Haiku Resources

Dissertations and Theses on Haiku (and Senryu, Renga and Tanka) in English
Randy M. Brooks, Ph.D.

1. Theses on Haiku in English


Haruchi Abbas’s thesis compares three early translators of Japanese haiku and their various suggestions for the development of haiku in English. The three “mediators” are Harold G. Henderson, Reginald Horace Blyth, and Kenneth Yasuda.


Joan Giroux’s dissertation was edited and published as a book, The Haiku Form, by the Charles E. Tuttle Company in 1974. This dissertation and book was one of the first “primers” on how to write haiku in English. Giroux examines the difficulties of writing haiku in English “due to basic differences of language and poetic tradition. It is important that would-be writers of English haiku be aware of the problems.” She argues for the development of “a truly native English haiku tradition based on the western Judeo-Christian culture.”


Richard Iadonisi employs a feminist analysis in his study of marginalized writers of American haiku. In contrast to white male poets such as Ezra Pound, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder, who attempt to re-invent haiku in English, these marginalized writers “tend to adhere closely to the formal properties, especially the 5-7-5 format.” In his abstract he writes “marginalized poets call attention to the ‘haiku moment’ in which the poet loses the self through a merging with the natural world only to subvert it — Lowell by inserting homosexual desire, Wright by including elements of the blues, Vizenor by incorporating Ojibway dream songs and the trickster, and Sanchez by imbuing the poems with a sense of ‘sisterhood.’”


Martin Lucas’ dissertation provides a brief history of the development of haiku in Japan, including its relationship with tanka and renga. He also discusses a short history of the “initial adaptation to the English-language context in North America.” A significant portion of the dissertation is an extended review of theoretical issues “of the key requirements of haiku, both in terms of form and content”. Lucas summarizes positions on form, content, punctuation, layout, season words, tense, internal comparison, metaphor, expression of
thought or feeling, imagination and experience, music, Zen, haiku moments “and haiku myths”. The third part is an account of haiku in Britain — key journals, collections and successful haiku writers. The last section is a discussion of haiku in the context of renga, haibun and other poetry and art. Lucas concludes with a recommendation for the future of haiku in English:

“If we are to accept, as I have suggested we should, that the future of English haiku is as a free verse form, rather than a strict seventeen syllable arrangement, the complexity of the task of composition would appear to be reduced still further. Even if we stiffen the challenge by requiring the presentation of a single moment of actual experience, in the present tense, it does not appear particularly demanding. But the first thing we should note when assessing this demand is that it is the very simplicity of the exercise that causes aspiring haiku poets to stumble. Stripping out imaginative excesses and rhetorical flourishes is an ascetic practice which appears, for many, to go against the grain. The Western poetic palate tends to crave exotic flavours, whereas haiku is as understated as a bowl of boiled white rice. What succeeds in haiku, what startles, is honesty rather than innovation. As in Cor van den Heuvel’s

hot night
turning the pillow
to the cool side

What moves us is the unifying power of shared experience, presented so as to be immediately accessible. It is this quality of naked awareness which is the value, and the difficulty, of the art” (346-347).


Tom Lynch starts with an overview of the origins and development of haiku in Japan and in contemporary North America. He argues that the surge of interest in haiku in America derives from “a major tradition in American literature” namely, the transcendental philosophy of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. He argues that American haiku is “a conjunction of the Emersonian tradition in American literature with the Japanese haiku tradition.” In this thesis he cites “affinities between Buddhism, especially the Zen sect, and characteristically ‘Emersonian’ ideas such as the Edenic impulse, the Essential Self, divine immanence, the effacement of the subject/object dichotomy, and the possibility of an ‘original relation to the universe.’” From this perspective, Lynch reviews the “theoretical debates in the haiku journals” and analyzes haiku by ten contemporary American haiku poets, including John Wills, Cor van den Heuvel, Gary Hotham, Anita Virgil, Lee J. Richmond, Raymond Roseliep, Alexis Rotella, George Swede, Marlene Mountain, and Bob Boldman. In his chapter on American haiku poets, Lynch makes a distinction between “wordless” and “language-centered” haiku. He writes: “In the following discussion I make the distinction between ‘wordless’ haiku and ‘language-centered’ haiku. Leroy Gorman seems to have been the first critic to apply the term ‘language-centered’ to haiku. Gorman uses this term to refer primarily to haiku that make use of the techniques of concrete poetry, such as unconventional letter or word arrangements, and that minimize or abandon the referential nature of language. I would like to expand the definition, however, to refer to any haiku that depends on characteristics of language other than its referentiality. So, for
example, Bashō-style haiku would be ‘wordless’ since in his poems we are primarily interested in what the words signify rather than in any visual or aural features of the words themselves; whereas many of the poems of the Teitoku school would be ‘language-centered’ since they depend on puns, rhythmic patterns, metaphors, and other tropes” (50).


Kirby Record examines the early years of haiku in English and the challenges of adapting Japanese traditions into another language and culture. He notes the importance of calls to experiment with writing haiku in English by Harold G. Henderson, Kenneth Yasuda, and R.H. Blyth. He also reviews early debates on haiku poetics, definition, form and techniques published in *American Haiku* magazine in the 1960s and *Cicada* magazine in the 1970s. Record concludes “Throughout this study one theme has persisted, which is the complete lack of agreement about English haikuists concerning either the nature of the classical Japanese model, or the appropriate form and essence of its English namesake” (page 223). Kirby also notes that: “The survival of English haiku depends on the tension between the individual talent and the power of its tradition. Since there is no real tradition for English haiku, it must borrow from its Japanese origins. English haiku poets tend to vacillate between reliance on the Japanese tradition when it serves their purposes and rejection of the same tradition when it does not” (page 227). Kirby Record concludes in his abstract “that English haiku can survive as a unique poetic genre only if the poets writing it achieve a deeper understanding of the principles which guided the classical haiku poets of Japan. Since the majority of haiku poets writing in English have either discarded the classical principles, or have transformed them almost beyond recognition, the poetry termed ‘haiku’ bears little or no resemblance to the Japanese model.”


