationships. To put it another way, “Language is material and primary and what’s experienced is the tension and relationship of letters and lettristic clusters, simultaneously struggling towards, yet refusing to become, significations.”

What Perloff is alluding to here in Language poetry represents a significant difference between haiku-compositional groups, regarding sensibility. Perloff’s article may be useful in that it provides historical and scholarly context to how “war dead / exit out of a blue mathematics” might be received. When the poem was originally penned, it seems doubtful that there existed an appropriate literary content, which might contain (hold, support) its soul. However we are now in a post-Language poetry era, and a number of practicing poets and critics in the haiku genre, being influenced by this and succeeding movements, utilize principles and techniques stemming from it.

My example of Language poetry here may seem excessively historicist; after all, Perloff’s essay is already a decade old. Yet your interpretive comments strike me as a pernicious echo of a “poet writing his or her ‘sincere,’ sensitive, intimate, speech-based lyric, expressing particular nuances of emotion” -- (“killed from calculations that I find sad”) -- a big step back into the “naive confessional” mode, with its passe conventions.

My thought is that while Language poetry may not have always succeeded in within individual works, its intellectual (and societal) influence has become increasingly important to our literary culture over the last three decades, within and without the university. A certain number of haiku in English represent new advances in style and approach, incorporating the history Perloff discusses -- rather than denying or avoiding it.
Philip Rowland

Richard -- I agree that Paul Miller’s

war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad

has “little to do with the original poem,” but would be very surprised if he meant it to be read as a haiku; I took it to be a slightly mocking paraphrase, deliberately poor, poetically. Well, just thought to point out that he merely (if, IMHO, misguidedly) put it forward as what he thought the poet was “trying to say.”

Richard Gilbert

Phil,

You write that Paul Miller’s

war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad

has “little to do with the original poem,” but would be very surprised if he meant it to be read as a haiku I agree in part, yet he states “it [the translated English] is essentially a rewrite of:

war dead
killed from calculations that I find sad”

It is hard to determine how unlike a haiku “essentially a rewrite” is meant to be taken. If it’s not meant to approach a rewriting of a haiku, then it’s merely a non sequitur. I take the implied meaning to be that
is actually of a lesser quality and value than the “essential rewrite” he penned. In this sense, I treated it as a haiku; to what extent the rewrite is meant as parody is something Paul could perhaps comment on.

As a further note, Paul writes above: “I don’t know the circumstances of this poem’s composition.” Yet, Alan Summers earlier provided a link to this article which well-explains the circumstances (sociopolitical context) of the poem’s composition. The poem in question, “war dead...” was first published in the context of this monograph (we translated the series of anti-war haiku found within, including “war dead” as preparation for publication). I’m unclear of the exact dates of our submission of these poems to the Noon journal—certainly Noon was the first appearance of this poem, outside of the monograph. For your information, here is the group of poems we selected (out of a number) for translation:

機関銃眉間ニ殺ス花ガ咲ク
kikanjuu miken ni korosu hana ga saku
a machine gun
in the forehead
the killing flower blooms

戦死者が青き数学より出たり
sennsisha ga aoki suugaku yori detari
war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics

枯れし木を離れ枯れし木として撃たれ
tareshi ki o hanare kareshi ki toshite utare
leaving a dead tree
being shot as a dead tree
Context is important to a deeper understanding of these haiku (the monograph by Itô Yûki is gripping -- Red Moon Press was inspired to produce the monograph, at its own expense, as I recall). At the same time, I think most would agree these haiku are effective as autonomous poems, and more, are among the most powerful haiku on war we possess, in English.

Philip Rowland

Hi Richard, Good to revisit the illuminating “New Rising Haiku” monograph.

Re. “I’m unclear of the exact dates of our submission of these poems to the Noon journal”: it was May 2006; selections finalised in June; publication September 2006. I remember being particularly pleased to be able to include a selection of these anti-war haiku; and getting some insight into the translation difficulties in discussion of a couple of pieces I picked that don’t appear in the monograph:

安死術夜戦の谷の蟹にある

Hirahata Seito

砲音に鳥獣魚介冷え曇る

Saito Sanki

Paul Miller

Dear Richard,

You write: “The experience (reader phenomenology) of a haiku is a different matter than what exists as published text. The text itself is in black & white on the page.
Because this haiku appears in English with Japanese kanji/romaji, and is penned by a noted poet, the text, in terms of translation, is treated as finished. I hope you grasp the difference.

Are you dismissing active participation with the poem by the reader? Clearly there are a number of poems here: the original, the translation, and my interpretation of the translation. All are valid poems. Since the poet has shared his version with us I believe he is giving us explicit permission to create our own reading. Phillip was correct that my “version” was a paraphrase of what I thought the poem meant—not a haiku itself (please give me some poetic credit). But frankly, your translation is a paraphrase of what you think the haiku means. The fact that you chose “blue” over “natural” proves that.

I’m perhaps more troubled by my perception that you seem to over-value process and newness than result. If someone slaps me in the face I don’t so much care that they are foreign, did it in a new way, and under the watch of a morally-corrupt government; I’m concerned about the pain. I get that you and others like this poem for a variety of interesting reasons, and I sincerely think that’s wonderful; I am just not one of those.

Paul

ps. for what it is worth, the essay “New Rising Haiku” doesn’t address the circumstance of the haiku’s composition, other than the social-political that you mention. So I don’t know if he wrote this standing over the dead body of a friend or from his apartment. I’d hardly equate the two

Richard Gilbert

Phil,

Thanks for the reminder and emendations. So the first appearance of these poems was in Noon. Most excellent. Was there ever a conclusive translation published, of those two you posted in Japanese? I don’t have my Noon copies here at home. Please feel free to post these last, if you like.
Paul,

Virtually all of my published work deals with reader-phenomenology. I think my works such as The Disjunctive Dragonfly illuminate the issue; a short comment can’t suffice. My mention of “text” has to do with the process of translation. There is something in your PS that strikes me as strange. You write: “I don’t know if he wrote this standing over the dead body of a friend or from his apartment. I’d hardly equate the two.” By this literalistic logic, one would need to know where all the poets were, in all the haiku, in order to judge the veracity of any and every given poem. I think there’s hardly a poet that doesn’t re-write/edit their works, for that matter. So, for you, I assume if in his apartment, the poem is false, and if standing over a dead body of a friend, true? I guess we should all be grilled, upon submission.

For those interested in the topic of anti-war haiku and fascism in Japan during the “Wartime Period” in relation to gendai (modern, contemporary) haiku, there is a follow-up interview (done by email exchange) between Udo Wenzel and Itô Yûki, which was published in English and German, in Haiku Heute (Germany). The English version is here:

Forgive, But Do Not Forget: Modern Haiku and Totalitarianism
Itô Yûki talks with Udo Wenzel (17 December 2007)

“I feel that, wherever they are in the world, haiku poets should not limit the possibilities of the poetry, haiku, in any sense.” -- Itô Yûki (2007)

Richard Gilbert

Phil,

I’d like to draw you out a bit more, concerning your recent poet in FN7, on the topic of abstraction -- if this is even the right word. You write:

For Barthes, the quintessential haiku’s “propositions are always simple, commonplace, in a word acceptable (as we say in linguistics)”—as Ashbery’s plainly are not:
I inch and only sometimes as far as the twisted pole gone in spare colors

Commonplace? Acceptable? The apparent absence of any concrete outside reference draws attention away from the “natural world” and towards—in the poet’s own words—“the experience of experience.” Does such abstraction necessarily preclude “evocation of haiku spirit” [found in the “The Nature of English Haiku” pamphlet]? Arguably—again with reference to the terms of the [British Haiku Society] consensus—Ashbery’s work bears witness to “the continuous flow of experience” that is intrinsic to the “haiku moment” precisely by incorporating the mediation or “interference” of language in the experiencing of that flow—or as he himself puts it, “the way a happening or experience filters through to me.” This practice does of course tend to displace more concrete subject matter, but also yields flashes of particular insight into the poetic process.

I would like to know how, and follow, your thoughts in this dimension, concerning the poem under discussion,

war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
Sugimura Seirinshi

I find “war dead” -- particularly placed into its contextual era of wartime Japan -- to be a much more realistic poem then the Ashbery you quote. As Paul Miller points out, there is the abstraction of “blue mathematics” -- which he takes issue with, in reference to intention or motivation. As haiku, Ashbery goes much further. You state: “Ashbery’s work bears witness to “the continuous flow of experience” that is intrinsic to the “haiku moment” precisely by incorporating the mediation or “interference” of language in the experiencing of that flow...”

How can “interference” of language relate to the “haiku moment” -- and what do you mean by “haiku moment” within this specific area of concern? Most relevantly, how would your thoughts here apply to “war dead”?
Additionally, you quote Ashbery, concerning his haiku approach (or poetic approach): “the way a happening or experience filters through to me.” There seems a world of potential obfuscation in the word “filters.” I’m not sure your point (or his point) is made clear.

