



virals

Archival Feature

The Haiku Foundation

introduction to virals

Welcome to *Virals*. There are a few different aspects to this section. First, I will introduce a much loved and appreciated poem (haiku/senryu) and provide some commentary on it. Next, and here is where the section gets fun, I invite the poem's author to make the next selection, and add a few words of commentary as well. There are no restrictions as to what the poet can choose—living or dead, traditional or outré, male or female, American, Japanese or other nationality. I envision *Virals* as a place where we can create a virtual anthology of great 20th and 21st century haiku, with in-depth commentary that allow everyone to take a closer look at the decisions the poet made and the effects of those decisions. It will, of course, be interesting to see how long a cycle can go on. If a poet should choose a poem by someone that is no longer with us or cannot be contacted, then I will simply begin a new cycle. Lastly, the postings in *Virals* are alive, and you and other readers are encouraged to add your additional thoughts and ideas, commentary and opinions. I hope you will help me make *Virals* a section that is long-lasting and becomes a resource for poetry enthusiasts all over the world.

To begin *Virals* off, I have chosen a haiku by Jim Kacian. Why not start things off with the founder himself?

— scott metz



virals 1

Stages / Scott Metz

dusklight —
I read her poem
differently
— Jim Kacian

This poem won Third Prize in the Robert Spiess Haiku Award Haiku Competition for 2006. We could take it to be *shasei* (sketch from life/nature) and be done with it. The judges for the contest, however (Charles Trumbull and Francine Banwarth), thought more of it, and I agree — there are finer and more intricate points and possibilities worthy of further consideration.

The construction of the first line seems to ask for a second look. A *shasei* reading of “dusklight” would be literal: an actual and specific time of day. But let’s reconsider it in a different light, metaphorically and symbolically. The poem does not make use of a specific *kigo* (season word), though it does, as Trumbull and Banwarth have written, give us an “autumnal feel.” This I think was the poet’s intention — Kacian nicely evades the predominant “adjective + noun” first line format of so many haiku by combining them into a new one-word creation. This is an uncommon word and process, and is, in itself, poetic. What does he achieve through this?

I believe that in using this process the poet, instead of referring to a literal time or setting or actual colors, suggests a state of consciousness, or even, perhaps, a stage of life. The combination of “dusk” and “light” condenses and clots what is already there and, in a way, allows less light, less wind, less life, to get through. In this reading “dusklight” then represents a new stage in the poet’s life, the “autumnal,” and with it a new set of eyes, a new state of consciousness, a new way of thinking about what has already taken place, what is happening in the present, and, perhaps, how to prepare for the future.

How does this autumnal state of mind and stage of life contribute to the rest of the poem? Is it, in fact, a key for the reader from the poet as to how the poet is now, at this stage in his life, reading “her poem”? Has the meaning of her poem for him, like the literal light, become more definite, more rigid, because of his own life experiences and their relation to her poem and whatever it is about? The construction and grammar of “dusklight” seems to point symbolically at least in that direction. Her poem must, in some way, be something special to the poet — and open to similar issues and ideas being brought up in his own poem — because he is returning to it. And who knows if the poem referred to is a haiku or a longer poem, published or unpublished. I am merely speculating here, but consider how such a turn in light, in life, could affect the reading of Marlene Mountain’s

pig and i spring rain

or LA Davidson’s

beyond
stars beyond
star

Because we do not know the poem or poetess, we are left with a delicious mystery. Ultimately, this speaks of the ability and magic of poetry (and especially haiku because of its openness and insistence upon involving the reader’s imagination and life experiences) to be reread and reinterpreted at different stages in a reader’s lifetime. And so I think, Kacian’s haiku is a poem of the interior, a poem of the mind and its constant movement. It is a virtually silent poem — “read(ing) her poem differently” requires no words spoken, and little action taken — and yet we feel the weight of a life in flux, the change of light. One is left to wonder how her poem will be read by the poet in his next lifestage (starlight? pitchdark?). Will the reading change again? Or might it return to his first reading, when it was all still just dawnlight?

As featured poet, Jim Kacian will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 1.2.

Out of the Ordinary / Jim Kacian

from house

to barn

the milky way

— Lee Gurga

It is rarely our exotic experiences which yield our best haiku: novelty seems to lend itself more directly to irony and humor, and thus to senryu. No, our best haiku come from deep immersion in our everyday activities. Do something once, and we note it; do something a second and third time, and we begin to observe it; do something twenty times, and we begin to ignore it. But do something habitually, and pay attention to that doing, and we may come to find something miraculous hidden within it.

What could be more mundane than the daily chores? How many times has the poet walked between house and barn to feed the animals, return the tools, make his way home? And every night the sky has been there. But this night, the poet was open, was reawakened to the splendor of such a vision in the midst of the humdrum of everyday existence, and was rewarded. Note the order of things: from house — where we live, what could be more ordinary? — to barn — where we work, or where we find the tools for our work — to the Milky Way — overarching, encompassing all, simply there.

The poem achieves its effect through surprise. The reader, after the first line, after the second line, believes he is rooted in the mundane. It is easy to conceive that what we are to imagine is not something visual, but rather some task of the mundane, walking, perhaps, between these two reference points. Then, quite unexpectedly, our vision is shifted upwards, out beyond our simple references, and to the cosmic. The delight of our surprise mirrors the poet's own, coming upon this in the midst of his workaday world.

The poem works in other ways, too. It is, of course, extremely brief, a mere seven words, eight syllables. But compressed in these eight syllables are three strong images, three strong emotional nodes, and a compelling force which binds them together. Both the rhythm and the sound of the poem serve to enhance this force. The rhythm is direct: two short lines in monometer, one iamb each, completed by a smooth dimeter of two iambs, relatively unstressed: simple addition. But the poem is obviously more than the sum of its parts.

The verbal color works nicely to complete the effectiveness of this poem as well, moving from the complex diphthong in “house” to the dark but opening sound in “barn” to the cadence of the wholly open vowel of “way,” each moving farther forward in the mouth, ultimately a release. The connectives are liquid, their sounds transporting rather than stopping. This contributes to the speed of the poem; likewise, the short “i” of “milky” hastens us to the surprise of the discovery, upon which we linger in the long final “a.”

What accumulative power such a brief poem can muster: in its eight syllables, we are transported from the mundane into the infinite. The poet controls our journey there with surety and dispatch. Before we can realize, we are amidst the crowding stars, willing riders out of the ordinary.

As featured poet, Lee Gurga will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 1.3.

we too / Lee Gurga

mosquito she too
insisting insisting she
is is is is is

— Peter Yovu

Who hasn't been annoyed by the sound of a mosquito buzzing around their head? The sound can be worse than the bite. Here that annoying sound has been translated into a poem that takes us deep into our selves. A poem on a seemingly trivial subject has been transformed into a meditation on existence by simply including the word "too."

From its beginnings as a part of Japanese linked poetry more than three hundred years ago, haiku has conquered every language and culture to become the world's most popular form of poetry. What is the secret of this conquest? Haiku uses image and line and syntax to open a portal between states of consciousness, between one reality and the next. It sometimes nudges us, sometimes jars us to explore the something that was there for us to see all along were it not for our mundane preoccupations. Here we find with Peter Yovu in the mosquito's whine not only distraction and annoyance, but in she too our own needs to assert our little selves. No other art points with such directness and economy to the essence of our experience. No other art is so accessible to the weekend poet yet poses such a maddening (and muddling) challenge to the accomplished wordsmith.

In Yovu's haiku, the season is both present and vital, though, as in many of the best haiku, unstated. The haiku's message is spectacularly reinforced by the artful use of sound. The repeated "o" sounds tie the first line together. The insistence of the repeated "insisting." The personality and ego of the repeated "she." The third line where sound and sense are inextricably woven in the buzz of the repeated "is" that stays with us long after the poem has ended. And for those to whom an established

form is vital, the poem's seventeen-syllable form provides an invisible foundation for its content. If there has been a perfect haiku written in English, this is it.

“mosquito she too” was first published in *Modern Haiku* 35.1 (Winter-Spring 2004)

As featured poet, Peter Yovu will select the next poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 1.4.

virals 1.4

This week troutswirl has experienced some great activity. The posting of Viral 1.3 garnered an interesting debate which, it seems, my own excessiveness may have stifled the flow of; for that I apologize. One particular item on the news posting (Politiku) brought about an interesting discussion on the 5-7-5 exoskeleton used by the mainstream, as well as a brief history lesson of English-language haiku. Also, the first installment of Peter Yovu's new section on the blog, *Sails*, has started off with a bang, and even a bearish tangent (see the "1st Sailing" post). Instead of moving the Virals section of troutswirl along with Viral 3.3, I've decided to take a step back and post *Viral* 1.4 instead (below) which features Peter Yovu's selection of, and commentary on, a favorite haiku of his choosing. With Peter's selection, Viral 1 comes to a close, as you'll see. Enjoy, and please keep the comments coming, positive or negative (but hopefully helpful and analytical, and critical in ways that allow us to see how and why haiku work, or not). It would be nice to hear more voices and see more bulbs light up along the string. To echo a recent comment left by Claire Richardot: "What good is a sky chart if the stars [both big and small] are wearing hoods?"

Silence Rains / Peter Yovu

the mountains'
silence be
comes the rains'
— Santōka

I do not know what Santōka 山頭火 wrote. I do not know his words, nor do I know if Cid Corman, whose "version" this is, immersed himself in the original or in a translation. Nonetheless, based on what happens to me when I read the poem, I am convinced that Corman entered the same field where Santōka once stood, (though ages and possibly continents apart), and came out changed, that is, able to give us this particular poem, this version, this

turning of one thing into another in a way that helps me consider that one thing is another, being and becoming.

And so I don't know whose poem I am honoring here, whose poem this is, or if it is anyone's at all. Perhaps I honor the genius of language itself, when it does not, as in this poem it does not objectify the world, does not use words to try to fix or rescue but rather bends as water bends to the slightest wind, revealing it. The question, the not knowing, is a mountain I can walk around on for a while: from vista to vista the answer changes, and finally it doesn't matter, the whole thing is turning to rain anyway, silence reigns, I become it, I fall to my knees.

“the mountains” was first published in *One Man's Moon* by Cid Corman (Gnomon Press, October 1984)

Taneda Santōka (1882 – 1940) can not select the next poem, and so *Viral* 1 comes to an end.



virals 2

Mother / Scott Metz

from here
to there
mother's silence

— Roberta Beary

Master Ogiwara Seisensui said that “a haiku is only one-half of a circle; it invites each reader to join the poet and complete the other half.” This quote seems to ring especially true in regards to the above poem by Roberta Beary, from her collection entitled *The Unworn Necklace* (Snapshot Press 2007), which, in 2008, was a William Carlos Williams Award Finalist (Poetry Society of America), as well as a winner in the Mildred Kanterman Merit Book Award (Haiku Society of America) contest.

This poem seems to be a test to our ability to imagine, as well as an intense invitation to dive into our life experiences and see what might possibly complete this puzzle. Can the circle, in fact, be completed though? And is it necessary, or even desirable, to do so? It seems we can not help but try; that it is our instinct, our nature. So, in Beary's poem, where is “here”? And where is “there”? Is it time? Is it space? Or is it both?

Allow me to imagine some possibilities.

Taking the brighter side first, perhaps we are outside, in a scene of warmth, amidst first blossoms or autumn foliage, and mother's silence is a silence in awe of beauty and of nature itself.

Unfortunately, I think that that imagining is ultimately doubtful, and that instead what we have is a scene that, if not within an interior, at least pervades coldness and iciness. In this case, the scene could be any number of places: a parent's home, a hospital room, a funeral home, or even a cemetery. If so, is this distance and time

more akin to that of a silence that's built up over a lifetime together, yet apart? From birth to death?

Or, perhaps we are being let in on the aftermath of a telephone conversation, with many miles separating them, perhaps even an ocean? If so, what, indeed, has been said? Who, after all, has not at some point in their life felt the cold silence of a disappointed, upset or concerned mother? Does it not toy with, if not destroy, something precious and profound? Does fault lie in the child's hands here? Or is this simply a mother who can not be pleased, or who, it turns out, is simply so very different from their offspring and no amount of words could bring them closer?

