



REVIRALS

YEAR 2

Archival Feature

The Haiku Foundation

REVIRALS 53

a slight shake of bells
as the harness comes off
night snow

— Chad Lee Robinson (*The Heron's Nest XI:2*, 2009)

Mojde Marvast is struck viscerally by the poem:

The contrast of silence and sound in the scene of this haiku made me wonder why bells accompany the harness. It was so beautiful!

Marion Clarke too:

I simply love how this ku from Chad Robinson has transported me to another part of the world, when I can hear the sound of reindeer bells and watch falling snowflakes against the night sky. The “slight shake” of the bells lends a delicate touch, so that the scene becomes magical.

And Lorin Ford is reminded of a close parallel:

To my mind, this is a beautifully done homage to and extension of one of my all-time favourite ‘long’ poems, Robert Frost’s ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’, which never fails to move me.

In both poems, that shake of the harness bells lingers in the silence of the falling snow, the only sound to be heard. It’s a sound of waking.

I like to think that the long miles of the journey have ended and both horse and human have arrived at the intended destination, but of course the other possibility is that the horse is being released and the buggy driver stays in the snow and succumbs, by choice, to the snow sleep. That the ambiguity of possible outcomes remains attests to Robinson’s sure and delicate touch in his appreciation of and respect for Robert Frost’s poem.

Jo McInerney’s reply was too late for us to consider:

Chad Lee Robinson's haiku is a beautiful fusion of sight and sound. The soft alliteration of line one gives us the jingle of bells and then with the reference to a 'harness' being removed we have a horse and the simple recognition that a sleigh ride has come to an end. Line three, 'night snow', supplies the setting, but more than this.

For readers unfamiliar with snow, it is like being drawn into a snow globe, where a shake of the clear dome gives not only a flurry of spangled white, but here, a simultaneous tinkle of sound. Perhaps some readers are placed within a Christmas cameo, where the beast being unharnessed is antlered.

Depending on readers' prior experience, this haiku either creates a charming fantasy or evokes the familiar in a way that transforms it. Extending this scene from a realistic perspective, we are at a journey's end. We have reached a haven of some sort and presumably a source of light as the snow becomes visible in the night air. There is the sharp cold and the sudden illumination of the drifting flakes, felt and seen more keenly as travellers move from sleigh to shelter.

What is transformative here is the way in which the snow crystals glimpsed against the dark seem to become one with the chinking of the bells such that, for just a moment, we hear the snow fall.

Alan Summers remembers it fondly:

I guess I am a winter person because I love fresh snow; and the Christmas/Yuletide festivities are the favorite time of the year for me. Attention to detail is such an important factor to me, and this haiku has it in spades, with activity and sound alongside rhythm and musicality, with tone and layers. Here we have someone back from a very long day ranching or herding, and possibly from the last night check.

There are bells either in the horse's reins, or the harness, or saddle even, and I wonder if the rider has added them, as it is nearing the Christmas period of December? It is certainly no holiday for this person, or their horse, with a lot to do to make the wintering section of country successful in time for the long hard season ahead. And of course we could be tempted, and wish fulfilling, to believe that Father Christmas himself, St Nicholas, has ridden

the prairie, and taken a rest from a pre-Christmas recce aka reconnaissance. The prairie is mentioned by me as this superbly crafted haiku is now part of a collection titled *The Deep End of the Sky*. I reviewed this collection for *Blithe Spirit* (journal of The British Haiku Society) kindly reprinted by Saša Važić, the editor for *Haiku Reality*.

This particular haiku comes from “Home Early” (originally called “Shiver”) and is the fourth section of Robinson’s collection announcing winter. Robinson says: “It had 11 haiku in the original manuscript, but it was agreed upon that the collection would be stronger by making “Home Early” slightly longer to bring the reader out of winter, which can be long in South Dakota (I have seen snow as early as October and as late as May), and into spring, or at least hint at the coming of spring. As the section title suggests, many of the haiku found here are more introspective than in previous sections.” I concur as this is an intimate look at an everyday aspect of work on a ranch, or farm. Tone and layer were mentioned earlier, and there is an anticipatory tone, of both Christmas and the end to a long physically demanding hard day’s night. It’s where a hot meal, superior to camp food cooking, is anticipated, with a beer, or decent coffee. Perhaps something even stronger such as A Dakota Coyote Light 100 Whiskey inspired by “white dog” otherwise known as “white lightning” or “moonshine”. The layers of the haiku are both the different meanings, that I can glean, and the pictures that are delivered up, as well as also how the lines layer into each other in a certain order.

The opening line gives us alliteration (slight shake) and consonance runs through the entire haiku (all the various words with an s or two) gathered in movement, and sound (bells) in concrete action and concrete imagery carried over into the second line. The third and last line brings a juxtaposition of imagery that may or may not be directly linked to the harness being undone. We are told it’s night snow, that maybe the snow has just started falling, not just off the harness, or cinch, stirrups, in particular, but freshly falling snow at night. It’s when the horse and rider have accomplished their duties in time, with a little of the night snow fallen from the harness, and doubtless from the stirrups and the rider’s boots as he dismounts: It’s that extra falling of snow, from sky to human and horse all acting together in a different type of partnership.

The idea of snow collecting on the rider's boots and stirrups reminds me of the famous Buson haikai verse, and this reminds me of the other type of layering, that of allusion to another poem, in particular of the same genre, but four hundred years later, where both verses are as fresh as the snow.

Tethered horse;

snow

in both stirrups

— Yosa Buson (1716 – 1784) in *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson and Issa*, edited by Robert Haas

And yet again, there is yet another allusion to another poem, a longer one this time, that of “’Twas the night before” (or “A Visit from St. Nicholas”) by Clement Clarke Moore, especially with this line “More rapid than eagles, his coursers they came.” Were those coursers horses, or reindeer? Well in the poem there is a note here:

Note: What is a “courser?” A swift horse; a charger.

The poem works so well as a working day poem of the work on the ranch or farm on the prairies, and also as a Christmas mystery.

And Rose Ades brings it all home:

Right from the first, I'm awake and alert to an almost pre-industrial quiet, punctured only by the “slight shake of bells”, glad for now I am not to be blasted or hurried by some gaudy, ear-wincing jingle.

With the second line the pace quickens a little “as the harness comes off”. So far everything has been carried to that “off” which pinpoints precisely the end of a long hard day. The moment of relief for horse and driver and release from toil.

I found energy in the harness coming off that liberated my senses, memory and imagination, and brought me back to the bare-rumped physicality of horses. And space at the line break, to shift indoors, to thaw out from the wind and the cold to smell the hay and the stable, perhaps a wood fire, hot food, a place to rest, reflect and give thanks. A sense that all was for now well

confirmed by the revelatory stillness and quiet of the final line “night snow”.
On this night we are safe and we will sleep as the snow covers yesterday’s tracks.

A whole way of life attuned to the rhythms of nature, the seasons and manual labour, and rest from it masterfully suggested in 12 words, of which one has two syllables.

As this week’s winner, Rose gets to choose next week’s poem.

RE:VIRALS 54

mid-life the afternoon rain lingering
— David Jacobs (*grandma's chip bowl*, Hub Editions, 2015)

Mojde Marvast is moved to quasi-poetic musing:

Midlife, afternoon and rain
Afternoon, passes the middle point (noon)
Is time passing heavily because of its density or because of a burden!
Rain is the density of the cloud.
Cloud is so light,
Middle point is so confusing because of emergence of so many questions;
and surely so fertile and influential.

And Marion Clarke filled in the gap:

My mind automatically filled in the word 'crisis' after reading 'mid-life'. With the persistent rain, there is a real sense of despondency in this monoku and the concrete way in which the word 'lingers' hangs at the end suggests the narrator's melancholy state will not be eased any time soon.

Nathan Sidney finds solace in the sluicing:

Is it the rain or the poet that lingers? And if the poet, is s/he lingering in the manner of a terminal patient or like a lover who wants to savour one more moment of a glorious sunset? The opening line carries a world of connotations; a crisis, a turning point, an epiphany. Afternoon rain suggests a day of heat and brightness now tempered by a cooling shower. The turn of the day mirrors the turn of life from youth to middle age. Is the rain dampening the poet's hopes or watering them? We might be tempted to make a pessimistic interpretation, but the ambiguity of the word lingering allows us to imagine that this is a positive experience, tinged with sadness perhaps but also wisdom gained and the recognition of

new beginnings. Rain after all is what allows the earth to bring forth all its myriad forms, coming in the afternoon it often eases the tensions of the day. We can easily believe the poet wants the rain to linger and likewise is happy to linger a little longer himself.

My initial reaction was to view this as a sombre poem, after all mid-life is so often associated with crisis, with the fact of facing up to the loss of youth, but increasingly we see people embracing their maturity, taking the opportunity to slough off the old skin and embrace a more authentic existence. The longer I spent with this poem the more I began to see it in a positive light. Yes, the word lingering conveys a certain sense of reluctance, of hanging around longer than one should, but don't we linger on earth because of friends and family, joy and beauty, because afternoon rain is just so comforting?

Alan Summers compares it with other from the same collection:

Although this particular haiku was not included in my book review, amongst the fifteen haiku I did include, there was a very good reason:

“Jacobs is also a practitioner of finely nuanced one-line haiku, but I won't give more than one example, as you must get the book, and witness this astuteness for yourself.”

Ah, when we reach that part of our life when we reconsider things wisely or foolishly in what is often termed a mid-life crisis. In this haiku we have long deliberate visual pauses between each word, literally lingering over them, as is the author perhaps over the spent rain and thoughts?

Of course the haiku could be brought back into what is often thought of as the standard approach of three lines:

mid-life
the afternoon rain
lingering

But the craft and the extra-special pausing and nuances are lost and better suited as a one-line haiku (monoku).

mid-life the afternoon rain lingering

Those long pauses, that long white space, could indicate the passing afternoon rain, remnants settling on everyday objects, and a lone man sitting on a bench in a park perhaps?

It feels both celebratory and poignant which may make sense to some of us who have varying degrees of depression, as this is a recurring theme in David's book. This is a good example of where the white spaces are packed with words unsaid. A highly evocative piece of writing.

And Jo McInerney delves into its process:

Though time seems to press down in Jacobs's haiku, it retains a curiously indeterminate quality, like the life stage it explores.

A monoku usually progresses with relative rapidity. Not here. The spacing prompts heavy pauses after 'mid-life' and 'rain'. The isolated opening compound noun forces us to stop and consider the state to which it refers. '[M]id-life' — on the one hand 'in the middle of life', an apparently enlivened state; on the other, that period of existential reckoning often associated with emotional crisis.

The middle of the monoku appears to strand the reader on a wet afternoon, perhaps stirring childhood memories of seemingly endless hours confined indoors. However, this is not an expression of youthful impatience. Afternoon rain is quite simply an unavoidable element of existence. The definite article gently underlines the specificity and apparent inevitability of this condition. If we do not die young, there will be afternoon rain. 'Into each life some rain must fall.' That line, popularised by Ella Fitzgerald and The Ink Spots in the 1940s, comes from Longfellow's 'The Rainy Day'.

Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall

Jacobs's haiku has more to offer than Longfellow's determinedly consolatory sentiments. It states the fact of afternoon rain and leaves readers to draw their own conclusions.

Afternoon is an interesting time in the day. Noon has passed with its bright light and symbolic sense of apogee. What follows is automatically a decline; however, it can be a seemingly long journey toward night, offering its own warmth and light. However, Jacobs's is not such. There is rain, or is there? '[T]he afternoon rain lingering.' The effect of the final word, which Jacobs makes us wait for, is significant. Lingering in what sense? Does the rain continue into evening? Does it remain only as moisture in the air or puddles on the ground? Does it fall from shaken branches? And what time is this? Has the afternoon passed? Are we now in evening, or beyond, with the afternoon recalled only through the rain that fell then?

There is no definite answer to any of these questions. Jacobs has taken us into a curious, inconclusive space where boundaries and conditions blur. That may be the essence of middle age and what follows.

I remember leaving my middle age more strongly than I do entering it. I remember the sense of a slow yet inevitable shift and the apprehension that came with it. It is different now; there is less a sense of either progression or decline and, for the moment, more a sense of stasis, of living in the present. Carpe diem is, I think, an injunction more for the old than the young. As we move beyond middle age, the sense of having nothing but this day is likely to become more acute.

Jacobs's subtly shifting, indeterminate poem suggests this for me. However, it is open to many readings as befits a haiku exploring as subjectively experienced a condition as aging.

As this week's winner, Jo gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 55

how to dress her
for eternity —
blossom rain

— Carolyn Hall (*The Heron's Nest* XIII:1, 2011)

Scott Mason has us imagine:

Try this little thought experiment: (1) cover the second and third lines; (2) feign amnesia; and (3) imagine where the first line will lead. More likely than not, you'll think of a baptism, baby portrait, first day of kindergarten, or some other early life stage event. But while we innocently conjure such moments, the poet slips us "eternity."

Yet one more surprise awaits us. In the poem's third line we actually retrieve time — but to little avail: it only magnifies the pathos of permanent separation from a loved one.

This haiku by Carolyn Hall is stunning, in every sense.

And Peter Newton acclaims its accomplishment:

What a raw and beautiful way to look at life . . . and death. It is exactly a poem like this that keeps me inspired to write the perfect haiku. One that has the emotional impact of a Russian novel artfully designed in eight words and a dash.

While Garry Eaton summons a familiar classic for comparison:

It seems remarkable how many haiku showing up in this feature contain strong echoes of American classics. This one reminds me a great deal of a longer poem from Emily Dickinson, which I quote for those who may not know it.

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.
We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –
We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –
Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –
We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –
Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

I quote it in full out of the conviction that knowledge of the Dickinson will add to rather than detract from the enjoyment of the Hall haiku. We all write as parts of continuing traditions upon which we can draw. But we do so most meaningfully if we know what that tradition is and are able to echo and elaborate upon it, as Hall does so well here when she evokes the Dickinson with her use of the word 'eternity' and adds an element from the classic Japanese tradition, the cherry blossoms, symbolic of dead youth, to this essentially transcendental theme.

And a late submission from Mojde Marvast:

So touching!

In my religion burial preparations are very different but this haiku made me think about a decision that will accompany a dear one throughout the journey! As if we are responsible till the end!

I also reminds me of a poem by Raymond Carver, "Another Mystery".

As this week's winner, Gary gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 50

hymns
in the ears
of corn

— Robert Boldman (*Walking with the River*, High/Coo Press, 1980)

Paul MacNeil shares his difficulty entering this poem:

While I know both “hymns” and “corn” with its ears, I do not find an easy way into this minimal haiku. To share, to apply my own experience to that of the haikuist is for me an essence of haiku. The ears of corn — just are. They are not sentient. They do not hear sounds religious or otherwise. An ear of corn is a vessel for seeds to propagate the species. Each tassel is the male source of pollen to fertilize each thread of silk, self or from adjacent corn plants.

I get it may be just word play for the double meaning of ear v. ear definitions. “Hymns” in the plural makes it a pretty long “moment.” If that is all there is, it is just the author’s cleverness, intellection, and affords this reader not much entry into the space between images where haiku lives. In haiku criticism, I always reserve the right to be spectacularly wrong.

Perhaps this is a rural church surrounded by corn fields? Still, with apology to Boldman and Gary Eaton, I find this just too thin — too devoid of landmarks. The hymn “We Gather Together” is a traditional Thanksgiving hymn. But to find this single hymn is perhaps a leap too far, especially for non-Christians.

As this week’s winner, Paul gets to choose next week’s poem.

REVIRALS 57

last night's rain
cupped in the banana leaf
a small green frog

— Ferris Gilli (*The Heron's Nest* II:4, 2000)

Mojde Marvast is succinct:

Great!
A whole divides in parts.
Parts, which are as important as the whole.

And Scott Mason theorizes how this poem came to fruition:

As I see it, haiku poets are explorers first and “artists” (or, less grandly but perhaps more accurately, wordsmiths and reporters) second. In this worldview haiku are vessels for the sharing of personal discoveries rather than crucibles of original creation or purely aesthetic expression. An effective haiku will produce an emotional resonance and even the occasional sense of revelation, but the original source of any such resonance or revelation lies outside and mostly beyond the poem’s ostensible author.

Ferris Gilli’s haiku serves as a splendid example: it’s not only a clear product of discovery but also a virtual reenactment of that discovery, allowing readers to share in the poet’s firsthand experience for themselves. Just notice how the poem unfolds on first encounter. Line one reads like the sort of self-contained fragment used in so many contemporary haiku to establish time or place or both. But by the time we’ve read line two it now seems as though the first two lines form an entire phrase (“last night’s rain cupped in a banana leaf”), just waiting to be juxtaposed by a third line fragment containing something from a different context or vantage. So what we actually get in line three surprises us with the startle of discovery. Instead of “cutting away” from the scene as we might have anticipated, the poet “zooms in” to reveal something that we—as she—had not quite expected to find (“a small green

frog”). And only after we’ve read the entire haiku are we conscious of the fact that its second line works as a pivot, permitting the last two lines to function as a complete phrase (“cupped in a banana leaf a small green frog”), subtly underscoring our realization that the tiny amphibian was right there in our midst all along.

Gilli’s poetic choreography here exhibits the skill and even the — dare I say it? — artistry of a master. Her poem reminds me of a favorite haiku by another master, Buson, which in Bill Higginson’s translation reads as follows:

evening wind —
water laps
the heron’s legs

Again we have the surprise and delight of some small miracle that was “there all along.” Like many if not most human discoveries, these are not ones of new existence but of new awareness. Marcel Proust put it better: “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but in seeing with new eyes.”

As this week’s winner, Scott gets to choose next week’s poem.

re:VIRALS 58

morning fog . . .
when my embryo
had gills

— Tyrone McDonald (*Nest Feathers: Selected Haiku from the First 15 Years of The Heron's Nest*, 2015)

Mojde Marvast was impressed:

Brilliant insight!
To breath in fog!
A memory of my embryonic life.

Paul Miller layed out the terrain:

In last week's re:Virals Scott Mason posited that "haiku are vessels for sharing of personal discoveries." Yet in Tyrone McDonald's poem I don't think McDonald has so much made a discovery as discovered a puzzle; one he struggles to answer. Biologists tell us that human embryos go through a stage where they have slits much like the gill slits of fish — which points to a common ancestor between the species. While this poem can be looked at as a reflection on faith, it seems to me that it is more a question of how far we have evolved (in all manners of the word) — if at all. Through a "morning fog" McDonald wonders at our multi-billion-year progress, and perhaps ultimately, what it means to be human.

And Tom Sacramona filled in some of the detail:

Humans are seldom writing about their rich evolutionary history — why is that? Brooklyn poet Tyrone McDonald is writing about this fresh topic and he does so with classic articulation — his control of voice is what instantly grabs me.

I imagine the speaker (maybe driving, maybe walking) along the water

when this moment of connection occurs. I picture an ocean, in keeping with the vast sea that is evolutionary history, and the morning fog speaks to the poet's state of mind: life is uncertain, I know where I am going today, but why am I going there? was life ever simple? The poem is evocative because it explores a tension between the speaker's current, aging life and the fleeting thought of his embryonic origins. When did the Hox-gene give us this new body plan? The realization becomes exceptional for the poet: his knowledge of that moment in utero is as clear as today is clear (in the "morning fog"). In any genre, but especially haiku, Tyrone McDonald's poem has all the trappings of an impressive verse: considerable depth and a fresh perspective on life.

As this week's winner, Tom gets to choose next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 50

trash day —
a drum set
in the pouring rain

— Brad Bennett (*tinywords* 13.2, 2013)

Mojde Marvast found a sympathetic resonance:

For me the sound was so dominant in this haiku:

Sound of rain, sound of drum.

An announcement, for trash day!

In my religion, we believe that on resurrection day a trumpet is blown and the dead will rise to be judged and start a life. I can see the start in a recycling life for what we call a trash!

And Jan Benson found resonance from other spheres:

From the first read, I found this haiku intriguing. Brad Bennett provides a solid shasei in this presentation, but I did not see the actual (literal) haiku until about the sixth read.

On the first read of the ku, I immediately found the prosody of it mesmerizing. There is rhythm in the words that drives the poem into my music consciousness. A drum rudiment immediately sounded, and I read “drumset” as the drumming of trash can lids and other tonal objects found in opening scene of the popular “Stomp-Out Loud” YouTube video.