Rob Scott studies “aspects of haiku’s cultural transmission and evolution in Australia from a genre oriented to the early Japanese models, to one which is informed by a growing international haiku community and an emerging local sensibility.” Scott argues that the most distinctive elements of Australian haiku derives from local content, especially the adaptation of kigo. He writes, “One of the strengths of Japanese haiku has been its ability to reflect its own culture through the use of kigo. This study includes a detailed discussion of the two main conceptualisations of kigo (season and culture) and potential sources of kigo, or kigo alternatives (keywords) in Australia are identified in the context of the depth and resonance they could bring to Australian haiku.” He concludes with observations about “a growing homogenisation of haiku as a direct consequence of globalization” which results in “a perceived loss of Australian identity in Australian haiku.”


Swede provides a brief history of haiku in North America and discusses which of “the eight most important rules governing the composition of traditional Japanese haiku still seem to be meaningful to North American poets and which seem to have outlived their usefulness.” He has a chapter on how “North American poets have distinguished haiku from its closest relative, the senryu” concluding that “distinctions based on straightforward content criteria are more clear and useful than those stemming from assumptions about authorial intent.”


For her undergraduate honors thesis, Barbara Ungar completed a study on haiku in English including the Imagist poet Amy Lowell, Jack Kerouac’s haiku, and a chapter on Michael McClintock and “New Directions in American Haiku.” She reviews the work and poetics of each of these three poets as representative of three periods of haiku in English that she summarizes as “exotic interest, avant-garde experimentation, and serious inquiry and adaptation.”

Theses on American Haiku Poets

Nicholas Virgilio


This is a study of Nick Virgilio’s art of writing haiku. Moser writes, “Few American haiku poets can claim to be as enthusiastic and prolific as Nick Virgilio. Over a twenty-five year period, the Camden poet amassed a collection of over 20,000 haiku, many of them unpublished. His poetry covers the contemporary American experience, from gritty urban life in Camden to the erosion of rural American communities in the face of industrialization. The poet writes about the loss of his brother in Vietnam and the toll of such losses on the American psyche. Most of all, through his poetry, workshops and lectures, Virgilio worked tirelessly to get America back in touch with the life-giving power of nature that surrounds our everyday lives.” Reading Virgilio’s haiku, Moser applies “the idea of ‘layers of meaning’ to discuss the movement of the poems’ point of view from the individual to the community to the entire society.”


Gerald Vizenor


An edited version of this dissertation has been published by the University of Oklahoma in 2012. A review on Amazon.com asserts, “Blaeser’s is the first study to reveal the full importance of haiku in Vizenor’s work. His poetry, which draws equally from Zen aesthetics and Ojibway dream songs, contains concise, economical descriptions, made up equally of absence and presence — a style characteristic of Vizenor’s writing in other genres as well.” Of special interest is Blaeser’s study of his work as examples of a writer employing “postmodern theories of the ‘open text,’” and indeterminacy “to elicit reader response".
2. Theses on Japanese American Haiku, Senryu and Tanka


Theresa Goudie studies writings, including tanka poetry, composed by three generations of Japanese Americans — the immigrant, first American-born, and third generation. In the dissertation abstract, Goudie explains that she “examines the literary archive of the Japanese diaspora in North America and uncovers evidence of an intergenerational transmission of trauma after the internment of all peoples of Japanese descent in America during World War Two. Their experience of migration, discrimination and displacement was exacerbated by the internment, the single most influential episode in their history which had a profound effect on subsequent generations.”


Junko Kabayashi examines Japanese literature written by Japanese Americans before and after the Pacific War as a means of studying “how bilingualism played a central role in the formation of Japanese American identity.” She argues that “Japanese language literature provided writers protected space within which they engaged politically charged discussions on such topics as racialized and gendered politics of loyalty and retaining biculturalism under the increasing pressure of Americanization. After the war, as the issue of disloyalty receded, Japanese language literature acquired a new role as a critical resource for Japanese Americans to commemorate wartime experiences, and to rebuild cultural and psychological ties with Japan and Japanese culture.”


Ayaka Yoshimizu explores “the diasporic memories and poetic practices of four ‘Japanese war brides’ in the state of Washington, U.S.A.” Her qualitative research was based on a two-month ethnographic study where she studied four women in a small community of senryu writers. She concludes that: “Based on a Bakhtinian analysis of ‘heteroglossic utterances’ I theorize the writers as heteroglossic subjects who performatively move between ‘culturally different’ discursive spaces, each of which has a set of power-relations and a set of discourses that organize it. When the writers tell their experiences in the discursive space of senryu, I argue, these stories disturb their identity determined by the dominant ‘war bride’ discourses.”

3. Theses on American Poetry and Haiku

Modern American Poets


Kita argues that H.D.’s poetry is inconsistent with Ezra Pound’s criteria for Imagist poetry, and therefore illustrates the diversity of Imagism. Her research draws on letters to Amy
Lowell and analysis of H.D.’s early poetry. She states that: “I will consider Imagism in respect of Japanese poetics; for as regards the relationship between Pound’s theory and the haiku and the Chinese ideograph, there are some important issues which have been hardly discussed. So, these issues provide room for reconsidering the formation of Imagism.”


Seiji Shikina argues that: “the adaptation of the haiku form in the poetry of the Imagists is too persistent to conjecture a coincidence.” The dissertation starts with a short history of Japanese haiku and aesthetic theories of haiku poets. Then Seiji examines Imagism as a literary movement. This study focuses on the aesthetic theories and poetry of Ezra Pound, John Gould Fletcher, and H.D. Shikina writes that: “There exist the distinct characteristics of the haiku in the imagistic poems discussed throughout this study: the use of super-pository technique, its suggestive quality, its extreme succinctness and understatement, its exact presentation of an image, and the search for oneness between man and nature.” The researcher concludes that: “The original Imagists studied Japanese poetry from different angles: Pound saw in the haiku the technique of super-position and the ideogrammic method; Fletcher gained an insight into the spirit of the haiku. He also analysed the main quality of the Japanese poetry in his book *Japanese Prints*; and H. D. came to the understanding of the Oriental philosophy by way of the Freudian psychoanalysis.”


