

R'r



Things She Can't Say (2009) by Chris Gordon

Issue 11.3

-Scorpion Prize 24

by Chris Gordon

-particles with integer spin

**-Discarding the Dividing Line:
conversing with paul m.**

by Jack Galmitz

-Outré Haiku of Katō Ikuya (1)

by Hiroaki Sato

-Haiku by Ginema

translated by Eric Selland

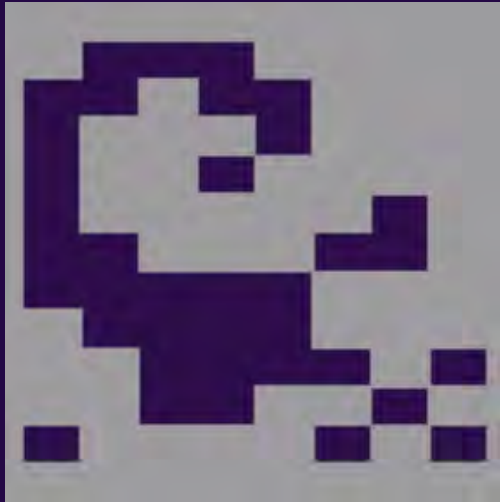
-Haiku by Tadato Nakatsuka

translated by Eric Selland

Scott Metz — editor

Paul Pfleuger, Jr. — assistant editor

Jack Galmitz — contributing editor



24

In the spirit of this issue of Roadrunner I spent my time with its poems without knowing who wrote them. Among the many compelling and original haiku there were two poems I kept coming back to. Their beauty and meaning difficult for me to easily articulate. Mysteries, in other words.

where does the idiom come from potatoes

A great example of a mental construct as one of the haiku's possible elements. Thoughts, reproductions, questions, quotations, samples. All of these are part of the perceivable world we often associate with the form. Some people still feel such things should be avoided in haiku, that they bring too much of an authorial presence or intruding "I" into the poem.

Such mental constructs are not really personal or idiosyncratic anyway, as much as we need to believe they are part of who we uniquely are. They belong to the accumulated human conversation that has been going on for thousands of years. As poets we should already be very cognizant of this conversation, as all of our verse is merely a response to the poets who came before us.

As for the potatoes, I have a soft spot for them in poems. They are very compelling characters, whatever scenario they find themselves in. Here they seem to answer the question about the idiom's origins. And for a second it makes perfect sense. And then you realize the potatoes are not the answer. They are equal partners in the poem with the mental construct. Thank goodness. We can put the idiom aside and make potato soup.

mannequins wearing new fall colors
the edge of our universe easy
to forget

On the one hand it's hard to go wrong with mannequins. Monstrous doubles. The Uncanny Valley. Horror movies and romantic comedies set in shopping malls. And yet they can be dangerous shorthand. So fixed in their associations that we have no latitude to understand them otherwise. Here the mannequins appear in "new fall colors," the language of advertising and the spectacle. While this may seem to rejuvenate these almost people, it does quite the opposite.

There are no new fall colors. There is the plethora of hues, shades, and colors we see each autumn and sometimes forget to notice. As for the Fall Line, this year's new is last year's old. It's all about tricking you into desiring what you already have. We put the mannequins in their new fall colors and it only highlights their chipped paint, their odd angles, their doll-like eyes.

Then we get our serious cut. We're about to confront the edge of the universe ("What is real and what isn't?" "The Fall Line makes us unreal?"), and it makes itself known to us first with a visual representation. A refreshing use of a poetic convention we don't typically see in most haiku.

And it's not the edge of the universe, it's the edge of our universe. In its simple postulation it admits the presence of many universes. And at the same time asks "What is our universe?" "What is its edge?" And here we stop. Does it actually have an edge? What would it look like? How to conceive of such a thing? Or is this statement leading us astray?

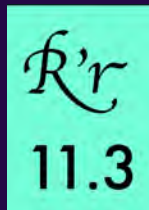
Here we have a second invisible cut in the poem. "How can I forget something I've never been aware of?" Because it's easy to forget. To me this brings us back to the mannequins. Doppelgangers frozen in time. Waiting for next season's new fashions. Knocking at the edges. Hoping for an answer. "Maybe we are the edge itself?"