The openness and invitation to participate in this poem is wide, and has much to do, I think, with its construction: 6 words; 8 syllables. This brevity opens the words up, freshens them, allowing them to sing: here, there, mother, silence.

And so they open, grow legs and vibrate, and breathe new life and meaning.

It also seems worth pointing out that the poem is universal in that the narrator could be female or male: it could be anyone's mother. And yet, a great amount of depth is added, I think, when one knows this poem was written by a woman.

Lastly, who is this mother? What of her? Are we to take the word literally, as the poet's actual mother who gave birth to her and (possibly) nurtured her? Or is it Mother Nature? Mother Earth?—"there," in this case, being the starry sky, the moon, or fellow galaxies: Father Sky (is the silence then the silence of creation?). Of course, since this poem is great poetry, I think it can, of course, be both, and be both at the same time.

Or, to look at this gem from a different angle: is the mother the poet, referring to herself in the third person? And what does she think of her own silence? Whether the scene is warm or icy, there is clearly an unspoken warmth, and a desire for warmth and connection. A longing that can not be dulled or extinguished. In this sense, "mother" becomes a global, universal keyword, able to be used in any season, in any year, on this planet where we all have, or had, a mother of some kind.

“from here” originally placed 2nd in the 2006 *Penumbra* Haiku contest (Tallahassee Writers’ Association).

As featured poet, Roberta Beary will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral 2.2*.

Partings / Roberta Beary

raven's cry
all the partings
still to come

— Dietmar Tauchner

In reading this haiku of Dietmar Tauchner's, which appeared in the anthology *dandelion clocks* (Haiku Society of America 2008) and was previously published in *The Heron's Nest* (X:1, March, 2008), I was struck by its beautiful simplicity. I immediately thought of two well-known American poets, Edgar Allen Poe and Emily Dickinson.

The opening line's plaintive cry evokes Poe's poem "The Raven," the well-known work that tells the story of an unwelcome visitor to a young man mourning his lost love.

The last two lines of the haiku call to mind Dickinson's poem "My life closed twice before its close" (#1732, Little, Brown and Company, 1961):

My life closed twice before its close —
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me
So huge, so hopeless to conceive
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.

Tauchner's haiku takes us into the realm of *sabishi*, the Japanese term suggesting loneliness or a sad longing. The feeling of loneliness in the haiku goes beyond

the moment, reaching into both the future and the past. Contemplating “all the partings still to come,” the reader cannot help but think of those partings he or she has experienced. Each individual reader’s understanding of the haiku is colored by a personal history of separation and loss. It is this quality of *sabishi* which gives Tauchner’s eight words their depth and universal appeal.

“raven’s cry” was first published in *The Heron’s Nest* X:1, March, 2008)

As featured poet, Dietmar Tauchner will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 2.3.

Out of Kindness / Dietmar Tauchner

out of kindness now
I shout at my father
going deaf
— Kevin Brophy

This outstanding poem by the Australian poet Kevin Brophy is a striking and touching one. It overwhelms with different associations of family affairs, especially the relationship between an adult son or daughter (but rather son than daughter) and their old father. It provides what I'd like to call “an existential force,” a power that derives directly from our experiences in and with life—something that Bashō and his Shōmon school might have had in mind when they coined the term *fuga no makoto*, the truth of art, as a poetic advise/device, or, later on, Shiki, and his idea of composing haiku based on *makoto* (“truthfulness”).

Brophy starts his “serious senryū,” or “existential/psychological haiku,” with enormous skill by using a line that can be understood in different ways. “Out of kindness now” might have the meaning that kindness is the way of human interaction between adult son/daughter and father, or it might mean that the way of kindness has been abandoned. “Now” deepens this effective ambiguity, since it evokes either a change of feeling—the “I” might have shouted at his father previously out of anger, for instance — or almost the opposite, the end of a sort of kindness, avoiding hidden feelings like anger.

The second line — “I shout at my father” — provokes all the associations of a rude treatment of one's father, but the third line calms down this angry emotion in stating that the father is going deaf and might need a loud voice to understand spoken words. In an amazing and intense way, Brophy captures the ups and downs of a lifelong relationship and expresses the ambiguous emotions for the father: anger and, finally, after all, kindness and compassion.

“out of kindness now” was first published in *Famous Reporter* 21 (June 2000)

As featured poet, Kevin Brophy will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral 2.4*.

Longing / Kevin Brophy

strong young bodies stripped to the waist two moonlit snails
— Sue Stanford

This is a haiku connecting with a number of important haiku traditions; it is attentive to the present moment; it is taking place in connection with nature; and it has the earthy humor so important to keeping the form alive, supple and subtle. The move to the snails is of course a marvelous surprise, but more than that it alerts me to the fact that my perception of nature has not been as sensual, nor as full of imaginative understanding as Sue Stanford is here (of course snails must revel in their youth, when it happens! — as we do). I have allowed my automatic attitudes to kick in when I look at snails. No longer! Sue Stanford's poem does not just open up a perception of snails, though, it suggests, as do all the best haiku, that a real connection with nature is both possible and is itself wholly natural. The single line form accentuates, I think, the intellectual and imaginative coherence of this haiku, and its rhythm as a statement in English.

I am also drawn to this haiku for its psychological nuance. What kind of person (mind) would be thinking like this? I hear in the the speaker awareness of youthfulness that is now a memory. There is a touching tone of longing born of knowledge and loss here.

As featured poet, Sue Stanford will select the next poem and comment on it for *Viral* 2.5.

Echoes / Sue Stanford

訝(こだま)して山ほととぎすほしいま>

kodama shite yama hototogisu hoshii mama

making echoes the mountain cuckoo just as it likes

—Sugita Hisajo 杉田久女 (translation by Sue Stanford)

This haiku by Sugita Hisajo, which won a prestigious prize in 1931 (one of the first prize winners out of more than 100,000 submissions), is remarkable for its simplicity and its resonance. Hisajo wrote that as she thought over the final phrase, she climbed Hikosan, the sacred mountain where she was first startled by the cry of this rarely heard bird, a number of times.

The simplicity of the haiku is apparent phonologically in the echo-like placement of the three “ma” sounds. Note the other chimes in its tightly controlled soundscape. Then there is the economical way in which, in just six words, Hisajo manages to give a sense of the extent and mystery of a mountain scene through the evocation of the random cries of a bird which can never be quite pinned to a definite location.

The haiku also works at an allegorical level. “Hototogisu” (lesser cuckoo), the name of the famous haiku group to which Hisajo belonged, is derived from the penname of its founder Masaoka “Shiki”. Suffering from tuberculosis, he identified with the cuckoo which was said to sing until it coughed up blood. Shiki’s approach to haiku composition stressed *ari no mama* — or things as they are. Hisajo, who was often frustrated by the roles available to her as a woman, both salutes this attitude and deflects it to express her own longing for freedom in her choice of *hoshi no mama* — just as [she] likes.

Some additional translations of Sugita Hisajo’s poem:

The mountain cuckoo creates echoes as it pleases
(tr. Hiroaki Sato, *Japanese Women Poets: An Anthology*, 2007)

keeps re-echoing—
little mountain cuckoo likes
having its own way
(tr. Sasa Važić)

over these mountains
cuckoos' trill echoes
as free as it wishes
(tr. Eiko Yachimoto)

in echoes . . .
a song of the mountain cuckoo
as I wish to play
(tr. Fay Aoyagi)

Voice echoing,
the mountain cuckoo,
does as it pleases
(tr. *Waseda Weekly*)

Sugita Hisajo (1890–1946) cannot select the next poem, and so *Viral 2* comes to an end.

miracles

A Penny For Your Thoughts / Scott Metz

a black model-T ford
rounds the white curve
of a heron's wing
— Cor van den Heuvel

This poem, from Cor van den Heuvel's first collection of haiku, *sun in skull* (Chant Press, New York City, 1961), really takes us unexpected and most welcome places I think.

Unquestionably the most influential car of the 20th century, if not its most influential invention, the Ford Model T began both America's car revolution, and, in effect, so many of the crises our nation and the world are now experiencing.

Through this image, this object — this symbol — and the road its on, it requires us to re-imagine and feel the growth and rise of the American empire, “free market” and global capitalism, industrialism, dependency on foreign oil, urban sprawl/suburbia, pollution, global warming, and the destruction and molding of the American landscape into a webbing of asphalt. Its impact is far and deep, and will be felt for centuries to come. It seems that this dark/black image can, through the lens of capitalism in the name of growth and expansion/Manifest Destiny and convenience, even take us back to the removal and destruction of the indigenous inhabitants of North America/Turtle Island. It's arguable that the Ford Model-T is just as destructive, if not more so, than the invention of the nuclear bomb. Only time will tell. Or hasn't it already?

And yet, this poem does not seem to be overtly alluding to a Man *v.* Nature moment. Society, the nation, the world, is rounding the curve, traversing it, and almost seems at one with it here. Society instead is moving forward, onward and upward, avoiding the steep cliff just over the edge, pattering along into the bright/white future. Clearly,

however, what has transpired since 1908, much less 1961, can not be viewed nearly as serenely. The future is here. Man, instead, through the car revolution, has become very much at odds with the world he's in. And so we have the entirety of 20th century American history, and its current crises, in the wing span of that heron, rounding its white curve, unfolded and spread out before us.

And yet there are other things going on in this poem, displaying innovation in haiku that is rarely, if ever, played with these days, or any other era of English haiku for that matter.

The poem can be considered both surreal and avant-garde.

It is surreal in the sense that it presents to the reader a fantastic, impossible-possibility, the “impossibly true.” Though the first two lines lull the reader into a state of ordinariness — perhaps driving along a snowy road, a winter scene, the curve perhaps implying a bit of treacherousness — the last line shatters that reality, shocking the system, and thus elevating it to something psychedelic. If a car were indeed small enough, it very well could ride along the wing of a bird (think *Honey I Shrunk the Kids* [1989] or the scene in *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* [1980] where the Millennium Falcon is at rest inside the cave of an asteroid, only to find it's been resting on the body of an asteroid-worm). But it is not; and so we are shot inside a microcosm, and a world of fantasy. And yet it is steeped in reality and naturalness. It plays with images that are common: a car, a bird. Yet they are seamlessly put together, thus creating something wholly unique and extremely refreshing. The images are immediate and vivid, beautifully simple, and effortless to imagine. It is a poem of the imagination, yet the juxtaposition does not hurt or strain, but instead delights, surprises and pleases.

It is avant-garde in the sense that this use of surrealism and rupture from “reality,” the common infused with the fantastic, indulging in the imagination, is a sharp break away from the predominant *shasei* method of sketching what is literally before the poet (or interpreting the images in a strict and literal way), so overwhelmingly used in English haiku. It clearly abandons this method.

The poem's use of stark black and white imagery also reminds me of films, especially that of the silent era (this is, after all, a silent poem, except perhaps for the chugging of the vehicle, though it's not mentioned). The surrealism reminds me of animation and cartoons and their unique ability to present the ridiculous and impossible as real and possible with style, humor, beauty and grace (the dancing hippos and crocodiles segment in *Fantasia* [1940] tiptoes to mind). I see this poem as something akin to a film clip one might view in a penny arcade (though I am a product of the 1980s, I was able to experience the uniqueness of penny arcades along the boardwalk while looking for the Ms Pacman machines). And so the poem becomes a kind of short, looped silent film/cartoon.

Insert coin and look through the viewfinder:

a black model-T ford rounds the white curve of the heron's wing

Insert another coin:

a black model-T ford rounds the white curve of the heron's wing

And on and on. Those last three words surprise every time, throwing the reader/viewer into a dream-like world. The wildness of nature, and the wildness of the imagination.

In 2009, Ford posted the largest financial loss in its history. Though they didn't apply for government bailout money (yet) — unlike the other Detroit car corporations — it seems it is surely in its death throes if it does not evolve and gain new vision.

