

This Week's Montage

—*Frontiers*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

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The history of haiku, like that of any art form, is an ongoing dialectic between traditional conventions and avant-garde innovation. Perpetuate only the same structures and subject matter, and the result is stagnation; conversely, stretch things too far in a quest for originality, and the result may be unrecognizable as haiku. The trick is to “make it new” (in Ezra Pound’s famous phrase) without unmaking it. That requires daring and imagination, along with deep knowledge of what has come before. The late William J. Higginson greeted the publication of Fay Aoyagi’s *Chrysanthemum Love* as a watershed event evincing just these traits: “In this one book, Fay Aoyagi has lassoed and galloped beyond most of what we have learned about how to write American haiku in five decades, and opened the way to a new century” (*Modern Haiku*, 35.2, 2004). Aoyagi brought to English haiku a new sensibility and subjectivity that expanded our idea of what haiku could be; yet, in terms of both form and seasonal references, her haiku are often quite traditional. Peter Yovu, in an influential essay for *Frogpond* (31.1, 2008), explicitly challenged English-language haiku poets to “Do Something Different” in terms of syntax and content—and has often practiced what he preached. And Scott Metz, editor of the avant-garde online journal *Roadrunner* and author of a glowing review of Aoyagi’s second book, *In Borrowed Shoes*, is one of the most innovative and challenging younger poets at work in haiku, both in terms of structure and subject matter. Together, the work of these three poets helps define the “frontiers” of early twenty-first-century haiku.

Fay Aoyagi (b. 1956)

Peter Yovu (b. 1949)

Scott Metz (b. 1976)

Nagasaki anniversary—
I push
the mute button

unexpected pregnancy
she spits out
watermelon seeds

intact zero fighter
at the Smithsonian—
cherry blossom rain

hint of autumn
I rewind
a Kurosawa film

summer festival—
my Astro Boy mask
has lost its power

letters offering
o% APR...
lotus seeds pop

winter roses—
I am tired of reading
between the lines

1–3 from *Chrysanthemum Love* (Blue Willow Press, 2003)
4–7 from *In Borrowed Shoes* (Blue Willow Press, 2006)

the river floor—
crayfish walking across
a mosaic of light

the owl’s flight unheard stars appear

sunlight through
the thin white blouse she
holds up folds and puts away

my penciled life—
I bow
to the Eraser

the rain opens
thousands of eyes
in a peacock

in a seed I don’t know the answer

we come
here: beneath the waves
the rest of the ocean

1 from *Turn to the Earth* (Saki Press, 2005)
2 from *Modern Haiku* 38.3, 2007
3 from *Modern Haiku* 39.1, 2008
4 from *Modern Haiku* 39.2, 2008
5 & 6 from *Roadrunner* 8.3, 2008
7 from *Roadrunner* 8.4, 2008

autumn heat reopening a scab

locked phone booth...
the petals have found a way in

museum
stone
god a
not
her
where
did drop
all &

the little
pieces *it’s*
go *raining*

dandelions starting over as well

tiny bird
it carries the world’s yellow
to the next curb

only american deaths count the stars

1 from *Acorn* 16, 2006
2 from *Acorn* 17, 2006
3 from *Modern Haiku* 37.2, 2006
4 & 5 from *Modern Haiku* 38.3, 2007
6 from *Frogpond* 30.3, 2007
7 from *Modern Haiku* 40.1, 2009

Previous Montages

March 22: Spring Is Here
March 15: Content

Next Week's Montage: Play Ball

Masaoka Shiki
Cor van den Heuvel
Dan McCullough