For another second or third read, I married the images of the “Blue Man Group” (Paint Drumming) into the white space of the haiku. That space where you not only hear the drumming, but see it. A synthesis of the sensory realm.

While Mr. Bennett may have meant this to be a sad day in the life of the drum set, I found the haiku invigorating, musical, rhythmic and satisfying.

And Bill Cooper found resonances of our entire culture:

With the first line of Bennett's haiku, "trash day", we are reminded that our species has evolved or devolved to a stage where we have a vast system of trash collection, compression, transport, and storage, with landfills aplenty and more to come, studied in detail by anthropologists who marvel at the extent of recyclable phone books, nonrecyclable plastics, and toxins associated with e-waste. Yet, this extraordinary undertaking, unique to our species, is for most of us in the developed world a well-ingrained habit. In line 2, Bennett introduces the uncommon drum set, leaving us room to wonder about its condition, why if usable it isn't being passed on. Then line three brings the pouring rain, animating the sounds of the drum pieces from snare to cymbals. Depending on the slant of the drum set and the rain, perhaps even the bass drum adds a few notes. My mind drifts to Woodstock and the memorable Santana drum solo, then to Buddy Rich, then back to the drums of prehistory. Trash, drums, and rain — in a few words Bennett beckons us to consider where we have been and where we are headed, prompted by the pings of rain.

But David Jacobs found that it just is:

Language here is everything. The unwanted drum set is not being poured or 'drummed' upon. It is not getting a soaking. It is not even in any particular condition (though the reader may determine that for him/herself). It is simply and rivetingly 'in the pouring rain,' surrounded by the everyday events of weather, darkness perhaps, and the monotony — or excitement — of trash day. The drum set may foretell of a dramatic event to come or one that has gone, perhaps a long time ago, a child who has left home, perhaps even worse. The beauty and simplicity of expression leaves the reader to fill in anything and everything he or she wants to fill in.

This is a haiku to enjoy over and over and one that does not deserve to be over-analysed (or poured over!) . . .

As this week's winner, David gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 60

evening bus ride . . .
bumping along
to the smell of chips

— Frank Williams (*Stepping Stones*, ed. Martin Lucas, British Haiku Society, 2007)

Mojde Marvast remarks:

This bus reminds me of today's life.
The evening, end of a day, on a bus
With strangers on a path though known built by the unknown, the driver,
unknown and the chips prepared and packed by the unknown!
What strangers we are in the life of civilization.
And we bump into obstacles unprepared.
The only company that is known is a smell, unseen but familiar.

Marion Clarke remembers:

Ah, how I love the smell of vinegar on chips! This brought me right back to traveling by the night bus in London after evenings out in the pub with my brothers and their friends down the local pub. The 'bumping' about as because the seats were hard in those days! It also reminds me of summers in my seaside hometown at nightfall, when the local bus stop would have a queue of day trippers returning home all eating a bag of chips. A really evocative ku for me.

Garry Eaton renders:

This modest haiku distills from the myriad events of the day a few concrete details that in themselves mean little but combined evoke clearly the way of life of the English working class, with its reliance on cheap public transportation (I see a double-decker), cheap food (I see fish and chips wrapped in grease-

soaked newspaper) and cheap entertainment (the public bus ride itself, with its immense possibilities for private speculation and amusing observations.) To cap the rendition of the experience, I think that the verbal phrase ‘bumping along,’ evoking the notion of a bumpy ride through life, alludes stoically but also with some pleasure to the trials, mishaps and the sense of a common plight that the less powerful can usually expect from life.

Scott Mason compares:

The dominance of our sense of sight is certainly a hallmark of our culture and perhaps even a characteristic of our basic makeup. I’m reminded of the advertising industry expression “video vampire” that warns of the common tendency of visual elements in TV commercials to obliterate audience recall of the accompanying soundtrack, which often carries the “selling message.” But when visual cues are withdrawn or suppressed our remaining senses may blossom. Many examples in haiku come to mind, including this pair:

dusk
an empty beer can
taps the dock
— H. Gene Murtha

summer night
we turn out all the lights
to hear the rain
— Peggy Willis Lyles

Most such haiku attest to a heightened sense of sound. Frank Williams’ poem evokes sound but more explicitly invokes tactile and olfactory sensations. If he’s the one munching the chips, then the whole gang’s along for the ride!

And Alan Summers plumbs history:

A bag of chips is the perfume of life. Chips, and their bigger combination

of Fish and Chips aka Fish n' chips or Chish and Fips, is over 150 years old as a culinary institution. Chips is British English for a kind of (potato) fries, though not really French Fries, but fatter, where a small bag could be a meal for some people. Confusion will lie in some areas as American English dictates that chips are packeted potato slices otherwise known in the U.K. and Ireland as crisps.

Why does Frank Williams' haiku mean so much to us living in the U.K. and Ireland, in particular? I could easily write a doctorate on chips; fish and chips; or fish suppers; and Frank's haiku.

More about chips and buses later, but for now, according to a survey in 2004, the aroma of fish and chips is Britain's tenth favourite smell, just behind perfume. Read more facts about us chip eaters, and newspapers and more.

Just like chocolate is for the broken-hearted, and for the very happiest of us too, so too are chips and their sting and bite of salt and vinegar aka salt n' vinegar. There are so many facts around chips, brought about around 1860, including that the humble bag of chips was vital during two world wars, when populations were rationed over real and needed food. Winston Churchill, Britain's War Leader, called them "the good companions" and so they escaped being rationed for the ordinary citizen. John Lennon smothered his in tomato ketchup, which is quite normal for many British people at least, and sometimes I'd even smother them in both tomato and brown sauces. Michael Jackson liked them with mushy peas, and Doctor Who liked them with cold custard. Chips, and their combined alternative meal of fish and chips literally sustained morale through two world wars fueling Britain's industrial needs at the most dangerous of times.

Frank's opening line already evokes a lot of memories of very long queues waiting a very long time only to find that they could not all fit into the long awaited bus. An evening bus ride can mean late season evenings getting dark earlier, so after a day's work a long journey is lightened by holding a bag of chips even before diving into them. Or this could be a bus ride after leaving a pub or bar after work, partly to avoid the rush hour, and getting back home late, where even one bag of chips, with its distinct perfume will cheer up an entire audience of tired and hung over bus riders.

With Britain's roads often neglected and wet cold days creating deeper

potholes, a bus ride was often an violent experience of multiple jolts and sharp braking. A bag of chips is its own multi-sensory overload in music, including lip smacking our fingers because we love the chip fat, vinegar and salt as we finger pick our chips. Combine that with the sounds and sensations of badly organized traffic flow at rush hours, and it melds to make the experience enjoyable, both to the individual and as a crowd-pleaser, believe it or not.

So although chips are all-year-round cheap food, unlike most fast food that is both slow getting prepared and highly expensive, they are strong double seasonal markers: The Summer holidays by the seaside; and the winter side of Autumn sliding towards Yuletide. Yes, a bag of chips comes into its own on late Autumn days and into Winter as both hand-warmers and instant body energy, and as a mood enhancer. A bus load of passengers might resent the stench of burgers and fryer fat but never the tang of vinegar, salt, and chips. It lifts your spirits, and enables you to be excited over the simple things, and more happily resigned to waiting more even an hour for a bus to take you home after work.

The British wax lyrical about chips and they may well have been a life saver when rivers froze over regularly in the 19th and early 20th Centuries when fish was impossible for the average person to buy. Why? Because women began cutting potatoes into fish shapes frying them as an alternative, while Jewish refugees from Portugal and Spain also came to the rescue as they have many times before, and since the old world wars, and the current ones. The bag of chips available as an early street food and then cheap corner shop repasts is a cultural heritage partly brought to us by refugees who have so often delivered traditions or innovations to make our cold and wet islands (Britain and Ireland) just that bit more bearable. Reading Frank's haiku cheers me up, makes me smile, and brings to the forefront ten thousand memories through childhood, into young adulthood, and beyond. There is also just the sheer delight of passing a chip shop with its warm glow, old-fashionedness, and that incredible alchemy of visual and olfactory sensations that brings a skip to our tired lives.

As this week's winner, Alan gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 61

amniotic sac
the floating nests
of prairie doves

— Marianne Paul (*Frozen Butterfly*, the video journal of
English Language Haiku 2, 2015)

Mojde Marvast has a visceral response to this poem:

Sad!!!
Floating nests
With no eggs and no mother to sit on eggs!!
Reminds me of an abortion or a miscarriage.

Marion Clarke did too, but in quite the opposite direction:

Everything about this ku by Marianne Paul speaks of incubation, warmth and safety. Although those floating nests might be a bit more at risk than a human baby in the womb, the fact that they are floating on water places them out of harm's way from land-based predators. Or, since I don't know anything about floating nests, is the poet perhaps saying the opposite — that the baby is safe in its amniotic sac while the dove's eggs, although also floating and warm in her nest, are open to predators? Perhaps the narrator is an expectant mother and she is worrying about those eggs on the water. I'm not sure, but I got a sense of safety from this delightful poem.

While Megan Hallisey displays an admirable process:

Is it reasonable to say that a haiku is a poem that you don't need to labor over? One breath, I believe, can mean one "intake" of breath, the whole poem taken in at once. Though the author may have labored over it, a good one gives the impression of having arrived fully made. This poem seems to want me to work to make something of it, and I find that if I strain a little,

squint a little, I almost can. But it takes a whole lotta huffing and puffing to get there.

The first line hovers over the next two as a kind of question: am I presented with the amniotic sac of a human or an animal? Will it matter? Is it the idea of an amniotic sac? Will what follows enlighten me — maybe not answer my questions, but even better, will it remove my need to ask them?

Immediately, however, I am faced with more questions. What I am given, especially following that puzzling sac, is so odd as to seem unreal. Floating nests, at least at first, take me out of my usual sense of things. That's fine, I like that, but giving myself over to this possibility of an alternate world by opening my dream-eyes, doesn't help. I can conjure a kind of dream image, but it is not satisfying. It's my dream, developing in the amniotic sac of my imagination. Oh, is that what the author wants? And yet it seems, in giving me two more or less concrete things — an amniotic sac and prairie dove nests — she doesn't want me to go off into dreamy imaginings. But honestly, I'm not sure.

So I look up “prairie doves” and discover that they are a kind of gull that makes its nest of bullrushes and marsh grasses in the northern prairie of the US and southern prairie of Canada. So the nests are real things, not gendai imaginings, surrounded by water that in some sense “float”. So yes, I've been given something pretty specific, juxtaposed by something which seems specific — an amniotic sac — but is mysteriously general. Anyway I've done my research and I go back to the poem.

I try to let the juxtaposition just happen to me, see if it will spread some haiku juju my way. Nothing happens. (Usually I'd just give up at this point, but I've started this re:Virals exercise and might as well go on). So here comes more straining and squinting. I come up with something: in the nests there are eggs, each containing amniotic sacs. But the author speaks of an amniotic sac, singular. So what I make out of this is that the nests full of eggs are themselves in an amniotic sac, as suggested by being on water. So there must a sac surrounding the whole thing, the prairie marsh, you and me, earth and sky, the whole universe and beyond. Right? I'm back to dreaming. But that's what haiku can do, I think; what Basho could do — use the real world to conjure dreams. Is that what's happening here, or am I trying really

hard to make it happen, to make, as I said, something of the poem?

Well, one famous idea about haiku is that they are co-written, so to speak, by the author and reader. A kind of collaboration. But I feel like I've had to do 90% of the work here, including research. And I come away feeling like I've mostly experienced my own projections and my own cosmology from a couple of odd factoids that have prompted a guessing game on my part.

That, and a rather long and probably annoying attempt to explain why I find this poem, in the end, exhausting.

As this week's winner, Megan gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 02

just please how to forgive spring rain

— Michelle Tennison (*Modern Haiku* 44.1, 2013)

Scott Mason gets right to the point:

a stream of conscience feeds the pool of absolution

As does Mojde Marvast:

Beautifully drags mind from words to ideas:

spring rain is a wonderful personality in nature.

So abundantly

Falls

and so powerful it is in

giving life

To compare forgiving with this rain and the company of just and please is a full moral lesson!!!

Patrick Sweeney finds a personal connection:

I like rain haiku. And I like how one must fight the urge to answer this one and go all Dottie Parker . . . Mushrooms! Pink azaleas! Quince in ancient gardens! Gene Kelly singing and dancing in the (milk added, possibly 'apocryphal') rain! . . . And as a Zazen Catholic, I'm a sucker for absolution. Yet the sacrament of penance for a life-giving force, a natural cycle . . . strikes me as strange and interesting . . . the rainy season here in Aomori can get a fella thinking just this very thing. It is easy to forgive John Dillinger's wooden gun, but not Dillinger. Floods and tsunami are certainly in need of some anthropomorphic forgiveness. It is hard not take a rainy day personally. The great thing about the rain is that we can weep about it and no one will know. That's close to 'how' . . .

And Jacob Salzer finds some possible redemption:

I love how this haiku is speaking directly from an author's point of view, asking how to forgive someone, or perhaps many people, or even how to forgive her own self, and yet, it also can apply directly to the reader in his/her own way(s).

"just please' brings a sense of urgency, and that urgency is wonderfully juxtaposed with the sight and sound of spring rain. As I read this, I hear the sound of rain and it's constant immediacy as a symbol of on-going forgiveness, implying that forgiveness is not a one-time decision, but rather a process that takes time to fully resolve.

The first 5 words also express just how hard it is to forgive yourself or someone (or many people) for something (or many things) he/she/they have done. There is a clear sense of struggle here that seems to be a real experience many of us can relate to.

Also, as a question, this one-line haiku sparks the reader to contemplate the sheer scope of forgiveness: how far can we go? How deep can we dig into our hearts and minds to truly and fully forgive someone? This question really hits the reader hard and reminds us of the most challenging things we face in life.

We also don't know if the question is directed towards the reader, to a particular person, or perhaps towards a higher power. This leaves room for the reader to contemplate and lets them participate in a very direct way.

From the author's point of view, we don't know what she, someone else (or perhaps several people) have done, and this only adds to the intense emotion in the haiku, and simultaneously urges the reader to participate.

The implication of repeated mistakes is also subtly implied here with the sound of repeated raindrops falling, which adds yet another dimension to this monoku. It also provides another question: how many mistakes can a person make, and how many times can we be forgiven?

I think this monoku is really about compassion, and the courage to treat others (and our own self) with compassion no matter what we/they have done. How deep is our compassion? How deep is forgiveness? If someone causes significant damage to you or your family, can you still forgive them

and treat them with kindness? Can we serve others and simultaneously respect our own self? Can you forgive yourself for mistakes you have made so you can move on and live a more fulfilling life? The author urges us to find out. And we are no longer alone: the spring rain falls in its own time, no matter what has happened, washing away our pain, cleaning our wounds. A wonderful one-line haiku.

While Garry Eaton brings the weight of the tradition into his considerations:

The poem can be read at least two ways, with or without a pause after “forgive.”
1) Without a pause, this is somewhat of a paradox. A voice out of nowhere makes a strange request, of whom we do not know, to be shown, or told, or inspired with an understanding of how to forgive spring rain. Since spring rain, in the concrete, practical sense, is such a benefit, why would someone blame it or want to forgive it? A little thought about this enigmatic monostich suggested to me that it might be read as playing off of a famous passage from Eliot’s “The Waste Land”:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm,
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

Here nature is to blame, figuratively speaking, for enveloping us in change and reminding us periodically of the need for inner renewal by ‘stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain.’ Eliot chose to open his epically-titled poem on modern life with lines that clearly allude to the opening lines of Chaucer’s Prologue to “The Canterbury Tales”, the greatest English poem of its period, and in so doing set up a far reaching literary, cultural and historical contrast. The passage in question from Chaucer, in Middle English, is as follows:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open ye,
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages:
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, etc.

My argument is that Tennyson's haiku is a typically brief version of Eliot's version of Chaucer, and the question I would pose is, does Tennyson's version, coming a hundred years after Eliot's, advance the ball in any way? First, there is the matter of length. Chaucer's twelve line invocation to spring, written in a robust, lyrical, medieval/religious mode that signals a vast and welcome change in the spiritual weather is reduced in Eliot's hands to a seven-line parody written in a shocking, blunt, resentful and regretful tone, requesting instead of spiritual renewal, a bleak, moldy, but predictable stasis. In Tennyson's hands in turn, Eliot's seven lines get shortened even more remarkably to a single line delivered in a tentative, doubtful, polite voice, pleading quietly for the insight that will release her from the habit of blaming spring rain for reawakening the kind of malaise more explicitly modeled by Eliot.

Her brevity is the second way in which, I would say, Tennyson makes an advance in her treatment of this theme. By writing

just please how to forgive spring rain

without a question mark at the end, with 'just please' at the beginning to give the words their full, reductive weight, Tennyson finds a way to return to a purer state of mind than Eliot's, one which is as detached as possible from

Western literary, cultural and historical perspectives and traditions. She cannot achieve complete detachment, short of complete silence, anymore than spring rain can stop requiring our attention when it comes, or when it doesn't. But in just saying less, and concentrating so much allusion, awareness and paradox into so few words, the poet renews spring rain in a way our compromised, modern literary consciousness can accept, so that for a moment, at least, she has done it.

2) Read with a pause after 'forgive,' I see a meditation or a prayer for the personal strength to forgive. After the pause, Tennyson shifts to 'spring rain,' an appropriate natural event to juxtapose against a plea for forgiveness, both because it offers hope for general renewal and because in Christian tradition spring rain symbolizes divine forgiveness and the ever present possibility of a redeeming, fructifying grace.

As this week's winner, Garry gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 03

old steeple
a turban of pigeons
unwinds the hour

— Beverley A. Tift (First Prize, San Francisco International Haiku and Senryu Contest, 2004)

Mojde Marvast brings into play experiences many of us will probably never have:

A very clear image flashes like peaceful memory!
This haiku expresses to me a release of hope after a special visit to a shrine and the word “old” emphasizes the root of this need in someone like me. Turban, like a whirling dance, feels like a vertigo brought about by rounds and rounds of questions and answers in spiritual turn-overs. Finally the hours of a tower clock are no more what they used to be, as if the freedom fly of many pigeons is like an expansion and as of now time will be different. It was like a deep exhalation for me making space for the fresh air of a new life!

And David Jacobs ponders the larger themes:

Whilst I am not entirely sure about “a turban of pigeons” (original nonetheless), this haiku is just about packed with everything — age (the steeple), religion or religions (the turban), nature and the commonplace (the pigeons), time (the clock), sky (is it grey or blue?) and the ultimate revelation of the time of day, or has the steeple clock failed and remained frustratingly on the same hour for goodness knows how long. I kept wondering about the latter point given I know two clocks — one the gate house clock on Billionaire’s Row in London which has stuck on 12 and another in my local cemetery on the lodge porch which has remained on 8 minutes past 4 for, dare I say it, an eternity. So have the pigeons unwound the correct time, time stuck from an indeterminable point far back or, possibly, both.

A well crafted haiku, detailed and thought provoking, and easy to see why it was a competition winner. Many will marvel at the pigeon turban but I remain unsure. . . .

While Kathe L. Palka finds resonance with another painterly poet:

In their intention to capture fully and imagistically a moment of experience, haiku can have a decidedly painterly or fine art photography quality. Tift's haiku depicts just such a beautifully captured moment. Among the old Japanese masters this ability is perhaps best illustrated by Buson's work, understandably so because he was in fact an accomplished painter.

A tethered horse,
snow
in both stirrups.

— Yosan Buson (translation by Robert Hass)

Here Buson captures a precise and surprising visual moment as snow gathers in stirrups and hints at a story. An invitation to the reader to imagine more. The horse has clearly been left to wait for its rider's return, perhaps for some time. How full are the stirrups? The snow's accumulation provides a visual account of the passage of time. The rider, although not present, is part of the story. What errand has brought him out in heavy weather? There is as well compassion to be felt for the horse waiting indefinitely in the cold winter weather for its rider's return, so patiently that snow is accumulating in the stirrups. I've always felt a sense of melancholy or melodrama in this scene which I've often imagined in black and white, like a single frame isolated in an old monochrome movie.