The herons, as far as I know, are still doing fine. And even if they are not, I highly doubt they will decide to go to war, invade other countries and murder their civilians in order to preserve and defend a selfish, greedy and wasteful way of life. Now, how about another coin?

As featured poet, Cor van den Heuvel will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 3.2.

Balancing Act / Cor van den Heuvel

Central Park
a juggler upside down
in my watch crystal
— Carl Patrick

This haiku by the versatile and gifted wordsmith Carl Patrick captures a moment in the park when time and space, gravity and freedom coalesce into an image of mystery and suspense. It recently appeared in *Dandelion Wind*, an anthology of poems commemorating the 2007 Haiku North America conference, edited by Michael Dylan Welch and Lenard D. Moore.

One aspect of the image that intrigues the imagination is its miniaturization of the juggler and whatever you want to imagine him juggling, along with the trees and lawns of the park, the sky and its clouds in short, the world. Another is that this is also all upside down. What's more, it is enclosed in the space of the crystal and superimposed on the face of a timepiece. While time and space are being joined in the watch, the image of the upside down juggler is defying the laws of gravity. That which holds the universe in balance is being turned upside down while the juggler plays with it. All this Patrick has caught in a glance at his watch and has now with his poetic skill with words juggled a superb haiku into existence, a creative act that is bound to make the gods jealous (not to mention other haiku poets, including the present writer).

There are many ways to interpret and to enjoy this marvelous haiku. I have only touched upon the possibilities. One could consider how the present moment is being marked by the watch at the same time it is being preserved by the poem. This can serve to remind us of the importance of Now and how if we can only experience It to the fullest, stop it within the crystal of our mind, then we too might be able to juggle the world into an enlightening constellation of revelatory objects. So, there

are many ways one may get carried away by this little poem, and before I get carried away over the upside down trees in Central Park, I will stop right now.

“Central Park” was first published in *Dandelion Wind: Haiku North American 2007 Anthology* (2009)

As featured poet, Carl Patrick will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 3.3.

A Small Glow / Carl Patrick

temple hall . . .
the firefly
shows off

— Stanford M. Forrester

It is a warm summer evening in the zendo. The windows are open to take advantage of a quiet breeze. The monks are intent on counting their breaths or emptying their minds, all turned inward, straining not to strain for enlightenment. Some are anxious, some are bored, some on the edge of contentment, which is mind without content. Though they know better, they can't help taking their meditation seriously. It's what we humans do.

Then the firefly makes its unpremeditated appearance, sailing without fanfare down the center of the hall, its mind perfectly empty and its enlightenment a small green flash. We monks and novice meditators try not to look, try not to be distracted. From what? Ourselves. Which is what we are trying to transcend. But what is transcendence but oneness with the firefly's tiny spontaneous glow? The firefly, unaware of the agony of these intellectual knots, solves all koans in its small flash. Is it showing off? It is being itself. To serve is to solve. Of course, all this is in my mind, not the firefly's. The firefly is no doubt, beyond doubt, utterly delighted with its light.

The poem contrasts our tangled struggles and the firefly's total spontaneity. The quiet of the temple hall interrupted by a miniscule epiphany is like the frog's splash in Bashō's ancient pond. But all this would be pointless chatter without Stanford's elegance and simplicity. Poised on a knife edge between formal balance and carefree humor, the poem is a six-word meditation on the paradox of showing off: something usually thought of as reprehensible that is in fact direct expression of our deeper nature. This is what creates this haiku's own small glow.

“temple hall” was first published in *Hermitage* (2006, Romania)

As featured poet, Stanford M. Forrester will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral 3.4*.

snow & sun / Stanford M. Forrester

deep snow
the amusement park lit
by a single bulb
— Cor van den Heuvel

This haiku is one of the most memorable I've read in the past ten to fifteen years. It is crafted with such technique that we forget we are reading a poem at all. Simply speaking, it transcends the page.

This is a poem about temporality and memory. We normally think of amusement parks in the summer time of our youth. Our memories are filled with sounds of laughter, music, and shouting. We can remember the smells of cotton candy, hot dogs, sea mist, and a girlfriend's perfume. It is warm out. Maybe we were wearing a short-sleeved shirt, or a light jacket that we would wrap our date as the night grew dark and chilly. The sky would turn indigo, but with each moment the amusement park lights would grow more and more brilliant, some glowing blue, yellow and red. In some places white street lamps would flood the avenues and of course there were strobe and blinking lights. We still might remember what it felt like to walk on the boardwalk or down the street; stepping on popcorn, or maybe a piece of melted chewing gum sticking to our shoe.

Although none of these memories are literally present in Cor van den Heuvel's poem, they truly are present. This haiku opens the door to our memories and evokes invisible juxtapositions to each well-chosen word present. Take the first line. Here there are two implied (or invisible) juxtapositions; the first being of winter and summer; the second of trudging in deep snow in the winter and walking over the amusement park grounds in the summer.

In the second part of the poem, there is a juxtaposition of light. A single light bulb is almost engulfed by the winter night in comparison to a cacophony of the usual amusement park lights that make you forget that there is a sky behind them.

Sound is another important element utilized by the poet in the poem. This is poem of silence, or perhaps there's a bit of wind blowing across the snow. Like the single light bulb, the sound present is engulfed in the deep snow. This silence or muted sound is compared in the reader's mind to the sounds of the amusement park going at full hilt.

These are only a few comparisons that can be made when looking at this poem. The use of the subject matter creates a certain tension that evokes in the reader a number of thoughts and ideas that lay below the surface of this snow. I invite you to explore this amusement park both in the deep winter and its highest summer.

As featured poet, Cor van den Heuvel will select the next poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 3.5.

A Simple Swirl of Water: A John Wills' Moment / Cor van den Heuvel

rain in gusts
below the deadhead
troutswirl

— John Wills

Talk about seeing a world in a grain of sand. Here is the story of life and death revealed in a swirl of water. Though like most good haiku it is about a moment of perception, this poem may take a few seconds to fully appreciate. Although it is basically about the single moment of the “troutswirl,” to experience the haiku’s full resonance one should also be aware of the several states, or conditions, of water that precede and accompany the moment. The three words of the first line call up not only the “rain in gusts” but by implication—suggestion—we are made aware of the steadier fall of rain, or mistiness, or even absence of rain, which comes between the gusts. The second line, with the word “below” tells us not only that we are looking at a stream, or river, but that its water is flowing and swelling above “the deadhead” (a wholly or partially sunken log) as it tries to get around this obstruction. We can also see the smoothness of the quiet water just below the log. We then see the coming together, the meeting, of those three or four kinds of rain on the different kinds of river surface, and finally we see the moment of the troutswirl itself. The many images of water united in one. And out of this elemental world of river, wind, and rain—and death—comes that one sign of life. The mystery is deepened as much by what we don’t see as by what we do, for the trout itself is either unseen, or just barely glimpsed through the water.

John Wills (1921 – 1993) cannot select the next poem, and so *Viral 3* comes to a close.



virals 4

The Disjunctive Kittens by Scott Metz

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

Marlene Mountain's use of irruptive and disjunctive qualities, as well as concrete poetry techniques, elevates this poem into a meditation on birth and creation, fusing images and feelings together, ultimately pushing the envelope of what a haiku is and can be through experimentation of language, form and space. It was ahead of its time when it appeared in Mountain's *the old tin roof* in 1976. It would more than likely raise an eyebrow or two of a few even today.

For the reader, this poem unfolds gradually, gaining clarity in fits, piece by piece, fragment by fragment (kitten by kitten?), with the line breaks and numbers startling and jarring us along the way. The first line is simply, "on this cold," and feels blunted or cut off, but also has a lingering and anticipatory feeling. What is "this"?

Only towards the end of the poem, at line four ("kittens") are we given an insight into the meaning of the numbers, though this insight still lacks certainty and concreteness: with the word "kittens" the four creatures are now there, and the numbers make sense, but how and why? These numbers, at least the first four, through disjunction and irruption (appearing out of nowhere almost, nonsensically), force upon the reader an alternate reality, a second world within the poem, playing with the reader's consciousness, pulling and pushing the reader in and out of the poem, while being part of the poem. And yet we are not done with the poem when "4" is revealed, and so there is still an element of surprise and revelation, and thus a need to continue

with the unveiling for further understanding and meaning. It is not until “5”, the fifth kitten, is revealed at the very end, line six, that the reader is allowed to rethink and reevaluate the entirety of the poem and the worlds within it, and then come to a more solid interpretation and understanding of the whole, as well as the emotions and feelings it creates.

The six line format is itself jarring in that it is non-traditional for western/English haiku, which has, for the most part, been traditionally strict about sticking to the three line format. It also strays from Mountain’s standard practice of the one line format, though this example is from her earliest period — a period that saw more experimentation with concrete techniques such as format and spacing. The way the last two lines read, “kittens/wet,” is also grammatically jarring, but lends itself to the poem finishing with wetness, and also allows the mother to be with the last of the litter, thus solidifying the overall concrete image. Using “wet/kittens” would have completely ruined this effect.

Upon coming to “5”, the fifth kitten, we are rewarded with both a concrete picture as well as the theme and very experience of birth and creation. The concrete: a female cat surrounded by its newborn kittens — the numbers in the poem, instead of being written out as words (one, two, three, etc.) are instead presented as their mathematical symbols (“2” being playful in that it could also be read as “to” = “2 night”/“tonight”). And so, the symbols become the kittens themselves, startlingly small and of almost the exact same size, nursing. The first line, “on this cold,” is the mother’s tail, “5” being the newest kitten at its mother’s mouth, being cleaned. It is a poem that is both a creation, is about creation, and also a poem which is created in the reader’s mind, coming to us in pieces, slowly, as if through the birth canal into the world, into existence, into consciousness. Holistically, the poem becomes a meditation on new life, birth and creation.

Lastly, the use of “spring night” adds great depth to this event. A kind of symbiosis occurs in that the nature surrounding the cat, kittens, and poet is giving birth and is breeding new life and renewal as well. And then, of course, the kittens are being born into this world of new life, this newest spring. The naming of the season also adds to the poem’s sense of wetness — the wetness of the kittens, of the mother,

the wetness of the air and the season—making this a visceral poem, something the reader can almost touch and sense through their own fingertips on the page. The coldness only increases the warmth, and the disjunctive and irruptive qualities magically seems to form an amulet for meditation on life and birth.

As featured poet, Marlene Mountain will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 4.2.

Unearthing / Marlene Mountain

gothic doorway something half eaten clings to the moon
— sheila windsor

When I go to online haiku sites the first thing I notice posted are one-line haiku. Sometimes I'll re-arrange a word or two in my head. If it seems there's only that one haiku, I often don't open the post. I know that it's really a three-line haiku bunched up. For some authors I'll click on just to see.

Of course I look at content. I look for the personal relationship between poets and their subjects. If the poet has a personal closeness, then I can get closer. Especially to a haiku that one has to want to find out what's there. Way back in the time of *The Wordless Poem* (1969), Eric Amann wondered why two-line and one-line haiku were rarely written. The latter clicked with me. Yet over these forty years or so, one-line has not been taken very seriously. Some poets would give it a try, but there must be something safe or cozy about the three-line. In the late 1970s, Clarence Matsui-Allard wrote haiku one had to reach into.

Some haiku unearth one-line. Some one-line unearth content. Well, some one-line haiku unearth our minds too. The internet opened new friends with individual views. One particular poet/painter is Sheila Windsor in England.

Did you feel a bump in the line? What happened? If anyone knows what the haiku is and/or means please don't tell me. I love it as is. Will it "work" as a three-line. It won't—the marvelous bump would be lost. It's an unearthing one-line.

"gothic doorway" was first published in *Lynx* XIX:3 (October 2004)

As featured poet, Sheila Windsor will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 4.3.