The Beat Poets


Giles studies three Beat poets and their search “for a larger geographic and temporal connection to help them break through tightening social, artistic, and spiritual strictures of postwar America. The East-West cross-fermentation which developed after the war provided these poets with an inroad for post-Modernist textual and philosophical experimentation set against a backdrop of Cold War anxieties, urban sprawl, gray flannel suits, and ultra-conservative poetics.” He notes their interest in Buddhist texts and interest in “Chinese shih and Japanese haiku forms”.


David Thimme examines how “Gary Snyder’s poetry conveys Zen states of consciousness through unconventional grammar and syntax.” He views Synder’s works “from a Buddhist perspective, which emphasizes Eastern forms such as haiku and the Zen koan, shows how the disruption of ordinary ‘dualistic’ thinking potentially improves the aesthetic of ‘nonduality.’” He also notes that “Snyder altered the haiku form to adapt it to the English
language. His suppressions of articles and personal pronouns accentuate his deliberately choppy tone and echo the compression of haiku. The poetic form was assimilated into Zen practice for its capacity to communicate concrete experiences and deep intuitions, or what poet and Buddhist commentator Robert Haas describes as a ‘moment seized on and purely rendered’” (29).

4. Theses on Japanese Haiku and Related Literature


Albertson studies “the early poetry of Shimazaki Toson (1872 – 1943), Doi Bansui (1871 – 1952), and Yosano Akiko (1878 – 1942), three writers who took Japanese Romantic poetry to its height in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Instead of following the realistic trend of shasei (sketching from life), each of these poets pursued a lyricism that sought ideals of nature and mined poetic allusions from classical poetic tropes.” Chapter 3 examines tanka by Yosano Akiko and how she employs “supernatural symbolism to entangle the modern discourse of love (ren'ai) as a spiritual ideal with classical poetic tropes. Deities, sin, and other supernatural and religious elements are prominent in Akiko’s poetry, but they have largely been overlooked by scholars who seek biographical explanations for her verses.”


Charles Fox studies the development of autobiographical tanka sequences by Kitahara Hakushu. He writes: “Hakushu turned increasingly to the traditional tanka form, bringing to it his well-known tendency to concentrate on sensual experience as well as his characteristically romantic preoccupation with the experiencing self. The pressures of his era had spawned both the rensaku (continuous compositions) from the traditional tanka and what eventually would be termed the ‘I-novel’ in prose fiction, and Hakushu built upon the rensaku by fashioning modern tanka poetic sequences structured around the sensibility of a single unified consciousness and the development of that persona’s sensual powers and range of emotions.” Fox concludes, “Through the medium of his art, I argue, Hakushu condenses the myriad fragmentary utterances of his tanka into interwoven and complexly nuanced representations of selfhood.”


Ichiro Hanami studies the development of aesthetic poetic ideals that later became associated with haiku. In his abstract he states: “In aesthetic terms, the Shinkokin period (1170 – 1206) is, perhaps, the most influential period in Japanese literary history. The Heian aesthetics of colorful splendor and logical reasoning were replaced by the desolate monochromatism of sabi and the mystery and depth of yugen, ideals that resurface in haiku, noh drama and such. Scholars have discussed these ideals as representing the poetry of the Shinkokinshu, but none have addressed the process of its development.”

Seliger Isabel studies the poetic theories of modernist tanka writer Yosano Akiko. This study focuses on Akiko’s book, Speaking Theory Through Poetry: Yosano Akiko (1878 – 1942) on Poetic Composition and Women’s Writing. Isabel writes: “She evaluates and resists the aesthetic standards and socio-political determinants of literature, as well as an art theory that promotes expressive freedom in tanka composition and women’s writing.”


Robert Kramer studies the “‘tea cult’ produced during the Edo period (1603 – 1868) in Japan.” In Chapter 5 he discusses aesthetic concepts of wabi, sabi and furyu “as ideals pursued and limits established in different tea gatherings.”


In the abstract Scott Lineberger writes: “Why were forms as different as haikaika, haikai no renga, and maeku-zuke all categorized together under the rubric of haikai? Conversely, how are these poetic genres different in form and content from their orthodox counterparts? This dissertation answers these questions by tracing the historical development of haikai from its beginnings in the Kokinshu through its various permutations in the medieval period and finally its maturation in the Edo period (1603 – 1867).”


MacDonald writes: “In the early 1600s, Japan’s nascent mass-publishing industry began printing editions of literary classics, such as courtly romances, medieval didactic tracts, and collections of poetry. By the end of the seventeenth century, an increasingly literate public was fueling a demand for parodies based on these works. My dissertation focuses upon one such text, Inu hyakunin isshu (The Mock One Hundred Poets, 1669), an illustrated parody of Hyakunin isshu (The One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, ca. 1230), the famous anthology of classical poetry compiled by the courtier Fujiwara no Teika (1162 – 1241).” He argues that poetry satire like this was “a form of parody that was firmly rooted in the literature of the past, especially the venerable form of comic verse known as kyōka (‘madcap verse’), and a natural outgrowth of classical poetics. The Mock Poets not only resulted from increased literacy but also contributed to a public discourse on how to ‘read’ classical poetry.”


Daniel McKee’s dissertation challenges “the conventional treatment of surimono as pictorial greeting/announcement cards that comprise a subcategory of ukiyo-e, a definition based on a short-sighted understanding of the genre’s history that rises from a distorting projection of western social forms and interests onto a Japanese case.” He argues that instead of viewing surimono as an art object, it should be viewed as semiotic “ritual poetic exchanges”. He concludes that: “The result of the broad view taken in this study, which
includes both *haikai* and *kyōka* practices, in relation to customs of composition, inscription and presentation established in *waka* and *renga*, is a new view of *surimono* as an art form defined by its poetry, in which, in keeping with the classical ideal of the poetic presentation, the work itself becomes a material manifestation of poetic ideas, tones, principles and approaches to representation.”


Frederick Meli summarizes in his abstract: “This dissertation is an attempt to understand the original meaning and early development of the Japanese term ‘aware’ and to grasp the structure of the conscious experience that is represented by the term. ‘Aware,’ a word in which in modern Japanese means ‘pity’ or ‘misery,’ is generally thought to be most important as a technical term in the field of literary aesthetics. The term’s important position is due in no small part to the theories of nativist philosopher Motoori Norinaga, who used ‘aware,’ along with ‘mono no aware’ (the pathos of things) to signify the ideal of all literature.” He concludes: “Through analyzing the use of the work in the poems, along with the perceptions involved and the emotions relayed, I come to ascertain certain essential elements of a conscious experience of aware. Such an experience, I conclude, consists in the discovery of immediate aesthetic value in feelings of longing and lack, rooted in perception of the objects of that longing and symbols of those objects.”


Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen’s dissertation includes a biography of Shinkei and translation of his book, *Sasamegoto* (*Murmured Conversations*). Esperanza writes: “Based on material in his *waka*, *renga*, and critical essays, the biography presents numerous translations from his works. It may be read as a kind of literary autobiography revealing some of the crucial inner forces motivating his thought, as well as the underlying themes and stylistic qualities of his poetry.” Shinkei is known as “one among ‘the seven sages of *renga*’ who revived the flagging art in the mid-Muromachi period by investing it with a far deeper significance than it had heretofore possessed in its more than one-hundred years’ history. *Sasamegoto* is Shinkei’s most comprehensive statement of that significance. Its main concern is to define the nature and function of Poetry as a means of liberating the mind from narrow subjectivity, and paradoxically enough, from the tyranny of words. The collective art of linked verse is a uniquely suitable vehicle for such a concept because compared to other genres, the poet’s mind or *kokoro* is here rendered more immediately palpable in the process of relating to another’s verse. Uniting the receptive and interpretive faculty with the creative, it is quintessentially the example of poetry as praxis, or as Shinkei calls it, a Way.”


Hiromi Taki studies contemporary tanka as exemplified in the works of Nakajo Fumiko. This dissertation “covers the first ten years after the end of the Second World War when the whole Japanese culture and its values were questioned and when tanka poets were severely hit by the criticism of tanka as a second-rate art. Though many tanka poets were shattered by the criticism, the tanka world slowly began to indicate some changes for a new era. The
attempts to search for new talent and the revival of female tanka are detailed in this thesis.”


In his abstract Robert Tuck explains: “This dissertation examines the influence of ‘poetic sociality’ during Japan’s Meiji period (1867 – 1912). ‘Poetic sociality’ denotes a range of practices within poetic composition that depend upon social interaction among individuals, most importantly the tendency to practice poetry as a group activity, pedagogical practices such as mutual critique and the master-disciple relationship, and the exchange among individual poets of textually linked forms of verse. Under the influence of modern European notions of literature, during the late Meiji period both prose fiction and the idea of literature as originating in the subjectivity of the individual assumed hegemonic status. Although often noted as a major characteristic of pre-modern poetry, poetic sociality continued to be enormously influential in the literary and social activities of 19th century Japanese intellectuals despite the rise of prose fiction during late Meiji, and was fundamental to the way in which poetry was written, discussed and circulated.” The last chapter focuses on Shiki and other proponents of new literary haiku emphasizing the haiku poet’s individual expression. However, Tuck writes, “no major ‘new haiku’ group ever completely discarded the notion that haiku was at base a group activity, and that the haiku society should be the basic unit of organization in the haiku world” (285).

Theses on Japanese Haiku Poets

Bashō


Aitken’s thesis was the basis for his subsequent book, A Zen Wave: Bashō’s Haiku & Zen, published by John Weatherhill, Inc., in 1978. This thesis is a reading of haiku by Bashō as examples of various Zen Buddhist principles.


Barnhill’s dissertation on Bashō uses theories of religion developed by anthropologists Glifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Examining Bashō’s literary works, Barnhill writes that “Bashō’s way of life reflects and embodies his world view in a religious way.” He views Bashō’s religiosity as “outsiderhood, the permanent location of oneself outside of both secular and religious structure.” Barnhill argues that “it is misleading to claim that the persona in Bashō’s journals is Buddhist. By discussing Bashō as a seer and analyzing the dialectical nature of his works, I suggest certain similarities between Bashō and Buddhism. However, by examining Bashō’s works in light of what William LaFleur has called the Buddhist episteme of medieval Japanese culture, I argue that Bashō’s literary works embody a religiosity that cannot be identified with Buddhism. It is instead an eclectic and unique development of the traditions of impermanence, itinerancy, and fate.”


Buson


Cheryl Crowley writes: “Haikai poet and painter Yosa Buson was a leader of the revival haikai movement (ca. 1765 – 1785). Buson was not given to elaborate theorizing about haikai, and wrote few sustained expositions of his poetics, but one document, the preface to the 1777 verse collection Shundei kushū (Shundei verse anthology) contains a lengthy statement about his poetic theory. Here he writes that the principle of rizoku (transcending the ordinary), was the key to excellence in haikai, kanshi (Chinese poetry), and painting. Buson’s rizoku theory was at the core of the most characteristic aspects of his poetic practice. It was a fundamental principle informing the Back to Bashō movement, that is, the efforts of poets like Takai Kitō, Katō Kyōtai, Miura Chora, and others to resist the trend towards vulgarity and commercialism that characterized contemporary haikai and recapture the brilliance of the early Bashō school style.”


Herbert Johnsson studies “the poetics of haikai in eighteenth-century Japan” promoted by Buson and his followers, especially their practice of composing haikai no renga.


O’Mara explains that “this dissertation examines the form which most consistently and clearly expresses the unity Buson perceived between his painting and his poetry: the haiga.” She defines haiku “as a composite work in which at least one inscribed haiku and a usually abbreviated painting exhibit linkage based on content.”


Papapaviou studies Buson’s haiga characterizing his success as a poet-painter through “a synthetic approach. This approach may be said to represent one of Buson’s major ideals; it is also apparent in his literary works and in the close inter-relationship of his poetry and painting. The study focuses on Buson’s synthetic approach through the consideration of his haiga, and, in particular, his treatment of the figure motif.”

Persinger’s dissertation “is a creative translation from Japanese into English of the poetry of Yosa Buson, an 18th century (1716 – 1783) poet.” He explains that he chooses to translate the haiku as free verse. “In my translations, I concentrate on the content, the images, and the individual words since I hold it important that not only are the translations accurate, but that they fulfill aesthetic expectations. Furthermore, while it is impossible to separate form and content, my translations privilege content over form since I believe it would be nearly impossible to keep the syllable count of 5/7/5 and not do drastic damage to the meaning.”