In "old steeple" by Beverly A. Tift the passage of time is also a feature. I envision a long moment. A church bell chimes the hour and pigeons perched around an old steeple take flight in the metaphorical description of an unwinding turban. The sound, like the rider in Buson's haiku, is not present but implied, inviting the reader to set the scene for herself. The sound is only present in the mention of the steeple, the mention of the unwinding hour and in the

resulting flight of the birds. What city or town, what country, in what season is this flock of pigeons unwinding from the church steeple? One can imagine a myriad of locations in real time. This haiku expands like a detail lifted from a painting, closing in on the blurred wings of the birds in motion as the surroundings fall away. A lovely sense of traditional wabi sabi is conveyed as well in the age of the steeple. The hours have likely been unwinding for many years in this place in this way. “old steeple” is a wonderful visually stunning haiku with an implied soundtrack and endless possibilities.

As this week’s winner, Kathe gets to choose next week’s poem.

REVIRALS 04

in the prison graveyard
just as he was in life —
convict 14302

— Johnny Baranski (*Convicts Shoots the Breeze*, Saki Press,
2002)

Mojde Marvast conflates what limits us:

Thoughtful! Grave!

Is a grave a prison?

If so no matter where the graveyard is, I am the imprisoned.

I would say the graveyard is my own body with the stubborn, zealous and
rigid mindset — a label and a number — against the flow of life.

As this week's winner, Mojde gets to choose next week's poem.

REVIRALS 05

overtaken
by weeds
the road not taken

— Carlos Colón (*Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*,
W. W. Norton, 2013)

Marion Clarke read this poem in a most personal manner:

Upon first reading, this haiku spoke of sadness and regret. However, once I spotted it was by Carlos (Haiku Elvis) I found it to be quite ‘tongue-in-cheek.’ The image of the weed-covered road might have been him saying, “Phew, lucky I didn’t choose that road — I’d have been all on my own!” Carlos’s wry humour in the haiku world is sadly missed.

Other poets were reminded of other poems. Mojde Marvast wrote:

This haiku recalls for me Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken”. The choice of “overtaken” to start the haiku is so impressive. Then comes “weeds”, all of a sudden, a change of stress! Then “the road not taken” is like a victory. Not of weeds, because someone (the poet) has noticed the road, but of the road.

Overtaken

Versus,

Not taken!

The road is an infrastructure, and though it may be hidden and I may feel lost, it is always there.

And David Jacobs finds this:

When I read this haiku, I was immediately reminded of Kipling's "The Way Through the Woods". In particular, the first few lines:

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods. . . .

Kipling's poem creates a somewhat ghostly atmosphere as it continues, the road as it once was being created afresh, but, as is the case, with haiku, we get nothing like this here, simply a taut three lines which brings us face to face with what we've done, what we haven't done, what we will never do, what we yet might.

I like the technical astuteness of this haiku — the short sharp sting of the second line (as opposed to the more traditional longer one) and the resultant flow of disclosure in the third.

While Sandra Simpson goes even further:

So few words, so many possible meanings . . . here are just a few ideas.

1: An old, overgrown footpath, perhaps forking off from a well-used route. But even in this literal reading, the poem carries a message with the 'old way' being erased from memory by nature's abundance — just as we have largely lost our folk memory of the medicinal and/or food values of plants that in the 21st century we call weeds (and so accord them no value).

2: A life viewed from its end and now regarded as having been wasted ('overtaken by weeds'). If only, the poet seems to be saying, I'd chosen that over this; done that not this; said 'yes' instead of 'no' . . . taken another road.

3: Although written by a man, the haiku does allow a woman's perspective — the poet has been 'overtaken by (widow's) weeds'. The 'road not taken' then opens many possibilities with choices in love only one of the possible strands.

4: The poet is celebrating "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and has —

perhaps as a writing exercise, perhaps for fun — distilled the longer poem into a haiku.

5: The poet has found value in overlap or similarities between the Frost poem and Basho's haiku:

this road —
no one goes down it,
autumn evening
(tr Robert Hass)

and created a new work while standing on the shoulders of these giants.

As this week's winner, Sandra chooses next week's poem.

REVIRALS 00

In my other life
a pale-green sycamore
arms wide, shimmering

— Patrick Sweeney (Only One Tree Haiku Contest, 2016)

This haiku caused ayaz daryl nielsen to wax poetical:

yes, a lovely color, the color green —
my green antennae
waving hello, my green antennae
and your green antennae, too!
an earthly affair
your cool, green skin
pressing against mine

Sheila Sondik finds this poem cuts both ways:

The speaker seems to be saying, “In my other life, my fantasy life, the alternate universe I choose to dwell in, where I display my best, most loving, glorious self...”

In this reality, the speaker is a glowing, twinkling, spreading, mature and youthful (pale-green) sycamore tree, encompassing multitudes within its outspread branches/arms.

I find this haiku full of joy in presenting this shining image. Yet the question remains open: is this the inner self the speaker wants to reveal to the world, or is there an undertone of regret at only achieving this state in imagined wish fulfillment?

In any case, the poem is a marvel of sympathetic imagination.

As this week’s winner, Sheila chooses next week’s poem.

REVIRALS 07

she waves a thin blue scarf becoming sky
— Lorin Ford (*tinywords* 15:2, 2015)

Marion Clarke has a light take:

I love the sense of ‘joie de vivre’ in Lorin’s delightful haiku. I imagined a person who had just dumped a cheating partner revving off in an open-topped sports car, her scarf fluttering in the air behind her. Good riddance, I say!

Meanwhile, Modje Marvast waxes lyrical:

Beautiful poem!

Beautiful moment!

The start of this moment by “she” made a hush sound of silence, but a female fertile silence, the picture I see is a calm sea.

Calm, because of the thin blue.

Wave has zenith and nadir, it fluctuates but within limits.

It goes on when it starts. It moves forward.

The sea wave, when it goes up joins the sky when it comes down it sinks into itself.

A kind of extrovert and introvert spirit at the same time all because of continuous movement.

The horizon where deep sea joins deep sky, is so promising and though blue but depth of this blue, at any direction, is not empty to be depressing, rather there are never-ending wonders and revelations . . .

And Jennifer Sutherland weighs its intrinsic vale:

Here is a haiku that has a sense of nostalgia and dreamlike quality about it. This is not simply a moment captured in time. There is significance to this scene which is memorable.

Whether it's a farewell for now or forever is not important. I am reminded how fleeting life is.

The alternate alliteration of words is wonderfully appealing yet in every read my imagination takes over and I am left caught in the image of a filmy chiffon scarf gradually disappearing into the distance.

“She” continues to wave me farewell from the present into a world of infinite possibility.

David Jacobs questions how we might view it:

At a recent meeting of the London haiku group, I trailed one of my own one-liners for discussion. It was structured the same way as Lorin's ie without any spaces to indicate a pause or whatever, although a member of the group was insistent that I should have included one — I suspect because the haiku was read with a pause simply by that person. Others disagreed.

Lorin's haiku could possibly be read with a pause or breath after 'waves', less possibly after 'scarf' and, most improbably, after 'blue'. But frankly it hardly matters. The success of this haiku is the glorious flow of the whole, mirroring the movement of the scarf itself. Is the poet the recipient of the wave of the scarf, or is she the waver, and simply the recipient of a wave of the hand. Or is she a third party, observing the parting itself. How often do we watch, for example, at departure and arrival gates, the way others say goodbye and greet loved ones while waiting for our own — perhaps even questioning the way we ourselves perform these acts?

The beauty of this haiku is in its flow and in the life that flows through it. It would almost be an offence to tag it as a one-liner.

While Sheila Sondik takes the opposite tack:

Lorin Ford's poem intrigues me because I enjoy cutting it in different places to create shifting meanings: after waves, blue, scarf, and becoming. In my most recent encounters with it, I became aware of the possibilities of reading “becoming” as both an adjective, “(a piece of clothing) flattering a person's appearance,” as well as a noun, “the process of coming to be something or

passing into a state.”

It’s fun and rewarding to mull over these various readings of this one-liner, but the biggest pleasure for me is to experience the exhilaration of this animated scene. Even if it’s a valedictory wave, it’s a transcendent one.

As this week’s winner, Sheila chooses next week’s poem.

REVIRALS 68

arms race
how quickly can you fold
paper cranes

— Johnny Baranski (tinywords 13.2, 2013)

Both our respondents this week caught the allusion that centers this week's haiku. Nathan Sidney asks the pertinent question:

Hands moving quickly, folding paper cranes or assembling the components of an atom bomb. An arms race between paper folders or nation states. On the one hand the poem is innocent, a simple question asked between origamists as theirs arms race each other in playful competition. In another reading I am reminded of the story of Sadako and the thousand cranes who dies from “atom bomb sickness”. Sadako tries to fold a thousand cranes so that she may, as in the folktale, be granted a wish. In the novel she dies well short of the mark, but in reality she easily completes the thousand cranes. Was her wish granted? Will our poet have theirs granted? So the poem can also produce an air of foreboding, as if some tragedy is on the way; a nuclear winter, a cold war, a war on terror, that only hope and wishes can forestall. Perhaps the arms race is between the weapon makers and the origamists, racing the war machine to gain their wish for peace. There is perhaps a third reading, where “how quickly can you fold” refers to losing the arms race. “Paper cranes” then becomes an exclamation, an origami still life juxtaposed against the frenzy of the arms race and the disaster of having lost, a snapshot from the life of the little people before the crisis hits.

While Sheila Sondik had a visceral response:

I gasped the first time I read this haiku. It's so matter-of-fact and understated that its impact is like a sneak attack on the reader. The poem's subject, “arms race,” is as topical as ever, unfortunately. We have to do something to deflect our governments from spending precious

resources on instruments of war. None of us has yet figured out an effective way to do this. The poignancy of offering our paper symbols of peace against the weight of bombs and missiles is a stunning juxtaposition.

The haiku refers to the short life of Sadako Sasaki who was 2 years old when the atom bomb exploded near her Hiroshima home. She died of radiation-related leukemia when she was twelve. Before her death she folded over 1000 origami cranes in the hope of getting her wish to stay alive.

As this week's winner, Sheila chooses next week's poem.

REVIRALS 69

winter night
my car follows
its own light

— Dietmar Tauchner (as far as I can, Red Moon Press, 2010)

Mojde Marvast relates to the personal element in this poem:

A simple but intricate thought! Winter and night both give me a sense of anxiety and caution.

I like to relate winter with age, when I am old, and night is end of day, when sleep is next. Sleep is truly another kind of life.

I need my own light to safely pass the night to a new day, a new life, which is very unknown! This haiku drew my mind to the other life. The life after death, is only made by my very personal attitudes, nothing is as clear as day light about it!

To which Marion Clarke rebuts:

There is a strong sense of sadness and abandonment in this ku, as if the owner of the car has totally given up. Perhaps he has just suffered a loss, either through death of a loved one, or the end of an important relationship. It feels as though he is letting the universe roll on without him actively participating from this point forward.

Sheila Sondik takes both such feelings from it:

What's lonelier than driving solo through the cold and dark? So often, we find ourselves moving through life alone, wondering how we will keep on going.

In this spare haiku, the vehicle (literally the car, but also the poem, the speaker, and, by extension, the reader) creates its own light, which leads it through the darkness. It finds its own way forward, its own salvation.

Dietmar Tauchner's haiku presents us with a pared-down scenario in a minimalist style. But its message is expansive. The image of that brave little car tunneling through the night is a welcome reminder, in these dark days, of the power of inner strength, self-reliance, courage, and hope.

And David Jacobs finds special analogies:

I've always admired what might be termed 'reverse logic' haiku, and Dietmar Tauchner's reminded me of Jane Reichold's:

autumn dusk
my neighbor's light
stays dark

and Tom Painting's

short hours
the lake pulls light
from the moon

Such language produces a peculiar kind of exactness which, in turn, produces a mood all its own.

Dietmar's haiku is no exception. I sense myself on a quiet country lane, constantly dimming and undimming the headlights, patches of snow, bare branches etc acquiring their special kind of strangeness and calmness, with the lights seeming to depict them without help or control from the driver. And as is pointed out, the car simply seems to follow in their wake. With the heater on inside, we are contained within our own warmth and perhaps a slight but thrilling sense of safety where there is none, given that we might break down in the middle of nowhere.

As such this haiku possesses a dream-like quality almost as a result of the sheer precision of its language.

As this week's winner, David chooses next week's poem.

REVIRALS 70

crayon map
my son shows me the way
to Neverland

— John McManus (The Heron's Nest XIV:1, 2012)

Nancy Rapp speaks for all of us when she writes:

John McManus's haiku is one of my favorites. Through the unique and pristine art of a child, the ever living child in us makes contact. Peter Pan, the boy who refused to grow up, there's a bit of him in all of us. Children experience everything for the first time. This is exactly what haiku brings to my life.

And Marion Clarke says, simply:

John McManus is so skilled at writing about his first-hand experiences with his children and I remember having a tear in my eye when I read this one for the first time. Magical!

As this week's winner, Marion chooses next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 71

the b-flat
fades from her piano . . .
autumn wind

— Maya Lyubenova (Under the Basho, 2014)

Robert Kingston weaves a small tale from this open-ended poem:

Summer end, the student refreshed, leaves for the next semester. Her words dissipates with each step after the parting kiss.

And Mojde Marvast speaks to inner music:

As the b-flat fades away from the piano, a feeling may abate, hurting the wholesome ability of our inner instrument to create harmony. Repairs or renovations are surely possible, as the last line refers to autumn wind! The autumn wind is for taking away the tired leaves. Maybe a piece of music is alive and faithful to its name while being recreated and not just listened to!
A beautiful haiku!

Alan Summers takes us deep within the music:

A haiku does not require a significant opening line, and I see that approach a technique or device that is optional and not a prerequisite. Haiku, as does any other form or genre of writing, has a duty to start somewhere, and so why not consider one that pins our flag to our map, both the author's and readers'? Maya's opening line immediately makes me think of two things, firstly music, orchestral or jazz, and secondly of Mayuzumi Madoka's first haiku collection, entitled B-men no natsu (Summer on the B-side or B-side Summer), which earned her the Kadokawa Haiku Encouragement Award in 1994.

Here I will focus on the musical aspect that I read into this, as I wonder if

the poem came from Maya so often on the verge of death over the years? Yet from the date of her haiku, she led a brave fight that gave her, and so many of us, those last few vital and extra years.

A note from Wikipedia says:

“While orchestras tune to an A provided by the oboist, wind ensembles usually tune to a B-flat provided by a tuba, horn, or clarinet. B-flat minor is traditionally a ‘dark’ key. Important oboe solos in this key in the orchestral literature include the second movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4, which depicts “the feeling that you get when you are all alone”, in Tchaikovsky’s words.”

Here, I would consider listening to Chopin’s Nocturne Op. 9 No. 1 in B-flat Minor while you read my notes.

The choice of the B-flat musical note is significant in my proposal that this may be a deliberately chosen death poem, traditional in East Asian literature, from Chinese poetry to Japanese waka and also including tanka and haiku. Its practice has its origins in Buddhism and of the three views, which I will list from my perspective, that is that the material world is a short-lived experience, everything passes; that too much attachment causes suffering; and that reality can be empty in and of itself alone. [Paraphrased from Wikipedia]

Some consider B-flat minor, endlessly repeating, to be in the key of death and is allegedly used in movies for death scenes. The colour of the note, and practice and performance of it is instrument dependent. It’s also called the dark note as it leads to a “darker” sound on strings re orchestral music. That it evokes a “dark” sensation, that brighter instruments tend to be more comfortable with sharper keys. This may lead to a perception that passages in flat keys sound darker: because they feature dark instruments more prominently. [Note: Paraphrased from the Music Stack Exchange website.]

Did Maya assume that she would die, and is so often, from Matsuo Basho’s time onwards, the death poem became part of the tradition to compose what could be, in literary terms, as her last or at least penultimate goodbye poem? So much intonation and reverberation from an opening line, even before

I reach the second line of the opening phrase in her haiku. The use of the word ‘fades’ although used often in haiku is never better and most poignantly chosen. It is as if the orchestral instruments become taken over by the autumn wind itself. In fact, autumn wind suggests to me both a feeling of loss, and the realisation of becoming one with the cycle of nature. A suitable final destination perhaps for a haiku poet, and certainly one who had such great artistry as Maya Lyubenova.

And Jan Benson takes us into the musician’s mind:

— This haiku is approachable even to the non-musician. Line 3 (“autumn wind”) is apt enough to allow any reader to enter into the melancholy of end-of-life thoughts.

— There is so much more depth in this haiku that resonates with a classically-trained musician, and even the science-minded reader, that must be acknowledged.

— All musical notes are mathematically noted with both:

A. Frequency (Hz) and

B. Wave length (cm)

— In practice, an orchestra is tuned from either an oboe, or the piano (a fixed-pitch instrument) using the common setting of “A above middle C” (A4) at $f_0 = 440$ Hz as the “concert pitch” where all transposing instruments (whose pitch is different from the pitch that actually sounds) may be “tuned”.

— In other words, the pitch of “A” above “C” rules the universe of tuning for classical music.

— For practical purposes, we should know that B-flat above middle C is approximately 466 Hz and is enharmonic to C. (The musician, or scientist, has to wonder, with this choice, if the poet is facing or contemplating the transposition one’s body takes in deterioration/entropy).

— For a musician reading this poem, the dissonance created in the discord of a piano sounding “B-flat” is readily supporting melancholy, (if not chaos) even before the clinch in line 3 (“autumn wind”).

— For the musician who may actually play one of the transposing instruments, the subtlety of a “wind” element in the poem as a transporter of sound (wind

instruments) is doubly complicit in the sadness of the drifting.

— For this reader, B-flat as a choice in this haiku levels the weakness sensed as one passes into the universe at large.

Finally, and simply, Danny Blackwell invokes the modes:

“the b-flat fades . . .”

Maybe a gust of wind caught the musician’s attention and the music faded as they switched their focus to the outside world, or maybe it was the last note, and as it fades they notice the sound of autumn wind — the two sounds blending to create a third “thing”, much in the same way haiku juxtapositions often work, or Brian Wilson orchestrations, where his unique blend created new “instruments”. The Greeks left behind interpretations of the way in which musical modes affected listeners, and many people nowadays would say that certain keys make them feel certain ways; the key of this piece, however, is not defined — we simply have one note in isolation, but that in itself can provoke a certain melancholy, and while it may seem like petty semantics, there is no doubt something subtly more sad about a flattened note than a sharpened one . . .

As this week’s winner, Danny chooses next week’s poem.

RE:VIRALS 72

trial separation . . .
spacing out
my hangers

— Ken Olson (*Frogpond* 38.2, 2015)

Ayaz Daryl Nielsen sympathizes, with a hint of hope:

yes, such are the lives we live . . .
x-wife's apartment
my hesitant, careful steps
bouquet of flowers
you and I
wizened enough,
perhaps,
to do it all
again

And Marina Bellini echoes that positivity:

Reading this haiku, my first feeling has been sadness; a life together has reached its final point and now there is only emptiness, but then I have tried to look at it from a different point of view. The author is making space for a new life, new experiences will come, new people will enter his life. So instead of sadness, I read expectations for a new beginning.

And Sheila Sondik finds a parallel:

Prosaic objects like clothes hangers can exhibit deep eloquence through the magic and mystery of haiku.

The speaker of this poem is taking his or her first steps adjusting to a trial separation. The ambivalence the speaker feels is shown in this tentative rearrangement of the hangers in the previously shared closet. Although

it's often exciting to have more room for one's things, in this case the new emptiness between the hangers may be a constant reminder of the missing partner.

Another haiku featuring hangers is Michael Dylan Welch's:

first snow . . .
the children's hangers
clatter in the closet

The children are already outside throwing snow around, while the house echoes with the sounds of excitement as they pulled their jackets off the hangers. Perhaps a parent in the house imagines future separations when hearing the sound of the hangers reverberating in the empty closet.

In Olsen's poem, the hangers make their statement visually; in Welch's, we hear their message. Haiku poets and readers are fortunate to be able to intuit such meaning from the material world of household devices.

As this week's winner, Sheila chooses next week's poem.