Still Rocking / Sheila Windsor

broken bowl
the pieces
still rocking

— Penny Harter

I won't attempt to define this brilliant haiku: that would be a kind of vandalism. Haiku, when it truly works, is the depiction, the encapsulation, of a moment that could not be expressed so perfectly in any other way. A moment caught in passing, overlooked by a million others and oneself, a billion times. I will though, attempt to express a little of what this particular haiku does for me: it conjures the interconnectedness of the All. We have 'bowl' as thing, as person, as humanity, as magnolia tree in bloom. It speaks of brokenness en route to somewhere else, a new form, new movement, next stage. It honors, in the simplest, absolutely briefest of ways, life, in all its marvelous manifestations and processes. My sincere thanks to Penny Harter for this haiku and many others, it was hard to select just one. My thanks to the countless other haiku writing kindred spirits, personally known to me or not, from all parts of the globe and from a variety of times: selecting one was next door to impossible, yet I have enjoyed the challenge immensely, for it has required me to immerse myself in haiku and that's a place I love to be.

"broken bowl" was first published in In the *Broken Curve* (Burnt Lake Press, 1984)

As featured poet, Penny Harter will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral 4.4*.

virals 4.4

Penny Harter's write-up below on Margaret Chula's haiku (above) is extracted from a review she wrote for Chula's collection, *The Smell of Rust*, in *Kyoto Review*. Harter's commentary on Chula's haiku, though short, gets to the heart of things: finding the metaphor and linking the rust to our own "livingdying." It was originally my intent to add my own thoughts directly to Harter's words. I've decided to keep them separate, however, in hopes of letting Harter's words stand and shine alone.

So, a few things that that draw me into Chula's haiku.

The first is the way colors are conjured without being entirely present. The marigolds blossom in the mind, for me, simply through the mentioning of their scent: life and color clinging, yet blooming, out of the rust, into another living thing. An interesting weave of life, death, and dying. In effect, a kind of world of experience, habit, tradition, and duty are created.

I like the decision to use "my" instead of "the": "my scissors". Not "the scissors."

I feel that's important because, as a reader, it makes me care more. It creates a sharper world for me and makes the overall effect richer. The idea that the scissors are, in a sense, the poet becomes more deeply felt.

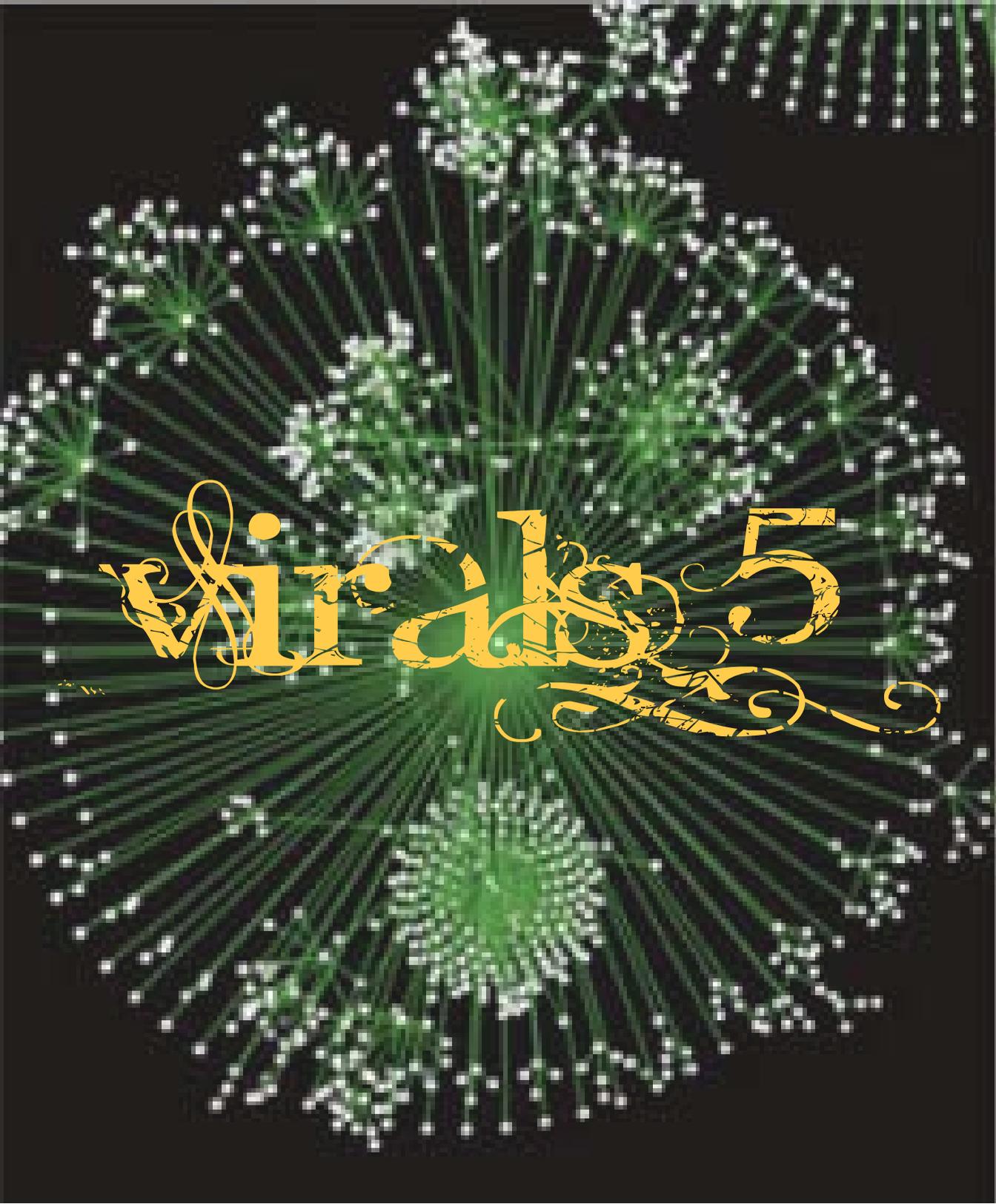
And so the haiku becomes a creation where the past, present, and the future are interwoven. The scents are alive and lingering, a year is recalled, while at the same time the reader is left with a world to linger on and ponder. What will come and how will one handle it? Major themes are aging, and memory, but also the sense of being alive and, always, moving on with it all.

What do readers think of this haiku and what can you add to Penny Harter's commentary and thoughts? What other angles do you see?

Oxidation / Penny Harter

end of summer
the rust on my scissors
smells of marigolds
— Margaret Chula

This poem appeals to several senses: visual, tactile, and olfactory. From shades of brown in the rough texture of oxidating metal, to a sharp and bitter odor. Rust does smell — of time, of oxidation, and, ultimately of transformation. Chula's image of the sharp odor of marigolds lingering on rusting scissor blades moves beyond the expected. We are all rusting as we move through the seasons of our lives — free radicals oxidating our cells, especially as summer ends and we move into the deeper seasons of autumn and winter. Yet we take what we can from summer into the coming cold.



virals 5

virals 5.1

Core / Scott Metz

bare branches
I choose a layer
of blue silk
— Peggy Willis Lyles

We make choices virtually every moment of our lives: big ones, small ones. Choices that have become so mundane that we are no longer even conscious of them. But we make them nonetheless. Oftentimes, we are overwhelmed by the variety of choices we have before us. The avoidance of making a decision is a decision as well, and has consequences. Some of our best decisions though are accidents or unintended, made in a second. From the gut. Inspiration.

All art requires making careful choices, even if they are sometimes spontaneous or out of the blue. The art of haiku, especially, requires careful and specific choices. And, though inspired by an instant or a moment of some kind, an image, a memory or memories, a deeply felt feeling or connection, or a flight of the imagination, the words to express and describe them don't necessarily arrive as easily, but are instead considered and sculpted and, if one chooses, revised. In some cases, extremely revised. Sometimes we make those choices and decisions. And, if we are serious about our art, then those decisions are serious; and those decisions have consequences in some way or another — the words we choose, the sounds, the beats, the line breaks, or lack thereof. Sometimes though they choose themselves and decide what goes down, and what goes where.

Bare branches have always reminded me of human lungs, antlers and coral, which leads to breathing, and the concepts of extending, branching out, growth, oxygen, and ultimately life itself. The tree has also long been an archetype in mythologies all over the globe: in *The Book of the Dead* they are where souls of the deceased find blissful repose; from India there is the Bodhi tree beneath which Buddha attained enlightenment;

in the Shintō religion of Japan, where nature is sacred, is the especially sacred *sakaki* tree (*Cleyera japonica*), an evergreen, and is found in Japanese mythology, literature, and sacred rituals; in *The Holy Bible* (The New King James Version) there are the two trees in Eden (The Tree of Knowledge/Wisdom, of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Immortal Life, the tree of the return), as well as the tree/cross Jesus was crucified on (metaphorically returning humanity to the tree of life/eternal life); there is also the “Christmas” tree tradition of Germanic paganism, symbolic of the continuation of Life through the cold and darkness of winter; and in Mayan mythology the Tree of Life (*Yaxche*), traditionally a Ceiba tree, was their *axis mundi* (navel of the world), and could be found at the center of most pre-Columbian Mesoamerican villages.

Yes, the bare branches also allow more sky, more blue, to be seen, and therefore connect to the choice of a layer of blue (soft, like a blue silk scarf, or perhaps an inner layer, something no one else could know about or see?). But this is only a literal interpretation and possibility, only one side of the coin. What if the sky behind and around the bare branches is instead actually cloudy and gray? What follows after the first line then becomes a kind of deep, and deeply felt, wish — an inspiration/decision influenced by a strong desire and need for warmth, for change, for the sunnier days soon to come and for the new leaves that are certain to come. They cannot come sooner for the poet here, revealing an inner thought from the core for clarity.

“Bare branches” also creates other things for the reader: a sense of atmosphere, the world around it, as well as a state of consciousness. And it does so creatively, with strong imagery, without being explicit or taking the easy route (“winter tree” for example). Seasonally, it allows its reader room to breathe. Whatever the case, those bare branches are full of life and motion, with leaves and buds, and perhaps fruit, to come, even though it might not be perceived on the outside. There are layers to the tree’s life unseen by the naked eye, layers to the sky and earth, and layers to the poet. In this haiku the core is touched and the layers connected and revealed.

“bare branches” was first published in *Wind Chimes* 26 (1988)

As featured poet, Peggy Willis Lyles will select a poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 5.2.

Confession by Peggy Willis Lyles

birdsong
my imaginary lover
alive again

— Yu Chang

Yu Chang’s “birdsong” first appeared in *The Heron’s Nest* in May 2004 and has been among my favorites ever since. Sharing a completely credible miracle, the whole poem is a scrap of song that bursts into being with a plosive spondee. The music continues in a longer, faintly trochaic, line, whispered and sped along by two light stresses and two that are barely perceptible. The final satisfying iambs, connected by unaccented initial vowels, are like a bell and its echo. Sound and sense meld, allowing the reader immediate access to the poet’s delight.

As for content, Yu gives us just enough information, not a slice of life but a transparent sliver, not the tip of the iceberg but the tip of the tip. He doesn’t describe the bird, its song, or his imaginary lover. He doesn’t need to. The opening image stirs the senses and memory, expanding to suggest spring and all the physical manifestations of that season. Then, the gently endearing confession of the second line comes quietly, shyly, establishing an emotional connection with the interior life of the poet/speaker and affirming shared humanity. Like the rest of us, he has a strong desire to love and be loved and a fertile imagination. The third line encompasses grand sweeps of the speaker’s history and of human experience. There has been abject, absolute loss, a time devoid of the feelings astir in the poem. The imaginary lover has been dead, and death is final — unless there is resurrection. “Alive again” is a triumph of the human spirit, that mirrors and becomes one with the resurgence of natural life in spring — the birds and the bees, buds and sap, procreative instincts and creative energy.

Without reducing the images to symbols, some readers, especially other artists, will associate the imaginary lover with the muses, and birdsong with artistic output. Again the disparate parts connect and interweave, offering another level of recognition, and the theme of disappearance and revival rings true. The song can become the very voice and revelation of the lover.

