

# Roadrunner Haiku Journal

November 2007 Issue VII:4

"The greatest lesson I ever learned from him (H.G. Henderson) was to keep my eye on the haiku and not the author. He was likely to dispute the merits of poor haiku written by an established poet as he was to praise what he considered a good haiku by a beginner. His distaste for the cult of author led to his dubbing a small group of fellow back-scratchers, "The Mutual Admiration Society," even while he gave their haiku the same objective treatment he gave all others."

-L.A. Davidson

Welcome to the *Roadrunner Haiku Journal*. *Roadrunner* is an international quarterly online journal that publishes quality English-language haiku and senryu, as well as gendai haiku translations. We chose the name of the journal because we want it to be at the forefront of haiku thought and practice.

**Jason Sanford Brown, Scott Metz and Richard Gilbert, Editors**

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[!\[\]\(003082e50e3009141f59bd5df831749f\_img.jpg\) Gendai Haiku Translations](#)

[!\[\]\(17413706fd4997a1a4bdf85c6864eee1\_img.jpg\) The Essential Hass](#)

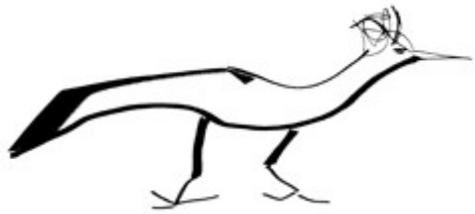
[!\[\]\(faf942dc3e59ce8eb64b4ac481eca7e0\_img.jpg\) Haiku/Senryu](#)

[!\[\]\(cf531ed27e91483460120fcc057b3901\_img.jpg\) The Scorpion Prize for Issue VII:3](#)

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**Tsubouchi Nenten — Haiku Selections**

Richard Gilbert and Itô Yûki (trans.)

May 31, 2007

Tsubouchi Nenten (坪内稔典 1944 - ) Selected Haiku from *haiku nyûmon*  
[Introduction to Haiku], Sekai Shisoushya, Tokyo: 1998, and elsewhere.

春風に母死ぬ龍角散が散り  
はるかぜにははしぬりゅうかくさんがちり  
*harukaze ni haha shinu ryûkakusan ga chiri*

to the spring wind  
mother dead, herbal medicine  
scatters

水中の河馬が燃えます牡丹雪  
すいちゅうのかばがもえますぼたんゆき  
*suichû no kaba ga moemasu botanyuki*

a wallowing hippo  
burns —  
snowflakes

(1) *botanyuki* are large snowflakes or snowflake clusters, known also as ‘snow flowers.’ *botan* is a peony.

バッタとぶアジアの空のうすみどり  
ばったとぶあじあのそらのうすみどり  
*batta tobu ajia no sora no usumidori*

flying grasshopper asian sky a washed-out green

桜散るあなたも河馬になりなさい  
さくらちるあなたもかばになりなさい  
*sakura chiru anata mo kaba ni narinasai*

cherry blossoms fall —  
you too must become  
a hippo

春を寝る破れかぶれのように河馬  
はるをねるやぶれかぶれのようにかば  
*haru o neru yabure kabure no yô ni kaba*

in the spring —  
lying down desperate, as  
a hippo

In these final two examples, elements of the original Japanese words are retained, in order to reveal qualities of language play, which are important to Tsubouchi's haiku aesthetic. Unfortunately this type of stylism has stymied attempts at translation. A brief cultural note follows each haiku, giving an abbreviated explanation of the untranslated phrases.

三月の甘納豆のうふふふふ  
さんがつのあまなっとうのうふふふふ  
*sangatsu no amanattô no ufufufufu*

in march  
amanatto:  
*u fu fu fu fu*

(1) In Japan, March (*san-gatsu*) is the end of the business year, full of fresh energy, yet somewhat sad with the departure of the old and familiar. There is a saying in this regard: *deai to wakare no kisetsu* (the season of meetings and farewells).

(2) *amanatto* — is a traditional Japanese confectionery, made of sweet, fermented azuki beans and sugar; the word-feeling of 'sweet natto' reminds of "natto," a unique food, with a pungent aroma, which is a kind of "power food" or "soul food" (vitality-enhancing).