RE=VIRALS 73

between road and bay the old forest one tree wide

— Katherine Raine (Jeanette Stace Memorial Award, New Zealand Poetry Society International Haiku Competition, 2012)

This week's featured poem caused Modje Marvast to wax poetic:

The flag of hope!
A tree!
whatever we do,
wherever we go,
Nature surrounds us!
Even with one tree
For a breath
More strongly survives,
Nature!

But brings Marina Bellini to an opposite take:

A very impressive monoku — where the old, perhaps sacred, forest once was, there is now a boulevard. In a few poignant words Raine shows us all the modern world contrast between nature and civilization. This haiku makes us ponder what we are doing to our planet.

Sheila Sondik elaborates the theme:

The forests of New Zealand, the Pacific Northwest, Japan, and the rest of our planet have been clearcut and drastically reduced in size. The astute speaker of this haiku recognizes the remnant of what once covered the landscape in a strip of trees along the shore. The forest can retreat no farther. Although there is deep regret and sorrow at the sight of this reminder of what's

been lost, there is also a sense of respect and celebration for the survivors. This is expressed in the long monoku format which sympathetically, and somewhat whimsically, echoes the shape of the band of trees, with the taller letters spaced out like towering individuals.

And Jan Benson sounds the alarm:

In her powerful and poignant monoku, Ms. Raine uses contrasting images to reveal an ongoing tragedy of global and oceanic change. It is interesting that the haiku is dated 2012, as an historic marker of the evidence of climate change. Her haiku is a valuable message to pay closer attention to our own receding coast lines, world wide. One of the Native tribes in America has documented this coastal occurrence as responsible for quick-paced losses of their trust lands to the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. Neither the state nor the federal government has offered to assist in a relocation of the sovereign domestic nation. Because the tribe's culture relies on sea-focused traditions, they themselves are hesitant to relocate. Since 2014, there is documented evidence in the coastal land losses:

Losing Ground: Southeast Louisiana Is Disappearing, Quickly

“A football field-sized area of land is being washed away every hour, and lawsuits are being filed to hold oil and gas companies responsible for the destruction.”

(By Bob Marshall, “The Lens”, ProPublica on August 28, 2014)

“At the current rates that the sea is rising and land is sinking, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists say by 2100 the Gulf of Mexico could rise as much as 4.3 feet across this landscape, which has an average elevation of about 3 feet. If that happens, everything outside the protective levees — most of Southeast Louisiana — would be underwater.”
(ProPublica)

As this week's winner, Jan chooses next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 74

Nagasaki . . .
in her belly, the sound
of unopened mail

— Don Baird (HaikuNow! Contest First Prize, The Haiku
Foundation, 2013)

Marion Clarke walks us through this surprising poem:

This well known, striking haiku by Don Baird begins with the word “Nagasaki” which comes loaded with horrific associated imagery. We switch to a human in the second line, in particular the “belly” of a woman. This could suggest a pregnancy, or perhaps the narrator has a bad feeling or instinct about something (“a gut feeling”) With the words “the sound” on the same line, we might expect it to refer to an ultrasound or other medical reference, but no, we learn that this is the sound of “unopened mail”! This seems absurd at first, as this shouldn’t make any sound. However, in a house with a letterbox (mailbox) on the door there might be a thump when the mail hits the floor, unopened or not. So this could be the results of a medical examination the narrator is dreading. Maybe it is a medical report of a scan to see if the baby is healthy. It could be a metaphorical sound in that the results could have a devastating effect on the lives of the recipients. With Nagasaki in the first line, it does not suggest that the news is good. I have read this haiku many times and it always chills me.

Marion didn’t supply us with next week’s poem.

REVIRALS 75

K-T boundary
on the sandstone bluff . . .
a rock wren calls

— Allan Burns (*Notes from the Gean* 1.3, 2009)

Sheila Sondik helps us to unpack this challenging poem:

This is an example of a haiku that may require some research by the reader. But once the search engine has revealed the meaning of the first line, the reader is rewarded with a short poem spanning a moment in a contemporary bird-watcher's day to a cataclysm 66 million years ago.

The K-T boundary (since renamed the K-Pg boundary) is a thin band of unusual rock which marks the end of the Cretaceous Era. The band contains a rare concentration of iridium, an element which is much more plentiful on asteroids than on earth. This is a key part of the geologic evidence of the impact and explosion of a huge asteroid, which caused the extinction of the non-avian dinosaurs and many other life forms.

But birds, which evolved from dinosaurs, survived. Here's a rock wren giving testimony to the long and miraculous evolution of life on earth.

And then Lorin Ford parses its layers:

Two natural things are present in Allan's haiku: a K-T boundary, a visible line in rock, such as may be seen at Trinidad Lake State Park, Colorado, USA and many other places worldwide, and the call of a rock wren.

What we need to know about K-T boundaries:

1. “. . . the Cretaceous–Tertiary (K–T) boundary is a geological signature, usually a thin band of rock.” (These are)” associated with the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event, a mass extinction which destroyed a majority of the world's Mesozoic species, including all dinosaurs except for birds.[4]

“ – Wikipedia

2. “The K–T boundary is very important to geologic time as it marks a

catastrophic global extinction event. Numerous theories have been proposed as to why this extinction event happened . . . including an asteroid known as the Chicxulub asteroid . . . Some researchers suggest that climate change is the main connection between the impact and the extinction. The impact perturbed the climate system with long-term effects that were much worse than the immediate, direct consequences of the impact.[3]” – *Wikipedia*

What we need to know about wrens: they are the descendants of survivors of the mass extinction event which occurred 65 million years ago, they are small birds but their calls are LOUD.

Birds, in the folklore of many cultures, have been messengers. Simply connect the evidence of a massive extinction event on our planet 65 million years ago and bird as messenger, as Allan has so subtly implied, and the now acknowledged (by most people) climate change that’s gathering force. This haiku is a magnificent call to awareness: awareness of the past, the present and the likely future if we allow ourselves or our world leaders to continue to put personal or national interest before the very real issues of climate change. Deep history can repeat itself, with variations. That rock wren’s call is a wake-up call.

And Allan Burns did it all in 10 words, without pedantry or politics, allowing readers to think and feel and make the connections ourselves.

As this week’s winner, Lorin selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 76

scratches where driftwood dragged the coldest month
— Jim Kacian (A Hundred Gourds 1.1, 2011)

Lorin Ford has this to say about her own selection:

Time after time, this haiku most immediately impresses itself on me with its sheer physicality: bodily sensations of the sharpness of those scratches, followed by weight and icy cold. On the technical, wordsmithing level these bodily sensations are partly evoked and certainly enhanced by sound, notably the play of assonance between the paired vowels of ‘scratches/ dragged’ and ‘coldest/month’ and alliteration of the first two sounds in ‘driftwood dragged’. Sound enacts meaning here. For instance, how short and sharp is the a sound in ‘scratches’ compared with its partner in ‘dragged’, which is dragged out by the following hard g sound.

Then the visual sense kicks in: nothing is moving (the verb is in past tense,) all is still, frozen in place and time. The driftwood, for me, is still there in the vicinity of a frozen lake, and its shadow is as black as its drag marks, as in a photograph, a black and white photograph, sharply focused. A photograph, it springs to mind, that might’ve been taken by Ansel Adams.

Hang on, some readers might be thinking, isn’t a sharply focused photograph realistic, an example of realism? And this haiku by the author of the essay, ‘Realism is Dead’? Consider Adams’ photographs again.

According to Robert Turnage in an essay first published in *The Living Wilderness*, Ansel Adams

“. . . dislikes the term ‘nature photographer’, but he seems even more dismayed by a popular misconception that photography like his, which invokes readily identifiable subjects, is ‘realistic’. He is not concerned, he says, with the mere recording of reality — what he calls ‘the external event’ — but is intent on conveying the emotional content of a scene, the ‘internal event’. . . .”

Art, whether great photography or poetry, is not “the mere recording of reality”, and I suggest that physical, bodily response such as I experience when reading this haiku might even precede, as “internal event”, emotional content. These sensations set the mood of Jim’s haiku.

This haiku has to be in one-line form. The form supports the horizontal nature of the visual scene, helping to foreground the evidence of slow effort, even struggle, of that driftwood being dragged (or dragging itself?) across ice or frozen snow.

At “dragged” we’re only halfway through reading this haiku. That the driftwood may have dragged itself suggests an uncannily animate world in which the coldest month, too, has been dragged onto the beach by the driftwood. Do we read a cut after “dragged”, where common sense would advise, or do we not?

It’s impossible to choose. Both readings must be held in mind. There’s no escaping the sense that the workings of a mysterious, animate world lie inherent in this haiku. How easily we say “things as they are”, when all we can know is things as we perceive them.

As this week’s winner, Lorin selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 77

southern humpback —
miles of ocean
pushing back
— Scott Terrill (*A Hundred Gourds* 1.2, 2012)

Both our correspondents this week help us to discover some things about humpbacks. Sheila Sondik finds the rhythm between animal and habitat:

Humpback whales displace water equal to their considerable body volume as they move through the ocean. The water seamlessly refills the space they occupied as they move on. This haiku allows the reader to feel the interaction of a whale and the surrounding sea. By extension, we become aware of the air we move through, and the interaction between our bodies and the atmosphere. Through close observation of the beautiful streamlined whale and the ocean pushing back in response, the poet encourages us to see the interconnectedness of every aspect of the natural world.

The very specific pattern of indentation of the lines vividly mimics the feeling of the ocean sloshing in its gigantic basin and the rising and lowering again of the whales as they swim along, a sight I've been lucky to see in the Pacific off of Hawaii and California. It is also suggestive of the push-and-pull of whale and ocean.

Bill Kenney adds to this his musings on energy:

Scott's haiku opens directly, line 1 introducing without embellishment the protagonist of the action about to unfold. In the absence of directive commentary, readers must bring to bear all they know, or can hastily learn, about this beast. The southern humpback migrates some 16,000 miles in an average year. This statistic, combined with the animal's massive size and elegant, streamlined form, encourages us to see the whale as a force not to be denied in its urgent forward movement.

Our impression is reinforced by line 2. Not only does the line speak of the

“miles of ocean” through and over which the whale swims to its destination, but the line itself leaps away from the lefthand margin, as though refusing to be held back by typographical conventions — and, perhaps, by extension, by any rule civilization presumes to impose on natural forces. And, as the reader, am I tempted to see something of myself in this embodiment of brute force (or something of the force in myself), moving relentlessly forward, contemptuous of any obstacles in my determined path?

Obstacles, like the counterforce introduced in line 3. The miles of ocean, which I had imagined yielding before the undeniable power of the whale, embody in themselves a power that challenges the whale’s. The ocean will not yield; it must be conquered. The power of ocean’s resistance is felt in the poem’s turning back on itself that we see in line 3. The line is pushed back toward the lefthand margin from which line 2 departed. Toward, not to, the margin. The poem ends in the midst of the struggle of force and counterforce. That the poem here employs, not merely rhyme but identical rhyme (back / back), further suggests that we are at stalemate.

Not that the heroic stature of the southern humpback is in any way diminished by this stalemate. Rather the force gathered against the whale, the force with which the whale must contend in its annual migrations, only lends a further majesty to the mission. These opponents are worthy of each other.

Three lines, seven words, eleven syllables. Yet the force of this poet’s imagination is strong enough to embrace this cosmic conflict. I feel that the poem Scott has given us can, with only a hint of hyperbole, be described as a haiku epic.

As this week’s winner, Bill selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 78

home from the funeral
I remove clothes from the dryer
before they wrinkle

— Carolyn Hall (*Modern Haiku* 40.3, 2009)

Mojde Marvast expresses her feelings conjured by this poem through symbolic language:

Sad! Tears washed life, now it is the start of a new phase of life.
After the storm the waves ebb. Death is mystery though the grief is more or
less the same, only the depth makes it different . . .

And Marina Bellini parses it in detail:

Line 1 sets a mournful atmosphere; we do not know if the funeral was of somebody she loved or just somebody she knew; once at the house, the author tries to keep busy doing an everyday chore. Line 3 gives the reader the choice of interpretation, the twist to this haiku, “before they wrinkle”, it’s the urge to keep things going, the need to have all in order, nice and tidy; but that wrinkle refers not only to clothes — as time passes her face will wrinkle, thus it’s better to move on trying to enjoy what life gives, before it is too late.

Meanwhile David Jacobs notes the sureness of formal control:

As a contributor to many of the English language journals, I always get the impression that Carolyn Hall is never satisfied with standing still — always working to make her latest haiku better than the one before (difficult!) and experimenting both with form and content. Sometimes I feel she doesn’t get it quite right (that is the penalty for ambition), but very often she comes up with a gem.

The haiku here, apart from being such a gem, may not be strictly ‘experimental’, but it did take me by surprise to notice it had exceeded 17 syllables. That

does show ambition and confidence, someone who isn't worried about contracting her haiku into the more generally touted 11-14 syllables. There is not a word or syllable here that isn't needed or doesn't work for its keep. As such there is almost not much to say about it. The simple everyday action of removing clothes from a washing machine, the thoughts that accompany such an action are seen as no less relevant or important than an entire life which has reached its end. The juxtaposition is near perfect. The final 'wrinkle' with all its connotations gives the haiku its final click of the box.

And Jean LeBlanc finds its literary predecessors, and places the poem in context:

Just this past week in American Literature class, we discussed Robert Frost's poem "Out, Out —," which describes the accidental death of a boy on a farm and ends with the lines, "And they, because they were not the one dead, turned to their affairs." It takes my students a few minutes of discussion to work out that the family is not indifferent to the boy's death, but instead must carry their grief with them as they return to the necessary work of running a family farm in hardscrabble New Hampshire in the early 20th century. Carolyn Hall's haiku reminded me of Frost's poem in how it depicts not so much the need to "move on" (a need that doesn't come until well after the grief-causing event, if ever) but the need to go through the motions of life, even if one feels that, suddenly, chores are so trivial compared to the newly-experienced loss. "After great pain, a formal feeling comes," wrote another great American poet, Emily Dickinson. The formality offered by routine is exquisitely portrayed in Carolyn Hall's haiku. And that final line, "before they wrinkle" — what an evocation of age, or of dying before one reaches an advanced age . . . This haiku is a mini-masterclass on subtlety, grace, and living.

As this week's winner, Jean selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 70

starfish . . .
to feel so much
of what we touch

— Peter Newton (*What We Find*, Imaginary Press, 2011)

Garry Eaton:

I am reminded a bit of Eliot's despairing exclamation:

I wish I were a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
— “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Apart from that, there is an interesting and arresting inversion of the usual at play in this haiku. Where stars usually evoke associations with the ideal, little of that remains in the starfish. However, the starfish, apart from being star-shaped, is also like the star in being a denizen of an alien environment that is remote from our everyday lives, and that is what makes the starfish's interactions with its environment a fit subject for poetic rumination.

What Peter Newton observes is how much more earthy and tactile the starfish's existence is than that of the star. It senses its world in a variety of ways, but its most prominent feature is its arms, or tentacles, which it uses to orient itself on the sea floor, to move itself along, and to grasp and manipulate its prey. It is virtually a moving mouth surrounded by fingers and what Peter wishes, for here he is wishing upon a starfish, is to be able to feel what he feels with as much urgency, immediacy and depth as the starfish feels when it touches what it touches as it moves around on the seafloor.

Getting back to Prufrock, what I would ask readers is whether the wish for a more purely instinctual life that these two poetic statements share and explore is better framed through the lens of Prufrock's neurotic suffering, or through the lens of Newton's relatively bland, cautiously nuanced image?

As this week's winner, Garry selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 80

The morning presses
its hot fist against the window:
the fight starts.

— Bart Mesotten (*Haikoe-boek*, self-published, 1986;
translation by Max Verhart)

Stella Pierides appreciates participation in the battle:

It may be a sunny, summer morning. Scent of orange blossom in the air. Birdsong. The day full of promise. No matter, for they belong to another poem, another narrator. Our narrator doesn't live in this scene.

Might he be living a life that, to use Hobbes's phrase, feels "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"? Each day spent in a selfish and brutal pursuit of survival? Perhaps the poet, Norbertine priest and teacher, describes such a pessimistic narrator's view of the human predicament. If so, he would be in the company of a number of thinkers.

Alternatively, let us assume that Mesotten's narrator lived in a more optimistic milieu in the past, noticing beauty and companionship, as well as pain and suffering. For reasons unknown — for instance, spiritual turmoil, illness, loss — his circumstances changed. Life now appears as an ominous presence, a heavy, suffocating atmosphere outside his window, hot and pressing threateningly against it, against his day. The morning light that in the past dispersed the shadows of the night, now only throws into relief the expectations, struggles, pain, the gaping hole in the fabric of his life. The narrator crouching inside an inner, dark corner, dreads the hot fist, dreads the day. The poet though, is not letting him give up. He takes up the challenge: the fight starts. This is another day he is going to stand up to. He enters the boxing ring: dreading the daily fight, bearing the pain, resisting gravity, while still raising his own fists, and from time to time, hopefully, noticing the blossoms between the blows.

As this week's winner, Stella selects the next poem.

REVIRALS 81

the good soldier
my ancestor who lived to tell
nothing

— LeRoy Gorman (*The Heron's Nest* XIX:1, 2017)

Mojde Marvast knows this poem from inside out:

Thoughtful!

War is a question word in itself!

As a citizen of a war-stricken land, I have seen true misery and grief of it.

I have lost young relatives.

Once, overwhelmed by the sorrows of parents of these young boys and their so-called life, after the loss, I asked myself:

The price of how much land equals the life of one's son !?!?!?

I am still searching for the answer!!

Thank you for turning eyes to this wound !

I didn't receive a poem from Mojde, so I've chosen the next.

REVIRALS 82

after all these years
ankle deep
in the other ocean

— Pamela Miller Ness (*Frogpond* 21.2, 1998)

Marion Clarke puts herself in the poet's "feet":

At first, there was a sense of regret in this haiku, that the narrator had perhaps left her homeland never to return as line one can almost be heard with a sigh. But the next two lines made me think that this was due to free choice . . . that the narrator could have stayed in 'this' ocean or left for the 'other' one and 'ankle deep' suggests paddling, which is a pleasurable pastime. So it seems to be more of a contented observation than a sad one.

And David Jacobs finds two oceans as well:

Time, space and distance interweave with one another as the haiku reaches its almost casual but stunning final line. In my first reading I paused slightly between line one and two, in my second, I eliminated the pause and replaced it after "ankle deep" ie "after all these years" (of being) "ankle deep". One of the best uses of a pivot line I have seen, not least because it is shorter and more stark than the more traditional longer second. The poet has moved from being "ankle deep" to being "ankle deep" in another place altogether. You can feel time gently lapping around her ankles in perfect harmony with the gentleness of the haiku itself as the language to wash around us.

Steve Smolak broadens it to include us all:

Pamela's haiku is wonderful, and filled with anticipation line to line; the irony grows as well. We have all heard Line 1 countless times, and know when we hear it the story can go either way: will there be resolution, or resignation? Line 2 poignantly suggests the latter. There is also a sense of

irony that after many years so little has occurred, even if we are prepared for it. It is stark even, and compels us to know, ankle deep in what? Line 3 delivers haiku brilliance — not only does the irony deepen, but we encounter an outright metaphor so highly effective, I believe, because it touches on a very real aspect of our lives! We are existentialists, everyone, no matter how deep our investigations go into our lives . . . maybe the poet is reflecting with a new outlook on life, and sees how half-hearted she was living what has come before? Maybe she, her companion, or both, have lived on the surface of each one's existence and realize they know very little about each other? The poem is intrinsically spiritual, wonderful, and harks of the greatness in which we all know is our true selves! T.S. Eliot comes to mind — “. . . and at the end of all our exploring, is to arrive at where we began, and know the place for the first time”.

While Nathan Sidney ties it all together:

A simple image with profound implications, not structured like a traditional haiku, taking the form of long/short/long, but very much in keeping with the haiku aesthetic with its use of understatement, mystery, loneliness and transience. I'm put in mind of a great journey, perhaps crossing from one side of a continent to the other, a journey long awaited, but put off due to the busyness of a life, the commitments, distractions and fears. But perhaps the ocean is not a physical one but a spiritual one, the great other shore lying in wait across the gulf, faintly glimpsed from the shores of a life entering its twilight years. There's a sense of regret from the opening line but we move from there to a sense of vast openness. The poet may only be ankle deep, but it would take but a brief effort to be fully submerged. Will our poet hesitate here or plunge in? In the literal sense there is the promise of joy as our poet dives in under the waves or simply wiggles their feet in the sand, enjoying the feeling of completion. In the spiritual sense we know that perhaps the journey has only begun. These two journeys, the inner and the outer, merge into one and we get a glimpse of the sacredness of the ordinary.

