

Roadrunner Haiku Journal

August 2006 Issue VI:3

Welcome to the Roadrunner Haiku Journal. Roadrunner is a international quarterly online journal that publishes quality English-language haiku and senryu. We chose Roadrunner as the name for the journal because we want it to be at the forefront of haiku thought and practice with a regional flavor.

Jason Sanford Brown

&

Scott Metz

Editors

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Special Feature

Between The Lines

A book review by Scott Metz

In Borrowed Shoes

by Fay Aoyagi

Blue Willow Press, San Francisco (2006), 108 pp, \$10

What we find on the cover of *In Borrowed Shoes*, Fay Aoyagi's excellent second collection of haiku, is an extreme close-up photograph of (what I believe is) a calla lily taken from above, an angle and proximity not unlike one chosen by the painter Georgia O'Keefe. Though the subject is something from nature, it is being shown to us from such a vantage that we must reexamine it, rethink it, take a closer look. It takes on a different meaning, perhaps even becomes a different object all together. What we find on the cover we find in the poems inside.

The haiku within continues right where her first collection, *Chrysanthemum Love*, left off, offering up more highly subjective, confession-like, poems that take us further into the layered mazes of her world and soul and the ways in which these two come together, if they're separated at all. The collection itself is a journey through Aoyagi, precisely what a good collection of poems, I think, should be. What this second collection makes certain is that this is the way Aoyagi writes: with great emotion, care and precision on most any theme or subject. Nothing seems too far out of reach or disparate for her to crystallize into a haiku. This second collection in many ways solidifies who she is, what moves her, what's on her mind, what's makes her write and what perhaps lies ahead.

Our modern times and popular culture come into play a number of times throughout *In Borrowed Shoes*:

hint of autumn
I rewind
a Kurosawa film

Here, during a moment of stillness and mostly darkness, the beginning of a season and a style of film-making come together to form something wholly unique and new, something modern in itself, a feeling unto itself. And what is this hint, this feeling? Is it the smell of the beginning of death, a reminder of death, or merely a slight plunge in the evening temperature? More than the simple act of rewinding a film is occurring. No doubt there are invisible knives involved.

summer festival--
my Astro Boy mask
has lost its power

In this one there is something much more lighthearted, less sinister, yet tremendously emotional nonetheless. It's no doubt Obon time in Japan, a period when everyone is on vacation visiting their families and paying respects to the deceased. For children, though, it is a time of fun since it is festival time with lots of sweets, food and goodies for sale. But there are also games, toys and huge displays of masks based on cartoon characters to ask for. Astro Boy is a hugely popular character in Japan, a household name. For Aoyagi though, putting on this strong and popular character's mask from her childhood isn't the same anymore. What power has it lost exactly? It's effect on Aoyagi? It's effect on those around her? A combination of the two? What isn't being fulfilled? For a poem with such a strong, simple first line--putting us right in the scene--combined with a piece of modern merchandise, there is an amazing amount of depth and emotion in this haiku, a sadness and a feeling of lost innocence which can no longer be retrieved. Then again, masks are as ancient as they come, so it's certainly not too extreme an object. It's just given a modern, colorful twist.

With so much subjectivity throughout Aoyagi's work though, an occasional objective haiku rears its head with a scream.

tiny sour oranges--
a kabuki actor
with bleached hair

Could Aoyagi in some way be referring to herself here, the modern artist working in an old form? What draws me into this poem though is the setting I imagine and the colors. The oranges of course give us their color but also put me back under my kotatsu watching TV during the winter months when I was living in Japan. A kabuki play would now and then be on TV (or better yet an interview with a kabuki actor out of costume, behind the scenes) and a bowl of tiny oranges not too far out of reach. Like so many of the collection's haiku, this poem involves a process of peeling and seeing what's inside, what lies behind the makeup and wig. What's inside and how much have things really changed?

Modern situations and references to popular culture and literature abound throughout the collection in interesting ways.

bumper to bumper traffic--
am I Dr. Jekyll
or Mr. Hyde?

letters offering
0% APR . . .
lotus seeds pop

lacy gloves
will I metamorphose
into Vivian Leigh?

In other haiku Aoyagi refers to Pippi Longstocking, Shangri-La, horror movies, Rapunzel and Bob Dylan, among other things, a technique the Japanese masters often used, referring, for example, to Chinese texts and Japanese folklore. Aoyagi has brilliantly updated this technique for western culture without being overly obscure.