Toshiko Yokota argues that Buson has been misrepresented as an intellectual literati. He writes that traditional biographers “construct a consistent but erroneous image of Buson as bunjin from his literary works and paintings.” Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, Yokota argues, “My analysis of the diversified social aspects of Buson’s life and works from a broader socio-historical perspective contributes to demystifying Buson’s romanticized image as bunjin who worked only for aesthetic purposes, and helps us to understand that Buson’s two-fold practice as a bunjin poet-painter was socio-historically constituted.”

Issa


In his abstract Scot Hislop writes: “In this dissertation I argue from the poetics of Kobayashi Issa (1763 – 1827) and other Edo era poets that reading the texts attributed to Issa as ‘literary texts’ results in misreadings.” The dissertation includes chapters on Issa’s haikai no renga, a discussion of the difference between haiku and hokku, and a chapter on Issa’s haibun.


Hank Pellissier summarizes his thesis: “Kobayashi Issa is one of Japan’s most beloved writers of haiku. He was also a Jodo-Shinshu priest. This essay describes the Jodo-Shinshu presence in fifty-eight of Issa’s “insect” haiku. Pellissier concludes, ‘The investigation reveals a spiritually ‘independent’ poet who was often devout, occasionally ambivalent, and sometimes downright hostile to the creed that ordained him. Jodo-Shinshu’s influence, although powerful, was consistently overruled if it clashed with Issa’s egalitarian instincts, compassion for all creatures, or insights and emotions regarding his own suffering.”

Shiki


Beichman’s dissertation was the basis for her book, Masaoka Shiki, published by Twayne Publishers in 1982. It starts with a literary biography followed by chapters on his haiku, tanka, essays and diaries. Beichman challenges common characterizations of Shiki as an objectivist or as champion of shasei approaches. She notes that most of “Shiki’s writing
was autobiographical.” She also writes that “Shiki’s style is usually described as objective and realistic. In his best writings, however, I find a large lyric and personal element as well. The combination of realism and lyricism, plus an assumption of closeness to the reader, creates Shiki’s distinctive tone.” Instead of “sketch from life” she argues that she finds “a delicate balance of such opposing elements as realism and fantasy, objective description and subjective expression.”


5. Theses on Haiku and Linguistics


In the abstract Michiko Kaneko writes: “This dissertation explores the poetic features of sign language haiku. Sign language haiku can be defined as a very short piece of poetic signing, which is influenced by the traditional Japanese haiku form. Traditional Japanese haiku form is known for strict formal discipline, objective description of nature, and strong visual appeal. Sign language haiku retains some of the basic features of traditional haiku, but has turned itself into a new poetic form which inherits characteristics both from general artistic signing and the particular discipline of haiku.” Kaneko organized a haiku festival and this research studies the haiku that were created in British Sign Language (BSL) for the festival. She concludes: “Because brevity is the fundamental feature of sign language haiku, all the poetic features are condensed and have become highly symbolic. There is a close deep relationship between form and meaning in sign language haiku, which requires an investigation into both formal and thematic aspects. Theme-wise, sign language haiku inherits topics linked to nature from the traditional haiku discipline, but also adds issues of Deafness and identity from the larger body of sign language poetry. In terms of formal features, sign language haiku makes the most of its visual-spatial nature, resulting in highly expressive, emotional, and embodied language. Features such as hand shapes, rhythm, symmetry, blending of poetic spaces, and use of eye gaze are all indispensable parts of sign language haiku as in sign language poetry in general.”


Marie Miller conducts linguistic research on how “sound symbolism, and more specifically phonetic iconicity, plays a role in conveying emotional weight in the context of poetry.” She reports that: “plosive to nasal ratio may indeed play a role in the perception of emotion in poetry, particularly in the case of poems with high plosive to nasal ratios, which were perceived as markedly more active and positive than other poems.”


Yamamoto studies “how pitch pattern is realized in Japanese traditional verses. My observation consists of four parts: (i) investigation of lexical pitch and accentual combinations of contemporary haiku in prose and in verse (ii) investigation of lexical pitch and accentual combinations of Basho’s traditional haiku (iii) observation of nonsense haiku and (iv) pitch range measurements of contemporary haiku in prose and in verse.”
reports the following findings: “Japanese speakers (i) tend to recite contemporary haiku that include familiar lexemes with expected pitch patterns, compared with Basho’s traditional haiku that include more lexemes unfamiliar to the subjects (ii) have two major pitch template choices, which I term plateau and default, when reciting nonsense verses, and the occurrences of these pitch patterns are supported by Japanese phonological notions such as default-accent, down-step or declining, and (iii) tend to read haiku in verse with a wider pitch range than that in prose.”

6. Theses on Haiku and Psychology


In this nursing study, W. Anne Bruce examines “mindfulness meditation” in health care. She writes: “The purpose of this study was to explore mindfulness by those who regularly practiced mindfulness meditation and were caregivers in a Zen hospice or living with a life threatening illness.” She concludes: “These perspectives may help nurses and health care professionals go beyond dualistic views and provide guidance for abiding in the midst of suffering that may be beyond words.”


Philomene Kocher “explores the use of haiku poetry to connect with persons with dementia. The happenings during two one-hour sessions provide the main focus for this study. These sessions were part of an ongoing spiritual care program on the secure dementia unit of a long-term care facility. The sessions were co-facilitated by the chaplain who leads the ongoing program, and by myself as both guest poet and researcher. Haiku were used as prompts to reminiscence. Words and phrases from the stories that were spoken during the session became the building blocks for creating collaborative haiku within the group setting.”


Kittredge Stephenson studies haiku writers “to evaluate its healing potential. Participants, 98 introductory psychology students at a large southwestern university, wrote for 20 minutes a day on three consecutive days and completed self-report measures of happiness, satisfaction with life, spiritual meaning, creativity, physiological symptomatology, depression, anxiety, and health/illness orientation at baseline and 3-week follow-up. A series of ANCOVA linear contrasts were used to examine differences between groups writing narrative about a neutral topic, haiku about a neutral topic, haiku about nature, or haiku about a negative life event. It was found that writing haiku demonstrated increased levels of creativity overall. In addition, the nature haiku group reported significantly lower levels of physiological symptomatology than the negative life event haiku group and had significantly lower illness orientation than the haiku control group.” Kittredge concludes that the results “suggest that writing haiku poetry is a creative activity that leads one to be more sensitive to the writing topic, whatever it may be. Narrative writing, by contrast,
appears to help integrate one’s experience. The difference between the heightened sensitivity of writing haiku and the integrative capacity of narrative are compared and recommendations made for future research.”