As this week's winner, Nathan gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 83

winter night
the everything
of a flame

— Sandi Pray (*The Heron's Nest* XVIII:2, 2016)

Aparna Pathak sees this as a minimalist poem:

A well-structured haiku in short/long/short form that may look gloomy in first read. “Winter night” suggests an old age where the only struggle is about keeping the flame burning. But at the same time it also reflects the contentment of the poet who doesn’t desire anything worldly anymore and focuses only on being alive as a bare minimum requirement.

On reading the haiku again from the perspective of a haiku poet it seems that poet is in pensive mood who just wants “flame” to keep burning so that she can write in its warmth and light on the “winter night”. Winter as kigo indicates seclusion that may be a forced loneliness or by choice so that poet may concentrate on writing.

As this week’s winner, Aparna gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS SA

Gita chanting . . .
birds become
the ellipsis

— Kala Ramesh (The Akita International Haiku Award,
2014)

Niranjan Navalgund makes a fine point:

While the person is chanting *Gita*, birds exhibit understanding of the verses by their presence. The above haiku could also mean that in the process of chanting *Gita* — the thoughts of the individual disappear or fly away!

And Garima Behal delves into a deeper interpretation:

To me, an ellipsis represents that a thought swimming in one's mind can no longer be expressed in words. It shows a profundity of the abstract that cannot be translated into the tangible. In this haiku, I see the birds as never ceasing thoughts, flying a million miles an hour. With the chanting of the *Gita*, as the mind approaches a state of centered thought, or even thoughtlessness, these birds slowly fade into nothingness. It is a calm that doesn't require description; a place where, having reached, the mind is freed of the desire to understand, interpret and label.

While Garry Eaton sets out the whole story:

This haiku alludes to the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text in Sanskrit that is often sung or chanted as part of Hindu devotion. As part of an epic, the Mahabharata, the *Gita* is about war and is dramatically set on a battlefield before a battle. It takes the form of a pep talk between Krishna, a Hindu god on earth, and Arjuna, the hapless, merely human soldier whom it is intended to inspire and who will possibly die in the ensuing action. More specifically, the *Bhagavad Gita* is about the courage and faith that facing

death requires everywhere when young, inexperienced and often innocent soldiers find themselves in a war without necessarily knowing or agreeing with the reasons for it. As such, the Gita would be chanted in a manner that reflects and expresses that dramatic sadness.

In a poem with apocalyptic overtones, Kala Ramesh alludes to the *Gita* in her first line, then strategically employs an ellipsis to suggest both the unstated words of the scripture and the timelessness of the challenge wars present to the meaning of higher civilization. If we look around us, that challenge still confronts us today, perhaps more universally and dramatically than ever before, despite our efforts. The Gita ends, but will the chanting of it ultimately trail off and fade away completely, like the ellipsis? Will there, at the end of our day, be left only wreckage and the sweet songs of birds to echo the chanted devotions that once were heard? I don't know if Kala thought of it, but could we be seeing birds of carrion leave after feasting on battlefield corpses and fly away to become only dots on the horizon?

As this week's winner, Garry gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 85

mosquito larvae
in stagnant water
on a sunshiny day

— Taigi (*A History of Haiku*, Volume 1, trans. R H Blyth)

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi conjectures on the poet's foresightedness:

This haiku evokes deep emotions at different levels as we interpret. First, construction of haiku, a nice contrast between L2 and L3, stagnant water and a shiny day.

Taking a dig into various stages of life cycle of mosquito egg, larva, pupa and adult, the haiku captured here is about stage 2 (larva) and ready for stage 3 (pupa). Stage 3 is very critical in the life cycle. It requires temperature conditions to make the wings dry and develop into full fledged mosquito. Larva too requires the temperature conditions to molt itself into pupa. This requirement of temperature is provided in L3, a shiny day. A complete story is evolving here well complemented by L3.

But, how long and intense is the shine? If it is for a little time and mild it helps development else it will evaporate the dirty water and hence home for Larva/pupa even before it becomes an adult. Though higher temperature can not kill, lack of water can incapacitate larva/pupa. It can not fly and its only source of food (dirty water) is no more.

Perhaps the poet indicates something bigger here. We all know how dangerous mosquito bites are and how the diseases are spread. Does he indicate the prevailing terror groups lurking in different underground layers and wait to hit at world in large numbers? Political scenario in the world is mild enough giving them a brooding ground? Or he is optimistic that the changing political scenario is capable to tackle this menace and save the world? This open ended and unasked question in line 3 makes this haiku unique.

And Debbi Antebi develops this to include the human condition:

This haiku hints at the metamorphosis and four stages of development that mosquitoes undergo in their lifetime: with the arrival of spring, the mosquito eggs have already hatched into larvae. With time the larvae will grow, shed their skin and morph into pupae. The adult mosquitoes will then break out of the pupae case and become flying insects.

The adjective 'stagnant' in the second line hints at the stillness and silence before the beginning of life. As writer Isabel Allende has said, "Silence before being born, silence after death: life is nothing but noise between two unfathomable silences." Indeed, the stagnant water will soon be filled with motion and buzzing with life.

The adjective 'sunshiny' in the third line is indicative of the start of spring. I think the word choice suggests a certain tentativeness — that it is not yet fully warm and sunny and that nature has not yet burst back into life. The alliteration of the 's' sound in the poem brings to mind the sounds of the organisms about to emerge and come out in the open.

The stages of development for mosquitoes also hint at the metamorphosis that humans undergo in their lifetime. On a physical level, the flying land insects that we know mosquitoes to be have their beginnings as larvae in stagnant water. As larva lives at the surface of water and breathes through a tube, a fetus swims and moves around in the amniotic sac, with the umbilical cord attaching the placenta to the fetus. On a more metaphorical level, humans also shed their skin a few times and undergo many changes before they can become independent and free.

As this week's winner, Debbi gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 80

home after dark
through the window my family
of strangers

— Dee Evetts (*The Haiku Hundred*, Iron Press, 1992)

Marina Bellini feels the dislocation:

In this poem, what caught immediately my attention is “strangers”. Is the author’s family a disruptive one, where people living under the same roof dislike each other or is there a different reason? The author works hard, long hours; he/she has little time to spend with them; when is back home maybe children are already in bed and the same is for his/her spouse. Either way, the atmosphere created is of sadness and loneliness. It depicts a scene that is too often part of our busy lives; we work too much in order to give the best to our families, but at the same time we can’t give enough of our presence and love and affection. A very well-written modern haiku, to which many of us can relate.

As this week’s winner, Marina gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 87

final rays . . .
still reason
to hum

— Marion Clarke (*Haiku Master*, NHK, 2016)

Modje Marvast tells a tale:

The last rays of sun keep stretching forward to reach the earth, finally the earth turns its face back, not to leave but to live.

This beautiful haiku reminded me of my friend's sorrowful experience of her 5-year-old daughter's death. She was nursing her through a long period of sickness. She said on the night of her "leaving", she tries not to look at her mother's face, and she keeps stealing her eyes from her mother while turning her face away. Her mother keeps the little girl's hand in hers and caresses the tiny fingers but she doesn't look back!

This haiku gives me a sign of hope that she has come back but surely very different from what she was when she left. That's why her mother keeps feeling her everywhere!!

Carol Jones accepts the circumstance:

For me, Marion's poem has portrayed a sense of a person coming to the end of life.

On times, life can be taken prematurely by an illness of some kind. Having to accept you cannot control every thing that happens in life, and to resign to the fact it is being cut short, taking stock, and making the most of the time that is left, the good things in life.

While Peter Newton discovers an optimism:

A good haiku casts the reader both backward and forward in time — if only by seconds. There's a narrative that comes before and after. One the reader supplies.

Here, I am struck by the phrase “final rays” which I take to mean sun rays and also radiation therapy for an illness. The word “final” suggests the more definitive ending. But whether it’s the end of a day or the end of an arduous treatment regimen lasting weeks or months there is “still reason / to hum”. There’s a simple optimism.

I can hear the soft tune that drifts beyond the reaches of these few words. A hum or a sigh that turns into a hum. The relief of kicking your feet up on the coffee table after a day’s work. The fewest words in the right order can reveal a person’s story. A state of mind. One’s character.

Reminds me of the line by Tolstoy in Anna Karenina:

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

Despite the subject of this poem, is the speaker of this haiku happy? What is happy? A good haiku can send the reader on the trail for bigger questions — often through the smallest details. For me, anyway, these words expand. Through them I realized that gratitude is a kind of learned happiness, one that is often hard-earned.

As this week’s winner, Peter gets to select the next poem.

RE:VIRALS 88

whale song
I become
an empty boat

— Michelle Tennison (Michelle Tennison 32, 2015)

Nathan Sidney too becomes an empty boat:

This isn't the first time I've encountered this poem and I remember being struck by it originally though I couldn't articulate why. Thinking about it now, it's the element of surprise, dealing as it does with an encounter with nature that enacts a magical transformation. So the poem, like the whale song, is a kind of enchantment, bringing magic and mystery back into the world. What does it mean to become an empty boat? Usually we think of inanimate objects as being deaf and mute, but ships fall into that special category of object that are imbued with life. We think of the slap of waves against the hull, the mast wires singing, the surge as the ship catches the wind and comes alive. In particular, an empty boat has no captain and hence no direction, it has no cargo and hence no burden. Maybe the poet has become an ark, standing empty, ready to save the endangered creatures of the world? Perhaps we can think of a ship as an ear or sounding chamber pressed up against the sea and listening to and amplifying the sounds of the deep? More prosaically, the whale song catches the listener unaware and for a moment the mind becomes empty of worry, of rumination, of separation and fear. At the same time we imagine the vastness of the ocean in which the human faces obliteration and epiphany and we are left as helpless as a rudderless boat, carried away on vast currents of energy. The structure of the poem is interesting as well, the syllable count running 2-3-4, as if some crescendo is rising, which is of course resolved in that delightful surprise of becoming boat and echoes the tune of whale song.

Danny Blackwell adds to this:

The power of haiku, like much poetry, often lies in its power to strike us with the sensation that there is meaning that lies beyond the words, and that the poem warrants work on the readers behalf — the reader, then, becoming an “accomplice” (to use Cortázar’s term). When the reader is active and becomes an accomplice to the poem, that is to say “activates” the poem, we are entering the terrain of the spiritual, philosophical, or existential — we are “entering” the poem, so to speak, and entering the position of the poet-creator. At their best, the haiku that occupy this Zen-like territory allow us to become the poet who has lost herself, or himself, and thus we become this absence, or interpenetration of subject and object—of poem and life. I happily confess that I don’t know exactly what this poem is saying. I hear the whale song and I am on the boat, and upon hearing the whale song I become the whale, and on becoming the whale I leave the boat, and I leave the boat empty.

But what if the whale is the empty boat? And, if so, why is it “empty”?

Upon considering these alternatives, the Pavlovian response kicks in: But what about those unwritten (yet endlessly discussed) “rules” about avoiding metaphor in haiku? And while I generally agree that clichéd metaphors are a waste of time and, more often than not, metaphors of any kind have a tendency to jar in haiku, that is because we are, understandingly, on the guard for something inauthentic. But when experience is metaphorical there is nothing more inauthentic than not giving into metaphorical thought and expression. And so, while I will continue to become the poem, and become the whale, and become the empty boat (or, better yet, to become “an-empty-boat-of-whale-song-me”), the meaning of the poem — if we can truly speak of “meaning” — will nevertheless continue to be the following:

whale song
I become
an empty boat

And Garry Eaton feels the resonance of that emptiness:

Listening is the only way to honour music and there are many ways to listen. In this haiku, Tennyson is also harkening carefully to the known facts about whale song: 1) that whales rely on underwater vocalizations to communicate with each other in ways that are important to their survival; and 2) that motor-driven ship and boat traffic on the ocean, getting heavier every day, makes a lot of noise that interferes with those vocalizations.

Tennyson might have expressed her concern over this conflict didactically, but preaching loses its edge. She chooses instead to respond to the threat in an original way that is itself a mysterious sort of song:

I become
an empty boat

— that is, a boat that makes no interfering noise because it is empty and therefore doesn't move. I particularly like the way the poet used the resemblance between a whale's body and a boat to construct a simile in which she, as whale-like, empty boat, through a complex state of sympathetic identification becomes a chamber that listens for, and resonates with, the whale's song rising from the deep.

As this week's winner, Garry gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 80

fish story
the cormorant spreads its wings
wider

— Lorin Ford (*Stylus Poetry Journal*, April 2006)

Marion Clarke is taken in by the tale:

At first, I wondered what on earth a ‘fish story’ might be. After reading line two I pictured the wingspan of a cormorant and thought “Ah ha, it’s a tale about a dead fish.” Then, in just one word, line three deftly conjures up a fishermen with outstretched hands, exaggerating the size of his catch — a gap that will no doubt grow wider with each telling of the story.

There is an almost concrete aspect in the elongated second line, and then the poem is quickly reeled in to end with that one-word line (its size perhaps more in keeping with that of the fish).

Very clever, Lorin!

And Nathan Sidney explicates its further depths:

We have to wonder whose story the cormorant is illustrating, its own or perhaps the poets? Is it a story about “the one that got away”? We are invited to imagine the secret life of animals, as if the cormorant is talking to his compatriots, the way that fisher people talk amongst themselves, with all the pride, joviality and exaggeration that comes along with that. The subtle anthropomorphism draws a connection between the world of humanity and the world of nature, reminding us that as we are a part of the living world so the living world is really just a collection of other “peoples”, each with their own stories. We could imagine instead the story of the fish themselves, whose hidden lives continue under the water in a world of gloom above which the cormorant is sunning itself. The one fish whose life has perhaps suddenly ended inside a bird’s belly or at the end of a fisher’s line, reminds us that for all the world’s beauty there is a steep price to pay. The failure to catch a fish

for a person might be a cause for a joke, but for others it is deadly serious business. Within such a simple image an abundance of lives are teeming and passing away and the connections and juxtapositions between sea and sky and land, birds, fish and people are all drawn together under the cormorant's spreading wings.

As this week's winner, Nathan gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 90

they keep throwing more in the soup kitchen river
— Dan Schwerin (*is/let*, April 8, 2017)

Julie Warther parses how the poem works:

This poem carries the reader along gently until the last two words which instantly upset the complacency cart. There's a rush back to the beginning to see what was missed the first time through. All of a sudden, words like "they" and "keep" and "throwing" are no longer innocuous descriptions of too many cooks tossing more and more ingredients in a soup pot. Now those words have weight: the corporate "they", the repetitive "keep", the harsh "throwing" which we now realize refers not just to food, but people. And while "soup kitchen" may be a familiar term, what is a "soup kitchen river"? Intuitively there's a link between the long winding nature of a river and the line that forms outside a soup kitchen, reinforced by the one-line format of the poem. Stronger still, is a reference to the current of poverty that drags along and threatens to pull under those in its grasp. The success of this poem lies in the uneasiness it instills in its reader.

And Nathan Sidney finds an early analog:

A slightly humorous image but for its serious content. Deeply visceral, we are brought to mind of rivers of excrement or rivers of saliva. Often soup kitchens create their dishes from unwanted food, so we also need to consider the mountains of waste from which the soup kitchen river has its source. I'm reminded of the woodcuts of Pieter Bruegel the Elder with all their crowding and confusion, some dealing in fantastical images of food and feasting. There is perhaps also a hidden political comment; is it ingredients that are being thrown into the river or is it in fact the homeless, the vulnerable, the abused who have been cast off and left to drown in an ocean of poverty? I'll leave the question of whether or not this snippet actually qualifies as a haiku to other readers, but certainly we are invited into a specific moment by the poet, who

has frozen a frenzy of activity into just one line and 12 syllables.

While Carol Jones queries the economic circumstances at work:

The first thing that springs to mind when I read this poem is the mix of detritus that seems to be ever present in, and on, the river banks.

Not far from my first thought, could 'they' be the unseen work force behind the never-ending conveyor belt of gadgetry being produced, the latest must have, in whatever colour, size or shape you want.

Not wanting to be seen with 'yesterday's' items, 'they' (the purchaser) not only cast a still-useful product into an ever-flowing river of appliances, but are swiftly caught up in the "spend, spend" mentality, to shore up flagging economies, and could then, maybe, find themselves in the eclectic mix of a real soup kitchen.

As this week's winner, Carol gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 01

the space
between the deer
and the shot

— Raymond Roseliep (*Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*, W. W. Norton, 2013)

Marion Clarke has a lot of questions:

Wow, what a powerful and thought-provoking haiku. It places us in a precise moment between the hunter and hunted once it's too late to turn back. Does time stand still for the deer in the face of imminent death? Does it wonder if it has time to flee or does it just freeze? Does the hunter feel any pity or regret in the nano-second after pulling the trigger?
Frightening, if we apply this to humans.

And Nancy Rapp knows the space between:

I love the pregnant three words “the space between”. My first connection to these words is the Dave Matthews song by that name. “the space between your heart and mine . . . filled with time.” I’m not a hunter and I love animals but even with a camera I realize there’s a space between a deer and myself which the deer will tolerate. Trying to get as close as possible to get a great photo, if misjudged, will cause the deer to flee. I imagine a hunter and the space between the deer and the shot. A space between his heart and the life he will take and the reasons and the space is filled with time to contemplate if it is necessary looking into the soft doe eyes filled with dread. The space is filled with the tension of life and death. It’s something and it’s nothing and I’ve experienced it after an accident or a near-miss and that space becomes so profound.

Marina Bellini fills that space:

A poem where the empty space encloses lots of meanings. Hunting season has begun. There is that particular moment when predator and prey see each other; the stillness of the moment, just that instant before the bullet is shot. The space between the hunter and the prey is not empty anymore; is filled instead with bewilderment and fear. If I close my eyes I can see the deer's eyes. They say that you can see fear, touch it, and smell it. What I find great of this poem is that the moment described by the author can refer to a broader background: the predator can be a soldier and the deer a human being; the predator can be a pervert and the prey his target victim. And ultimately this space can be the moment in which we are facing our own fears.

And Danny Blackwell defines it:

The end of the first line in this poem creates the first space, with the word “space” itself. We pause like patient hunters of poems, waiting for our prey to come into the line of fire — except we are not yet aware that that this is a hunt, and that we are part of it. We are, as readers, unsuspecting deer — momentarily suspended. Now, at the end of the second line, we become deer. Then we reach the climax in the last line, which artfully falls (like many great Japanese haiku) on the very final word, “shot,” which sends us now back to relive the moment, to watch the story unfold with a new objectivity. We have become the hunter. And the deer.

And we become everything in between.

We can observe the space — both physical and temporal — that separates the hunter and the animal.

The tendency of Japanese haiku to hinge on the last word is partly linguistic, as Japanese can easily form sentences where all the elements that come before the final word are modifiers. (It is noteworthy that many great translations of haiku invert the line order, so that what typically appears in the last line of a Japanese haiku, is generally moved to the front in the English translation.) This poem is not an example of that linguistic piling-up, but it does, however, take up that structural feature — so frequent in haiku — of saving the key element until the very end, and in this way makes us active participants in the unfolding of a drama.

Great haiku are like world-activating devices, giving birth to the so-called 10,000 things of the Tao Te Ching, usually by focusing on very specific moments, fragments, which nevertheless give us a sense that we are glimpsing a mere part of some unified whole. And so every time we read this seemingly unsentimental poem, set in what may be an indifferent universe, we are giving birth to the 10,000 things, and we can imagine the myriad sights, sounds, and sensations that go unnamed — in the space between the deer and the shot.

As this week's winner, Danny gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 02

Nightfall,
boy smashing dandelions
with a stick.

— Jack Kerouac (*American Haikus*, 1959)

Jim Kacian identifies with that boy:

Is this a case of “plain as porridge”? It would seem so: what could be homelier than an unadorned time-of-day context (“nightfall”), and the uncerebrated actions of youth?