I do think, if I read correctly, that you are posing a dialectic between “simple / commonplace” and (language or textual) “mediation / interference” -- yet perhaps implying that both poles of this dialectic can pertain to organic (?) expression, i.e. “the way a happening or experience filters through...” into haiku.

I find for example in Paul Miller’s objection to “war dead” -- particularly where he writes:

“having an emotional reaction to a poem is the first and most important reading you should have . . . for me the abstraction distances me from a real event. The advantage realism has is that the reader is forced into a real situation that they must grapple with. “blue mathematics” is just too cute and clever for me to deal with. It also makes the poem intellectual rather than emotional--for me.

-- how much cuter and cleverer is Ashbery’s “I inch and only” in this regard? Paul advances the provocative proposition:

“The advantage realism has is that the reader is forced into a real situation that they must grapple with.”

I think Paul is connecting “force” here with a clearly (enough) envisioned situational reality, evinced in the reader, by the haiku. For realism, “advantage” is thus pragmatically connected with emotional impact.

Yet by contrast, it’s evident that many readers share a viscerally potent emotional (as well as intellectual) reaction to “war dead.” In other words, Paul’s proposition is one defining (in part) his sensibility, but not that of other readers. We might inquire into what others ways emotional impact is being imparted to readers, in “war dead.”

This said, I wonder if even here “emotion” is actually questionable, as an axiom to
hang your hat on. I doubt that the primary intent of Ashbery’s “I inch” is impactful emotional reaction (certainly not that caused by a realistic situational immediacy). You conclude differently, with “flashes of particular insight into the poetic process” -- which, for those into “flashes” (like me) would be rather an emotional thing -- though I would extend your metaphor to “dwelling” within (this concept draws on a more extended sense of “home” or psychological, rather than literal/realistic landscape, evinced by the poem). Personally, by the end of the ku “gone in spare colors” I’m dis-embodied and possessed by a feeling of ‘childlike disappearance into space.’ I find this ku to be rather lovingly/playfully “twisted” and a big tease. Its veracity is that it exists! (Rings the bell in terms of creative uniqueness, and idiosyncracy, and yet it’s a readable, scannable non-nonsense nonsense.) With an abundance of impossibility and uniqueness, I witness a “language” statement (proposition) and a line drawn in the sand, regarding genre in haiku.

So a further question for you -- is there any sense of (genre) direction here that we might articulate in a more embodied or pragmatic way, concerning haiku?

Philip Rowland

Richard, Re.

安死術夜戦の谷の蟹にある  
anshi jutsu yasen no tani no kani ni aru  
平畑静塔  
Hirahata Seito

and

砲音に鳥獣魚介冷え曇る  
houon ni choujuu gyokai hie kumoru  
西東三鬼  
Saito Sanki

the versions we ended up with were:

clean kills: in a night war a canyon a crab
and

at the shriek of artillery
birds beasts fish shellfish
chilling dim

My guess is that the second of these is more in need of revision, tho the first is tricky, too...

Richard Gilbert

the versions we ended up with were:

    clean kills: in a night war a canyon a crab

and

at the shriek of artillery
birds beasts fish shellfish
chilling dim

My guess is that the second of these is more in need of revision, tho the first is tricky, too...

Right! Thanks Phil. There is the weird (creepy/horrific/ironic) rhyme-sense-rhythm of “no tani no kani ni aru” [lit. night war’s canyon’s/valley’s crab is /: a crab exists]. And Sanki’s “hie kumoru” [chilling dim] is about as bizarre in Japanese as English. Ito and I had many discussions about this. I was tempted to think of “hie kumoru” as “extinction” (of all life, of wildlife, or ? but perhaps this is conceptually overwrought). In the end, our imaginations failed us -- we finally returned to just trying to say in English what it says in Japanese, without a further “figuring out.” I wonder if a sensitive bilingual poet/translator might offer an alternate translation -- Fay, where are you!?
Philip Rowland

First, the comments of mine (of 15 years ago) on Ashbery’s haiku were not meant to be taken as particularly relevant to “war dead”, though in terms of the perceived “abstraction” of both (Ashbery’s further along in that direction, agreed), some slight connection may be made. The BHS consensus on “the nature of English haiku” that I referred to in the essay and Paul Miller’s comment on the “distancing” effect of “blue mathematics” may be related (similar). Hopefully, my take on the Ashbery haiku is clearer in the context of the whole essay (in which, as I wrote, my broadest aim was simply “to challenge or at least complicate the received view that it is necessarily ‘concrete images, not abstract words, that carry the meaning and create the tension and atmosphere in haiku’”). “Haiku moment” and “the continuous flow of experience” were terms of the BHS consensus (the notion that the haiku arrests a moment in time, registering its temporality), and my adopting those terms in reading the Ashbery haiku was a bit tongue-in-cheek.

I agree that the “war dead” haiku is more realistic; Ashbery’s ku more surrealistic -- or abstract expressionist? In the latter, there seems to be no “event,” other than “the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice” (Stevens), to which to relate it. It is playful (and to be playful, you have to feel pretty much at home), and, I agree, it’s a line drawn in the sand, one kind of limit, regarding genre in haiku (“tundra”, for example, another). I wouldn’t go so far as to say that it’s “a big tease,” though (has nothing to do with pole-dancing, I presume!); I find it “makes sense” rather beautifully; its “veracity”: that it’s damned hard to explain or paraphrase! -- or as you put it, “that it exists!” (In the David Porter piece on Dickinson that I referred to in an earlier post: “Abstract expressionist artists since Kandinsky have sought representations of this sort of experience that unknowably is.) “The twisted pole gone in spare colors” touches on something that’s hard to put your finger on, in somewhat the same way as “blue mathematics”.

Sugimura’s “war dead” seems, in contrast to Ashbery’s piece, uncanny, not at home in the world to which it refers. It is “abstract” in the sense that it takes an ineluctable fact and tries to come to terms with it metaphorically, via an idea-image (or “strangely abstracted image”).

I have to keep this brief, but thanks for the thoughts in response!
PS. (re: #17): Yes, I love that “…yasen no tani no kani ni aru” - how to reproduce some sound-sense of that?! Right now I prefer “…in a night war’s canyon a crab” to what we had.

Peter Yovu

Very happy to read: “Abstract expressionist artists since Kandinsky have sought representations of this sort of experience that unknowably is”.

I have waking and more often hynagogic moments that slide across my consciousness like continents of oil on the skin of a bubble which elude, allude, illude . . .

Ordinary language will not do to say what such experience “unknowably is”, and one finds the upwelling of “the twisted pole gone in spare colors” as refreshing rain from the bubble’s burst.

Blue. *The Dictionary of Word Origins* says this:

“Colour terms are notoriously slippery things, and blue is a prime example. Its ultimate ancestor, Indo-European bhlewos, seems originally to have meant ‘yellow’ (it is the source of Latin flavus ‘yellow’ from which English gets flavine ‘yellow dye’. But it later evolved via ‘white’ (Greek phalos ‘white’ is related) and ‘pale’ to ‘livid, the color of bruised skin’ (Old Norse has bla ‘livid’. English had the related blaw, but it did not survive, and the modern English word was borrowed from Old French bleu. . .”.

math, n. a mowing. --ME. math, fr. OE. maep, ‘harvest, crop’ . . .

“blue mathematics” reminds me how little English is spoken in haiku, which typically favors restraint and spare language. To do as Shakespeare did, and Dickinson, and draw from many roots, to yoke Anglo-Saxon and latinate words, or words of Greek origin, so as to juxtapose in sparkful dissemination . . . seems not be the way, perhaps cannot be the way.
And so I often think of English language haiku as translation, as approximation of Japanese, as examples to give some sense of how haiku is (and does) to those who do not know Japanese, and beyond that as examples of examples. The way forward may be by way of the English language itself. But then, the way forward may not be haiku.

Alan Summers

war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics
Sugimura Seirinshi (trans. Richard Gilbert and Ito Yuki)

Thank you so much Peter for creating this space, and that we can discuss and breakdown various matters, but in particular, for me, ‘blue mathematics’ and touching on the color blue in other haiku away from the ‘norm of colour’. Why does ‘blue mathematics’ continue to work for me after hundreds of re-readings? Just that some haiku I read, can be read that many times, as much as summer grasses can be, despite the fact it was not anti-war, but perhaps a completely neutral poem.

Yes, true, in the English versions of Basho’s verse there are no higher register words yet ‘blue mathematics’ contains one higher register, to a degree, and the combination, at least in the English version, of ‘blue’ and ‘mathematics’ might appear to be a phrase in a higher register than necessary, yet that ‘phrase’ haunts me, as calculations are constantly made regarding counter-aggressive actions such as the recent attacks against ISIS in Iraq for instance. What group of politicians and bureaucrats would not consider the effect on a political election sometimes over and beyond the actual need for action to defend non-combative civilisations?