But I didn't need to tell you any of that. The poet has done his work well, honing to the essence, making the haiku simple, direct, and accessible, as well as profound. He risks revealing the personal, having recognized its universality. The poem is concise and compressed, but also strongly elastic. It readily accommodates the intellect and links to a broad cultural heritage. Yu never meant to keep it to himself but generously crafted the haiku for sharing, allowing us to take it for our own.

So, enjoy it over and over, in the ways that the speaker in Billy Collins' "Japan" repeatedly savors a haiku by Buson. Place it beside one of Rumi's poems honoring the Beloved, among Wallace Stevens' descriptions of the imagination — or Einstein's. Ponder it within the context of spring myths from many cultures, and surround it with the diverse religious traditions that include reports of resurrection from the dead. Bring it out in the cold silence of some deep-winter day, embracing full awareness of a planet in peril, and then consider the creative power of human imagination. Add it to your personal repertoire and pass it along to someone else. Haiku isn't a cage. Climb a mountain with it or explore a rainforest. Let birdsong flow freely and variations of the imaginary lover live again and again.

"birdsong" was first published in *The Heron's Nest* VI:4, May, 2004)

As featured poet, Yu Chang will select the next poem and comment on it for *Viral* 5.3.

viral 5.3

It seems appropriate that this *Viral*, selected and commented on by Yu Chang, follow *Viral* 4.3 and *Periplum* 3, both of which accumulated such great discussions and so many interesting thoughts and readings. One of the key questions it seems that was being alluded to but not being addressed head-on was this: what is Nature? How do we define it?

It seems that because our definition of Nature is expanding to include us (humans) and our inventions — that human nature is indeed part of Nature and vice versa and not separate or divided from it — our definitions of haiku and senryu, and what they can be (and what they are capable of doing), must expand as well. The lines become blurred, as they should. Isn't this a good thing, and a natural trajectory for haiku and senryu as they become more global? *Kigo* (season words) become less vital and exclusive, and more work that employs season-less, universal words (*muki-kigo*) become prevalent — the human nature of Nature becoming more central, more accented. Is this subjectivity, or a new objectivity?

This *Viral* (5.3) seems to be yet another example of this kind of artistic progression: a seasonless poem where human nature-consciousness-emotions and something physically perceived outside it are spiraling around one another, pushing and pulling, with deep connections that go all the way back to the origins of humankind (“Where there are rocks, watch out!” — Alan Watts). In many ways, the seasonless poem goes deeper than seasons, and, with the openness they create, require the reader to go deeper as well. You the reader, bringing your life experiences and imagination in tow, are allowed to come in contact with a world the seasonless poem creates more openly, with more freedom, and are given the chance to create your own season for it, or however the poem works through you. It's a collaborative workout. What season does it leave you in and with, and why? Take a look. And watch out.

Some / Yu Chang

a deep gorge . . .
some of the silence
is me

— John Stevenson

“Ah, the color gray . . . a lonely man, in a deep gorge under a misty sky, not even a crow in sight.” That’s the picture I painted right after the first read. I find it curiously satisfying. Much later, after a closer read, I was delighted to find another portrait for the poet — centered, humble, and at peace with his surroundings.

The sense of elation has stayed with me since I first read this lyrical, and evocative poem. The gentle pull of the understated first line “a deep gorge . . .” sets the scene, and the invitation for the reader to join in is put forth in the second and third lines. The poem succeeds effortlessly, without raising a single decibel.

On a bridge in Ithaca, I caught a glimpse of the gorge after our (Route 9 Haiku Group) poetry reading at Cornell’s Mann Library to celebrate the 2006 Poetry Month. It’s like any other gorge just deep enough to rattle me out of my complacency.

A man on a bridge looking down into a gorge is a common scene, but a poet with an open mind has found a poem. Like my composer friend, Hilary Tann, says, “Composing music is making the commonplace incandescent.”

What was in the poet’s mind when he wrote the poem? Could it be that he just wrote it down with nothing particular in his mind? It really doesn’t matter. Each time I read the poem, I am thankful for the space and the freedom to let my imagination play a part.

The poem’s telescoping construct provides enough room between the first line “a deep gorge . . .” and the third line “is me” to accommodate layers of unspoken emotions effectively juxtaposed in three short lines. Two concrete images, a man

and a gorge, are brought together by silence, a word which could conjure up all sorts of sounds, from thunderous waterfalls to the faintest whisper of a wounded heart. A bridge is made, and the reader is invited to come in.

But what is the poet trying to tell me? A voiceless confession of some action/inaction in the past that gave rise to the formation of the gorge? The last two lines when read as a single sentence seem tinged with regret. Could this be a change of heart in the darkest hour of his life? Does he feel centered again and the poem is wide open? Could it be true that if we all open our hearts and talk to one another, the world would be a better place? We'll never know. Maybe that's why a poem like this is so tantalizing.

“deep gorge” was first published in *Geppo* (July/August 1996)

As featured poet, John Stevenson will select the next poem and provide commentary for *Viral* 5.4.

The Garden / John Stevenson

after the garden party the garden
— Ruth Yarrow

When offered the chance to write about a haiku I admire, it seemed as if every haiku I've ever read vanished from my memory. I knew that I could pick up almost any issue of the journals to which I subscribe or any of the haiku anthologies and find poems that would inspire admiration. But I decided that it would be more interesting to wait and see what poems came to me spontaneously, in their own good time. Ruth Yarrow's was the first to arrive in this way.

The poem speaks for itself. I shall now proceed to gild the lily.

The poem says that, after the garden party, there is / was / will be the garden.

Viewed as experience — a party at 27 Sycamore Street — it might suggest that of a hostess, or a child of the household, a neighbor, or a gardener, caterer, or a musician packing his instrument.

It could be that of a guest who has returned in search of something lost or misplaced. The list can go on in this fashion until overtaken by exhaustion. In a similar vein, each of these observers has a range of potential responses to this encounter with a post-party garden and each of those responses may be in the form of thought, intuition, and/or visceral reflexes involving memory, present experience, or anticipation. So, for each trunk there are branches and for each branch there are twigs and leaves of potential experience and attending resonance. And yet the thing is so simple.

Alternatively, the poem could be looked upon as projecting a scene without a human participant, without a self as witness — after the expulsion from Eden, what is Eden? After one's own death, what is the life that goes on in this world? The garden behind

27 Sycamore Street might be contemplated for an instant as a strange place, that is, a new place. What is it then? Not “what is it like” but what is it?

Or the poem might be about words. It contains six of them, two of which are repetitions. Iteration, inflection, and seasoning. It might be about words, words, words.

I believe in the twenty-seven ways. There are more than twice as many ways of looking at a haiku as there are of looking at a blackbird. Each of them is a way in which a haiku might be an effective poem and none of them is THE way.

One of the ways that I enjoy looking at a haiku is to notice how it embodies a correspondence between things depicted (there and then) and my experience as a reader (here and now). These *Virals* columns, like all of our discourse on haiku, are a virtual party. They can be great fun. They can be something to dread. They can be a social vehicle of career advancement.

after the garden party the garden

As featured poet, Ruth Yarrow will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 5.5.

The Light in the Darkness / Ruth Yarrow

toll booth lit for Christmas —
from my hand to hers
warm change
— Michael Dylan Welch

I find this poem full of contrasts and of hope. The contrasts include the lighted booth in the early dark of a December evening, the coins warmed by his hand reaching out into cold Christmas weather, and the warmth of the connection in what is a very impersonal fleeting monetary exchange. The hope I feel in this poem comes from the light in the darkness, the hope of the season, the reach across what may be class and race as well as gender lines, including the smile and thanks I assume are there. And that last line has so many reverberations. We are all humans, giving us the potential to connect with warmth. We have the potential to change the global messes we are in if we make those connections. I admit this is laying a lot on a short poem — maybe far too much. But the feelings of connection, warmth and hope are all in that moment, and after all, emotions are what makes any poem poetry. Thanks, Michael.

“toll booth” was first published in *Frogpond* XVIII: 4

As featured poet, Michael Dylan Welch will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 5.6.

viral 5.6

Beauty in Haiku / Michael Dylan Welch

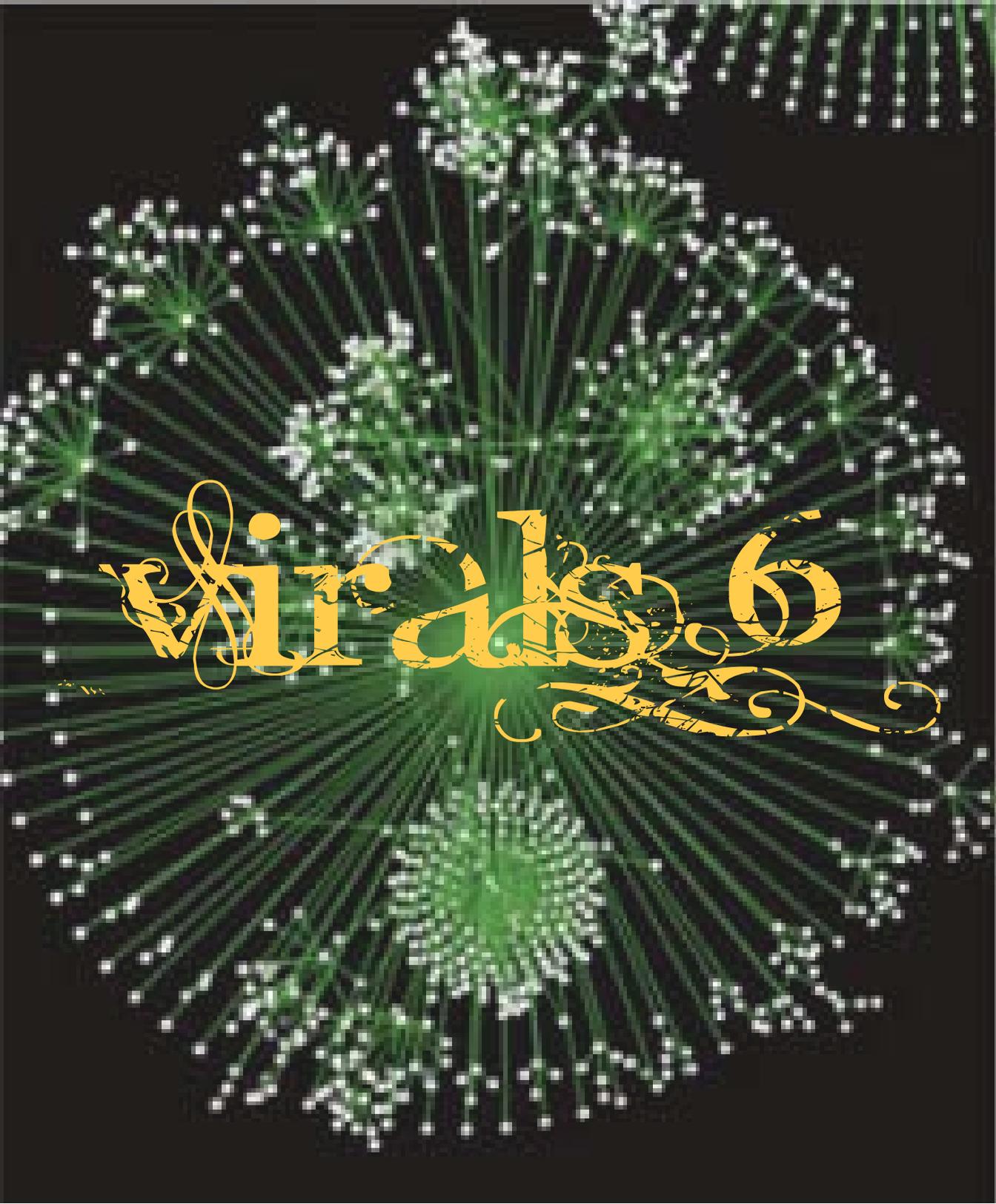
鮫鱈の骨まで凍ててぶちきる
ankō-no hone-made itete buchikiraru
the anglerfish frozen
right down to its very bones
is hacked to pieces

— Katō Shūson (1905–1993)(tr. Dhugal J. Lindsay)

This poem may startle readers because of its bluntness and violence. Many readers and writers of haiku prefer that haiku focus on the beautiful, so much so that they may believe that haiku should be limited to the beautiful. In Japan, however, the subjects of many haiku are often merely mundane, and not specifically beautiful. Moreover, subjects also appear that are decidedly unbeautiful, as in the preceding poem. Robert Bly has asserted that American haiku could represent darker content, in the way that Shiki's haiku, for example, reflected the tensions of dying from tuberculosis, or the way Bashō's haiku are often directly or contextually tinged with the dangers of travel. Our haiku, too, has plenty of room for duende, as well as dark subjects. Haiku need not dwell entirely on the dark or seemly, but just as too much salt spoils a meal, so does too much sugar. As James W. Hackett has said in his guidelines for writing haiku, "Lifefulness, not beauty, is the real quality of haiku."