In this extension of the 2009 master’s thesis, Kittredge Stephenson analyzed short-term and long-term measures of 235 college student writers based on “writing type (narrative, haiku, or haibun), image content (nature or non-nature), and affective valence (positive or negative).” The short-term effects measured included: arousal, affective valence, and flow. The longer-term measures included: “negative (anxiety, depression, physiological symptomatology) and positive attributes (spiritual meaning, creativity, mindfulness).” Kittredge found that the writing groups “experienced greater salubrious change when their writing included narrative: mindfulness, change in affective valence, and flow all increased.” Kittredge found “no significant differences between participants who wrote haiku about nature versus a non-nature topic. Relative to those writing haiku in response to negative nature images, those writing haiku in response to positive nature images evinced decreased depressive symptomatology, increased physiological symptomatology, and greater positive change in affective valence.”

7. **Theses on Teaching Haiku as Literature and Writing**


Jessica Curran writes that “this dissertation analyzes the works of Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau, situating them in a contemporary ecocritical context, but more importantly, in a widened sense of ecopoetics. The project’s thesis states that the ecopoet, in mourning the loss of nature as idealization and salvation, embraces a state of radical metaphor-making, which in turn allows for a heightened sense of intimacy and necessitates a commitment to meditation. The cultivation of intimacy and the practice of meditation lie at the heart of ecological thinking and being.” She further explains: “In shaping this narrative of ecopoesis, multiple genres are discussed in relation to meditative practice as a form of diurnal awareness, including the epistle, ode, haiku, journal, lyric fiction, and elegy.”


Becky DeVito studies “the cognitive processes of poets as they go about their normal business of composing a poem. In this study, I ask: In what ways, if at all (and to what extent), has the process of writing a poem functioned as a process of inquiry for these poets? I also study how, if at all, the poets perceive that sustaining a practice of writing poetry has impacted their meaning making in other areas of their lives, and their perceptions on whether they have conducted inquiry through their writing practices. I examine the poet responses in light of trends found in other data from the study.” She recruits seven published tanka poets and “asked them to compose a poem using a think aloud protocol, and ended each session with a qualitative interview to gain a more complete sense of how the poem came into being, as well as to obtain the poets’ perceptions on how they normally go about the process of writing poetry.” Recruited from the Tanka Society of
America, the poets include: Miriam Chaikin, Elaine Mokhtefi, John Stevenson, and four poets who chose to remain anonymous.


For her thesis, Robin DiJoseph creates “An original book of haiku poems for six-and seven-year-olds on common childhood experiences, e.g., losing a tooth, taking a bath, playing a game.” Her thesis includes “responses to work by six groups of children in different educational settings.” And it “Contains a chapter on reading and writing haiku poems in a first and second grade classroom.”


Dufort’s dissertation focuses on strategies and benefits of “community and collaborative learning in the college classroom.” She especially considers “research and ideas from the fields of psychology (attachment theory, resilience theory, and logotherapy), cognitive science, medicine, business, group dynamics, and physics” related to a classroom community based on collaborative learning. Her primary example of collaborative activity is students writing haiku poetry. She argues that “While academic prose is useful in some ways, poetry is useful in others, and an approach combining the two serves to increase the accessibility and usefulness of the ideas under discussion.” Dufort uses haiku because it provides “evocative and approachable writing that is economical with words.”


In this dissertation, Ellie Friedland examines her own experience with Zen Buddhist traditions of contemplation and writing. She narrates her own growth and education over a three-year period of Zen practice in two areas: (1) writing haiku and tanka, and (2) studying and acting Shakespeare. “She approaches these content areas as awareness practices: Zen is the contemplative; writing is an internal expressive practice; and studying and acting Shakespeare includes public, externally-focused creative expression.” Friedland begins with the hypothesis that “an important purpose of education can and should be ‘to make you wonder and answer that wondering with the deepest expression of your own nature.’”


Atsushi Iida studies the effectiveness of using English-language haiku composition in a second-language classroom. He writes that this dissertation “explores the interaction between academic prose and the effect of writing different text types, focusing on Japanese poetry, haiku.” This is an empirical study of 20 college freshmen at a private Japanese university. Iida’s data come from “multiple sources: pre- and post-essays, the books of haiku, weekly journals, self-reflections, and face-to-face interviews.” He concludes: “This empirical study demonstrated that, for the participants, the task of composing English haiku had positive effects on the development of their L2 academic literacy skills and helped them to gain a greater awareness of voice in L2 writing. It also showed that English haiku composition was a valuable task for the participants in L2 learning.”

8. Theses on Using Haiku In Other Academic Disciplines


Jesse Burgess examines “the aesthetic qualities of Zen haiku and discusses their application to music.” He asks: “Is there a music like a haiku, one that manifests an essential minimum of Zen haiku aesthetic qualities and justifies it as in the Zen haiku attunement?” Then Burgess “examines pieces of music from many different cultures and epochs and explains why some can be considered to manifest the Zen haiku attunement and others cannot.”


David Charles employs Bakhtin’s concepts to examine improvisation in theatre. He writes: “Improvisation has often been viewed and valued in terms of its service and resemblance to scripted traditions of theatre. Such a stance seriously undermines the significance and impact of this global performance modality, and has resulted in improvisatory modes being largely ignored or downplayed in modern historical accounts of theatre.” In this study, Charles discusses “more widely recognized theatrical movements, such as the Roman mime, Italian Commedia dell’Arte, Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Viola Spolin’s Theatre Games and Keith Johnstone’s Theatresports, the inclusion of lesser known (and marginal) practices, such as Japanese renga, Nigerian Apidan and Jacob Levy Moreno’s psychodrama, further elucidates and complicates improvisation’s generic qualities.”


For her dissertation, Janet Chen composes a work, Four Seasons after Haiku of Bashō, for a large ensemble featuring Chinese instruments. She explains that the piece “uses timbre and sonority to depict the vivid colors of the four seasons.” The dissertation also includes a second composition, Spring Air and Winter Night, blending Chinese and string instruments.