Basho was an envoy, and a double agent. Yes, it appears so. His double life was being a poet and not a stooge for the more urbanised group of people in his time. Just as Sugimura Seirinshi has not forgone his duties as a poet by being a stooge for the growing corporate companies who wanted Japan plunged into war for territory.
“If all men lead mechanical, unpoetical lives, this is the real nihilism, the real undoing of the world.”
Reginald Horace Blyth (1898 – 1964) Zen Quotes

Lorin Ford

戦死者が青き数学より出たり
sennsisha ga aoki suugaku yori detari
war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics

Literally, in given word order:

戦死者 (sennsisha) = war dead (KIA)
が (ga) = (concerning [subject]: war dead)
青き数学 (aoki suugaku) = blue/natural/of nature
but! also:
unripe/unnatural (e.g. “This fruit is still “green” [unripe, not yet ready])
+ mathematics
より (yori) = showing “like” | comparison | connection
出たり (detari) = to come out of / exit

Thanks, Richard. This is useful. It’s hard for me to know how to value an interpretation or rendition because I’m never sure if the English words carry even the mood that the author conveyed in the original, let alone the meaning, which also depends on things like movement, pace and emphasis, not just the words.

青き数学 = blue mathematics. This is in no dictionary, because this collocation is the poet’s neologism.

It is true that “blue” has many added meanings in English. But then, “blue” (as “aoi”) has many different meanings in Japanese, as well. In English, blue is a color of nature (ocean, sky) but also the “blue” of the blues, of sadness, tragedy, depression.
In other words it (like “aoi”) offers contrary, contrastive or contradictory meanings. so the use of “blue” for “blue” in Japanese is actually the only interpretive move, in the translation. The signifiers differ yet in both languages they are semantically complex and paradoxical or agonistic (polarized); a different poem is created, yet with a similar sense of agon, tension.

And that, above, too.

Yes, blue has many hues and many associations, but why has the poet chosen ‘a blue mathematics’? When two words are put together like this, each changes the other. In relation to mathematics, my experience of ‘blue’ (in my imagination) becomes colder (is this just me, just a personal peculiarity?) It also becomes more the blue of distance (the further away things are ...like hills ...the more blue they appear to be to the human eye) What I’m trying to say is that ‘mathematics’ must have an effect on how we experience ‘blue’, on what sort of blue we bring to mind, it’s not just the other way around (‘blue’ as adjective qualifies ‘mathematics’ as noun)

出たり (detari) = to come out of / exit

Who is coming out of, exiting, leaving? (genuine question!) Could it be the author/poet himself, the one reflecting on the subject of the ‘war dead’? Or is it the ‘war dead’ who leave, exit, the last of their existence being as numbers accounted for in records? Becoming a number as well as being dead seems to make those people (‘the war dead’ ... no names, nobody’s son etc. ,nothing personal) into abstractions, but then...

Or do they return to mind, come out of abstraction as ‘the war dead’, individually and in groups, into the memories of the living? Come out of, exit the cold, distant numbers of the death toll and haunt the living? Weigh on the poet’s mind?

Blue with associations of cold and the colour of distant things, mathematics as measurement (and “measurement began our might” or the like from Yeats). The colour blue measured as having a shorter wavelength and higher frequency than all other visible colours apart from violet since the C19 (so, though ‘leaving’ the visible spectrum , not as far toward the end as violet ... & therefore more present than
Dickinson’s ‘amethyst remembrance’ that Sandra mentioned

I’m a bit like Paul M. The childhood fairytale that’s lasted in my mind is ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, so I admit to a chuckle at Paul M.’s “no pants” comment. The reality, though, is that I’m more open to this ‘war dead’ ku than I am to many relatively contemporary American ‘war dead’ haiku, which strike me as sentimental and manipulative of the reader and all much the same.

For me, this poem is cold and mysterious, with a haunting quality. I can’t say I get it but I can’t dismiss it. I know how I feel when I recall how many horses were killed in WW1. And how many Australian horses. The numbers are a cold weight.

Why is the mathematics blue, though? I can’t fathom that any more than I can fathom the convention, in traditional Japanese verse, of having the autumn wind as white.

But I’ve not seen any objections to ‘white wind’ as a kigo.

Forgive the musings and stumblings and rambling ... it’s all I can offer, it’s where I am with this one.

Lorin

Paul Miller

Among other things, I think this poem interestingly speaks to the notion of translation. A poem like Basho’s frog pond is probably “fairly” straightforward to translate since for the most part its pieces are objective and relate in logical ways. Not necessarily in the sense of explaining the cut parts, but we know what an old pond is, we know what a frog jumping is.

The “blue mathematics” haiku, on the other hand, is very abstract, and as we have seen “blue” might not even be the right word (as in: preferred by the poet over the choice of “natural” etc). This is not a critique of the translators who are doing their best with what they have—which is most often not the poet themselves.

I have always thought of haiku as a shared activity, where a poet tries to share his “moment” or impression or experience with a reader. When the pieces are fairly
I think a translation can capture the poet’s intent, and thus allow the reader to discover it as well—or at least get close. For abstract poems I’m not sure that is true. As Lorin asks, why blue? And what does that have to do with mathematics? In a way we have multiple cuts of meaning; the poem ceases to be cut once between the two parts, but additionally between individual words. I think my interpretation of sadness (from the blues) is most likely a western construct and probably has nothing to do with the poem. But I don’t know.

ps. I happily acknowledge that there may be a range to my idea of sharing, and that perhaps some poets ask me to create my own poem/moment from the raw materials. ala “Language poetry”. While I find such poems engaging, I do wonder how they fit into the haiku “tradition” with its basis in sharing (ala renku).

Karen Cesar

An engaging article regarding “the notion of translation”

Philip Rowland

Re: Paul’s “as we have seen ‘blue’ might not even be the right word (as in: preferred ... over the choice of ‘natural’ etc”:

“aoi” is a colour word; it can indicate youth or naturalness or inexperience, immaturity, unripeness, but it would, I think, be taking liberties to translate it as other than “blue”.

For me, “blue” (in “blue mathematics”) works because of the various and somewhat contradictory/ironic connotations, which never quite resolve; with the total effect working intuitively, too, partly due to the feeling of coldness I get from the image -- “blue with associations of cold and the colour of distant things,” as Lorin wrote. If “blue” simply connoted sadness, for instance, it would be a considerably less interesting poem. I brought in some examples of Emily Dickinson’s “strangely abstracted images” earlier to emphasise that we don’t always need to be able to explain or account for the logic of an image for it to “work” imaginatively or intuitively. Some other examples, from haiku in translation, that come to mind:
Sayumi Kamakura’s

The child deep
in green sleep;
the mother sleeps
in purple

Why purple? I could ask, but don’t feel much need to. (Which is not to say it’s not sometimes worth asking.) My guess, however, is that “sleep[ing] in purple” is more accessible than “blue mathematics”; likewise Tomas Transtromer’s:

The white sun’s a long-distance runner against
the blue mountains of death.

Or even (returning to haiku written in English), perhaps more challengingly, Ashbery’s:

a blue anchor grains of grit in a tall sky sewing

As with “I inch...” (mentioned in my FN “Challenge” and in Peter Yovu’s post on this page), it may not be necessary to make clear sense of the poem referentially for it to “make sense” poetically; the interplay of syntax, sound and images (quite vivid in “a blue anchor...”) takes precedence. I wouldn’t be surprised if many baulk at Ashbery’s haiku, for amounting to little more than the play of technique, but presumably few would argue that modernist and postmodernist conceptions of poetry be disallowed in haiku?

Lorin Ford

Paul, Philip et al,
Returning to this today, I’m reminded how specific English probably is compared with Asian languages, perhaps especially in relation to object and to time. I have nothing but admiration for the efforts of translators of poetry who labour in attempt to give us some idea of what the original poem might be like.

How differently might this haiku be read with the seemingly unimportant swapping or omission of the definite article for the indefinite?

戦死者が青き数学より出たり
senasisha ga aoki suugaku yori detari
war dead
exit out of a blue mathematics

to

war dead exit out of the blue mathematics

The Japanese might actually be more like:

war dead exit out of blue mathematics

If in the Japanese there are no articles or similar indicators, just “out of blue”, then it’d be up to the reader to infer collective (‘blue mathematics’), indefinite (‘a blue mathematics’ ... one of several or many instances of blue mathematics) or definite/specific (‘the blue mathematics’) which also allows the ‘out of the blue’ colloquialism to come into play.

Only the author himself could tell us, I suspect.