Chris Gordon

Chris Gordon is the editor of *ant ant ant ant ant* (antantantant.wordpress.com). His poetry has appeared in a number of anthologies and journals, including *The Antioch Review*, *Fence*, *Northwest Review*, *Roadrunner*, and *Sentence*. He is interviewed by Jack Galmitz in the current issue of *A Hundred Gourds*. His mixed-media work is available at deviantART (mrcr3w.deviantart.com).

john stevenson

gary hotham



-December 2011-

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11.3

particles with integer spin

scorpions inside a century turning doorknobs

incision

clear

water

flailing open

diamond antics of the trigeminal nerve

the fear of death hangs on watching crows

*Salty
bodies
passing*

close

*the
fibbing
window*

forgotten hands the salt inside an envelope

climbing down
on ladders of rain
the dead pass through us

in the mirror
the face one sees
1 atom thick

the blood
the horse i was, left
to the woods

**I sing US a
threnody
to the quick and the dead**

particles with integer spin a rain tight anagram

checkered milliseconds the plum of memory's echo

no second
parenthesis
just swallows

**once too many
tadpoles about
her eyes**

**daffodils
in our backyard
we clown car it**

her magic
numbers a crossing
observed

her words inventing another piece of my mind

cream-filled heresies in the think of it

unabsolved ululation
uncalculated underscore
unwept unchurch ultrapure

**insistent dream
difficult voice
this one who is**

obsidian dark sigh and pick proof

machine

gun

fire

the muted news
of morning

the government of winter in her coal dyes

trading a past
life regression for a
past life: rape

negotiating the quake
investing in smeared
leaves

**an awkward shuffle
his open palms cradle
the sound of crows**

in the amber
interstices a few
exclamation marks

Eye to the wandering sun alit in time punched holes

mile after winter mile trying to handcuff the light

what thoughts I can twilight crickets

more signs
about the next town

—

clouds stretching out of existence

on the mensroom
floor flattened by many
feet green apples

tonight I'll stop the neon alley undulating black organs

≅ the warp of asphalt seething and languid but

**the cold behind a question
stars with eight legs
dangle**

another raw star I eat the night air

over pouring saké
another lavender
singularity

in the bowl
a goldfish is poured
speechless

The son of man returns ornamental pears

the everywhere death unfolding spring

commuting a parrot pinned to a bag

an astronaut
just returned:
no blooms, no rice

without child
i find my wife inside
an inedible mushroom

a child's dance i can't find the center to

In the full stop of red engines ago

a dot in the kaleidoscope fingers unborn thunder

inside a bat's ear
a rose
opens to a star

thrush ingmachines . . .

their earthworm accordions

rend a soft tune

the winged cows
milking them
a state of mind

empty hand
of karate you
condense the vast

string theory we dress in vacant buildings

*his shadow
alone could winter
early beach
boys*

what the seagulls
circle we
misunderstand

nude beach
hanging in the closet
forms i was

autumn deepens
the unfathomable
bits of her

green rain. The pairs of hands we unveil. A festival with

fallen, trampled moss. The month then the year got away

leaning against
the next semester her
blog in mine

darrell lindsey

peter yovu

eve luckring

cherie hunter day

michelle tennison

paul pfleuger, jr.

william m. ramsey

richard gilbert

susan diridoni

chris gordon

john w. sexton

jack galmitz

carolyn rohrig

rebecca lilly

scott metz

jim kacian

peter newton

philip rowland

chris mcinnes

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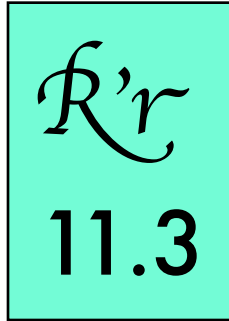
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Discard the Dividing Line: Conversing with paul m.

By Jack Galmitz

JG: Hi, Paul. Welcome to Roadrunner Haiku Journal as an interviewee.

pm: Glad to be here, Jack. Thanks for having me.

JG: Congratulations on the publication of your latest book, [a few days north days few](#) (Redmoon Press, 2011); it's quite a compelling body of work and your original linocuts compliment it. I find the linocuts resemble the poems: both carefully strip away everything except what you want to stand out and both have a simplicity that culminates from sophistication. Do you find a similarity in the two practices?

pm: That's an interesting observation. However I'm not sure the end result of either is as premeditated as you make it sound. Peter Yovu once wrote that a haiku "is a balance between control and surrender." I think that is a key concept of any creative act. An experienced poet is really just an observant poet, meaning that at all times they have twenty kigo in their head—what is representative around/within them at that moment—and that the rest of the poem is their reaction to that representation. A kigo is simply the bedrock

we all share, and each poet leaps from it. I think we have control over that first part in the sense that we understand it, but we can be surprised by the leap. Regarding the illustrations, I had definitive ideas of what I wanted the picture to look like, but so much of “getting to the end result” was outside my control—whether it was my lack of skill, or the surprise that what I thought would hold ink didn’t. But both creative acts clearly work that balance.