Jim Handlin develops “a set of haiku materials that can be used to train the intuition of educational administrators so they can better negotiate the different interpretations of organizational experience that can be summarized as the: (1) efficiency or rational system theories; (2) the human resource theories; (3) the political or power theories; and (4) the cultural or symbolic theories. The danger for administrators is to choose one theory and make the world fit it. Consequently, administrators in their training should become conversant with the literature and practice of all four perspectives as well as being required in their training to develop approaches that integrate the various perspectives. While much has been done to popularize a multiple perspective approach to administration, very little scholarship has explored a methodology to develop an integrating approach. This study
explores haiku as one such methodology.” Handlin argues that “haiku exposes a complicated multi-valued, ambiguous, multi-dimensional reality; not a black or white, either/or world. Because haiku incorporates the nature of ambiguity within itself as nature does, it allows for the process of discovery, for brainstorming and creative guessing through spontaneous use of the intellect and feelings. Thus, haiku is a methodology for helping administrators to conceptualize and work with the ambiguity that underlies the multiple perspective approach to administration.” He concludes that haiku is “a useful, practical, creative tool that administrators can use to stimulate their creativity, improve their conceptual and analytical abilities and enhance their ability to negotiate ambiguity.”


Yoko Igarashi studies early twentieth century Western art songs based on Japanese tanka as “a late manifestation of *Japonisme*, the Japanese influence on Western art and music. The songs discussed in this dissertation include ‘Japanisches Regenlied’ (1909) by Joseph Marx, ‘Three Japanese Lyrics’ (1912 – 13) by Igor Stravinsky, ‘Petits Poëmes Japonais’ (1919) by Francesco Santoliquido, and ‘Romances on Texts by Japanese Poets’ (1928 – 32) by Dmitri Shostakovich.” The dissertation provides a history of *Japonisme* in Western art and music. Igarashi summarizes that: “The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between the original Japanese poems and their translations into European languages, and to discuss their transformation” and “Japanese influences in Western music.”


Jason Levis composes *Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness for solo bass trombone and ensemble*. He explains that “The title reflects my interest in haiku, and the possibility of containing in a brief statement, a moment of total clarity and harmony. While reflecting on Professor Thow’s passing, sitting on my front porch, watching the blooming plum tree in front of my house shake and stir ever so gently when the wind would pick up, I experienced one of these moments of deep quietude. Even as the title is not a haiku in its traditional form, it contains a moment for me where something brief and subtle can have a sudden impact and lasting resonance.”


Dania Lukey’s thesis focuses on her “journey as a budding artisan of weaving and ceramics and as a devotee of poetry. Over the course of the year, the author created a journal using her exploration into these crafts as a platform to explore the convergence of ideas from disciplines thought of as divergent: Zen and Buddhist ideas of life and aesthetics, systems theory of inter-relationships, cognitive science’s ideas of embodied knowledge, and ideas from the philosophers of art and education.” Haiku becomes part of her artistic exploration. She writes that “the value of reading a haiku is in the reader’s journey through it, not the words, not even insight if they are to have arrived at one. While the reader is following with ‘intentionless intention,’ they re-place themselves over and over in the universe, grounding themselves as an interdependent member of their environment” (22).

George Meyh’s thesis provides guidelines for using haiku in nature education. He gives an overview of the basics of haiku aesthetics and proposes its use as a means of studying nature.


Stephanie Pointer’s thesis is a journal of her participation in a program of “Integrated Arts” which included an Artist-Forest-Community Residency in the Helena National Forest. She explains that she was seeking to become closer to nature to improve her artwork. She writes: “This presentation primarily documents a voyage of discovery into the business of mounting a solo show. More importantly, the purpose of this paper is to give the reader a feeling for the creative encounter. This paper strives to provide an ability to view the work and experience that transformational moment which is so captivatingly elusive. For this reason I have included a section devoted to a selection of my imagery and Haiku poetry to accompany them.”


Steven Smith composes *Haiku Seasons*, a choral work that uses several haiku to portray moments in nature. Smith explains that “The intent of *Haiku Seasons* is to create an image of nature isolated from human interaction. Thus, the image is a pastoral setting with many independent parts all coexisting in a relatively silent world. I combine aspects of tonality, time, space, and silence to create this image.”

Tercek, Mary Jo. “Typographic Interpretation of the Poetic Forms of Haiku, Senryu and Renga in Book Form.” Kent State University, 1995. MFA. 84 pages.


Richard Whalley is a composer trying “to find ways of achieving greater intimacy through engaging my audience’s imagination and memory in the experience of listening to music.” He uses a haiku as the basis of a four-movement work for a large chamber ensemble. In his abstract he writes: “In many ways this strikingly simple haiku by the American poet Tom Tico epitomizes what I strive to achieve in composition: an insight on the world that has the power to transport us from the logistics of everyday life into a deeper realm of existence. A wisp of spring cloud drifting apart from the rest . . . slowly evaporates. What, for me, is so beautiful about this haiku is how within just 18 syllables — through attention to a fleeting detail within something so familiar, yet so awe-inspiring as the sky — a reader is transported very powerfully into a spiritual association with nature.”


Tsan Wong develops an artificial intelligence program to generate haiku. He writes that his “goal is to generate a modern haiku poetry automatically.” He explains that “Besides just generating few lines of human-understandable text, to be a successful generated poem, one must fulfill certain kinds of requirements: for example, Grammatical: The most basic
requirement that a text should fulfill, Meaningful: a poem should be meaningful so that it is human-understandable. Poetic feature of a poem: This is the most abstract aspect that is quite difficult to describe using few words. To deal with poetic feature, the issue is sometimes subjective in nature.” His approach uses “popular web 2.0 technologies, blogosphere, and web search engine, to generate modern haiku poetry.” Here is an example of a haiku generated by his JAVA-servlet application Wong titled HAIG (Haiku Artificial Intelligence Generator):

Drifting snow and windy
That leaves us dreaming
Chase the moon


In this autoethnography, Mika Yoshimoto examines “the identity struggles of Japanese women learning English as a second language from the perspective of sociocultural theory and critical theory in a postmodern stance.” She draws on her own experience as a Japanese woman learning English and studies “three female Japanese students learning English in a Canadian University in Ontario.” This study focuses on the use of “four different discourse genres; narrative, haiku, metaphor and academic discourse. I choose to write narrative discourse to express our stories poetically. My decision to create was inspired by haiku, a genre that expresses my changing values and never-ending painful transformations. The untranslatable nature of language and this journey of women inspire haiku that emerges in a third space of the said and the unsaid. Finally, I turn to academic discourse to compose the meta-story of what I am doing and why, and to situate my identity and my research in a theoretical framework.” Mika shares original haiku throughout the dissertation.