Lorin
Martin Gottlieb Cohen

in Fukushima’s waves half life

Seaview

Quote from: martin gottlieb cohen on January 16, 2017, 08:23:11 PM

The power of this really scares me, Martin!

marion

Alan Summers

I worry that the love of the gun will increase as tensions build up even more around the world:

she carries the warm gun’s child
Jan Benson

Yes yes yes,

It absolutely amazes me how many international, industrial-nation cities participated in the 1/21/17 human rights and dignity demonstrations; the impetus being reactionary to Trump’s lack of values.

Everything I saw on t.v., in regards to the marches, showed a sense of decorum and peaceful demonstrations, with singing and speeches.

History holds many examples of resistance movements in the past. And agreed, guns eventually become actualized when the voices are ignored.

--There is a growing disregard for “police” in America, and an example just last week here in Texas, of another officer killed.
- Trump seems to be moving to a police state, but it is early.
- I do believe even non-gun owners are buying handguns at this time.
- Even here in this active living (senior) complex, the ladies in the gossip groups are talking guns, “for protection”. Those who own them are glad to share knowledge on the topic.

Jan
field notes
Field Notes 8: what is your relationship to haiku now?

Peter Yovu

The question posed by Field Notes 8 is: What is your relationship to haiku now?
--How, if at all, has it changed since you first took up the practice?
--What surprising (or perhaps not) influences have affected you?
--Do you find yourself going deeper into haiku, or perhaps moving away from it?
--Can you give an example or two of your early work as well as an example or two of recent work?
--What are your thoughts and feelings about the current “state” of haiku in general?

This is the final installment of the Field Notes series. My enduring gratitude to all who have contributed.

Sabine Miller

When asked who the most important person she ever met was, Etel Adnan answered, “a mountain.” It is possible that the population of creeping things with whom I spent my tropical childhood had the biggest influence on early haiku. Proximate influences were: Buddhist practice and study; poets such as Rilke, Levertov, Gluck, Hass, and Oliver; Neideker’s The Granite Pail; and, above all, haiku (mostly Buddhist) poets. I aspired to Issa’s humility and lightness, Paul Reps’s nobility, and vincent tripi’s intimate transcendencies.

Owl feather
in my palm
– the feel of moonlight
vincent tripi (Between God & the pine)
wind troubles my dreams
how delicate
the cumbline
(Poems from a Garden)

Still a process of communion, haiku has become less monastic/exclusively-satori-seeking and more porous to other influences from life and art. Beginner’s mind has conspired with somatic therapies, energy cultivations, and studies in neuroplasticity. I moved from country to town to city to town. I look to poets who stretch the genre.

Osiris
reconstructed
buttercups
Peggy Willis Lyles (R’r X.2, 2010)

Video intrudes. When I started writing haiku in the late nineties, I hadn’t watched TV, seen a movie, or taken a photograph for some time. I didn’t cruise the internet or read the newspaper. My visual experience of nature, at least, was less mediated. I bet that watching youtube clips and the surprise-endings of movies like “All Is Lost,” and “Blue Valentine” (an oceanic allusion to the Sistine Chapel and a firework-sunset, respectively) has, over time, loosened a proclivity toward too-tidy or predictable “third lines.” Allan Burns’s essay, “Haiku and Cinematic Technique,” inspired some intentionally cinematic moves.

high in
the palm tree wind
and its wild horse
(unpublished)

Also at work are the songs of e.g. Bob Dylan, Sam Beam, Regina Spektor, Dave Rawlings, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Jeff Tweedy, and Brett Dennen, to which I have been listening more closely lately. A few times their long- or second-winded or
irregular lyrics – played on the stereo or in the neurological echo chamber – have carried a haiku to completion. This is primarily a rhythm entrainment, but a review reveals some disjunctive cuts:

And she chose a yard to burn, but the ground remembers her
Wooden spoons, her children stir her bougainvillea blooms
“Passing Afternoon,” Iron and Wine (Our Endless Numbered Days)

I loved you first, I loved you first
Beneath the sheets of paper lies my truth
“Samson,” Regina Spektor (Songs)

Morning any town you name
“Morning Morgantown,” Joni Mitchell (Ladies of the Canyon)

These are a few of my influences. If you are reading this, chances are you’re among them, so thank you! And especial thanks to Peter for so skillfully leading this forum.

Sabine Miller

Peter Newton

After 20+ years of writing haiku and a good 10 of actually taking the time to pay attention to what haiku is I’d say my relationship to the form has deepened. If someone were to ask me in passing “why haiku?” I’d say: “Haiku connects me,” And by that I mean fills me in on the details. As a writer of poems and haiku specifically, I am a reporter of things in the world. I jot things down in the little palm-sized notebook I carry in my back pocket. A few random excerpts of late include;

“house of leaves perfect globe,”

“taking refuge unconnected stars,”
“last bird heads south. . .”

Pieces of poems maybe. World fragments. Maybe just blips on the radar screen and I’m homing in on the next moment of my life. I am a net and haiku is what catches. Every day is a flurry of words and experiences ups downs ins and outs. Haiku is for me a kind of long low hush like the tide pulling the water away down the sand. A calm ensues. It’s the world taking a breath and showing me how to do the same.

When I first began writing haiku my approach was academic. A sleuth poet in search of a poem to solve with a clever twist. Now, I am slightly more in tune with this one fact: all life is a mystery. So, observe. Everything is a companion. Haiku is one way of having a conversation. May we each be so lucky to carry on . . .

Eve Luckring

Perhaps because of the fluttery ineffable I feel in response to “What is your relationship to haiku now?”, this poem immediately came to mind, and any attempt to develop something more has escaped me.

moths gather the unfinished business of her closed door
(Frogpond 37:1)

Tom D’Evelyn

Yesterday I met with a painter to discuss the paintings of Edward Hopper, especially the late paintings. I had worked with this painter on adding haiku to her bag of tricks, so she was aware of certain universals in Basho – for example, the distinction between loneliness and solitude. But now she was on home turf; she had a degree in art history and decades as a painter to draw on. We looked at the image of the nude sitting on a bed staring out the window. The walls are bare, the woman is bare, a white light dominates the space. The woman is of a certain age. She holds herself in an almost yoga-like position. Straight spine, arms comfortably resting on her legs. Her hair is pulled-back, leaving her face exposed to the light.
When asked for her feelings about this image, the painter drew on her knowledge of the sitter, of Hopper’s marriage, and so on. She made intelligent comments about the composition of the painter. She said the woman seems lonely, perhaps forsaken; the bare walls emphasize the emptiness of the space. We can’t see what she sees out the window, if she sees anything at all.

Then I asked her to apply what she learned from haiku about loneliness, about emptiness, about states of mind associated with meditation. She drew a blank. I kept talking, pointing things out with this new framework. She began to see the image differently. She personally could have been this woman. She saw the woman as an image of integrity in communion with a source that transcends her.

When I got home I wrote a little essay based on this conversation. See http://poetryandbeing.com/ where I analyze a haiku by Basho.

The study of haiku doesn’t leave you where it finds you. It provides an alternative view of reality. The habits that go with haiku can rewire your consciousness so that you actually see things differently. Call this the haiku habitus. It is the focus of my practices as teacher, writer, and poet.

I am aware that the concept of haiku I’m fleshing out here is not often discussed by critics. Critics tend to be historicists; for the most part, the “habitus” of haiku I draw on, rooted in Basho and in the millennial traditions going back to the Zhuangzi, does not have currency. It is considered anachronistic. We moderns must be, well, modern.

Bullshit.

My study of haiku has helped me recover a set of habits of perception that allow me to discuss values in art that matter to me. I have taught haiku for decades now; one of my students has won awards (Madeleine Findlay). I teach haiku every week here in Portsmouth.

In my own creative work (see http://songsofsouthmillpond.wordpress.com/), I start not with Basho but with the poets collected in The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry (New Directions 2003). This anthology develops
the ramifications of the poetics developed by modern American poets under the influence of what I call her the haiku habitus. In statements given at a symposium in 1977 and excerpted in this book, Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder said, “Japanese poetry, which after all is an extremely compressed expression of Chinese aesthetics . . . “ The imagery of the pond songs is as “compressed” as any haiku image, and it drinks from the same sources.

In many essays on my blogs and in my pond songs, I continue to explore the vision of reality that I draw from this haiku tradition. My pond songs don’t look like haiku but they follow patterns explored by generations of Chinese poets. These patterns were adopted and adapted by Basho and centuries of Japanese haiku poets. Basho explicitly paid tribute to some of these poets. In Peipei Qiu’s groundbreaking study of Basho and the Dao, the brilliant scholar-critic shows how Basho made the Zhuangzi new for his time. Along with haiku, I have become familiar with contemporary Taoist research, and this too has nourished my “haiku point of view.” I like to think Basho and I are on the same page.

This study has also brought me into ecopoetics. David Barnhill’s presentation of Basho leaves no doubt that the haiku vision is an ecological vision. And this vision is not reductive; the Chinese tradition of rivers and mountains poetry, so congenial to Snyder, is metaphysical: it is rooted in an awareness of the paradox of the human presence in nature. That human language is inseparable from ecopoetics is brilliantly demonstrated by Scott Knickerbocker, Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language (2012).