Often “plain as porridge” also seems “flat as pancake”, but there’s something else going on here that arrests our attention. For me this conjures the same deep anguish as Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gently into that good night. / Rage, rage against the dying of the light,” and, if not quite so melodiously, even more concretely. The night is the time of the other, the wolf, the dark — all of us are different in the night. Could the boy tell us why he is lopping the field of small yellow suns? At this hour? Perhaps not, but there is a *justesse* to it that is felt, as actor or witness.

Kerouac surprises again and again in his mastery of the genre. It is as a prolific and rebarbative writer of “fictions” that he made his name and fortune, but it is in his haiku that he comes closest to attaining that which he struggled to achieve throughout his life: the Buddha-spirit, and dissolution into the Void. It is a testament to his genius that he did so without good modeling (he had read Blyth, of course, but the normative haiku of his day were 5-7-5 nature sketches, which this poem decidedly is not), community support (this is years before there were groups or dedicated journals or conventions), or even collegial workshopping (Rexroth and Snyder may have introduced him to haiku, but one look at their work will convince that he blazed his own trail). Given how much novelty he was conjuring, we can forgive him the slight “Tarzan-speak” we find here. His ability to pare a moment to its essentials, providing a clear and memorable image and a deeply felt resonance, is simply unparalleled in haiku of his time. He was, indeed, “King

of the Pops”.

As this week’s winner, Jim gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 03

the daisies
you paint full
of philosophy

— Geraldine Clinton Little (*Modern Haiku* 19.3, 1988)

Aparna Pathak takes a direct tack:

While conceiving this beautiful haiku Geraldine seems to be mesmerized with the artwork. The daisies are looking real with natural colours that are used to paint them rather than giving any kind of gaudy effect to it. Here she clearly distinguishes between these daisies and the ones where artist try to paint them with flashy colours.

Daisies perhaps represent life here, where “full of philosophy” is about being real than try look artificial, outwardly or inwardly.

Geraldine pensively advocates simplicity over being cosmetic.

As does Carol Jones:

Daisies, little plants, uncomplicated in its method of survival, opens up in sunlight, and closes in darkness, simple.

I ask myself, now, with line 3 is it referring to the way we complicate the simple things in our own lives or if others with firm points of view do it for us, more so in a position of power — gilding the lily — so to speak, putting a wash on things to make it more attractive.

Are the daisies referring to humans? I think so, as I don't recall any other species on the planet interfering on such a grand scale, when it comes to complicating things.

My philosophy in life ‘if ain't broke, don't mend it.

But Marion Clarke is not quite so sure:

Geraldine Clinton Little's haiku made me wonder how the painted daisies could be "full of philosophy". How do these daisies differ from any others in order to be described in such a way? Has the artist personified the subject so that the blooms look philosophical? Is it that the painter has studied their subject in such depth that the resulting piece has totally captured the essence of the flower? Or, could the image be a totally abstract representation, causing the viewer to question the very nature of a daisy? Perhaps the depiction of the flowers in some way reflects the philosophical nature of the person who produced it. Or maybe the narrator knows the painter personally and is saying that he/she paints in a way that questions the nature of everything. I'm not sure, but the fact that it leads this reader to ask so many questions suggests that, like those daisies, this haiku is full of philosophy!

Lorin Ford feels the weight of the words:

Interestingly, when I copied & pasted this haiku lines 2 & 3 became indented. I suspect this may have been its original published form. The indented break after "the daisies" allows me two views of the daisies. There are the actual daisies and the daisies painted on canvas. But in the transference of daisies 'from life' to the image on canvas something has been added: philosophy, a product of the human mind. "Philosophy" is a word with a weighty feel. There may be a criticism implied or the author may simply be making a sharp observation: there is a difference between daisies as they are and daisies co-opted as symbols of something else, "full of philosophy".

The conundrum raised by "the daisies" and "the daisies you paint" puts me in mind of an old favourite poem, 'The White Room', by Charles Simic, which begins:

"The obvious is difficult
To prove. Many prefer
The hidden. . . ."

and towards the end, continues:

“Just things as they are,”

before immediately undermining the likelihood of human perception of “things as they are” with wry personification:

“Unblinking, lying mute
In that bright light
And the trees waiting for the night.”

Nathan Sidney calls it like it is:

“To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a Wild Flower”, is this the philosophy of the daisies? Or is this philosophy the stylistic choices of the painter, who in interpreting the flowers has engaged with a world of art history. Perhaps it is the painter who is full of philosophy, holding a conversation with the poet as he puts down in color the world in front of him that is for a moment seen as perfect. The poet has made an interesting choice by including the word “full” on the second line rather than on the third, which anyway would have made the last line a little too chunky. By including it on the second line not only do we get another meaning, that of the daisies being in “full” bloom, but it creates a sense of anticipation which the third line resolves. The reading I prefer is to see this poem as a reference to the art of haiku and making itself. Here the daisies painted are the ones of the mind's eye, blooming into existence with the first line. The philosophy they are full of is all the theory of the poet/painter, and a world of history, critique and commentary on the art form/s themselves. Of course, my interpretations are coloured by my favourable bias towards philosophy, a word with a certain gravitas. It is entirely possible that the painter has killed these daisies by painting them full of “philosophy” rather than say “magic” or “bodaciousness”. Perhaps what the poet meant to say was that the daisies and the painter are full of shit!

and Sheila Sondik rounds upon the whole of the work:

Daisies belong to the Asteraceae or Compositae family. Not as simple as they appear to the casual glance, each bloom consists of many ray flowers (commonly pulled off to prove or disprove a love relationship) and myriad central disc flowers.

This enigmatic haiku offers its readers many possible interpretations. Is it contrasting the daisy, symbol of innocence, often the first flower children draw, to the voluminous corpus of philosophy? Or is its message aimed more at artists than at thinkers? The goal of painting a daisy is not only the reproduction of the visual aspects of the flower. We have cameras (phones, even) that can do that. There should be a discovery in the work of art, or at least a statement, beyond imitation of the visual world. Philosophy is concerned with the fundamental nature of reality and our knowledge of it. As a visual artist, I want to express my own consciousness and worldview through the artistic medium, no matter what the ostensible subject of the painting.

Is it “the daisies you paint” which are “full of philosophy”? Or are “the daisies” in all their is-ness, contrasted with the artist? Is “you paint full of philosophy” a reprimand or a compliment to the artist? The repeated F sounds in “full of philosophy” seem to me to add a humorous cast to that phrase. In any case, Geraldine Clinton Little has given us a most intriguing poem.

While Danny Blackwell knows the angst of vegetation:

“If there were not anxiety behind those apples, Cézanne would not interest me any more than Bouguereau.”

The above is a quote by Picasso that has followed me around since I wrote my BA dissertation on music many years ago.

This quote resonated with me profoundly because I felt that good art should be more than academic or technical, and I was investigating the mystical origins of art, which seems to have been born out of a need to see the world through a filter, to give the world’s mysteries their myths, or philosophies.

This poem offers us a portrait of the still-life artist. It is an ambiguous portrait of the artist and his art because we don’t know exactly what “philosophy” is hidden behind those daisies.

All we know is that the painting offers more than a pictorial representation. And yet we cannot see this representation, so it would seem that this poem is more like the micro-theatre that is senryu, and that we are sharing in a very human drama. True, one may imagine the very real daisies being painted and, therefore, could happily treat this as a haiku. But to me the physical daisies are absent in my mind's eye: all I see is the poet looking at the painting, and possibly the painter too, who I imagine is in their studio. (I also imagine that the painter is someone the poet admires and has some kind of relationship with, a relationship I sense is affectionate. Of course, much of this is not explicitly in the poem and yet nevertheless these are the images the poem provokes in me.)

Perhaps a key question to ask would be this:

Is it right to use poetry — words — to describe another art form, in this case painting?

Frank Zappa once said that talking about music is like dancing about architecture.

So maybe it is equally futile to write about painting?

Whatever the case, here we have a series of words that describe a painting of daisies that are more than daisies, and yet we know not what.

What we do know is that we are “looking” at art — and by extension the artist — concerned with more than what's on the surface, so to speak. And that, I hope, is something we can all relate to. Because painting daisies without some kind of philosophy would be futile. If you just want daisies, look at daisies! So, although Bashō said to learn of the pine we should go to the pine, this poem seems to be more concerned with humans than flowers. So we could maybe say that if you want to learn about us you should look at our paintings, our art, to see the world when it has undergone a transformation and become more than what is being represented. That is to say that, like Cézanne's apples, there is philosophy behind those daisies.

As this week's winner, Danny gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 04

the only sound that's come out of me all day firefly

— Scott Metz (*a sealed jar of mustard seeds*, issue 9 of *ant ant ant ant ant*, 2009)

Marion Clarke seconds the emotion:

An intriguing haiku from Scott Metz. The image for me is of a person who has spent the entire day on their own, perhaps through choice, but perhaps not. He has now settled down for the evening in a favourite chair on the porch, surrounded by the comings and goings of nature. I get the impression that the author hasn't felt the need to make any sound throughout the day and the one he makes at the sight of the first firefly of the evening could well be of pleasant surprise. Well, I heard a gasp as I read this!

As this week's winner, Marion gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 05

morning wind
the library
of fallen leaves

— Anatoly Kudryavitsky (*Horizon*, Red Moon Press, 2016)

Carol Jones is bestirred by the triggers of the poem:

The words have an ethereal vision, a subtle awareness of a mind full of knowledge, maybe. Our minds store massive amounts of data, much of it we forget about, but is still there, somewhere. In this haiku I think it maybe referring to memory loss. However, “morning wind” could read in two ways, the stirring up of many things forgotten, memories that have lain dormant for year. Music, a certain sound, or a conversation can rekindle thoughts of yesteryear, and the feelings that are attached to them.

And Danny Blackwell finds echoes from his own library:

A feature of poetry, often used in haiku, is to take advantage of the ambiguity offered by homophones. A typical example in Japanese poetry would be the frequent wordplay offered by matsu (/) which can be either the verb to wait, or a pine tree. Fortunately this example ‘englishes’ well, as the word pine is used for both a pine tree and the verb to pine — and it is often in this sense of yearning for the person that the poet is waiting for that it is used. I mention this because I am unable to see a short poem with the word “morning” and not hear, feel, and consider the word “mourning.” I don’t think necessarily that this is intended here, but the reference to fallen leaves would create an apt conjunction, as the wind through dead leaves is potentially a very mournful sound.

As always, every reader refigures the text they are presented with, based on their previous reading, and every reading is potentially new, even for the same person at different times. While I’m not enamoured of the library image in this poem, I am nevertheless reminded of a line from poem 10 of

Pablo Neruda's book *20 Love Poems and A Hopeless Song*, which I offer in a rather Latinate translation in order to respect the original syntax:

Cayó el libro que siempre se toma en el crepúsculo.

(Fell the book that is always picked up at twilight.)

And suddenly the idea of fallen leaves and books — in this crepuscular light — intrigues me. And I ask myself, Where do our books go to die?

As this week's winner, Danny gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 06

*poem about disappointment but it's only the word sea.
— Mike Andrelczyk (*Is/let*, March 6, 2017)

Danny Blackwell had a lot to say about his own choice:

This is a poem that immediately captured my attention and spoke to me in a language I felt familiar with. We all live in a relatively meta-narrative age these days. In other words, we have long since dismissed with a complete suspension of disbelief, and frequently need to maintain an ironic distance from our fictional universes. By that I mean that we like to see the cogs of the machinery; we like to have the narrator tell us it's all a trick, that it's all a farce, and in doing so liberate us from feeling like fools — but only so we can go back to immersing ourselves in these fictional, or poetic, worlds that are so necessary for us.

In full knowledge that I am talking at length about a poem that is a self-contained universe and that is basically self-explanatory, this piece by Mike Andrelczyk could be described as a poem about a one-word poem — a one-word poem, we should add, that doesn't exist. Except that it does. It exists in our minds the moment we complete reading the poem, as we dispense with the narrative machinery and envisage the word sea — alone and unadorned. And yet in this poem, unlike the infamous one-word haiku “tundra,” we are told what to think. (Bad form according to the haiku commandments).

Essentially what we have here is the following conjunction: Sea/Disappointment.

Now, I don't think that this is at all hard to relate to. Also, it is done with maximum precision, while invoking nature. So, whatever one feels about what is and isn't haiku, it is undeniably operating, to some degree, within the flexible parameters of the haiku genre in Japanese. (Brief, one-line, nature-oriented, poem.)

True, the poet has ‘sinned’ by ignoring the writer's mantra of “show-don't tell” because here we are being told what to feel, and not shown. But the end result for me is almost the same. I see/sense/feel/hear the sea, and the sea

that is present in me after reading this work is filtered through a particular emotion (that of disappointment). This poem could come across to some as a cold post-modern exercise in empty artifice — but not for me. Would it be better if instead of telling us it's about disappointment he created an image that provokes that emotion in us? I guess this is not the time or place for such value judgments. They are simply different approaches. After so much meta-narrative exposure, there is something to be said for cutting out the middleman, and dispensing with such contrived manipulations.

In essence, what is written, and what we are reading, is a performance instruction. Pianists, for example, don't shout out the letters *fff* when they read them on a musical score. They simply play louder. In other words this poem is the word sea with performance instructions — the word performance here being one and the same thing as “reading.”

Regarding the formal elements, Mike Andrelczyk has used a unique format: an asterisk, followed by a poem that is essentially a description of a poem — or a description of itself, if you will — with the asterisk functioning like a sort of footnote. The author has used this format for a number of works, which were featured in the experimental journal *Is/Let*, but of all the ones I read, this to me was the most powerful. I like to see poets developing a unique language, and developing and pushing forms, thereby pushing readers to consider and reconsider what is and isn't poetry, and what is and isn't haiku. On a more Zen note, I am personally intrigued with the idea of toying with the asterisk as a *kireji* (in this case, a *kireji* that precedes the poem — the cut coming before we know what is being cut) and that this new *kireji* implies disappointment, in the same way that the Japanese word *kana* (), so ubiquitous in haiku, has a wide range of interpretations — commonly being rendered in English with the exclamation “Ah!”

And is there any reason why an asterisk couldn't come to stand for disappointment in the conventions of an, as yet unexplored, literature?

It is possible that the English language and English-language haiku are still left wanting in terms of a satisfactory equivalent to the Japanese *kireji* employed in haiku.

Having seen how the poet has used the asterisk in other works, it is not the intention of the poet for the asterisk to represent disappointment. I

am simply playing with potential possibilities for innovation in English-language haiku, and I think that imagining that this asterisk is a kireji (albeit a pre-poem kireji, that cuts before that which is cut, and that is written and yet is meant not to exist, and that implies a certain predetermined state, such as disappointment) is an interesting diving board from which to reevaluate some of our prejudices about the Japanese genre of haiku, which we continue to “translate” into modern English interpretations, with all the weight of History, Culture, and Narrative on our shoulders

I, for one, am quite moved by this disappointing sea, although I’m sure there are many readers out there who are disappointed that this is what passes for a haiku these days.

As this week’s winner, Danny gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 07

first frost
keeping pace
with a stranger's cane
— Alexy Andreev (*Bones*)

And Danny Blackwell once again had a lot to say about his own choice:

It is generally considered good practice in haiku to avoid, where possible, any explicit reference to the poet (the first-person “I”) who is narrating and, to a certain degree, to avoid personal pronouns in general. This stems from a linguistic trait in Japanese, in which people are loathe to name themselves or others directly, as a matter of courtesy and good manners. Of course there are exceptions, both in ordinary conversation and in haiku poetry — Kobayashi Issa, for instance, frequently refers to himself, in both 1st and 3rd person. In English, however, the omission of the personal pronoun is generally more problematic — primarily for linguistic reasons — and, as a result, we are not trained in the kind of ambiguity so common in Japanese. A good example of this tolerance for ambiguity is the fact that Japanese tend not to distinguish between singular and plural, although they have the linguistic tools to do so, should they want to be explicit. The famous poem by Basho about an old pond and a frog, for example, makes no specific reference that allows us to know with any certainty whether there is a single frog jumping or numerous frogs jumping.

(If I’m not mistaken some haiku poets didn’t even decide themselves whether they were writing in plural or singular! Sadly, I cannot recall the details of the poem but I distinctly recall reading about the haiga of a particular poet — I have a sneaking suspicion it was Buson’s poem about crows perching on withered branches at dusk — where the poet illustrated the poem in two different versions: one with a single crow and another with various.)

In regards to the use or omission of personal pronouns in English haiku, I believe the practice of striving to achieve some kind of equivalency with Japanese haiku has been fruitful and has allowed us room for manoeuvre as

readers. I mention all of this because this particular poem allows us plenty of ambiguous space. The haiku follows a traditional format. It begins with a seasonal reference (“first frost”) followed by a line-break, which functions, to all intents and purposes, as a kireji. (It should also be noted that the “first” this or that — in Japanese — is very much a trope of traditional haiku).

The second half of the poem juxtaposes this seasonal phenomenon of first frost with an image of two people, one who is using a cane and the other who has slowed their pace, possibly as a result of the icy ground. What is masterful about this poem is the way that neither of the subjects is explicitly referenced — they are merely implied (by the cane, and the person “keeping pace” with the cane). The absence of personal pronouns not only adds to the haiku concision we have come to value, in lieu of any hard-and-fast syllable count, but also creates doubt around the very idea of Subjects themselves, and of individual identity. This blurring of the line between subject and object is undoubtedly linked with the eastern philosophies that so influenced Japan, and it is here where the art of the poem lies because it is precisely a poem about empathy, and about the blurring of lines between “You” and “I”. We can, furthermore, consider the first line as personifying the frost, as if it was The First Frost itself that accompanied the person with the cane. (A person we instinctively perceive as a vulnerable figure, possibly an old man or woman.) Add to this our metaphorical instinct to personify Winter as an old man and we are left in no doubt that this “first frost” is a harbinger of the winter to come for the narrator, and the “winter” age of a person being represented by the slow pace of the cane (a great example of the power of objects to signify something way beyond the object itself.)

I should add that the element of personification of the first frost is much more a possible reading than a direct result of the text, and the poem functions perfectly without this extra layer. Nevertheless, it is clear that in haiku there is generally something more what we are presented with and that, as a rule, we tend to go beyond the poem in order to discover a profound sense of connectedness, be it with nature or with the products of nature, such as people and plants, and so on.

But it is not only in recognition of hardships and suffering that we are united, the same also occurs in moments of shared beauty. A counterpoint to the

poem under discussion would be the following haiku by Issa:

花の陰赤の他人はなりけり

Which Blyth translates thus:

Under the cherry blossoms
None are
Utter strangers.

In summary, this poem — for me at least — is that of a poet-narrator, who is keeping pace with an old man or woman on a frosty day, and enters into an empathetic relationship with the “other”, and is consequently awake to the realization that we all grow old. Further to this, the poet enters into an empathetic relation with the season itself, and by extension with the universe as a whole.

And if that isn't what a good haiku is all about then I don't know what is.

As this week's winner, Danny gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 08

atop the town flagpole
a gob of bubblegum
holds my dead brother's dime

— Nick Virgilio (*Selected Haiku of Nicholas Virgilio*)

Marina Bellini offers us a straight reading, shorn of biographical information:

Two boys playing, the daring one reaches the top of the flagpole and sticks a dime to mark his achievement; is lucky dime perhaps? In the last ku we learn that the brother is dead; the reader imagination can start from here. Did he die falling after his bravado? Or did he die at war? In my opinion the strong connection between the flag and all those soldiers who didn't come back from the war zone, allow us to choose the second possibility; in my imagination I see all mourners at the funeral or commemoration, and the author remembers that dime still there and maybe he remembers their time as kids when all was an adventure.

And Danny Blackwell provides the context:

In Sean Dougherty's video Remembering Nick Virgilio we can listen to the poet's brother, Tony, recall the event that inspired this haiku in honour of Larry Virgilio:

"Before Larry was going off to boot training he was in the square with his buddies, and he shimmied up this enormous flagpole, and he took a piece of chewing gum and a dime, and he stuck it on the top, and he said: 'When I come back I'm gonna go up and get that dime.'"