9. Creative Writing Theses with Haiku and Related Literature


For his creative writing thesis, Wayne Bartholomew has written a pulp detective novel employing haiku-like stanzas. He explains that The Bronze Dame is an experiment, in which I attempt to blend the rigorous structuring of the East with the itinerant, gritty styling of the West.” His conception of haiku is primarily syllable count. He states: “In terms of the East, I adhere to the ‘traditional’ English formatting rules for the structuring of haiku (the vehicle in which I tell my tale): three lines, with a syllable count of five, seven, and five, in the first, second, and third line, respectively. However, I choose to omit the obligatory kireji (pause) that comes at the end of either the first or second line, opting instead for pauses when and if I see fit. I also choose to omit the kigo (season word), in which the renga (reference to the natural world) is set. The result is a terse, tightly edited voice that tells the story of a witty, perceptive hero, who, in Chandler’s words, is the ‘best man in his world, and a good enough man for any other.’”


Aubrie Cox writes: “This collection essentially synthesize two aspects of Japanese culture: tanka and kyōka poetry and yokai. Both have roots in exploration of the human psyche and our relationship with the natural world. The challenge while respecting these traditions and
elements deeply ingrained within Japanese society has been to utilize my own Western traditions and understandings to create new interpretations of both the poetic form and folklore.”

**Eliason, Kristen.** “Treatise On Drowning.” Notre Dame University, 2008. 76 pages.


Florence McGinn writes, *Following the Blood Trail* is a collection of free-verse poetry and English-language haiku. Its purposeful structure examines private meaning and aesthetic process. It explores feminine experiences, sensuality, Asian American reflections, and writing process through archetypal metaphors of life quest and blood price to voice a confirmation of freedom and purpose.”


Mary Rogers writes: “Multiple verse forms and various poetic subjects dominate this manuscript. I am primarily interested in short verse forms, either traditional forms, free verse forms, or experimental forms that blend free verse craft, traditional structures, and/or visual and spatial elements. The sonnet, the prose poem, the elegy, stanza forms (couplet; quatrain; tercet for example), and concrete or pattern poetry are included. Many of these poems are autobiographical in nature. For example, I develop ‘the memory sonnet’, using the sonnet form as a vehicle for autobiographical writing. One traditional form, the haiku, is explored in detail, illustrating an understanding of its centuries-old tradition, while also developing the form into more modern and contemporary applications. For starters, the entire collection is structured around the seasonal element of haiku, broken into 4 subtle parts — spring, summer, autumn and winter. I capture, within the form, a moment of ‘intense perception’ so often attributed to haiku.”


Younkin describes his two-part creative thesis: “The first part, ‘Origami,’ features short poems that meditate in the space where the everyday world disrupts imagination, leading at times to revision of memory, lyrical grumbling, and mythologizing experience. Many of these poems are influenced by traditional Chinese and Japanese poetic forms. Part two, ‘No places,’ is a long poem that explores a mystifying and imposing suburban landscape of massive strip malls, endless housing tracts, and car-centered infrastructure. The poem consists of lyrical and narrative modes juxtaposed with haiku.”

---

**10. Theses in English on Haiku in Other Non-Japanese Languages**

Brower examines Spanish American haiku, placing works into three categories: Western poetry, Westernized haiku and “those which do not even seem to function as ‘good’ poetry.” The five chapters include “The Basis for the Misunderstanding of Haiku in the West; A Comparison of the Technical Devices of Spanish American and Japanese Haiku; Spanish American Interpretations of Haiku; A Comparison of Themes and Images; Spanish American Haiku.” ~from Japan & Korea: An Annotated Bibliography


Ishikawa writes: “My dissertation explores the limits of representation, and the dialectic relation between two distinct cultures in what Kristeva sees as ‘the stranger within ourselves’. It is composed of two main parts. In the first part, I analyze the depiction of the Chinese coolie as an exoticized subject, opening the debate on how to ‘represent’ this immigrant.” He goes on to explain: “In the second part, through the analysis of haiku, I challenge this parameter by positioning my argument against the Latin American representation of the ‘other’ to that of representing Latin America through the ‘other’. Through haiku, the Latin American space is now the object of representation. I therefore displace the traditional representative form from ‘subject’ to that of ‘object’. I argue that since haiku is an imported form that depends on Latin American space — geography, climate, time, etc.—in order to manifest its poetic value, it problematizes cultural hierarchy: instead of representing a subject through Latin American literature, Latin America is now the object of representation through an adopted Japanese literary tradition.”


Zelideth Rivas summarizes her dissertation: “Japanese immigration to Brazil began in 1908 when Japanese arrived to provide labor for the coffee plantations. Today, Brazil has the largest diasporic population of Japanese descendants. This dissertation explores the literature of the Japanese-Brazilian jun-nisei, people who were born in Japan and who immigrated to Brazil as children.” This literature includes memoirs, short stories and “poetry from the tanka anthology Koronia man’yoshu (Colonia Man’yoshu, 1981).”


Tomoko Sakuma writes: “This dissertation is a sociolinguistic study of the ideologies about language, culture and ethnicity among Japanese immigrants and descendants in Brazil (hereafter, Nikkeis) who gather at a local Japanese cultural association, searching for what it means to be ‘Japanese’ in Brazil. This study focuses on how linguistic behaviors are ideologically understood and associated with cultural activities and ethnic identities.”

All content that is generated by the Foundation is copyright © 2008-2015 by The Haiku Foundation. All rights reserved. All views expressed on The Haiku Foundation web site are the views of the authors. They are not necessarily the views of The Haiku Foundation.