The haiku in *In Borrowed Shoes* also have an amazing way of asking and reminding us what we remember, how we remember and what triggers us to remember things. There is a strong sense of the psychological throughout.

spring herbs
do you remember the name
of your first grade teacher?

in how many languages
can I say 'thank you'?
wild mustard

cutting lemons
how many nursery songs
do I know in English?

ants out of a hole--
when did I stop playing
the red toy piano?

Other haiku touch on the rather surreal, where everything seems to burst with life and a consciousness.

river stones
they remember the salmon
from the year before

frozen moon--
"RSVP required"
from the fox god

Part of the collection's journey also seems to take us back with her to Japan, forcing us to look at what it's like to "go back", to revisit, to reopen wounds and personal history, and therefore, hopefully, heal and move on:

persimmons--
I ask myself why
I burned the bridge

morning stroll
in borrowed shoes--
split-open chestnuts

tiptoeing past
the old well
this summer moon

Aoyagi is at her best though when she creates juxtapositions, allowing her readers a bit more involvement and their own lives and imaginations to wander and perhaps fill the spaces left open:

hydrangeas
her split personality
and collection of rings

winter roses--
I am tired of reading
between the lines

winter drizzle--
redwoods absorb
the city inside me

It amazes me how Aoyagi uses nature and the seasons in her work. These references always take us further into poems. Never are they used to merely "report the weather" or as some cheap prop. There is always a necessity for them, a need to find a deeper, more complex meaning with whatever she combines them with. Whether they are indeed "real" and true to the moment or imaginative creations seems entirely beside the point.

The photographs throughout *In Borrowed Shoes* add a great amount of depth to the collection, reminding us to look closer at the poems, and therefore at ourselves. For both the poems and the

photographs there is more than meets the eye at first glance. Everything asks to be meditated upon further.

There is something for everyone I think in this collection, perhaps because we get so much of the author in this collection. For anyone seriously interested in what today's English haiku looks like, *In Borrowed Shoes* is a must and in many ways a guide to show us how to do it best.

I leave you with my favorite haiku in the collection, a poem of subtlety, layers, mystery, psychology and our ever floating world:

through eye holes
of a paper mask
I watch the gate closing

Fay Aoyagi's second haiku collection, 'In Borrowed Shoes' was published by Blue Willow Press. If you are interested in purchasing it, contact her at: fay@bluewillowhaiku.com.

Fay's website is: <http://www.bluewillowhaiku.com/>

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Haiku/Senryu

Ann K. Schwader

fox
on the shed roof
his thoughts his own

wind chimes
answer each other
winter's end

blue flax
back from the roots
clearing sky

Gregory Hopkins

stormy night
I read her letter
out loud

so cold
the moon
bends

sunset
the shadows
of our lives

Perry D. Guevara

in the grey winter
cold she blooms
origami flowers

my eyes
blink a lot
like the stars

she sleeps on a hill
beneath the man
in the moon

Keith Heiberg

sudden gust
in the maple:
forgotten rain

changing his mind,
the child orders
the rain to fall

now that the mushrooms are up
the moon can set

Keiko Izawa

I'm thinking
thinking, thinking. . .
crescent moon

occasionally
our heartbeats synchronized
autumn moonlight

measuring his love
in the last ice cube. . .
summer night

Carolyn Hall

new yoga stretch
flood waters begin
to recede

lakeside walk
the sunlit glow
of a red umbrella

homeward-bound . . .
down through the clouds
snow-capped granite

Patrick Frank

my son tells me about the darkness inside himself

crickets sing inside and out waiting for Linda to join me in bed

the cry of a solitary bird just before the creation of green

Ashley Rodman

gravity
the countless stars
of butterfly weed

light curves
in the tomcat's eye
blood moon

nude
in the rose moss
a clay pot

paul pfleuger jr.