JG: Speaking of control and surrender, you have certainly been influenced by the naturalist, [John Muir](#). But, I sense an equal impact in your work from the American Transcendentalists. For instance, your first poem

with eyes closed spring grass

reminds me of Walt Whitman’s “I lean and loafe at my ease, observing a spear of summer grass.” And your assiduous searching for happenings in the natural world reminds me of Henry David Thoreau’s remarks that “we must learn to ...keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn”; and his view that to “transact some private business...to trade with the Celestial Empire,” which was Nature, would elevate his soul. The universe, for the Transcendentalists, was akin to Richard Bucke’s Cosmic Consciousness. Would you agree that your influences can be traced to these forebears?

pm: Very much so. That’s a great quote from Thoreau, conscious as he was of life’s continuous creation. As a child of the Los Angeles suburbs and then as a resident of San Francisco for a number of years, I have always felt that half of the world was missing. That half I discovered in Nature. So I make time to get out into it, to see its relationships, and to see what it can teach me about its larger self, including myself. I am hesitant (I’m an accountant after all) to

extend those mysteries to the larger cosmic consciousness Bucke speaks of, but the writings of the transcendentalists have helped me steer my own thoughts. Interestingly, Dee Evetts in an issue of Frogpond once asked the haiku community why so many poems were written about nature when so many of the poets lived in cities. I answered that cities are static and lacked seasons, and in turn our relationship to the changing seasons. Life is change. It is Thoreau's 'dawn.' And I'd argue that humans have a seasonal clock. I don't think it's a coincidence that the natural world mimics our emotional lifetime.

JG: Paul, your haiku for the most part are written in the classical mode: a "seasonal reference," followed by a pause or cut, and followed by complimentary or contrary elements. For me, this is reminiscent of Thoreau's admonition "I say beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes." Your choice of a traditional form for your haiku also reminds me of other spiritual heritages—particularly the Amish and Chasidim—who choose simple black suits, because this is suitable for the conventional world and releases the wearer's intellectual energy to devote to higher purposes. Your formatting also reminds me somewhat again of Thoreau's hut at Walden; if you recall he borrowed an ax, bought and re-used some boards from another house, and otherwise used materials available from his natural environment. I think we can definitely see in one of your poems how you build from heritage and what's readily available:

sparrow song
a fence built
of found logs

You have included in your volume some experimental haiku, which I'll get to later. But for now, I wonder how you respond to my above analysis of your preference for tradition.

pm: There was a year recently in which I was very worried that the repetitiveness of the form would become tiresome, and looked to writers like John Martone to see how I could vary what you call the 'classical' three-line structure, to open up a poem mid-line or mid-word (something he does very interestingly) to create misreadings and extra-readings. But ultimately I decided that such misreadings were things to be used sparingly, since in most cases I am trying to share a particular moment, and those misreadings draw too much attention to themselves. Perhaps the choice of picture over frame? Yet, while I do write the majority of my poems in the 'classical' structure, I allow myself the freedom to follow the poem, and let it dictate its own structure—whether three line, one line, or many. I suspect all writers go through that struggle with form, especially a form like haiku which we (correctly or incorrectly) inherited.

JG: Well, I find your forms virtuous—pleasing and balanced. I do not think they slip into the weaknesses that a predetermined format for a poem might tend: repetition, imitation, even self-imitation, numbing of the sensitivities. In fact, my overall impression of your poems is that they convey virtue as a moral character, a human characteristic, and they achieve this because of your engagement in your subjects, but more of this later. I'd like to take a look first at the few experimental haiku that you include in your volume. The first one I'd like to look at was published previously in Roadrunner:

outdated magazines
in the green room
of a rose

I remember reading it, liking it, but not quite grasping it. Now that I've had more time to examine it, I think it creatively captures the green sepals opening and separating as the rose matures; what was initially fresh, fragrant, even a bit glossy—the sepals—containing all that was new, as magazines are when shiny and contain the latest information, become outworn and exist in a separate space—room—at the presence of the flower. I think the poem uses metaphor quite powerfully.