Translation from *Rose Mallow* 58 (2003), by permission from Dhugal J. Lindsay.

Katō Shūson (1905 — 1993) cannot select the next poem, and so *Viral* 5 comes to a close.



virals 6

virals 6.1

Abyss / Scott Metz

soldier unfolding the scent of a letter

— Chad Lee Robinson

What we have here is a timeless, universal ku that plays effortlessly and intriguingly with language, images, memory, distance, and the nature of our world, if not the entire universe. This ku is expertly sculpted, and not a word is wasted or needed.

The one line format is perfect for this ku and allows the poem to open up and achieve its greatest impact and resonance. By leaving out punctuation and not forcing line breaks upon it, the words are allowed to play off of one another, unfolding and building meaning as it moves along. If, for example, the ku were broken up or split into, say, three lines, it would impede in many ways on the way in which one would read it —or, even more, how the words and images would build in the reader’s mind and imagination. Punctuation or line breaks would also ruin the playfulness of the language and syntax Robinson has created and lose a great amount of its edginess. By leaving out clear and definitive breaks and punctuation (inviting the reader, instead, to decide where they may or may not be), the language is allowed to be non-sensical, and surreal in that the sum surpasses the parts as well as ordinary life. For example, as I read the words “soldier unfolding,” and softly, naturally, pause, my mind goes in many directions. The soldier might be unfolding: a uniform, a flag, a sheet, a map, a rifle, a bodybag, a manual — what will it be? What we come to learn, of course, is that it is the actual soldier (neither man or woman, but universal and timeless in this poem) who is unfolding: her or his heart, mind, soul, memories, imagination, etc. But this we learn only with the last word of the poem, “letter” (which I am pricked, in one reading, to imagine possibly being a play on “let her”), and is what we are left to contemplate and imagine ourselves.

Because there is no break or punctuation though we are taken smoothly and directly into (what we think will be) something more concrete: “the scent” — perhaps our

strongest source for triggering memories. This undoubtedly, yet pleasantly, confuses the reader. How can someone unfold a scent? A kind of creative misreading takes place (did I miss something? Was there supposed to be a break/cut somewhere?). And again, if we were to softly pause after “solider unfolding the scent” I am sure our minds would go in many directions concerning what that scent might be: dust, sweat, blood, cloth, rain, smoke, plastic, earth, metal, oil, etc. There is also, I might add, the possible homophone reading of “the scent” as “the sent.” Knowing that it is the scent of the letter, we are then left to ponder the scent itself from the sender. Could it be perfume? Cologne? Incense? Or that unique smell every home in the world and family seems to have.

Ultimately then, the one line format allows the ku to become a visual poem: not only has the letter been unfolded and flattened out but also the soldier. Whatever was inside the letter, which certainly must have traveled some distance, moved the soldier in such a way that their mind-soul-imagination-memories-reality was opened up and spread out. The toughness and resolution of the soldier is transformed by the letter’s contents and where those contents take their consciousness. The ku becomes a spear struck into the heart of things.

And, though the poem is about a soldier, and one might naturally think of a military soldier of war (personally, my mind leaps to a scene from Terrence Malick’s film *The Thin Red Line*), I am reminded of a quote by William Butler Yeats: “Why should we honour those that die upon the field of battle? A man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself.” And so, in this ku, in being taken into the abyss of this soldier, we are also hurtled into the abysses of war, hate, peace, the soul, mind/consciousness (imagination, memories, reality), life, death, destruction, violence, loneliness, distance, beauty and love, and, ultimately, into ourselves.

“soldier” was first published in *Modern Haiku* 37.1 (Winter-Spring 2006)

As featured poet, Chad Lee Robinson will select and provide commentary for *Viral* 6.2.

viral 6.2

In Between / Chad Lee Robinson

all there is
between heaven and earth —
towering clouds
— Michael McClintock

Haiku tend to be filled with the smaller things, the kinds of things people glance at and never think about again, even things that escape notice altogether. McClintock's is a much larger scene, one that fills the windshield, one that extends beyond the peripherals of our vision.

I was born and raised in a valley of the Missouri River that opens into a wide expanse of prairie grassland and rolling hills, a small town boy surrounded by farms and ranches and open sky. How many times in my life have I seen this very scene? Generally speaking, prairie life is tough, especially if your livelihood is tied to the land. The land depends on you to take care of it as much as you depend on it to take care of you. It is a fragile existence.

McClintock's haiku is much more universal than what I've suggested. You don't have to be from the prairie or the San Joaquin Valley to appreciate this haiku. After all, the first part of the poem includes "all there is / between heaven and earth". The clouds represent themselves and everything in between, the animals, the land, us, and they tell us that everything is fragile and is fleeting. Each blade of prairie bluestem, each cow, each cloud, all there is that is part of that long horizon that you look out on will one day be gone. A fragile existence, but a beautiful one.

"all there is" first appeared in *Modern Haiku* 32.1 (Winter-Spring 2001)

As featured poet, Michael McClintock will select the next poem & provide commentary for *Viral* 6.3.

Nightgown & Cloud / Michael McClintock

white cotton nightgown

a cloud

on the bedroom floor

—Jean LeBlanc

I am a lover of clouds, even this one made from a white cotton nightgown.

Poems like this seldom get the essay, short or long, that is due them. They touch on the mystery of things and the deeper reflections within the human heart. They defy paraphrasing and resist any kind of satisfactory exegesis; they cannot be explicated by traditional Western means involving the surgical examination of segments and parts, inspection of phrasal structuring, investigation of allusions or close probing of metaphor.

In most haiku, nature dominates the imagery and is the thing we attempt to experience directly, without distraction or intellectual noise. This haiku is obviously different from that norm. Every object in it—the entire scene—is an artifact of human life. That cloud on the floor, for all its likeness in weight and form to a cloud of the air, is a white cotton nightgown. Things are only what they are, yet what they are depends on other things around them: This is not philosophy but how the mind experiences the world of objects and phenomenon, and how it “feels” emotion.

A poem of contrasts and likenesses, this haiku belongs to a tradition that runs as a strong thread through the entire literature. It is not a haiku about nature but human nature, and exhibits the same kind of subjective reality out of which the old masters, using imagination and the faintest, most attenuated form of metaphor, crafted these poems [all tr. R. H. Blyth]:

Ah, summer grasses!
All that remains
Of the warrior's dreams.
— Bashō

Scooping up the moon
In the wash-basin,
And spilling it.
— Ryūho

The temple bell dies away.
The scent of flowers in the evening
Is still tolling the bell.
— Bashō

Reluctantly
The willow leaves the boat
Far behind.
— Kito

Every year
Thinking of the chrysanthemums,
Being thought of by them.
— Shiki

In the LeBlanc poem, it is that (metaphorical?) leap from nightgown to “a cloud” that leaves the intellect behind, and that at the same time opens up for the heart-and-mind a universe of endless possibility and potential within the simple framework of the poem's imagery.

What is the emotion we feel here? The sensuous, experiential dimension is delicate, intense, very immediate. Hence, it is “real,” meaning solid. There is not one emotion but many, and they shift over time and with each reading. An immediate, subjective reality reels its objects and impressions through our psyche: motion in stillness,

urgency in quietude, a cloud out of a nightgown. One thing becoming another, the endless fecundity and beauty of things: it is useless and perfect.

With each reading, between the poem's first word and last, a kind of portal opens through which our stream of consciousness may pour, like water through a sluice gate. There is a rich and complete story here, to be sure, but what is the story? For me, it is as ever-changing as any cloud in the sky.

Re-reading the poem—at different times, in the day or at night, in different seasons, in different moods and personal circumstances—the poem seems always to tell me a different story about the owner of the nightgown, about the person who sleeps in that bedroom, or who remains awake on top of the bed in the stifling heat . . . Who is about to take into their arms a lover on a cold winter night or, perhaps, with a last kiss, has just let the lover go, to sneak over the wall in the garden . . . Or who, disappointed in love, gazes in sadness at the nightgown tossed lightly upon the floor, all anticipation deflated and a lonely night ahead.

In this poem, the implicit works more deeply on the mind than the explicit. The emotional content is huge, but unstated. The poem's eroticism is delicate and as much spiritual as physical. While on first reading one may be arrested by the absence of human beings from this bedroom, all that passes in the glimmer of a moment. When reflection begins, we realize that LeBlanc has made a poem in which the presence of human beings is the more powerful and immediate for their absence! Endlessly various in its possible interpretations, in what it conveys in feelings and experience to a reader, this is one of those quiet, stunning pieces that can shut our mouth and still the chatter in our brain.

["white cotton nightgown" is from *Just Passing Through: tanka, haiku, haibun*, by Jean LeBlanc, The Paulinskill Poetry Project, 2007.]

As featured poet, Jean LeBlanc will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 6.4.

virals 6.4

What Isn't There, Is There / Jean LeBlanc

rising from your bed
remembering
the train whistle

— Judith A. Christian

I tell my students in Freshman Composition, “As with any poem, you can write a two to three page analysis of a well-crafted haiku.” Their eyes grow wide with . . . terror? Disbelief? The excitement of a creative and intellectual challenge? Well, terror, then. That is what I feel now, as I try to find the words to describe everything I hear and see and experience in Judith A. Christian’s elegant, simple, complex eight-word, thirteen-syllable haiku, “rising from your bed.”

I have lived in two places where the sound of a train whistle could be heard late at night, a freight train passing through my nondescript town on its way from someplace wonderful (Montreal?) to someplace else wonderful (Boston? New York City?). Christian’s haiku brings me back to the lonely nights of adolescence, in my third-floor bedroom in our house on a hill above town. Not far below, the train tracks followed the Nashua River through north-central Massachusetts, a north-flowing river meandering its way to the Atlantic, a river that suffered the indignities of everything a hundred little milltowns could throw at it — and into it — before finally reaching the Merrimack and eventually the sea. Everything—train, river — going somewhere, anywhere. “Somewhere, anywhere” — the refrain of one’s teen-aged years. And every night, the train whistle, which made the going sound just as forlorn as the staying. What a first word: “rising.” The “I will arise, and go now” of Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” The rising sun. A rising from the grave of one reborn, resurrected. All images of light and hope; not the stuff of this haiku. The words “darkness” and “night” are not present in these lines, and I have risen from bed in broad daylight after many an afternoon nap, but somehow we just know that this poem is set in the wee hours that offer only insomnia and longing to the one rising from bed.

Or am I wrong? Is this a poem about inspiration? The act of “remembering / the train whistle” making the poet get up immediately to write the poem about the act of “remembering / the train whistle”? And so, it could be a poem about light, after all, the light of an idea pulling into the station of one’s consciousness, initiating that flurry of activity, the gathering of belongings, the disembarking, the looking around for familiar faces or landmarks.

The train whistle is present in this poem, while being absent from this poem. The whistle is not heard in actual fact, but in memory. Had the actual sound reached the riser’s ears five minutes earlier? Five years earlier? Fifty years and five hundred miles distant from where the bed is now located? Yes, to all of the above?