(3) *u fu fu fu fu* — For us, this onomatopoeia creates an image of a group of older women eating the sweets together—in Japanese “ufufu” is a small laughing voice, made with a slightly opened mouth, that is, a kind of modest, small-voiced chuckle, and one imagines a hand placed at the level of the mouth, hiding it.

(4) The haiku also has a sense of personification: it seems as if *amanatto* itself is modestly chuckling, in a feminine manner. This haiku is among the most well-known of Tsucouchi Nenten, and is often cited.

たんぽぽのぽぽのあたりが火事ですよ  
たんぽぽのぽぽのあたりがかじですよ  
*tanpopo no popo no atari ga kaji desuyo*

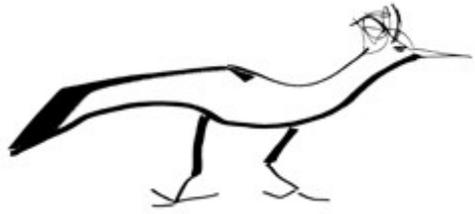
tanpopo no popo :  
surrounding, burning!

(1) *tanpopo* is “dandelion.” The *popo* of *tanpopo* is a neologistic, onomatopoeic coinage. By utilizing *popo*, *tanpopo*, itself, not considered onomatopoeic, becomes so. Literally, the “*popo*” of “*tanpopo*” is on fire. In the pun, *popo* can represent the circumference of the flower, and/or the edge (latter half) of the word.

(2) *desuyo* is a dialogic part of speech which has the sense of a rallying cry, as if to say, “look at this!”, e.g., “Here is the place of the fire’s energy!” and also, ‘Emergency!’

(3) *popo-popo-popo* (etc.) is the sound of a steam locomotive; a locomotive engineer is known as a “*popo-ya*,” and “*shushu popo*” is a term children use for locomotive. The term *poppo* can be found in the 1603 Jesuit Japanese translation dictionary, as “the manner in which steam or fire rises.”

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# Roadrunner Haiku Journal

November 2007 Issue VII:4

**Haiku/Senryu**

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this rain on the windows of a hawk's wings

what can hold  
what can be held  
taproot

pearl in the oyster I release

mountains and rivers...  
the gaping mouth  
of a just-born bear

**Sabine Miller**

blood moon  
a poppy blooms  
in Afghanistan

akatonbo  
do you return each night  
to this plum tree

**Josh Wikoff**

out of the blue  
a crow coming out of  
a crow

a death  
in the mirror  
my eyes are closed

**Peter Yovu**

in the bag of crickets an inexplicable blue feather

on the dry part of the napkin floating in the bowl a moth

your panties soaking in the sink today the crocus bloomed

held together by grass coat hangers of different colors in the pond

**Chris Gordon**

new moon  
I use one cell phone  
to find another's

the tang of late summer brine on my lips

**Andrea Grillo**

a blood orange cloud the monks march on

**Helen Buckingham**

on  
the  
porch  
screen  
hatchling walking sticks  
could  
there  
possibly  
be  
more