Michael McClintock

These new mannerisms lightly explored in Field Notes dissatisfy me and make me impatient, feeling as if I’ve been chewing over-mixed taffy, unbaked bread, or something made of semi-liquid plastic, like Silly Putty -- a marvelous toy product of industrial chemistry that comes with a warning to avoid swallowing.

The theories and notions touched on are not new and have, in their revisit of mostly failed experiments of the last 50 years in poetry (and clumsy attempt to over-write onto the haiku aesthetic architecture) made no case at all to stand as either new
poetry or a “new” haiku. It is all a rather good example of criticism’s failure to make itself the nexus and logos of what remains firmly the territory of actual haiku practice, the creation of original language art: poetry.

The haiku or poem itself is still the best teacher. Freakish intellectual acrobatics will remain, however, an attractive alternative for those inclined to be bored with actual haiku history and literature in its evolution over the centuries. To quote Larry Eigner in a letter he wrote to Charles Olson in 1956 --- “ . . . as to the practical matter of communications the limitations are obviously vast . . . “ He writes a bit further about “the toppling toers [sic] of Ilium.”

In my practice of haiku and tanka I want room to move around. Field Notes discussions up to this final installment appear to reflect that this is a common desire, which isn’t surprising. We all live in multiple worlds and each of these is common to all men and anchored in the materiality that exhales into our consciousness our sense of space and time and all the ideas that inhabit and procreate in the mind. Kenneth Patchen once said “ . . . it takes a great deal of love to give a damn one way or another about what happens from now on: I still do.”

I still do, too. Everything I’ve written, and continue to write, is a love poem.

I don’t bother much with originality. I work for authenticity and communication: small things, maybe, and almost impossible to achieve in language, but for me there is nothing else worth as much when achieved. The rest, with its mediocrity and conformity, doesn’t matter a damn. The real mystery of beauty cannot be apprehended or conveyed by mocking or sentimentalizing beauty in its reality.

Field Notes discussions have been fine reminders that our poetry is exploratory: it prods and probes --- and has this in common with other poetry. In our work we appear to confront social, artistic, and other madness, in different ways --- also not surprising. We can look to the history of the literature to understand and experience what has worked and survived to be valued by new generations, and what has fallen to the wayside, to be lost, forgotten or ignored. This latter is an outcome none of us wants and, therefore, the struggle to advance authenticity in our work trumps any bother with pretensions of originality and the usual all-consuming fires that are lit by a transient avant-garde armed with its propaganda machines, personalities, and
particular species of narcissism, self-absorption, and a cooperative, enabling group delusion. Which is as expected.

These are old, tired patterns involving how the human being socializes and will not end here, but are part of the process necessary to the individual who must eventually turn away from the club, group, or herd, and pursue their art alone, if they are to achieve art at all, at any point, in their career.

There is, on the other hand, the individual’s capacity for love and wonder, and the comparison and empathy that comes from these: these are basic, clear, and uncompromising. Success along these lines will require enduring plenty of poverty and pain, political and artistic rejection, and most probably the peculiar persecutions that are the result of indifference.

Haiku is changeless and ever-changing: this is one thought. People come and go; a few people stay. A haiku conveys the world and human experience in these ways, too. There is perfect sense to it, yet nothing rational. Inside the beauty, the overall design is evident and simple.

These two older poems I close with, and the two more recent, are cut from the same world and, for me, have no particular markers relating to getting from one place to another in my practice of haiku, which has indeed been a journey but one I’ve undertaken without any sense of destination beyond the immediate poem. I have spent 50+ years wandering the maze without calculating where I might find the exit to some other place.

    twisting inland,
    the sea fog takes awhile
    in the apple trees

    the hyena,
    outside of night:
    laughing
a long bus ride
the prophetic language
of the stops

no!
I say it loud in the dark
making a spark

John Stevenson

When I began writing and publishing haiku, it was primarily curiosity that motivated me. In the same month that my first haiku was accepted for publication (by Brussels Sprout) I also had a page-length poem accepted for a special edition of The Wallace Stevens Journal. That issue contained poems or essays by John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, John Updike, Robert Creeley, X. J. Kennedy, Robert Pinsky, and others.

Haiku surprised me. And now, twenty-two years later, when I hear haiku poets wondering how we can get more attention and respect from “mainstream poetry,” I consider that misguided. Haiku is exactly the right poetry for our time. “Mainstream poetry” would do well to come to us for inspiration.

Cherie Hunter Day

My involvement with haiku spans over 40 years. I’m not the same person I was when I began my haiku journey. I was an eager student for many years, reading all the haiku I could find, mostly Japanese haiku in translation. This had a huge impact on my early writing. I paid careful attention to the attributes that set haiku apart from western short verse.

Nowadays I focus more on integration of haiku into the larger continuum of literature. I read more broadly, not just haiku journals. In addition to haiku I write prose poems and flash fiction as well as haibun, tanka, and rengay. On the days that I’m frustrated with one form of writing, I can explore a different one. When I’m tired of words, I work on collage. The shift into colors and textures nurtures
my intuition; that in turn refreshes the writing process. But I always come back to haiku.

Haiku is a wealth of lessons: new ones and old ones that I need to relearn. I remain a student. Nature is still my best teacher, but now my interior landscape and imagination informs my expression as much as the external landscape. Writing haiku today seems to spring more from my spirit and my love of words and sound in language.

I don’t think there is one way to write haiku. It doesn’t tuck neatly into a box. This is disquieting to some and liberating to others. I’m optimistic about the depth and breadth of haiku. There are publication opportunities for every mode of haiku. I see this year’s new journals and annuals such as is/let and muttering thunder as contributing vitality and encouraging a reengagement with the self and surroundings. Haiku is not only alive but thriving.

I write across the haiku spectrum from traditional three line 5-7-5 to the one-line modern and H21 ku. It’s exciting to contribute to the mix.

balanced in the wind  
first one foot, then the other  
white-throated sparrow (1982)

war memorial  
the shine on a bronze soldier  
from so many hands (2009)

dusk the new neighbor’s wind chimes (1996)

raw umber the hill’s shorthand for want (2014)
1) What is your relationship to haiku now? How, if at all, has it changed since you first took up the practice?

My 1982 Naropa BA thesis in Poetics and Expressive Arts contained a number of haiku, adjudicated by Allen Ginsberg and Patricia Donegan (Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics). I found an old box of poetry today and this thesis may yet exist; however, pre-‘pc’ it’s probably lost to time. The haiku were unremarkable anyway. I’d like to dwell first on the past in my response. Around 1981, my first year in the Poetics program, I found the three pieces below (two titled). These works show influence from Pat’s haiku & Japanese court poetry class, intermixed with preoccupations of contemporary poetry.

Tori Gate

eating three meals today
tonight, facing dark mountains
young moon, new moon, old moon

Notes of Late America

“I turned around and was shot through
with some shiny projectile.”

“I couldn’t believe him. It was
crammed and awful lying down.”

the fierce wind
is not sacrifice
in the house
Only “Tori Gate” overtly emulates haiku form—as it appeared to me then—here also the influence of Hitomaro, in From the Country of Eight Islands (Sato & Watson, trans., eds., CUP), which had been published that very year—a prized sourcebook. The following excerpt retains its original layout (a single-page poem in three seven-line stanzas), written to Peter Orlovsky in commemoration of his class. Peter’s book, Clean Asshole Poems and Smiling Vegetable Songs, Poems 1957-1977 (City Lights, 1978, 1992) is worth reading to absorb his naïve and sometimes goofy-joyous style. Peter was a great teacher, and a most warm-hearted human being.

. SHORT .

. Oh long napkin .
. Having chair to feet me .
. Bound my eyes kiss .
. Dear black olive round .
. And word long ornament .
. Blue-print doggie .

. Holy woods brown .
. Tree me stop swirling .
. Run feathers what hanging bird .
. Gallons under noise running .
. Green leaf I know .
. Tree house well open .
. Oh life birds !

. Cork water bobs .
. Fly on train walks .
. Shuck corn phooey .
. Pickets fence a million .

A kinship with haiku exists here too, I feel. Allen insistently declaimed (chided me), “No ideas but in things!” A statement I stubbornly resisted, being drawn to Gertrude
Stein, symbolist poetry and language/image experiment. Like many interested in haiku it was that “zen” (what?) taste in Blyth’s impassioned commentary throughout his Haiku volumes (1947-1964, Hokuseido) bridging haiku with the short poem—this urged exploration: if not anti-narrative (all poems are narrative to an extent), at minimum haiku strongly resist the generic-narrative-confessional “me “me” “me” rife in journals and poetry readings now and then.