I keep coming back to this being a poem set in the dark of night. As I tell my literature students at some point each semester, I am an optimistic pessimist. Each moment, I tell them, can offer an experience of beauty to the aware observer, or to the observer who is open to the possibility of beauty. At the same time, we all know—we all know—how this journey ends. To that ending, and beyond, is where this haiku takes me each time I read it. Someone rising from bed in the middle of the night, made restless or perhaps even momentarily crazed, by the memory of something that has been lost. That something is I. This present-tense haiku is about the future, and the past. Everyone who reads this poem becomes both the rememberer and the remembered. Every barrier established by the laws of physics is meaningless, here within the world created by these eight words, by these thirteen syllables, by this gentle trickster poet.

As featured poet, Judith Christian will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 6.5.

From Here On Earth / Judith Christian

that star
seems close enough
to swim to

— Diane Gillen Lynch

We are, always have been, and always will be, among the stars. It was natural enough, pleasant enough, to choose this haiku by Diane Gillen Lynch. I first heard the rhythms of language in songs such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” and I am dazzled by the images sent by the Hubble Space Telescope. It is also easy for me to travel off into intellectual musings about our relationship to stars. Why do we travel among them? Why do we want to touch them?

Ancient Buddhist cosmology asserted the existence of multiple, if not infinite, world systems. Then, as now, the light that travels from stars is what defines, what gives us the knowledge of those worlds. Epicurus, about 23 centuries ago, wrote, “There will be nothing to hinder an infinity of worlds.” Is it that the light of our minds knows that the stars will never end, and so to be among them means that we, too, have no beginning and no end? Modern astrophysics edges closer and closer to the ancients’ belief in the coming into being and passing away of an infinite number of universes, the system itself having no beginning and no end.

But wait . . . Basho is shaking his head and warning me away from such musings. Look at the first line of this well-tempered haiku. That star . . . of course. One star, the particular (Venus?), shining in the night sky, and from its light, the coming into existence of the observer. From our position on the Earth, with the naked eye we can look at only one star at a time. We can see many, but to really look, to discern the color and brightness with the naked eye, it’s one at a time. It is that particular star, and this particular poem, we are to look at, with the same intense gaze that is required to look at the night sky.

Where is the star and where is the observer? I see the star on or near the horizon, and between that star and the observer is a lake, or more likely, an ocean; but even if there is no intervening body of water, the night sky has its own horizons, and its own endless black pool. And, yes, the star seems close enough, but to swim to? There is a longing set up by the word seems, and the wistful desire to rejoin our eternal star selves is mediated by that word. We are firmly on terra firma, we are, alas, stuck here on Earth, which is exactly where a haiku should be. There is a beautiful hesitation, a gap between the second and last line, a place of expectation. I'm hooked. I'm there gazing into the distance for a moment, until the wave comes in and wakes me: to swim to. There is a dark danger in the last line. Overcome by longing for the eternal, desperate, or just impulsive—there could be many reasons for a night swim to a star; but like a hand grabbing one's elbow, “seems” keeps us safe. There will be no swim. There is only the wonder, the inscape, the lapping water, and the lasting light of this poet and this poem.

As featured poet, Diane Gillen Lynch will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 6.6.

Pools Of Light / Diane Lynch

春の日や水さへあれば暮残り

haru no hi ya mizu sae areba kure nokori

Lingering

in every pool of water —

spring sunlight

— Issa (tr. Stephen Addiss)

This is a gentle haiku. It invites the reader to rest with it awhile. I feel myself being lulled by the soft flowing sound of the water. I feel the warmth of the spring sun, a bit higher in the sky now. After the cold long winter, these first warm days, we wait in anticipation, and hope, of spring—the season of renewal.

This poem is universal. Our species is attracted to water. Whether one is participating in an activity associated with water or simply lingering in the light, we love sunshine and water. We are never in a hurry to leave this restorative and healing atmosphere. At first, my imagination takes off with all that could occur at this moment in time. I wonder what life is teeming under the pools of water? Are there koi fish in Issa's pool, or frogs? Are there cherry blossoms on the surface? Is there a reflection, perhaps of a plum tree? What birds are singing? What color is the water?

I stop thinking about all that is not mentioned. I focus on the water and the sun's reach to every pool. I think of how three-quarters of the planet's surface is covered by pools—and the sun's reach to all of these bodies of water. And I think of how water and the sun's light are requirements for survival.

As I look out my window, I see several temporary pools that were formed by flooding rains. But Issa's pools are not temporary. They remain, centuries later, in this timeless haiku. Let us linger.

this translation appeared in *A Haiku Garden* (1996) by Stephen Addiss

Kobayashi Issa (June 15, 1763 – January 5, 1828) cannot select the next poem,
and so *Viral 6* comes to a close.



Virals

viral 7.1

Sorry for the short absence of posts. My life has been a whirlwind lately. I just got a new (great) job and had to move as soon as possible. I hope this might have given some readers a nice break and others a chance to catch up on some of the recent posts. Now that I am back and “re-connected,” I’d like to present a new Viral I wrote for one of my very favorite haiku. Here’s to new beginnings!

O e n n s / Scott Metz

a love letter to
the butterfly gods with
strategic misspellings
— Chris Gordon

Another love letter.

This ku creates its openings for the reader not through juxtaposition, or strong, irruptive/disjunctive cuts or breaks, but with something called “ma”: a kind of “betweenness,” creating realities beyond language and empty places for the reader to enter and imagine (Hasegawa Kai, “Haiku Cosmos 2”). This poem has quite a few: specific details (and the absences they create), the creation of an alternative, mythopoeic world, as well as allusions to Asian philosophy and literature and Western mythology/religion.

This poem is entirely objective. And yet, we feel the strong, knowing presence of both the poet/witness (fascinated and concentrating) and the author of the letter; through their absence, we feel their presence more strongly than if they were both directly in the poem (in the form of “I” or “he/she”). The poem feels both fictionalized as well as directly observed. Who knows though. That’s part of the fun. To quote Haruo Shirane: “Fiction can be very realistic and even more real than life itself” (“Beyond the Haiku Moment”).

The love letter itself it seems must have been written by someone of a certain age with some amount of knowing, intelligence and understanding of the world and language. And yet, the poem has a sincere childlike quality, fascination, imagination and excitement.

Whatever the situation is, there is an intimacy between the poet/observer and the author of the love letter. The intimacy could be personal, someone close to the poet. It could be the actual poet. Or it could be someone they have never met, however they know their life and their oeuvre quite intimately (for example, the novelist and entomologist Vladimir Nabokov whom I can imagine hunched over his writing table, writing out his love letter to the butterfly gods on his famous index cards in pencil).

In a sincere way though, the poet is close to the love letter's author: the poet knows that the misspellings are purposeful and strategic. The exciting opening for us as readers is to ponder "why"? Why the strategic misspellings? What is their purpose? What does the love letter's author know about the "butterfly gods" that we do not? What does the absence or addition of letters (the openings) in their spelling tell us about the nature of butterflies, their lives, and their gods? What has been misspelled? Which words? Why? It seems the misspellings have a deep link and relationship to nature itself; that the misspellings are supposed to be a mimicry of nature's additions and new items (a flower, a leaf, a stone, a spot of sunshine, or the spot of warmth after its has left). If the butterflies are attracted to those additions and subtractions and seasonal fluctuations, then perhaps their gods will be attracted to something similar in a letter to them. In this sense, the absence of an O becomes not only a flower but a magnetic, vortex-like looking-glass to suck them in, if not trick them. The poem is season-less, and yet "butterfly" is there in the mentioning of their gods (therefore conjuring up a world of spring, traditionally, or summer), who construct not only the "reality" of the human world the letter is being composed in, but also an alternative reality/world/place/dimension.

What do the butterfly gods (plural, not singular) look like? Where do they reside? Wherever it might be, they, at the very least, exist inside the mind and imagination of the love letter's author — the only place they need to exist. We can only guess, but

perhaps the strategic misspellings will attract the butterfly gods' attention and make them reappear, become more visible, more active, present, and visit more often, come sooner than later, in order to help the author's heart/mind/soul which must be experiencing some kind of sadness or pain. With this reading, the season then is not spring or summer, when butterflies are most present but, perhaps, autumn or, better yet, winter. The letter's author misses them terribly. "I l v e y u. P l s e r t r n s n." The word "butterfly gods" reaches into the past in two ways: one toward the East, the other towards the West, working as a kind of super-allusion. This technique is what Haruo Shirane has called the "vertical axis": "leading back into the past, to history, to other poems" (Shirane).

The poem's Eastern allusion, of course, links to the rich history of Japanese haiku written on butterflies down through the centuries, adding a strand to the web:

A fallen flower returning to the branch? It was a butterfly.
— Moritake (15th-16 c.) [trans. R. H. Blyth]

You are the butterfly and I the dreaming heart of Chuang-tzu
— Bashō (17th c.) [trans. Robert Aitken]

butterfly what are you dreaming fanning your wings
— Chiyojo (18th c.)

Settled on a temple bell and asleep—a butterfly
— Buson (18th c.) [trans. by Hiroaki Sato]

The butterfly having disappeared, my spirit came back to me
— Wafū (19th c.) [trans. R. H. Blyth]

a butterfly went past after seeing me as an apparition
— Yasumasa Sōda (20th c.) [trans. Gendai Haiku Kyokai]

These are only a few examples, but a clear thread that ties them together, and many many other examples if shown, is "sleeping" and "dreaming." As the Bashō example

explicitly references, the use of the butterfly more often than not was a literary allusion that goes back even further to Chunag-tzu's butterfly dream and Daoism in general, a philosophy that was central to Bashō's poetry and way of life (see *Basho And The Dao: The Zhuangzi And The Transformation Of Haikai* by Peipei Qiu), in addition to Chinese literature and poetry (see Li Po's poem, "Ancient Song"; be sure to scroll down). Another dimension is Japan's indigenous religion/spiritual belief system, Shintōism, and its worshipping of nature, ancestors, polytheism, and animism, celebrating the existence of kami (gods/spirits). In this sense, by connecting to this work through the "vertical axis," Gordon's poem not only becomes a part of and an extension of haiku tradition but also, through the examples shown, takes on a dream-like quality.

Reaching into the West, "the butterfly gods" engage with European paganism as well as Roman and Greek polytheism. By not saying "a butterfly" is "a god" or "spirit" but that there are gods, somewhere else—a place we can't see them, looking over things, making decisions, playing with people/mortals, controlling some strings (heartstrings?)—the poem draws us away and out of Eastern spirituality/religion/literature and into a more Western frame of reference and understanding.

One could go so far as to say that haiku poets in general (East or West) do indeed believe in butterfly gods; when we write of butterflies, in essence, we are keeping the butterfly gods alive by worshipping them with our thoughts and sacrificing words to them. However, in writing about a subject that has been done and done again ad infinitum by haiku poets the world over, Gordon creates something entirely new and fresh again—precisely what modern English haiku should be doing and be about. He not only makes it new, but makes it artistic, deep and rich, as Kaneko Tōta suggests: "create the new in the grandeur of the old."

"a love letter to" was first published in *ant ant ant ant ant* 10

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As featured poet, Chris Gordon will select the next poem and comment on it for *Viral* 7.2.

Four Out of Five Doctors Agree / Chris Gordon

waiting room quiet
an apple core
in the ashtray
— Gary Hotham

Among other things a satisfying haiku asks a number of questions from its reader. Some of them are interdependent and some of them stand alone. And not all of them can be answered, or should be fully answered. It is often this indeterminance that gives the poem some of its resonance. Its images and ideas vibrating. Never quite settling into distinctness.

Hotham's apple core haiku, like many of his haiku, is centered on an image-oriented experience with an obscured or understated narrative presence. Under this seemingly matte surface a number of questions are stirring. There is a tension in both the form and the potential subject matter that causes us to hover above its meaning like moths.

First there is the poem's place in time. Its bid at social history. An ashtray in an office has become an obvious anachronism, and so refers to the time when there was less concern for smoking as a public health issue. Ads for cigarettes came with a physician's claims for their health benefits.