The tears that follow make it clear that Larry never came back from Vietnam. Nick Virgilio described haiku as "a record of a moment of emotion keenly perceived that somehow links human nature to all nature." And he said that we should aim to "become more conscious of our feelings and to share these with other people." We constantly find that the more specific narratives are — the more based they are in the minutiae of other people's lives —

the more keenly we relate to them, irrespective of how distant to our own realities those narratives may be. It is a commonly repeated piece of advice among writers to write about what you know, and be as specific as possible because it is precisely this specificity of human life that is so universal. Nick himself says: “You explore this provincial you and you become universal,” you become “a tight little package of humanity,” and this poem is without doubt a tight little package of provincial humanity that is universal.

In the video, Nick talks about his belief that we all have haiku experiences, and that we should try to express them in “the least number of words possible,” starting with “the big scene first, then the little parts of the big scene” in order to create an effective “word painting.” (We could also consider haiku in cinematic terms. For example, the technique of this poem is akin to a zoom, or a series of cuts with each cut honing closer in on the key object of the scene.)

Nick definitely practiced what he preached — well-ordered, concise poems that detail very personal moments in honour of some universal humanity — and his command of the form was the result of a notoriously strict, almost monastic, work ethic. I have long been one of those poets that admittedly feels a bit snobbish about 5-7-5 haiku, and yet Nick’s 5-7-5 are sublime, and show no evidence of being in any way forced or contrived. He was also not afraid to use rhyme, which is often considered bad form in haiku. Here are two more haiku (both in the 5-7-5 metric and one of them rhyming) about his dead brother:

sixteenth autumn since:
barely visible grease marks
where he parked his car

on the darkened wall
of my dead brother’s bedroom:
the dates and how tall

The flagpole poem uses neither rhyme nor a 5-7-5 syllable count, but what is interesting is its syllabic symmetry: all three lines are of 6 syllables. I doubt

that he went in with the intention of writing a 3-line poem of 6-syllable lines, but I'm fairly sure that he would have been aware of the syllable count, and that he would have been conscious of the poetic effect of every word, sound, and rhythm. Haiku can often be quite anemic because writers are striving for some Zen simplicity, or intentionally un-poetic declaration (in keeping with the generally held belief that haiku is a non-poetic form, or at the very least a genre that eschews unnecessary poetics in favour of presenting things in their essential unadorned is-ness). This is true to a degree: overly poetic haiku often do suffer as a result, but that doesn't mean that a good haiku shouldn't have poetry. The cadence of this poem, the alliteration, the order and presentation of its constituent images, are all masterfully presented. The images may be of inanimate objects, and this still-life poem has no direct human subject acting in the poem (except retrospectively), but the result could not be more human . . . could not be more emotive. Here's one more haiku by Nick, who says it all better than I ever could.

adding father's name
to the family tombstone
with room for my own

For your service, Nick, we thank you.

While Marietta McGregor brings us to its pathos:

A first reading of this haiku reveals a single run-on idea without a definitive kire, comprising what appears to be a statement of simple fact, albeit an unusual and quite arresting one. From L1 and L2 we learn that someone has left something in an unusual place, a place they probably shouldn't have been. We imagine from those first two lines a dare-devil act, probably some youngster who has taken up a dare and scrambled monkey-like up the flagpole to deposit gum and stick a coin on top. Probably no more than a young teenager, this agile gum-chewer probably laughs with triumph at the top of the pole, having won the dare and left a token for posterity. He (and we find out it is a 'he' not a 'she' doing the climbing), doesn't think about

adult concerns such as respect for the flag or the slight disrespect in climbing the town flagpole that proudly flies the national standard. He's young, and he can do it, so he does! So far, so funny. Then when we begin further to deconstruct the poem a much sadder story emerges, one of great depth and breadth in time and space. The closing line. "my dead brother's dime" is a sudden shock dragging us into the 'now' reality. That laughing, devil-may-care boy is dead, while his brother lives on, older and sadder, possibly in the same town, or perhaps just revisiting the town they once lived in, remembering very well that day when his brother climbed so high, with a joyful flourish to mark his exploit. Knowing a little about Nick Virgilio's life helps with our further insights. His beloved brother met an untimely death in Vietnam, and he wrote many haiku in an elegy of mourning for his sibling. This haiku shows us how we are never free of a great loss, but by simply remembering them, we honour our loved ones. That little coin still stuck on gum way up up high is a kind of memento mori. This is a powerful haiku of great emotion, conveyed in the most unadorned of words, and all the stronger for that.

And Tom Sacramona sums it all up:

Nick Virgilio wrote the haiku above, the subject of this week's re:Virals, memorializing his youngest brother, Larry, who died in the Vietnam War:

deep in rank grass,
through a bullet-riddled helmet:
an unknown flower
in memory of Lawrence J. Virgilio

Nick Virgilio's elegiac poem "atop the town flagpole" is a perfect English-language haiku exemplifying the mood Basho wrote his best work conveying (Basho's autumn poem about a crow [or crows] squatting on the withered branch comes to mind). Nick is separated from his brother Larry, the distance felt is realistically too immense but, as poet, Virgilio uses concrete imagery to render objects for comparison — he chooses a small child and

a tall flagpole at the center of town, maybe also the center of this child (or young man's) world. Of course, this "child" is from Nick's memory. (Tony Virgilio, Nick's middle brother, discusses this haiku in a video remembering Nick,(1) and he places this poem a few days or weeks before Larry goes off to war, saying he will be back to get it. We may therefore assume Larry is 18 years old in the haiku, but the poet having the haiku moment, Nick Virgilio, is probably more than twice Larry's age, still mourning the loss of a beloved brother). If not a "child," Larry is certainly still "child-like" in his knowledge about the world. Larry had yet to experience the horrors of war before he climbed and put that gob of bubblegum (and symbol of innocence) atop the town flagpole.

The reader may also assume it's an American flag, which on a number of occasions Nick Virgilio writes about remembering, perhaps with a pang of irony, that Larry died fighting for his country in an unpopular war. Arguably, the incongruity between reality and expectation resulting from the true outcome of the Vietnam War provides a backdrop Virgilio uses when exploring the flag as symbol in other poems as well ("always returning/ to the flag-covered coffin:/ dragonfly").

In "atop the town flagpole," the mood is somehow lighter despite its content, and, amazingly, the poem exudes a childhood wonder and adult regret, innocence which had its risks and rewards. So Nick gives the pole to the reader as an image to depict the emotional distance he felt, as well as suggest a metaphorical replacement of reverence for country with reverence for his brother, which the physical objects Virgilio chooses and their placement (and replacement) in the poem implies, i.e., the bubblegum receives the emphasis and the poet's attention rather than the American flag.

In addition, one could make a case for Christian overtones in Virgilio's use of the spatial attitude of the pole, pointing/leading the eye towards the heavens, where Larry may still be, implying some part of his brother remains, and is looking down. However, I am sometimes left feeling very cold after reading this, and feel that maybe more of its power as a poetic piece comes from the contrast between its shared exploration of themes of presence and absence.

References:

(1) Dougherty, Sean. (2015). remembering Nick Virgilio. YouTube. April 16, 2015. Retrieved on July 24, 2017.

As this week's winner, Tom gets to select the next poem.

REVIRALS 00

unable

to get hibiscus red

the artist eats the flower

— Raymond Roseliep (*Step on the Rain*, 1977)

Carol Jones takes us in an unexpected direction:

There seems to be a strong emotion of frustration in the poem, and maybe a little humour also. On first reading I could feel the artist agonising to produce the perfect colour for the botanical subject before him, a need so great that to have a better understanding of the colour he eats the flower and hopes the taste will enhance his awareness of producing the correct hue, (some people, it is said, can taste colours) only to find that his frustration has gone, a feeling of calm has taken over and realises the plant is of more benefit inside him and stress has gone.

But there is also the fact that many people turn from conventional medication when all avenues have been exhausted to find that magic potion to cure ailments and return the body to its healthy mode. Some of the herbal remedies are hit and miss and many need more investigation before ingesting. How desperate a patient must be to take chances by taking in a, supposed, excellent remedy that may do more harm than good. I think this poem will bring forth anxiety and apprehension in the healthiest of people that read it. The question I ask myself — how far would I go, what would I do to rid myself of unwanted ailments? A thought-provoking poem.

As this week's winner, Carol gets to select the next poem.

REsVIRALS 100

election year
not knowing what to make
of the sky

— Michael Henry Lee (*full of moonlight: The Haiku Society of America Members' Anthology* 2016)

Marion Clarke recommends cloud-gazing:

This haiku of Michael Henry Lee's really made me smile. Trying to find logic in the world of politics is often a futile exercise — we might as well just lie back on the grass and watch cloud formations.

As this week's winner, Marion gets to choose next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 101

This new posting is a bit of milestone — not only does it mark the beginning of a new century of re:Virals, but it also announces a changing of the guard. Jim Kacian, who administered those first hundred posts, has handed this on to Danny Blackwell, who is looking forward to your insights into a whole new collection of poems. Please support Danny with your very best commentary.

morning prayer . . .
an orchid absorbs
the sound of bees

— Hansha Teki (*Multiverses* 1:1, 9 October 2013)

Dan Schwerin meditates on the droning of bees, borne back ceaselessly into the orchid:

Hansha Teki has given us something to contemplate. The first line, ‘morning prayer,’ is followed by space and time. A prayer in the morning may be to orient, or simply the start of a day’s practice. This haiku is not flat-footed about conveying some answer, but in space and time we see, ‘an orchid absorbs the sound of bees.’ An orchid is refinement, the heights of creation among us. Such refinement absorbs the drone in a way that is set beside the prayer. In space and time an orchid can take in the same tired droning and reflect beauty back. In *The Great Gatsby*, orchids convey perfection among characters such as Daisy, Myrtle, and Carraway. After spent opportunities for love there are, ‘dying orchids on the floor.’ The orchid of this haiku is not on an arc of momentary love, but absorbs the sound of bees. This orchid takes in the sound of bees and gives us back beauty and refinement.

Mary Stevens finds a quieting of the mind:

In prayer, we verbalize: directing our speech, aloud or within, to some greater power for guidance, comfort, intervention, forgiveness, or to express gratitude. Even its less chatty sister, meditation, while usually conducted in

silence, often starts with setting an intention, and can result in receiving guidance. In this way, prayer or meditation is a kind of conversation. But at some point in both practices there comes a quieting of the mind — a silence as subtle as a bee's buzzing becoming muffled upon deeper entry into the sweetness of a flower.

Alan Summers finds himself reaching for love and science:

The haiku had me looking up the science. I first of all found that plants are useful to businesses because they absorb sound so well:

“Noise reduction is one of those less-known benefits of plants. Plants are used in many applications to reduce noise. Plants can also greatly reduce unwanted noise inside buildings. When sound waves hit a flexible material, the material will vibrate and the waves are transformed into other forms of energy as well as being deflected in other directions.”

Extract from: How Plants Reduce Noise Levels Indoors
by Senior Horticulturist, Ambius, Matt Kostelnick (May 2013)

I also wanted to get underneath the natural history part of the science, so on with my faithful searching and of course I find there's a particular orchid, for a very good reason or reasons:

“The Bee Orchid gets its name from its main pollinator — the bee — which is thought to have driven the evolution of the flowers. To attract the pollinating bees, the plant has evolved bee-like flowers; drawing them in with the promise of love . . .”

Reaching for the science I realised “of course, it's all about love!” Not the sentimentalised side of love, perhaps, but the essential drive of all things even mildly sentient, including humans, for love, for merging.

So I was blown away by the haiku after my research. We all look for love, often in the strangest, craziest places and manner of methods. So why not have a single orchid as a symbol of love quietening even the planet's

population of bees? Why not? Orchids are symbolic in many ways, including that of perfection, which so many strive for, sometimes instead of love and affection, and of innocence. And in a time of great upheaval, when there is great destruction of natural beauty, and of common sense and decency, and of community, I concur that in an era of madness and ignorance, why not have morning prayers to begin a day.

I have delved into the science, and love, but have I gone into the poem, just as the orchid itself has designed the bee to go deeper?

I go back to the juxtaposition, and that morning prayer that gains an ellipsis, and having experienced something intimate, and perhaps we could call it divine, the ellipsis is well placed both for poetical pause, but also that mystical silence filled with sound, that can be experienced in meditation.

The middle line is intriguing, which is why I began a circuitous route of investigation about how an orchid absorbs. True, without the ellipsis we could have a hinge line suggesting, or leading the reader to deliberately “misread” that the orchid is either absorbing the morning prayers, which may or may sound like bees, or both.

An arresting haiku from start to finish, and again it’s proved, at least to me, that some of our best examples of haiku deserve re-reading, and not brushing over if their surface level meaning is not conveniently accessible.

The haiku is also a good case that sometimes a stronger verb, rather than one that sinks into the background, can really set up ripples for the reader, if they care to dip their toe into the pond a little more.

Sheila Sondik thinks that plants may line the path to religion:

We read and interpret the first line through our human filters. Someone is praying, aloud or silently, or overhearing another’s prayer. In the rest of the poem an orchid receives the bees’ sound, which the flower may absorb as a form of prayer. Each partner, the flower and the bee, is dependent on the other — the bees for sustenance, the flower for pollination, which insures the survival of the species into the next generation.

A number of years ago, I took several botany classes at botanical gardens, I was awed by the complexity and elegance of the structures and biological

systems of plants. One of the most amazing topics was the coevolution of orchid species and their specific pollinators. The orchid and its particular bee may, indeed, loom godlike to one another.

While I was attending these botany classes, I often thought that the study of plants was the surest way to acquire religion. I think the writer of this haiku may have had a similar experience. It was delightful to reencounter that experience expressed so beautifully in this haiku.

Sandra Simpson deals with the problems of kigo, and elaborates on orchid pollination:

In the Chinese tradition of brush painting the orchid is a signifier of spring, although Yuki Teikei's kigo lists orchid as an autumn word while Higginson's online list has it as mid-spring or autumn (two different types of orchid, presumably). Where I live *Cymbidium* orchids, one of the most easily grown types and able to be grown outside, start flowering in late winter.

But whatever the season – and I intuit late winter or spring – it's a fine day, as honeybees don't work on wet days or when it's too windy. Maybe the poet is inside gazing at an orchid with the windows open or maybe he is outside with his mind open! I don't believe he is at a place of worship but rather see him alone, praying in his own way.

Some flowers, including some orchids, are constructed so that bees and bumblebees have to dive headfirst down into the bloom to get at the pollen – the bee sound we can hear may be coming from inside the flower. Can you see the petals trembling and hear the buzz? The idea that the flower has become the bee's buzz gives this haiku an echo of Basho's famous poem: a bee / staggers out / of the peony (Hass translation).

As a hobby grower of orchids, the last thing I want is a bee pollinating the flower – because it then discolours and dies! The longer the flowers stay unpollinated, the longer they stay pristine on the stem (of course, I'm speaking generally – the orchid family is one of the largest plant groups in the world so there are plenty that flower for only short periods, pollinated or no). It may take years to get some orchids to flower in 'captivity' so a stem of flowers can sometimes seem like a miracle (or, indeed, an answer to a prayer)!

So this haiku may be read (for the human, the orchid and the bees) beyond the miracle of being alive to the certainty of death and, thanks to pollination, back to the miracle of life. (Yes, Simba it is truly a circle.)

Anyone keen on orchids native to their country will, of course, want and need bees (or other specialist pollinators) to do their job and help create the next generation of plants. Humans have wreaked havoc on native orchid populations around the world – clearing forest habitat, draining wetlands, spraying meadowland or even, as in Turkey and now Iran, eating them to extinction!

The poet has put together three things that happened in a moment and formed a set of beads that is a prayer in itself, a prayer for the good of the planet, for the small things that inhabit it, for our continued survival to appreciate moments such as these.

As this week's winner, Sandra gets to choose next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 102

a last year's lambskin where mushrooms gather dusk
— Lorin Ford (First place, Katikati Haiku Contest 2014)

Sandra Simpson kindly offers us an edited and expanded version of her report as judge for the 2014 Katikati contest:

A haiku that takes me straight back to my childhood — I can feel/hear the wind in the old macrocarapa trees as I stand looking at the scene — but it also a poem that demonstrates an expert grasp of language, rhythm and technique and is, I believe, an example of what Martin Lucas meant by “haiku as poetic spell.”

We have *mono no aware* (a certain melancholy that all things must pass) which is put into the context of the “circle of life” — the lamb’s carcass has nurtured the fungi which may yet feed the poet. (By the way, edible mushrooms grow only where sheep have been, not cattle.) And we have *ma*, the ‘negative space’ that gives us room to enter; the space between the words, the silence between the sounds. There is also a choice of whether to put a break between ‘gather’ and ‘dusk’, which adds to haiku’s mystery.

Although lambs denote spring, here we have the much darker “lambskin” and in the context of an open field or paddock the effect of the word is decidedly chilly. The skin is all that’s left of one of the spring births of the previous year — the carcass has been lying in all weathers and available to all carrion feeders for 18 months, long enough for the flesh to have been stripped and/or nourished the surrounding soil.

The season word is ‘mushrooms’, denoting autumn, supported by the gathering dusk, which may be read literally or as a metaphor for the close of life (‘dying of the light’).

Most words are single syllable which adds to the rhythm, while the repeated ‘m’ and ‘s’ sounds quieten the tone of the poem (there’s only one harsh consonant) allowing me to picture the quiet way nature has gone about the business of reclaiming her own.

Danny Blackwell explores the poem's "duende":

This poem, which won the 2014 Katikati haiku contest, has been called a "complex, profound and mysterious poem."

To begin with, let us look briefly at the monoku as a form. An interesting feature of an unpunctuated monoku is its implicit ambiguity, which generally requires us to go forwards and backwards in order to uncover, among the multiple possible readings, the reading we feel most apt. This experience is analogous to the way we unconsciously process melody in music. As Ferrara states in *Philosophy and the analysis of music, bridges to musical sound, form and reference*: "We continually modify the original tone as the rest of the melody continues to be played. Each tone is both now and retained (undergoing continuous modification) in our consciousness. Too often we think of past, present and future as residing within different compartments of time . . . rather the past is experienced as achievement or as foundation, modifiable by present and future events. Thus, the past itself contains new possibilities."

So, should we read the poem as "mushrooms gather dusk"? Or "mushrooms gather. dusk"?

The fact that mushrooms are usually gathered, using the passive tense, means that the first reading — that of seeing mushrooms as active gatherers — creates a disconcerting sensation. And when we see that they gather something as abstract as "dusk" we are even more alienated from a simple reading.

The possible alternative reading of "mushrooms gather. dusk" is an equally poetic one. The idea of mushrooms gathering together, and doing it during a crepuscular moment seems particularly pagan.

And no less poetic is the simple reading of a spot of mushrooms gathered together by natural forces.

This poem, for me, has what Lorca called "duende" that difficult to define dark essence that pervades all great poetic utterance. The Spanish word *duende* literally means elf or goblin, or some similarly mysterious, and often mischievous, supernatural being. The term is closely aligned with flamenco music, and many aficionados will praise an artist or a performance that

has duende (and conversely disqualify others in which duende is absent). Lorca refers to duende as that “mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained.” And some of Lorca’s comments on the essence of duende are not a million miles away from the Japanese idea of wabi-sabi, with its focus on the beauty of the imperfect and the ephemeral. In the 1933 lecture on duende that he gave in Buenos Aires, Lorca said the following:

“The hut, the wheel of a cart, the razor, and the prickly beards of shepherds, the barren moon, the flies, the damp cupboards, the rubble, the lace-covered saints, the wounding lines of eaves and balconies, in Spain grow tiny weeds of death, allusions and voices, perceptible to an alert spirit, that fill the memory with the stale air of our own passing.”

(Translation by A. S. Kilne)

Are the mushrooms in Lorin Ford’s haiku a symbol of life, and of dark fecundity, or are they “tiny weeds of death”? Perhaps they are both.

Finally, the use of the phrase “last year” in a haiku may often lead us to read the poem as a new year poem of sorts, and perhaps we could imagine this haiku as one that speaks to some enigmatic ritual of nature, occurring in that moment between worlds — between light and dark, between an exiting season and the entering one, the old world and the new. Between life and death.

Poetry can certainly help us learn how come to terms with “negative capability,” an elusive term coined by poet John Keats that refers to an ability to exist in accord with “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason.” And Lorca’s comment that the duende “draws close to places where forms fuse in a yearning beyond visible expression” makes me think of the complex, profound and mysterious fusion of elements in this haiku.