The zombie spectre of new formalism lurched as the junk bond kings of the Reagan era exclaimed triumphs of capitalism. It seemed a haven of some kind, haiku—as a “way” or path towards a delicate, nuanced and sensitively animate psychic tissue between self and literal life. Various Beats, previous Fluxus members and St. Marks poets visited and taught at Naropa, through the years. In a variety of ways they challenged previous modes of progressive formalism—through randomization (as counterpoint to intentional structure in the Burroughs “cut-up” and zen-random concepts of John Cage and colleagues), through the spontaneity of the ordinary (in dance, e.g., Barbara Dilley, later President of Naropa, who had danced with Merce Cunningham, before becoming a dancer/choreographer with the Judson Dance Theater, formed by Yvonne Rainier), and through shamanic oratory (e.g. Waldman, Rothenberg, Corso in his readings, and others). As a searching being, and as a poet, I was utterly confused.

March 9, 1981 marked the completion of my first class on haiku and Japanese court poetry. I turned in a “Final Haiku Project” to Pat Donegan. This course was almost certainly the first western university-academic class focused on Japanese haiku (in translation) specifically directed towards possibilities of poetic composition in English—a class itself composed of budding poets. Pat’s approach was designed to explore new poetic territory, expand poetic (consciousness) possibility, and inspire aspects of feminism (e.g. presenting the legendary women poets of the Heian era), and multiculturalism. Only my “Preamble to Final Haiku Project” exists in the box: students were asked to write a short personal statement of three pages.

Found are certain preoccupations, along with errors of understanding, typical of the era.
2) What surprising (or perhaps not) influences have affected you?

In the 1980s era mentioned above, Naropa was a vibrant, non-traditional inter-arts community. It has become increasingly difficult to envision the creation of such communities, as living costs have risen and vocational careers moved to the forefront of educational systems. Though even in the early 80s, Naropa was vocationally hopeless (and unaccredited). I began to re-discover a newfound sense of community, and friendships, through the HNA conferences, beginning in 2007, and due to the prevalence of virtual tech, have been able to foster them. It’s difficult to form new artistic friendships in later life and haiku do mysteriously create community: the poetry itself has also flowered as this.

3) Do you find yourself going deeper into haiku, or perhaps moving away from it?

I find that haiku depth is always a surface. And anything profound must be accidental, actually. So “deeper” really implies craft and effort; sadly, I am very lazy and distracted, and only occasionally intentionally write haiku, usually with some surprise. I’ve been moving “away” from haiku forever. I think “Plausible deniability: Nature as hypothesis in English language haiku” (http://research.gendaihaiku.com/plausible/) confirms this trend away from concrete literalism, concerning form.

4) Can you give an example or two of your early work as well as an example or two of recent work?

The early work above—lately, I’ve been interested in the haiku sequence as a way of moving into borderlands between haiku-as-such and short-form poetry. At the beginning of this exploration I wished to make each “line” (or 3-line stanza) function autonomously as a haiku, but have now moved further into a looser “weak disjunction” concept, in service of storytelling, if necessary. Moongarlic, Issue 3 (http://moongarlic.org), November 2014 (pp. 53-71; about 16 “lines”) presents “only so long for,” with each line/poem on a separate page. Bones, Issue 5 (http://bonesjournal.com), November 2014 (p. 81; in seven lines) presents “Observations on the Lack of Stars” which uses objective typography and color variation in its conceptual approach.

5) What are your thoughts and feelings about the current “state” of haiku in general?
With the flourishing of a number of well-edited international online journals, the continued exploration of center, fringe and exo-haiku possibilities, and wider recognition by the literary community, a newfound sense of spring is in the air, yet much depends on where we go from here.

6) Is it enlivening to you? vital? confusing? stale?

As with fine cuisine there is much to savor; one easily passes on uninteresting dishes.

7) Has it taken a wrong turn, or do you feel there is promise in what currently appears in various journals? And how does it affect your own work?

No to wrong turns, yes to promise. I’m not sure what to do next, in criticism. The Disjunctive Dragonfly, a New Approach to English-Language Haiku (Red Moon Press, 2013: http://bit.ly/1to12kB) represents the completion of a conceptual approach developed over 10 years. Some may know that I recently formed SHAO NPO: “sailing for haiku across oceans” (http://sailing-across-oceans.org). The site is self-explanatory—what is not is the sense of pilgrimage, challenge and risk-taking, as well as learning I wish to undertake—away from the built environment—in searching out persons, communities, sacred places and poems in and around Japan, and finding contrasts between marine and land haiku cultures. I’ll add that we haven’t updated this website as we have found an excellent new (1989) sailboat, and are closing in late January—after which we will redouble our public efforts and communication of the campaign. Closeness and distance, ever in the waves.

nights: a cold world
confidence spins
worlds waves hours

Paul Miller

My relationship to poetry has always been as a bridge between something outside myself or of myself (physical, witnessed, dreamt, memory, etc.) and myself. It is a bridge of words. It is a diary entry; a moment captured—where moment is used in the widest sense. However, the “myself” is always changing.
In the past decade we’ve witnessed a shakeup of haiku by what we incorrectly called gendai out of Japan to more recent L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E influenced work. We’ve also seen a deepening of our understanding of haiku’s base—i.e. traditional haiku. Logically, one would expect my bridge to become stronger because of these educating influences; that however is not the case.

Instead, the gendai/L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E influences have made me more and more aware of the limitations of language as a communicative tool, as they also open up other ways of seeing and being in this world; while influences from critics like Martin Lucas make me aware of how tone-deaf formulaic haiku can be. Lucas might question the music or “spell” of a phrase like “spring morning,” preferring something more robust. Of course much of haiku history contains these code words, and if you are someone like myself who believes that sharing is a foundational block of haiku, then they cannot be avoided entirely. Specificity might suggest a way out, yet too much of that can lead to obscurity. It seems that success in haiku is a moving target.

The worst thing we can do is “define” haiku: to lock it into a single form or template, so I am delighted with the new environment where all forms and styles seem permissible. I am delighted to see how haiku approaches other short poetry. How each feeds off/influences the other. Scott Metz’s book Lakes & Now Wolves is a great example of that—yet I would be hard pressed to define all the poems as haiku. Yet is that distinction even relevant? Perhaps most importantly, the book makes me think about what haiku is or can be. As the editor of a journal I think these are exciting times; I wouldn’t be an editor otherwise. However, at the same time I feel the weight of all these choices and their consequences.

Perhaps my crossroads is the old truism that the more you learn the less you know. I like to think I have always been at that crossroads—looking for a way forward—but that is for others to decide.

ps. The previous Field Notes have been a part of that change of “myself” so a substantial thanks to Peter and the other commentators for the forum.
Bruce Ross

Haiku still remains for me an insight into nature. My relationship to haiku and haiku inspiration has not really changed. So published haiku (one a contest winner) skirts the same inspiration:

early 2000s

summer heat  
the little stone Buddha  
buried in weeds

winter solstice  
the houselight left on  
for our return

late 2000s

Ice Age cave  
the path leads down  
to vast darkness

just enough  
reappearing for a moment  
morning star

My energetic system determines the nature and quality of my insight. Sometimes that system is sorely affected.

A few changes in this current decade are perhaps a loosening up of my phrasing, perhaps influenced by the haiku of poets I respond to.

Current phrasing that is dominating published (USA) haiku (and therefore other cultures’ haiku) and winning awards is on the one hand a fractured, quasi-intellectual idiom and on the other lackluster haiku in a conversational idiom. This trend is
misleading to the aims of haiku poetry and the quality of haiku poetry.
Imposing old poetic turns (dada, etc.) and faux psychological “complexity” (calling it American gendai) and being rewarded for it is not going to preserve haiku.

Peter Yovu

December 2

I don’t know if he was writing about a particular Red Sox team or about baseball in general, but I recall Roger Angell saying that what kept him interested was that every game presented to him at least one thing he had never seen before.

I continue to read publications like Modern Haiku because most issues contain something I have not seem before. Recently it was Michael McClintock’s

no!
I say it loud in the dark
making a spark
MH 45.3

I like to think that this, and the kind of poem I am talking about, would delight readers of any poetry magazine. It does not require the context of haiku. It does not need to be named as such, though Michael might disagree. And yet, though one cannot know for certain, it might not have been written without long engagement with haiku.

December 4

The depths (I mean this as a singular plural) are a wordless place, and yet they are incomplete without expression. They are impersonal—nobody’s possession—but rejoice when someone is present to this need, this call for completion. The impersonal depths, one might say, fall in love with the individual, the person through whom they might find particular, prismatic expression.
This is one way of saying how poetry happens— why there is poetry rather than no poetry at all— and why poets feel compelled to write, as a fulfillment of the depths, however momentary it may be. However momentous.

And as a person is prismatic, and in relationship with a various world, so expression, or the form it takes, will vary and the depths reveal themselves now this way and now that, now from this perspective and now from that.