Perhaps, though, we have moved on and the ashtray's purpose has shifted to that of the generic waste receptacle. Still a familiar sight. Something no one had the energy to remove. The apple then makes its entrance as the healthy alternative. And so we get a different kind of public service announcement. But then there's that apple core itself, sitting in the middle of the poem.

As with many of Hotham's haiku, there's a tangible representation of someone's absence. A coat hanger in a closet. Warm shoes on the floor. A coffee cup in a hotel room. One of the underpinnings to Hotham's work and its appeal is that images of objects can be far more provocative than images of people in terms of opening up multiple narratives, even contradictory narratives. It's as if the people in photographs or paintings keep us out. Privilege the meaning of the work for themselves. They know the story and it isn't yours. When things stand alone we have more freedom to enter into them.

The apple core stops being merely an apple core, opens itself up, and becomes the hand that set it there. The hand of the person who perhaps just left the waiting room. To visit with whom? Social Worker, Employment Counselor, Court Clerk. A Doctor perhaps. What sort of doctor? How serious is it?

The observer of the apple, who now enters the room and the poem as well, are they waiting for this physician too? Have they merely accompanied the sick person? And so the hand that was on the apple becomes more intimate, more familiar, and perhaps more dear. Perhaps this is the office of an Oncologist.

The absent person who has left some tangible and incidental item can now signify our daily encounter with separation, loss, isolation, or even alienation in our quiet and barren institutional environments. And removing people from the poem itself has merely invited them back in in greater number.

Let's look at the craft of the poem itself, how it facilitates its intentions.

From a distance the poem looks eaten away, eroded, a haiku with its lower left corner missing, which suits the image of the apple's remains, the ashtray with its cigarettes, or not, consuming themselves in fire.

The generous space before the second and third line also brings a pause, a silence that follows the quiet of line one. And finally serves to underscore the word of entry, waiting, which hangs above the empty space and seems attached to an already completed poem.

While the opening line is compact, concrete, and poetic, an already familiar grammar of the haiku, the second and third sound more like speech, or truncated speech, rendered invisible or flat with the inclusion of articles, absent from the first line. The effect is to create a further divide between the setting and the event.

The haiku diction of the first line suggests we will encounter a more traditional or familiar image to stir up our waiting room bathos, and despite the many places the waiting room takes us, we are ultimately left without a locatable narrative, the overwrought symbols of worry and difficult transitions (waiting room quiet my wife's jewelry in my hand / waiting room quiet I unfold the letter again / waiting room quiet the water cooler adjusts itself) being absent and replaced by typical ashcan fodder, almost invisible because garbage has become so pervasive in our numerous landscapes.

We have in fact trained ourselves not to see it, and this haiku makes us do so, because if we want some meaning and resonance from the poem, some frayed thread of a narrative to keep us going back to it, we have to find it in the ashtray.

“waiting room quiet” was first published in *Modern Haiku* 6.2

As featured poet, Gary Hotham will select the next poem and comment on it for *Viral* 7.3.

Three Words Over Many More Years / Gary Hotham

crickets . . .
then
thunder

—Larry Wiggin

In February of 1974 I received my copy of *Modern Haiku* and as I was reading thru it two haiku by Otoko Tomodachi made the proverbial leap off the page:

cold rain
bare bulb shining
on the bathroom bowl

alone
fall grass caught
in the wooden door

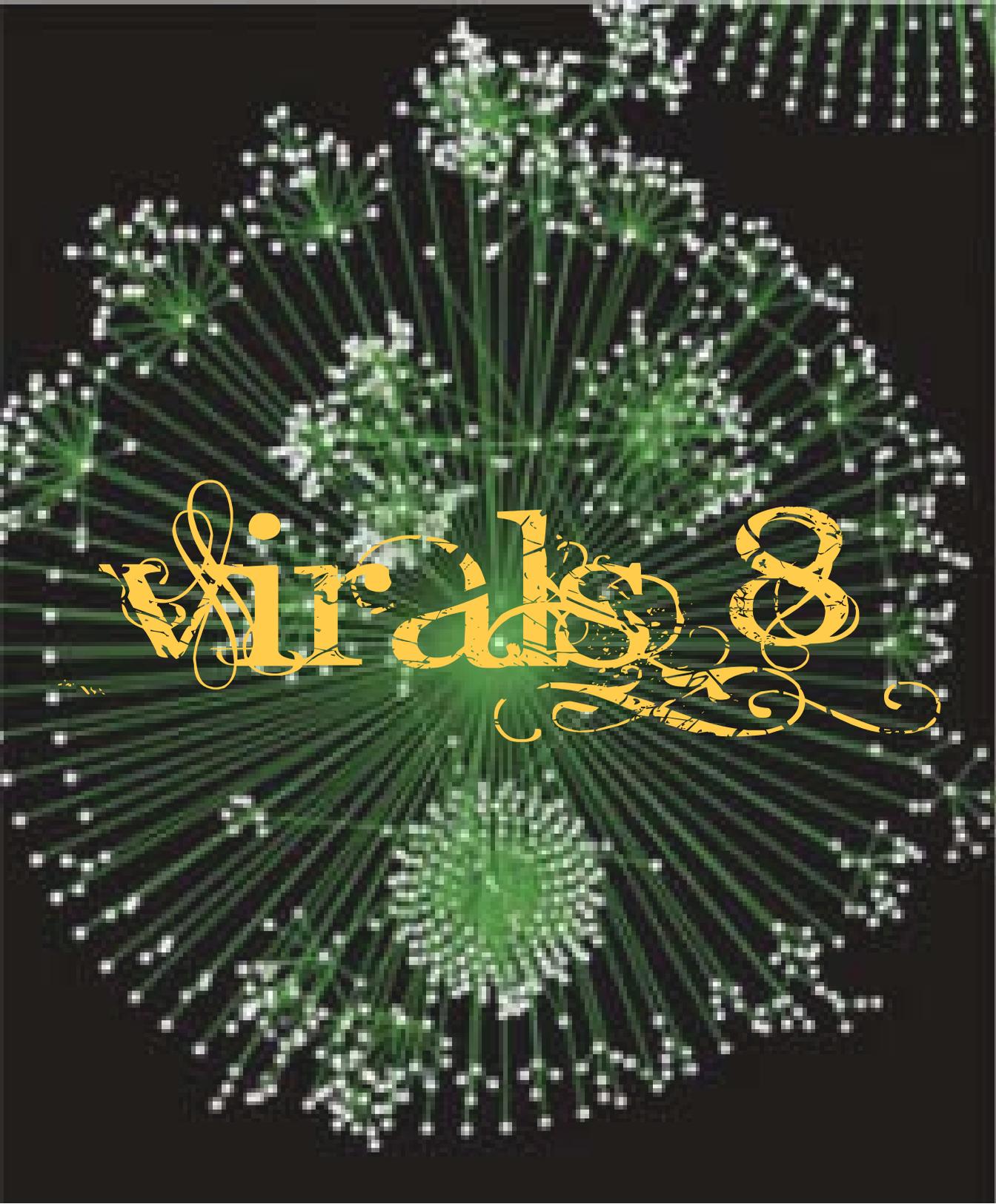
The two haiku made a great impression on me and by someone whose name I had not seen before. I sent a letter of appreciation to the writer via Kay T. Mormino who was the editor of *Modern Haiku* at that time. It was a sad day when she wrote back that Otoko Tomodachi was the pen name of Larry Wiggin and he had died the previous November. I was disappointed that I had not made contact with him about his work and that there would be no more new haiku from him.

Later that year in August I received my copy of *The Haiku Anthology* edited by Cor van den Heuvel in which there was a selection of haiku by Larry Wiggin. The haiku placed at the beginning of this essay was in the group. It made a strong and lasting impression on me. It displayed a powerful simplicity. It was precise and to the point. It swiftly recreated a delightful moment of time. It conveyed a powerful use of words. There was a penetrating intensity in its three words. A grand explosion

in my world of haiku. It has remained one of my favorite haiku. Three words from Larry Wiggin—a gift over the many years.

Larry Wiggin is no longer with us, and so *Viral 7* comes to a close.

virals 8



virals 8.1

78% / Scott Metz & Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

under the nitrogen blue sky
the white horse
of my life

— Patrick Sweeney

SM: For me, this ku is about the fleetingness of life, motion, and also transformation. By invoking a gas (nitrogen), something ungraspable, yet definitive, is conjured. It's a peculiar thing to use in a haiku poem — something scientifically named — yet it's 78 % of the earth's atmosphere, and so not that very peculiar at all. It feels modern though and part of our world and slang. The use of the word conjures exactness; it is precise and elemental. Again though, it has a vacuity to it, something odorless, escapable, always in motion, something that can not be held or tied down. What is "the white horse"? For me, it conjures speed, beauty, strength, freedom. It's a strong (even mythically mighty) image that takes us from the infiniteness and ubiquitousness of the sky/air to something concrete. Yet, at the same time, it's abstract and metaphorical. Could it, in fact, simply be a cloud that looks like a horse? And does this cloud remind the poet of their own life? Of our own lives? How simple; how beautiful. There's a purity and evanescence that i love about this ku. All in all, it leads me, ultimately, to disintegration.

PP: We may instantly recall a number of storybook tales ending happily with a knight or a prince charming riding in on a white horse. We may think of gods riding chariots drawn by white horses, or the *Book of Revelation* (19:11-16), where Christ appears as the Word of God. A white horse as a symbol has no shortage of meanings. If it is, in fact, a metaphor, it's unpretentious. "The white horse" could represent someone or thing that rescued or completes the poet — a lover, a child, a friend, a place. Regarding the latter, years ago, it was mountains that set me straight, and I don't see it being too far of a stretch to see the likeness between snow-capped mountain humps bearing resemblance to a white horse. And there are literally

White Horse Mountains that I know of in China (Yunnan and Zhejiang provinces), America (California), in Japan (Nagano Prefecture), and there may be others. We know Patrick Sweeney lives in Japan. Just a thought.

“under the nitrogen blue sky” first appeared in *Roadrunner* IX: 3

As featured poet, Patrick Sweeney will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 8.2.

No Horizon / Patrick Sweeney

burial at sea—
the horizon
so much nearer
— Rich Youmans

I read this haiku in *Without Halos*, a New Jersey literary magazine that was bigheartedly open to all poetic forms. This poem punched a hole in my consciousness and was promptly added to my sacred store of frequently recited and treasured utterances. “burial at sea—” is like when I first learned what Ash Wednesday was really all about . . . contemplating one’s own finitude and the multitudinous energy transformations that await, could give even a tiger mystic the heebeegeebees.

My grandmother used to say an Irishman is old by age six. I have always felt a craggy wisdom behind this haiku. Naturally, “burial at sea—” brings one to a solemn place. I don’t know what the poet’s intentions might’ve been, or whether I am completely misreading him, but I do know I use his poem as a kind of reminder to hurry up and pay attention to what I have to get done. My Japanese friends tell me there is no horizon and I smile and bow and continue to pray.

As featured poet, Rich Youmans will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 8.3.

virals 8.3

The Search / Rich Youmans

stars
roof aerials facing
different directions
— Gonzalo Melchor

I first saw this haiku in *Acorn* 17 (Fall 2006). I loved the dichotomy between the tangle of aerials, none in agreement — how human! — and the galaxies in their eternity and mystery. Under the stars, the aerials seem to reach out for communication and even insight into the nature of existence, those mysteries that abound in the distance of space and time. They search in all directions, but in the end must settle for all-too-earthly transmissions. Perhaps the author also meant to suggest how, to satisfy this longing, human beings often construct individual (and often contradictory) belief systems to give some semblance of order and meaning to the universe. Yet above the chaos of the aerials, whose quest for the ultimate signals may not be satisfied (at least not in this life), the presence of the stars continues. Their progression that reminds us of the remarkable, mysterious wonders beyond this world.

As featured poet, Gonzalo Melchor will select a poem and provide commentary on it for *Viral* 8.4.

virals 8.4

was never completed, and so ends *Virals*.

virale