with you
at the back of my tongue—
the East River

the lives I've led
by this dark river
only in name

in the depths of autumn
merely something
we slap together

John Barlow

a well-endowed
marble god seed pods
pop in the heat

old pier . . .
a shoal of small fish
rain-ripple the surface

splattered black
a fisherman paddles
ink from a squid

Lynne Rees

at the top of the hill
I am still
the same size

a raindrop
balanced on a leaf of grass –
someone is crying

bright star
shining close to the moon ...
my emails unanswered

Bruce Ross

Earth Day
a faded blue trail sign
on an old tree

branch by branch
up the old pine
spring wind

spring morning
slower than the clouds
two crows

Robbie Gamble

my side of the bed
her side of the bed
fall equinox

dead deer
on the highway shoulder
fifth of July

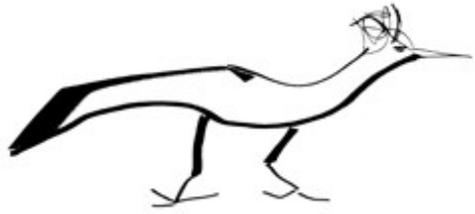
muggy night
deep in the fridge
radishes

Margarita Engle

insomnia
the night blooming
jasmine

levitation
the lone cloud
above its shadow

moonflower
the fragrance
of names



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Southwestern Haijin Spotlight

Victor Ortiz

Victor Ortiz, born in Southern California, currently resides in San Pedro, CA with his wife Mimi. He graduated from UCLA with a Ph.D. in Classics and though he only occasionally teaches Latin, he continues to read ancient Greek and Latin literature for fun! He first discovered haiku along with his students at an independent school in Los Angeles when he decided to have them write 5-7-5 haiku in Latin. It was so much fun he continued to write haiku in Latin and even published some in *The Classical Outlook*. Soon writing haiku became a way of life and now he writes almost everyday, but rarely in 5-7-5, and only in English. He was lucky enough to have had his first English haiku published in *Frogpond* and has managed to keep publishing in haiku journals ever since. *Into Breath* (Red Moon Press, 2002) was his first chapbook and his first haiku collection is due out in 2007. Although a few of his haiku have received special recognition, he considers himself a neophyte because the more he writes haiku the more he realizes there is to discover. He does consider himself a member of The Southern California Haiku Study Group, though they may not realize it since he misses far too many meetings.

Haiku is short enough to suit his attention span, but long enough for him to experience lasting truths. Haiku connects him to life, helps him establish relationships with his world, and when he listens closely enough it transforms him.

winter evening
faded pictographs
in shadow

windy ridge
a rusty bed frame
in winter light

snail trail
grinding holes
in a granite boulder

recess
children count
police cars

sunrise
clouds at the foot
of Los Angeles

late winter storm
refried beans buried
under melted cheese

wherever
I walk I walk
in the sky

desert petroglyph
autumn rain falls
on the sun

Black Mesa
a water serpent winds
around the clay pot

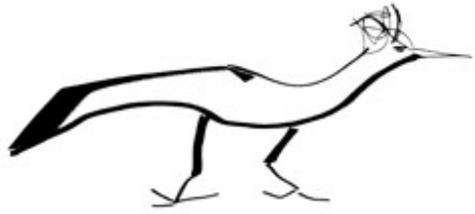
snowmelt
down the arroyo
her laughter

spring rain...
the rattle of seeds
in a painted gourd

bees among
the desert lavender
winter song

Some of these originally appeared in *Modern Haiku*, *The Heron's Nest*, and *Acorn*.

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The Scorpion Prize for Best Haiku/Senryu of ISSUE VI:2

The Scorpion Prize is a commendation for the best haiku or senryu of an issue. It is announced in each current issue for haiku/senryu appearing in the previous issue. The award is adjudicated by one of the editors or a guest judge. A short summary of the adjudicator's thoughts about the haiku are presented. At this time there is no cash or gift award, just kudos.

First Place:

from icy branch
down to icy branch
the distant moon

by Bruce Ross

This haiku is traditional in style. It is a poem where movement, tactile, and visual elements all reflect and reinforce its tone and depth. When reading the first two lines, one expects some kind of winter bird to present itself, but there is a twist between the last two lines and there is no bird, but a distant moon. This is a poem of self realization because the branches are bare, covered with ice, there is no where to hide. Perhaps it is also a poem of loss. What is most impressive is the poet's ability to use the movement of the moon to creclose, the moon is not rising, but it is in descent, hence leaving the sky. It would be a different poem if the moon would be climbing from branch to branch, but this does not happen. This is my take on this haiku. Either way it is a wonderful poem that deserves recognition.

Stanford M. Forrester

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