driving  
home  
alone  
no not alone  
the  
grass  
hopper  
re-  
minds  
me

**Lee Gurga**

my father's broken worry stone

**Allan Burns**

the taste of dust  
vultures circle  
a lost star

**N.C. Whitehead**

vexing laughter  
the equanimity of things  
that just aren't

retrogression's onus  
an arcane moral code  
must be followed

**Jeff Winke**

i can't find the time destroyed by the past

out of nowhere isn't

sadness sneaks into a poem about the red gladiola

a pond turtle rises from 200 million years

**marlene mountain**

fading tan a peso in the penny jar

**Bob Lucky**

nothing matters how green it gets

rather listen to night with nothing on

bird me catch me

**John Stevenson**

walking among the dead  
all the flowers I avoid

**Karen R. Porter**

a barge ascends  
within the lock  
spring dusk

**Matthew Paul**

after  
the boiling point  
a robin's song

**Laryalee Fraser**

mountain pass  
the pressure of silence  
fills my being

erect sunflower the shadow shrinks into itself

**Kala Ramesh**

in deep woods the darkness around your voice

mountain view one thought builds upon another

all those stars one nipple then the other

winter I call a tree by name

**Gregory Hopkins**

morning breeze garden oak throwing shadows into itself

not knowing its name who am I to the wild grass

blue metals fastening the air dragonflies

**John W. Sexton**

This scar I've come to love the autumn badlands

Dumplings steaming in the face I've lost

Grotesque hands stroke the withered grass to life

Perfect skies  
crossing the Tropic of Cancer  
early for work

**Paul Pfleuger, Jr.**

in dress uniform  
Death offers up  
his seat

**Jason Sanford Brown**

**Haiku Sequence in the Sufi Spirit**

In which chamber  
of your heart, beloved,  
is our bed?

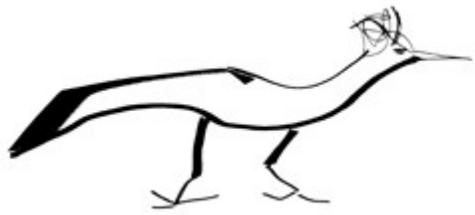
your breast  
against the moon  
induces prayer

not letting go  
a piece of honey  
on your lip

withered grass  
on a dry plain--  
rain on me

**William Ramsey**

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## The Essential Hass

A Short Interview with Robert Hass

**RR:** How and to what extent has haiku influenced your poetic thought and poetry?

**RH:** I don't think anybody can ever answer this question— either the how or the how much— very accurately. One would have to have a great deal of detachment about one's own work. How? The power of the image, the power of simplicity, the power of discrimination, the implicit idea that anything can contain everything, something about negotiating nothingness in the sense of not ultimately having a place to stand (or sit) in our observation of the world. How much? I don't know. A lot. At least it seems to me that my debt is great to the poets I've most studied, Basho, Buson, Issa.

**RR:** What is it about haiku as a genre that is powerful, and also distinct from other poetic genres, to your mind?

**RH:** I've written a long essay about this, "Images." It's in my book *20th Century Pleasures*. [\*See Excerpt below.]

**RR:** Do you think that in the future a poet writing haiku in English (as their main poetic form) can achieve notability, within the wider arena of literary culture (why or why not)?

**RH:** I don't see why not. Though I am inclined to think that short poems, even short poems with a seasonal reference and a 5-7-5 syllabic structure, written in English can't be, strictly speaking, haiku. Or to say it another way, the haiku is still acclimatizing itself, in this country, to the cultures of American poetry. When Basho began to write, there was already an eight hundred to a thousand year tradition of poetry and art in Japan to give resonance to the brief seasonal words on which haiku depends and a pre-industrial culture that involved quite close observation of the seasons and a set of religious and cultural rituals embedded in those seasons. This condition doesn't obtain in English-speaking North America (or Spanish-speaking South America, where there have also been many experiments with the haiku form.) I expect something unexpected will eventually evolve from our admiration for and attempts to translate the practice of the short Japanese poem.

**RR:** As with poetry in general, the sheer volume of publication is high, yet quality is too often mediocre. Would you have any suggestions for the future, for editors and poets?

**RH:** Yes, high standards for oneself, generosity toward others, except for editors who need to practice high standards and courtesy.

**RR:** Haiku are generally taken to be a poetics of nature, and often take aspects of the natural world as a focus or topic; could you discuss the question of haiku and nature, poetry and nature, in light of recent

revelations of global warming and as Bill McKibben put it, "the end of nature?"