The wordless place cannot be revealed in its entirety, but what is revealed can imply what, as Heidegger said, is concealed by revelation. Any view of a statue— or a human being— necessarily obscures all other views. (And yet each view is dependent on what cannot be seen).

Day breaks— it conceals night and implies it. The wordless is concealed by words. Concealment is a form of revelation.

“Eternity is love with the productions of time”. Blake.
Accidental mystic John Wren-Lewis spoke from experience:
“I am eternity John Wren-Lewising”.

I am the universe Peter Yovu-ing. Whatever I do. Whenever I write.

December 5

I’d like to quote from the book The Long and the Short of It by Gary Saul Morson. He is writing here about aphorisms, and in particular about the need to recognize the plurality of impulses driving different kinds of aphorism. I find it useful to apply his thoughts to haiku.

The quote— italics added by me:

“Different kinds of aphorisms convey specific views of life and experience. If we are to understand these diverse views, it makes sense to classify them accordingly. Approached in this way, each genre suggests a distinct sense of life as a whole. The world of the prophet differs from that of the wit.”
That was the approach to genres adopted by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. [He] developed a method to grasp each literary genre as an implicit philosophy, or what he called a “form shaping ideology.” He meant that each genre proceeds from a particular worldview (“ideology”) generating appropriate forms of expression. [For Bakhtin genres] result from a defining ideology or sense of experience.

. . . A genre resembles an entity less than it does an energy, an impulse to apply a certain way of seeing to surprising circumstances with which it interacts and, as a result, changes. Genres are restless, some more so than others.

Moreover, a genre’s take on life cannot be reduced to a set of philosophical premises. [Any] reasonably complex genre’s sense of experience is ultimately inexpressible. [The] genre always contains potentials for development in more directions than are apparent. Until the genre dies, its wisdom is never complete, and if resurrected, it can develop still further.

As a genre seeks out forms, it also discovers appropriate occasions, which, like forms, reflect its worldview”.

There are distinctions to be made between haiku and aphorisms, of course, though sometimes the line is blurred. Ruth Yarrow’s

after the garden party the garden

(most recently in *Haiku in English*) and Eve Luckring’s

so greenly history puts forth thorns
(Haiku 2014)

are two of many examples.

To be clear, Morson is saying that while such things as maxims, apothegms, dicta, etc., may all be considered aphorisms, they are also genres unto themselves, each of literary significance, and each suggesting “a distinct sense of life as a whole”.
Can this be said of haiku? Increasingly, popular journals such as Modern Haiku and Frogpond are publishing a variety of forms. Haiku 2014, the first of what one hopes will be a long series of annual anthologies, seems to be predicated on the notion that a “genre always contains potentials for development in more directions than are apparent”.

I don’t believe this variety is merely the result of innovation for the sake of innovation, though in some instances—maybe too many—that is no doubt the case. I would like to think that, tentative as many of the new haiku may seem, they “proceed from particular worldviews”—or inner impulses—“generating appropriate forms of expression”. One may have preference for and greater receptivity to one form over another—this would be as true for haiku as it is for aphorism—but the understanding of Bakhtin’s “form-shaping” worldview may serve to increase one’s appreciation for diversity, and experimentation.

I like the idea that “traditional”, “contemporary” and “innovative” haiku each suggest “a distinct sense of life as a whole”, and that this would be true of other “kinds” of haiku as well and include poems which have been influenced by all or any of these and yet defy classification. In thinking about haiku, and my relation to it, I find this helpful.

Gary Hotham

Haiku and the World in 2014: Still a Craftsmanship of Risk¹

I think one of the biggest things and maybe the most important thing to have changed since I began practicing haiku in the 1960’s is that anyone beginning haiku

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¹ For a stimulating exposition of the craftsmanship or workmanship of risk and the workmanship of certainty check out David Pye’s book, The Nature and Art of Workmanship first published in 1968. This comes from the perspective of one whose work is with wood but can be applied to explain and understand a poet’s experience with words. He describes the risk:

If I must ascribe a meaning to the word craftsmanship, I shall say as a first approximation that it means simply workmanship using any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on the judgment, dexterity and care which the maker exercises as he works. The essential idea is that the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making; and so I shall call this kind of workmanship ‘The workmanship of risk’: an uncouth phrase, but at least descriptive. (page 20)
now has a wealth of English language haiku as a resource. Back in the 60’s there wasn’t much of that resource. Our sources for good haiku were from Japan. They owned the genre since they invented it and were the guiding word. And then most us depended on translations from their language. There were some poets who knew the language such as Bill Higginson. Someone taking up the genre now doesn’t even have to think about or deal with the haiku written by the Japanese. Not that I am advocating that kind of isolationism. But in the old days one was probably attracted to the haiku because they had read some translations from the Japanese. I know I was. I wonder how many of the writers coming on board now were attracted to the haiku because of what they first read by an English language writer? That would be an intriguing piece of research.

Another thing that has changed and was hinted at in the previous paragraph is that the English language haiku has taken on a form and life of its own that doesn’t depend on how it was done in Japan in the past or is currently done. It has come into its own maturity. This is not to say we don’t or can’t learn from the ancient and contemporary masters of the haiku in Japan - we have! - but that we no longer depend on them exclusively for our direction with the haiku even though they invented it.

I think the current state of the English language haiku is bumpy at the moment. But perhaps no more unsettled than in the past. The world of poetry in general is also bumpy and going in many directions so it is not very surprising that the English language haiku world reflects that. It probably is confusing to those writers new to the genre. And will be until they decide where they want to go with the haiku and develop their own voice.

After all these many years I find the haiku still has a strong pull on me. Any number of times over the years I have wondered if the pleasure of reading and writing haiku would all go away. So far it hasn’t. I still look forward to the next issue of the haiku journals I subscribe to and the collections by individual writers and the anthologies. And I personally still enjoy the risk of writing them. The challenge and excitement of creating the haiku with a short bunch of words has not yet become stale or boring.

George Swede

What is your relationship to haiku now?

How, if at all, has it changed since you first took up the practice?

Before answering this question, I would like to depict the historical context within which my early haiku emerged.

In 1975, as reviews editor for a periodical, I got a pre-publication copy of *Modern Japanese Haiku* (Makoto Ueda, University of Toronto Press, 1976). Prior to this, my only acquaintance with the form had been some stilted translations in coffee table books about Japanese culture and art. Ueda’s translations of twenty 20th century poets, however, rang true and revealed surprising variations of form and content.

In the U.S. and Canada during the 1970s vigorous debates occurred about what an English-language haiku should be. With the help of Eric Amann, I decided to survey the kinds of haiku that actually were being published by the foremost poets of the day. We examined the work in two major anthologies: *The Haiku Anthology* (Cor van den Heuvel, Anchor Books, 1974) and the *Canadian Haiku Anthology* (George Swede, Three Trees Press, 1979).

We discovered that about 80% of the haiku were written free-style while the rest were in the 5-7-5 mode; that over 90% were in three-lines with the rest being one-liners, two-liners, four-liners or visuals (eye-ku); that 90% included images from nature while the remainder did not, i.e., were senryu; that only 5% used abstract ideas or generalizations; and that 99% used the present tense. (Swede, G. & Amann, E. “Toward a definition of the modern English haiku”. *Cicada*, 1980, 4:4, 3-12)

About a decade later, I did another survey, this time focusing solely on content. My source was the second *The Haiku Anthology* (Cor van den Heuvel, Simon & Schuster, 1986) grown to an encyclopedic size with 648 haiku (plus more in the appendix). To shrink my task, I decided to look at the work of the top dozen contributors who had a total of 350 included haiku. I figured that this was a reasonable sample size as well as representative of prevailing haiku styles.

Three different kinds of content emerged from the analysis: nature images only (22.8%), human images only (15.7%), and both nature plus human images (61.4%).
The results decisively showed that the prominent writers of haiku in English in the 1970s and 1980s preferred to combine images from the natural world with those based on human experiences or artifacts. In that era this was an important finding because much Western writing on the definition of the haiku form emphasized that only images from the natural world should be included; any human elements turned a would-be haiku into a senryu. (Swede, G. “Elite haiku: Hybrids of nature and human content”. *Modern Haiku*, 1992, 23:1, 65-72).

Finally, in answer to the question, my early published haiku were in concert with the results of this research, that is, most of them were hybrids (nature plus human content) and in three lines. But, I also wrote pure nature haiku as well as senryu and often switched to the one-line form for all three kinds. Moreover, during the 1970s and 1980s I began having fun with “eyeku” as well as with what I call “bifids” (two-word haiku).

What surprising (or perhaps not) influences have affected you?