Last year, Lambskin, Mushrooms, Dusk. I don’t know precisely what relationship all these elements have. But I’m okay with that for the moment. Why?

Because this poem has duende!

Hansha Teki is familiar with the scenery:

As one responds immediately to the music of Lorin Ford's haiku, the images attain a vivid familiarity for those of us who know the annual death and rebirth cycle of stock farming. While wandering over the farm, it is not uncommon to come across a small white fleece that is all that remains of a mostly decomposed body of a weather-slain lamb. Fungi are at work reclaiming the slower decaying wool that failed to protect the lamb from the harshness of the weather. The image in the haiku presents an almost maternal action of the fungi gathering life from the gathering darkness of death.

In New Zealand it is not uncommon to find such remains while gathering mushrooms in the warmer season. Echoing the image of the fleshly decay under the white lambskin is the dark underbelly of a white mushroom that becomes our food.

For those of us who are practicing Eucharistic Catholics, the suggestion of the Lamb of God is unavoidable.

As this week's winner, Hansha gets to choose next week's haiku.

RE:VIRALS 103

eye of the whale
the center
is everywhere

— Michelle Tennison (*murmuration*, Red Moon Press, 2016)

Clayton Beach discovers there is more than just loneliness:

This haiku has an immediate sense of vastness, opening as it does with a gaze into the eye of a leviathan. The reader is immediately dwarfed by a sense of the great expanse of the ocean and the endlessness of nature. For most readers this will be a disorienting, foreign image, few having dived with whales, but we can imagine ourselves under water, face-to-eye with the giant and feeling so tiny and insignificant. Those who have swum in the open ocean know that it is a deeply humbling experience, with nothing but miles of blue around us — while out of our element the ocean can be truly awesome and terrifying. Here, the existential terror of the “pale blue dot” effect is softened by the sentient gaze of our distant mammalian cousin, the soft, wise look of cetacean intelligence that is so alien and yet sparks a feeling of connection and heightened intimacy as only a brush with such a wild, free and magnificent creature can do. Through the whale, we are brought into the embrace of the ocean and all its magnitude without being overwhelmed by our own diminution.

“The center” could refer to the pupil of the whale, but on a deeper level I take it to refer to that feeling of being unmoored in the vastness of the sea, where the center truly feels everywhere, and land seems only a faint memory, equally distant in every direction. As we lose our sense of self, the center becomes that of impersonal nature, something at our core that belongs to everything and exists everywhere, so this haiku actually exhibits a fair amount of Bashō’s conception of *sabi* — but there is more than just loneliness, there is connection as well. It exhibits a complex and layered mix of the humbling, raw intensity of impersonal nature with the almost magical intimacy of the brief connection with an otherworldly creature, and the

subsequent expansion of consciousness as we merge with the infinite in our poetic thought-space and allow ourselves to be immersed in the dark ocean of the mind.

The ocean is associated with the unconscious, dreams and our primordial past, with the chaotic, unformed space at the center of the womb, and all of these elements swirl in the currents of the mind, gravitating toward the inescapable singularity of the gaze in the “eye of the whale,” truly an instance of when “you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you.”

Danny Blackwell gazes into the eye of a duck, and the eye of the duck gazes back at him:

Question: What do we have in this haiku?

Answer: The eye of a whale.

I am, of course, referring to the concrete nouns we can easily pin down. Obviously the poem is reaching for much more than that, with its philosophically ambiguous assertion that “the centre is everywhere.” As this poem is somewhat elusive, it may seem acceptable to investigate the connections we make, and the symbolism that occurs, when we talk about whales, and about centres. (All of which is perhaps a roundabout way of prefacing some rather subjective digressions, for which I apologize in advance.)

I recently came across a fascinating article in Catalan called “Cocodrils i balenes a les esglésies” (“Crocodiles and Whales in Churches”) by Joan de Déu Domènch.

The author of the essay says that in the past the appearance of a whale provoked a question that nowadays might seem insignificant: “What does this mean?”

(A question we find ourselves asking in regard to this haiku.) In the old dairies referenced in the essay we find people including the beaching of whales alongside portentous events such as eclipses, storms and comets, and Domènch’s essay goes on to show how the word “monster” is derived from a Latin word that means more or less, “indication” or “warning.” The

whale bones most frequently found in churches are the ribs, which are more often than not placed outside the church, in front of the doorways. (Obviously this was a habit in lands here whales were not common and were therefore considered almost mythical beings.) The symbolism behind this, of penetrating into the belly of the whale through this symbolically charged church portal, might be further explored in the myth of Jonah and the Whale. And what better spirit guide to explore this myth than Joseph Campbell:

“The whale represents the personification, you might say, of all that is in the unconscious. (. . .) In reading these things psychologically, water is the unconscious. The creature in the water would be dynamism of the unconscious, which is dangerous and powerful, and has to be controlled by consciousness.”

Ultimately the conflict is resolved in the Jonah and the whale myth with the hero killing and assimilating the monster, in order to transcend humanity and, “reassociated himself with the powers of nature, which are the powers of our life, from which our mind removes us.”

Campbell closes by saying that we are deceiving ourselves when we think that our consciousness is in control, stating that consciousness is “a secondary organ of a total human being,” which must submit to something greater.

Admittedly Tennyson’s haiku is not about being inside the whale, but it is difficult not to have these symbols peopling the depths as we read the haiku. And Campbell’s assertion that the “I” that we think is in control is not the centre — and his comments about the symbolism of water and whales — gives us pause for thought.

On an even more askew tangent, I found that upon reading about the “eye of the whale,” in relation to some mysterious “centre,” I could not help thinking of David Lynch’s comments on the eye of a duck. The following quote is taken from an audio transcript which I have edited slightly for easier reading:

“You know, nature can teach us a lot of things, and there’s something about, in painting, you’re working within a certain shaped canvas and

there's many things that one does intuitively — to move the eye, you know. There's repetition of shape, there's repetition of color, but when you start looking at a duck, you see your eye is moving in a certain way, and you see textures and colors and shapes and you start wondering about a duck, what it can teach us about, you know, any kind of abstract painting, or proportions or even sequences, scenes . . . and it always is interesting that the eye is in the perfect place — if you move it to the body, it would get lost, if you move to the leg or the beak it's two fast areas competing, even though the eye is the fastest.”

Here the interviewer interrupts Lynch to ask him what he means by slow and fast and this is the response:

“An empty room is a certain speed, and a person standing there is another speed, and that proportion can be beautiful, if the room is a 2 and the person is a 7 — I think a person is around a 7. Fire and electricity can go up to a 9, for instance, or a really intricately designed decorative room is pretty disturbing, sometimes. It's too fast. But then if you put something slow in it, it could work beautifully. A busy room and a person, they fight each other. It's a relationship thing, I think. Fast and slow areas.”

Lynch's comments, in turn, got me thinking about the Pythagorean concept of *musica universalis*, also referred to as harmony of the spheres, which is a now pretty much discredited but nonetheless enduring idea that the celestial bodies of the sun, moon, and planets produce sounds (inaudible to the human ear) that define our understanding of harmony in music. It is evident that in order for harmony to work we generally need a home key or tonic note — a centre, so to speak, to which everything else is held in relation. Lynch's ideas of number — where a person is around a 7 and fire can go up to a 9 — presuppose some sense of implicit cosmic balance. And we can actually find some cosmic constants that are allied with our instinctive aesthetic judgments in things such as the Golden Ratio of mathematics. The Golden Ratio is not necessarily about a centre (it is more similar to the photographic idea of the rule of thirds) but it seems to imply that there is

indeed an underlying order to the world — at least on the surface. Scientists, especially in quantum physics, seem to offer us models of the world based alternatively on order or chaos. Is the centre spoken of in Tennyson's poem a stable reference point, or is it a concept in flux? The poem under discussion might be interestingly juxtaposed with Larry Gates's haiku (included in *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years*):

passing whale's eye . . .
the islands on the horizon
sink and rise again

So what, then, is this elusive “centre” that gives us a reference point? Maybe we will never know. Maybe it is indeed everywhere. And perhaps we need to think in terms of what are the right questions, more than what are the definitive answers. Or what are the best doubts. Some prefer to explore the mystery with science, some with gods, and others with poetry. Whichever we opt for, it would seem, for the time being at least, that haiku is still available for offering up more mysteries.

Hansha Teki allows the image to sink in:

This poem has an immediate visual impact that accretes richer overlays of significance as one allows the image sink in. My memory first refocuses on images of the mass stranding of about 400 pilot whales in a remote part of NZ in February this year, the biggest of 85 strandings that occur each year in parts of NZ. We even have an organisation called Project Jonah that mobilises stranding rescue operations.

The first line of Tennyson's haiku also calls to mind spyhopping orcas such as I have witnessed off the Kaikoura Coast. The whale's eyes may be seen slightly above or below the surface of the water, enabling it to see whatever is nearby on the sea's surface.

God's words, from the heart of the tempest, to Job in the King James Bible translation “Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?” also rise to the surface as does the story of Jonah and the whale forever accompanied for me

by the music of John Taverner's "The Whale".

The next two lines allude to Jorge Luis Borges' essay "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal" in which Borges posits that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors.

In his *Pensées*, Pascal had written "Let him contemplate all nature in its awful and finished magnificence; let him observe that splendid luminary, set forth as an eternal lamp to enlighten the universe; let him view the earth as a mere speck within the vast circuit described by that luminary; let him think with amazement, that this vast circuit itself is only a minute point, compared with that formed by the revolutions of the stars . . . All that we see in of the creation, is but an almost imperceptible streak in the vast expanse of the universe. No idea can approximate its immense extent . . . This is an infinite sphere, the center of which is everywhere, but its circumference nowhere. In short, it is one of the greatest sensible evidences of the almightiness of God, that our imagination is overwhelmed by these reflections."

In a mind-blowing three lines Tennyson has given us the latest intonation of an enduring metaphor.

As this week's winner, Clayton to choose next week's poem.

RE:VIRALS 104

inside a bat's ear
a rose
opens to a star
— Eve Luckrig (*Roadrunner* 11:3)

Matt Katch searches for new enchantments:

Using traditional forms in writing poetry, whether it be a villanelle, a ghazal, or some other form, carries with it two considerations: the structure, which is often rigid, and any traditions as to content. Haiku writers and fans perhaps know this better than anyone. And in a realm of restrictions, we continue to search for new enchantments. Eve Luckring's poem opens up in both distinctively literal and figurative ways, yielding an interesting approach to haiku that dances along these lines of tradition. Experiencing the hidden joys of the natural world is essentially what the majority of haiku do, and this is no exception.

First, from the literal standpoint is the action of actually looking at a bat's ear. The initial shape of many bats' ears is that of a rose petal. Deep down inside the ear, inside the concha, the entrance to the ear canal can resemble a star shape. Of course, one could interpret the shapes differently, as well; perhaps an inverted heart leading to a tiny cave. The point being that the choice of images to describe the ear has its significance in what it symbolizes in a more metaphorical sense — and is also meaningful with regards to the images the author did not choose.

Both a rose and a star have an enchanting quality to them. They are things commonly used as objects of beauty. The lines also each reference a different part of the natural world. The bat is an animal, the rose is a plant, and the star is a part of the greater cosmos. In keeping with the tradition of haiku often involving a human observer, this combination of animals, plants, and the universe, as well as the idea of looking directly into a bat's ear, is itself very much a human perspective.

If taken less literally, there's almost a surreal quality to the lines. Given the concrete nature of the images, it is not hard to imagine a rose opening up onto a universe inside a bat's ear, like layered images in a Kubrick flick. It creates a lovely sequence whereby literally looking inside a bat's ear, we see the real shapes morph into powerfully evocative images; a mirage of ever-expanding relationships is superimposed over but a piece of a flesh-and-blood creature — it's actually pretty romantic, I think.

The true measure of a great haiku comes at its turn. While the final line of a haiku can elicit some sense of peace and calm, often enough it is a source of surprise or reflection. It's the third act twist that everyone ends up talking about exiting the movie theater, and depending on how they talk about it and respond to it . . . well, that can make or break the poem. In a form that has such limited space to work with, all choices face that much more scrutiny, and of course none so much as what we will see in that final line. A bat's ear and a rose, though impressive images, are small, but as we move down to the closing line something shockingly tremendous emerges: a star. It is a greatness concealed in a place we would not have thought to look for it. Behold both a symbol and source of wonder.

The author's choice in using traditional imagery is also an interesting one. I think it speaks to a bit of a Modernist attitude. In the same way that, say, stone is a stand in for altar or wood is a stand in for a Christian cross, having simply a rose and not a more specific variety like an amber flush, or having a star and not a pulsar, allows for the words to be more emblematic. The words with the weight of tradition are allowed to stand as they always have, but inside a new, somewhat unexpected, environment. That is the essence of this poem: a strict adherence to traditional symbols given a unique source. While I mentioned that the last line should be treated as essential, it is the opening line that most intrigues and leads us to that somewhat old-fashioned style miracle. In a contemporary culture where novels can be sold based on the impact of their opening gambit alone, this feels entirely appropriate. It's a marvelous way to approach the past, keeping old truths alive without sacrificing entertainment and originality.

It may seem an oxymoron to call a simple, cliché image like a star something original, but it's not the star we need focus on — we should just let that

sweep us off our feet — it's what evoked the strong feeling when we didn't even see it coming.

Hansha Teki seeks some reverberations here:

In poems such as this one by Luckring, it is somewhat meaningless to analyse it for 'meaning,' but one can pay attention to the reverberations it sounds out in oneself as reader or listener.

The first line opens up layer after layer of resonance in this reader/listener. A bat's external ear functionally aids its dependence on echolocation for navigation and, being 'as blind as a bat,' for building up acoustic space and image of the world beyond itself. Playing on the sound of the word 'auricle' I think of an 'oracle' within, or a blind Tiresias, delivering divine communication.

As I hear the first line I seem to hear, in the background, Ariel's song from *The Tempest*, joyously celebrating the interconnectedness of the observable natural world of sight and sound. The image of the cowslip's bell, the flight on the bat's back, overlapping the cowslip's ear in the fairy's song from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* establish sense routes from the originating 'bat's ear' image:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I.
In a cowslip's bell I lie.
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.
I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

A rose, acoustically imaged inside the bat's ear as it echolocates its way around for food or nectar, opens the listener up to a poetic cosmos beyond oneself just as the bat builds up and opens up an acoustic map of its surroundings.

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” — Anaïs Nin

Lorin Ford also finds Shakespeare lurking:

Roses, the flowers, open to sunlight. Bats are night creatures that rely on their sense of hearing. How does a bat know when it's time to wake? What if there is something in a bat's ear that opens to the evening star (Venus)? Why not call it a rose? I like Juliet's argument: “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II. Scene II.)

Whatever the technical names for the inner parts of a bat's ear are, those parts are perfect in their function: elegant, beautiful. They are so, whatever name we might give them. Eve Lueckring has given those parts the name of 'rose', which is a symbol of beauty. A symbol is a symbol is a symbol. (Apologies to Gertrude Stein) By an association of the workings of a bat's ear with beauty, elegance and delicacy, the poet enables us to appreciate the perfection and interconnection of the bat's ear with the universe as it is.

Clayton Beach echolocates more possible literary allusions:

I chose this ku for commentary this week because I found it both appealing on a superficial level of pure imagery and mysteriously suggestive of further depths of meaning. It has a nebulous sense of potentiality but doesn't provide any solid answers, and yet it is not so impossibly hermeneutic as to be unintelligible or off-puttingly obscurantist.

From the most literal perspective, we have a sequential, changing morphology of images that gives a sense of constriction — the rough convolutions of the bat's ear ridges pull into the spiral of a rose which closes into the pinprick of a star, at the end of the poem one can even sense the star blinking out into nothingness. It is not quite a standard, parallel association, but more the technique of gradual transformation. Interestingly, there is both expansion, the tiny bat's ear, the larger rose, the immensity of a star, and yet, a feeling of constriction and pulling into the center as we start at the edges of the ear, enter the roseate spiral and follow it to the center, a quantum state

of simultaneity, where we are stretched infinitely large while entering the infinitesimally small.

Whorls—Fibonacci spirals—are ubiquitous in both nature and art, and we find haiku poets drawn again and again to their allure. The whorl of the human ear is a common subject of haiku, it brings to my mind this ku by Kenji Ōnishi:

少女の耳たとえば花いろかたつむり

a little girl's ear,
for example; a snail the color
of cherry blossoms

In Luckring's ku, however, she has opted away from the obviously traditional image of the human ear to use something foreign and disconcerting: the ear of a bat. Bat's ears come in a myriad of shapes and bring to mind the wonder of specialism through evolution, evoking changes that occur on a grand, cosmic scale, and yet also the tiny, delicate, and trembling creature that barrels through the night sky in search of insect prey. The bat's ear also brings to mind the idea of "seeing" through hearing, a synaesthetic effect that is almost akin to seeing through the third eye, suggesting divine intelligence and otherworldly perception.

The rose, then, can be a rose-shaped part of the bat's ear, or if taken as a new image after the cut provided by the line break, a fresh image of traditional beauty. It serves then as a pivot word (*kakekotoba* in Japanese theory) that allows us to take two meanings from it depending on whether it is connected to the first or third line. If we tie it into the next line, "opens to a star," we have a surrealist image of the infinite contained in a small, delicate rose blossom — to "hold infinity in the palm of your hand" (Blake). Now our sense of smell is evoked and mingled with a sense of wonder. Yet there is also the possibility of a mental image of a rose-shaped nebula deep in space with a single star shining at the center, as T. S. Eliot wrote:

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear,
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

This has always been one of my favorite passages in *The Hollow Men*, and I don't think it's a stretch to assume Luckring intended the allusion, given the consistent sophistication of her work and how many parallels there are to it — “sightless,” as the bat of the first line, then the multifoliate rose of the second line opening into the perpetual star—this adds even more depth and mystery, a kind of religious awe and wonder to the *ku*, with the final star transforming into the searing eye of God high in the unforgiving, desolate sky of death's dream kingdom. While there is heavy Christian symbolism in Eliot's poem, we could also view the mysterious depth we find in the *ku* as an example of the Japanese aesthetic called *yūgen*.

As all of these ideas swirl in the whorl of our mind, the inchoate will coalesce, and suddenly we connect all three images together, treating them as one, which provides a glimpse of the bat, with a roseate ear shape, darting through the evening sky when its ear toward the heavens and hears, for an instant, starlight — the music of the spheres — this creates a delicious inversion of the opening synaesthesia of “sound as sight,” which we saw from the human perspective, but now we have the bat's perspective as it “hears” the light of a star.

This haiku is both sensuously engaging and confusing with its multiple levels of synaesthesia, it contains worlds within worlds within worlds as infinities spring from infinities that sprout from nothing and shrink back into the void again, a shifting, mercurial mindscape — utterly masterful in its use of brevity and minimalism for maximal effect.

Nathan Sydney wonders about the batness of a bat:

If haiku is the art of imagistic juxtaposition then we must give Eve's poem a full 10 out of 10. Here we have three images that at first seem to have no connection whatsoever, standing together to create a very puzzling impression indeed. I've never given much thought to the inside of a bat's ear, but we're probably many of us familiar with the question and famous essay "What is it like to be a bat?" and even more familiar with the question of "What's in a name?" Does the poet wish to suggest that the mystery of a bat's consciousness (a rose by any other name), whatever we wish to call it, is a mystery opening upon the very beginnings of the universe, a mystery akin to the nature of light? That no matter what clever words we have for brains and minds and neural correlates of consciousness, that ultimately the batness of a bat will be as forever out of our grasp as light from a distant star. But possibly as close as the light of our own minds? Of course the meaning could be much more concrete than that, perhaps the folds of the bat's ears simply suggest to Eve the petals of a rose? Do those ear petals open upon the celestial singing of the spheres? Certainly we are all aware of a bat's super keen powers of hearing, hearing so finely attuned that maybe they can detect the blooming of a rose or star. I must admit this haiku leaves a great big question mark for me, there's no simple reading that I can find, but us moderns are very happy to not have everything spelled out in our poetry, to have to work a little or a lot for our revelation. If there was a haiku moment behind the genesis of this poem, it must have been a very singular one indeed!

As this week's winner, Matt gets to choose next week's poem.

END OF YEAR TWO