**RH:** One of the arguments for the cultivation of haiku, I suppose, is that attention to nature has become a moral imperative. McKibben is good on this subject and the great text is still the essay, "The Land Ethic" in Aldo Leopold's *Sand Country Almanac*. That book, especially the essays "Thinking Like a Mountain" and "Good Oak" and "Song of the Gavilan" are also useful texts for thinking about how to naturalize an imagination of nature in North American poetry. In so much of poetry and thinking about poetry right now, *there is a good deal of appropriate skepticism about the assumptions behind realism as a literary mode* and therefore about the whole question of what we do when we think to represent nature. *It might be useful to let this tradition— and the range of anti-realist practices from surrealism to language poetics— enter the practice of haiku*, if only to take away the sort of easy wow! poem that tends to be the first stage of our attempts to appropriate the form. Allen Ginsberg's notion that the blues lyric is the American version of haiku might also be helpful in this connection. See his effort at what he called "American sentences."

[*editor's emphasis*]

\*Excerpt from "Images."

"The summer had been crowded with people, visitors, friends, children, their friends; even backpacking, I had gone with groups. The week had been a large gathering of grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters, in-laws, children. The communal rhythms of family life have their deep satisfactions— even the logistics of them. The true haiku of my days just then would have gone something like this: "Bill and Leif want to climb Mount Tallac and Karen and I are taking the Volkswagen to go fishing, so can you and Mom walk to the beach now and pick up Luke at Peter's later in Grandma's car?" A means to a means to a means, Ranall Jarrell called it. It was beginning to be too much of a good thing, and trading away solitude for those other pleasures for so long had begun to eat me up. I suppose I was also feeling, paradoxically, the submerged melancholy of the end of summer. If I had written about what I had seen, if we had, as the Japanese did, a set of conventions that could carry all that weight, I think I would probably have gotten it wrong by identifying too closely with the animal:

Mid-August:  
black ants, and the little dead marmot's  
half-closed eye.

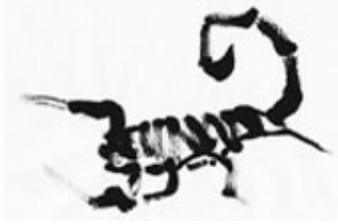
This image, like others, seemed partial to me walking down the mountain, glimpses of life, but not the heart of it. At Susy Lake, however, I felt as if I had been granted a death vision: white trees, white grass, white leaves; the snow patches and flowering currant suddenly dark beside them; and everything there, rock, tree, cloud, sky, shuddering and blazing. It was a sense, past speaking, past these words, that everything, all of the earth and time itself, was alive and burning."

**-Robert Hass**

(*Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*; "Images"; The Ecco Press. Hopewell, NJ. 1984. pp 282-3)

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## The Scorpion Prize for Best Haiku/Senryu of ISSUE VII:3

As Philip Rowland pointed out in his talk at HNA this past summer (to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Modern Haiku*), we need to beware of the haiku of “watery pebbles.” It seems that, in keeping with its name, the Scorpion Prize ought to be awarded to a poem with a little sting. A poem that focuses the mind in the way an encounter with a scorpion would. Such poems are unfortunately uncommon, combining a keenness of perception with a sharpness of expression along with a turn that, like the flick of a tail, makes us flinch. The poem in this issue that comes closest to this ideal is

razored through  
to the void  
raven

### **Ann K. Schwader**

This haiku wrenches us out of our complacency and propels us into the void, a physical void of color and then on into a metaphysical one. From the perspective of craftsmanship, the poet artfully uses sound to tie the beginning and the end of the poem together through the use of the raz/rav and ed/en sounds. The use of the past participle effectively permits a vibration between the active (of the raven) and passive (of the poet). I wish I had written it.

falling into  
the space between our spines—  
full moon

### **Dana Duclo**

An interesting, unique perception. “Falling” seems particularly fortuitous here. The moon gets under our skin in a way the mere moonlight couldn’t.

coyote choir  
we wake beneath  
next season’s stars

### **Allan Burns**

Where I live, I hear this choir quite often and a change in the sound signals the arrival of winter in a way nothing else does. The poem gives me a chill, yet the warmth created by “we” reduces the creepiness, shifting the focus from the ominous coyotes to the shared experience of the cosmos.

deep in the raindrop a blade of grass

**Graham Nunn**

A very appealing reversal of perception. We expect the blade of grass to be outside the droplet, but here we have a miniature paperweight or jewel-like amber with its surprising inclusion.

Lee Gurga

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