Everything and everyone influences my writing. I can, however, point to some islands in a sea of undercurrents. I’ve already mentioned the first—Makoto Ueda’s *Modern Japanese Haiku*, in which he features 20 poets from the 20th century (with 20 haiku each). The anthology helped change the course of my writing from mainly free verse to mainly haiku. Another landmark influence was Eric Amann’s adventurous periodical, *Cicada* (1977 – 1982). His editorial policy encouraged experimentation and critical thinking, drawing to the magazine among the best of that era’s haiku poets, many of whom continue to shine today. My later writing has been shaped a bit by contemporary versions of *Cicada* such as *Roadrunner* (2004 – 2014, Scott Metz being its primary editor).

Do you find yourself going deeper into haiku, or perhaps moving away from it?

I’m certainly not moving away from haiku. I’m as deeply involved as ever. But as I change, so do the perceptions that inform my haiku. The resulting poems seem to be different compared to what I was writing earlier. But these are my observations and, as literary critics like to point out, poets are poor interpreters of their own work.

Can you give an example or two of your early work as well as an example or two of recent work?
Since I’ve been writing haiku for four decades, I’ve broken it into four parts: work from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

1970s Haiku

Plummeting to earth  
a hawk seizes the feet  
of its own shadow  
(©1976. Published eight times: Sun-Lostus Haiku, 1977 to Haiku Journey, Hot Lava Games, 2006)

In her large blue eyes I make a small impression  

1980s Haiku

eyelid cloud  
(©1982. Published six times: Biased Sample, 1982 to micro haiku, 2014)

From the bridge  
between my hemispheres  
grandfather still fishes  
(©1985. Published four times: After the End, 1986 to Joy In Me Still, 2010)

1990s Haiku

graveyarduskilldeer  

spring flood  
two wooden shoes float by  
taking turns being first
What are your thoughts and feelings about the current “state” of haiku in general? Is it enlivening to you? vital? confusing? stale? Has it taken a wrong turn, or do you feel there is promise in what currently appears in various journals? And how does it affect your own work?

Haiku writing today has grown more muscular and polished, much like today’s professional athletes. I find the changes invigorating as well as occasionally frightening because I worry about whether my aging brain will be able to keep up.

Michelle Tennison

What is your relationship to haiku now? How has it changed?

The writing itself has changed, as modern and contemporary Japanese haiku in translation and experimental haiku in English have broadened my scope of what haiku can be. In terms of technique, I am, as are many, experimenting with variations of the traditional form and language of haiku. I am also increasingly comfortable...
with ambiguity and with less direct associations, and I have a greater appreciation of the role of symbolism in haiku. Perhaps most significantly, I have directed renewed attention toward inner landscapes of experience and am cultivating a more heart-based relationship to the world. Many of my more recent haiku have developed directly or indirectly through heart-centered / consciousness-shifting avenues such as meditation and breath work and other practices that encourage non-ordinary, non-egoic (transpersonal) perception.

As haiku poets we can explore nature and self-nature simultaneously, recognizing how each informs the other, and how they are, in a more refined quality of perception, deeply linked. I have enjoyed the expansiveness of the new haiku available to us in the West and have embraced the openings it has engendered in my own work. I am especially grateful for the blurring of separation between my spiritual life and haiku practice, as I feel that through this union my relationship to haiku can only deepen.

Don Baird

Late to the party . . .

Haiku are to me today as they were yesteryear in that I arrive at them from a blend of my inner cosmos with that of the outer. I find truth and mix it with imagination (not fiction) and develop the haiku. Over the years, maybe I’ve gotten a bit better at it, but my process remains the same — I notice something in the external-goings-on and mix it with my imagination (internal perceptions) and creative forces to select the correct presentation (words). Simply put: word choices, musicality, imagery, and solid disjunction, combined, constitute the core of my internal process of composing haiku; the Universe at large is my exterior stimulus that presents ideas and, therefore, the poetic material that I crave.

Michelle Tennison

Over a decade into a haiku practice, I have come to acknowledge that it is not necessarily the individual haiku I write as a haiku poet that “matter,” but rather the real value lies in the process of relating and quality of perception that haiku
engenders. It becomes a path of empowerment.

I forget sometimes how much haiku has brought to my life. I just stumbled upon an older somewhat ecstatic journal entry that addresses just this topic:

The haiku themselves are relevant, but they are perhaps not as relevant as the life you are leading while living into these haiku: A life of communion, meaning, attention, mindfulness, an awake life where everything is communicating, everything is intelligent, where monotony and the mundane have been replaced with resonance and mystery and meaning, where your field of being has expanded exponentially to include the plants, animals, stones, stars, wind, water, earth, and fire as intelligent, communicating companions. Through these tiny little exercises in consciousness your life can become very large and infused with spirit, for haiku illuminate the animating spirit within the phenomenal world.

This is a relationship to haiku I have been blessed with at rare moments, and they are moments that change everything. They keep me going. It is a relationship I continue to aspire to.

Rebecca Lilly

For this installment of Field Notes, I was asked to consider my relationship to the haiku genre---in particular, the essential elements of haiku, as I understand them, and how my own work has evolved in view of that understanding.

Essential to haiku, it seems to me, are the following elements:

1. Brevity: haiku are minimalist poems with a small number of total syllables, 17 English syllables, or thereabouts.
2. Dependence on sensory imagery: while haiku can certainly reference abstractions or ideas, it does seem to me that the primary emphasis in haiku is on concrete sensory images, usually drawn from the natural world.
3. An “Ah ha” moment or immediate unexpected turn or insight: while this is no doubt an element in much poetry (at least good poetry), haiku
seems distinguished by a sudden realization, juxtaposition or insight, often, though not always, in the last line or portion of the poem. Since haiku are brief and concise, I think the form is especially well-suited to “pack a punch.” The realization is often immediate and doesn’t require extended cogitation (although how it works might be spelled out in complex ways through intellectual analysis).

4. Self-transcendence: I think of haiku as lifting us out of our ordinary state of self-consciousness, and making us more fully aware of what’s going on right now, at present. Some writers have described haiku as creating a greater sense of “oneness” with the world, and while I think that’s true, I find the more natural way to articulate its effects is in terms of a loss of ordinary self-consciousness (or mind-based “ego-consciousness”), perhaps meaning an expansion of consciousness into the world, or into a sense of self beyond ego, or both.

I am unsure whether these features are sufficient to distinguish haiku from other forms of minimalist poetry, and I’m equally uncertain whether there’s a clear demarcation between haiku and other minimalist poems of approximately seventeen syllables or less—or whether there needs to be.

As for my own work in haiku, I’m interested in further exploration in two directions:

1. I’m interested in developing a more contemporary “associative vocabulary” in haiku. Take, for instance, the idea that the crow has been traditionally associated with autumn and with emotions such as sorrow or melancholy. Would it be possible to take such traditional symbology and upend it in some instances—perhaps have the crow turn to a symbol of renewal, or perhaps have it symbolize a more nuanced version of the traditional sorrow or melancholy? Also, how can we augment the traditional haiku symbology (or associations) in a way that takes account of our contemporary experience, particularly our reliance on “virtual” experience via the internet and electronic devices. I find it interesting to consider how we can convey features of 21st century experience through the traditional nature imagery and associations characteristic of haiku.
2. I’m likewise interested in exploring new forms in haiku, in particular the arrangement of words on the page, and seeing how spacing can create ambiguity and multiple readings---while at the same time honoring the immediacy of insight and move toward self-transcendence that I find so essential to haiku.

Ellen Grace Olinger

This excellent question recalls the Haiku - Three Questions Series, edited by Curtis Dunlap, at Blogging Along Tobacco Road. I remember writing my answers in 2010, from my heart, and have not reprinted the earlier haiku I shared there since then. Many poets are included, and perhaps this is a new resource for some readers.

Newer short poems, including haiku, appear in a Christmas collection I created on WordPress last year. I am leaving it now as a free online book. http://quietchristmaspoetry.wordpress.com There is also a large print chapbook to go along with the site.

I realize I have returned to my haiku beginnings; my love of this form and other short poems that can be read by people in many life situations, and from many points of view. For me, the beginnings were from broken health and grief. Now my goal is to share with others, also from a place of peace and wellness (though I know life can change in a moment). Sometimes memories overtake me, and I write my way back. I think of my personal work as an encouragement ministry. Sometimes I write from a teacher’s point of view, in other contexts. I simply love language, and this love brings wholeness to my life.

With my work as a volunteer for the education page at The Haiku Foundation, I have studied craft a great deal more. I believe a lot of listening and reading create a good foundation for writing poetry. Everyone’s path is unique though. By God’s grace, I was able to give 20 years to special education. I like to think that haiku seems friendly and possible to someone who may find the language arts especially difficult.

Years that seemed fallow at the time have truly supported me. I also love being older and having a different perspective about time. I sit and wonder a lot. So grateful.
holiness
and humility
Christmas

wind freeing the snow
from evergreen branches
waterfalls

looking at trees
I remember prayers
of friends
(from my Christmas site)

Thank you to Peter Yovu and the poets for Field Notes.
Blessings, Ellen