Rather than discuss the pros and cons of metaphor in haiku—once frowned upon—I would point to the wonderful, excited reception the Japanese haikai had to the haiku of Tomas Tranströmer and its use of metaphor as reported by Kaj Falkman in his Homage to Tomas Tranströmer in Japan, [which can be found on the Haiku Foundation's blog, Troutswirl](#).

Before moving on to some other examples of your experimental haiku, how did you feel when you wrote what would be called a post-modernist haiku?

pm: A short answer would be that I felt 'excited!' As evident by their sparse number in the book, they are something I'm still working out. In the last few years we've seen an explosion of exciting non-traditional haiku at the periphery of the community, some similar to Japanese gendai work, but often more of an abstract style that is definitely American. One of the first such poems I saw was your own 'Inside of me / Bison are stampeding / Across caves' which remains today one of my favorite haiku of all-time. I think my poem works in a similar way, although I am hesitant to explain it since logical summations distort its more organic genesis. The poem plays with the idea of a 'green room' which is traditionally a room stage performers wait in before they go on stage. I had in mind the green room of the Tonight Show or Letterman with their true and pseudo

celebrities. The final line makes the imaginative leap (a haiku-leap, if you will) to the room being the calyx of a rose, only now the rose has faded—much like all celebrity will. In reality the tight bud was perceived first and I imagined what might be inside.

JG: The second experimental haiku I'd like to examine is the following:

a line borrowed
from another poet
spring rain

What I find engaging about this poem is the fact that the subject is never really disclosed, although when read another way it is: literally, the poet admits borrowing a line while it is raining outside in spring. Of course, read differently, the facticity of "spring rain" is the borrowed line. This poem operates by ambiguity, a poetic device that's been highly valued in mainstream poetry since the 1950s.

Another poem that works with ambiguity is also a concrete poem: it is spread out on two pages, and the ambiguity arises from the fact that the poems on each page can be read as separate poems, until the reader realizes it is a concrete poem and is actually one poem dragged across two pages:

white wood asters a thousand

years the lake

emptying

Again, ambiguity, as here, is always surprising and so stirring, and the images on the first page are powerfully drawn. Then, in addition, once I realized it was one poem, the long gap, the separation of the poem's parts on two pages, strengthens the number of years it takes for the transformation of a lake into a forest.

Then, there's another haiku that would be called a concrete poem:

all night

thud of
ripe apples
at the

u
&
I

verse's
core

I find the separations of stanzas strategic and strong in this haiku. "all night" implies the length of intimacy between the u and I; the sound of the lovers is natural and comes without control—a "thud", the way "ripe apples," young lovers together do, and I appreciate the reverberation of the word "core" to describe the center of the experience as it reconnects to "ripe apples."

My question to you Paul is do you have a different regard for these experimental haiku than for your more formalistic haiku?

pm: That's an interesting question, and a little like asking a parent who their favorite child is—the one who asks endless questions

(especially ones you don't have the answer to) or the quiet one who breaks windows which inadvertently lets in birdsong? You learn from both. These particular poems presented something that I couldn't resist. The poem "white wood asters" was originally a one-liner to mimic the surface of the lake, and it wasn't until I started placing the poem on the page that I saw how moving its parts could heighten its effect. I'll go back to my earlier comment that I allow myself the freedom to follow the poem where it wants to lead. Each individual poem has a 'feel' for when it is done. A trope in haiku is that we want to leave preconception aside to approach our subjects openly and honestly. That applies to form as well. I'm delighted you recognized "all night" as a haiku, which I definitely consider it to be. That poem in particular begged to be broken apart to create interesting readings. The phrase "u / & / I" (you and I) and "verse" from the original word "universe" would never have risen to the surface without opening it up. That's a poem I won't say more about other than I find it very dynamic. It's a favorite.

JG: As I mentioned earlier, Paul, I consider your forms as vessels for virtues, in the sense of morality, as a human characteristic. I'd like to start this discussion with the oldest, that is, your veneration for the venerable age of the universe and your place in it as "a visitor myself," as a man with a visa so to speak, or as you emphasize it in part of the title of your book "days few." Here are some poems illustrating this:

small plot of land
the same sun
I was born under

sequoia that fell
long before my birth
the path around it

sun on the horizon
who first
picked up a stone

ancient moon
an outgoing wave
reveals sand crab holes

Your choice of such phrases as “small plot of land,” which may either refer to earth itself or even to you; “the path around it,” as perhaps humanities small patch of space in the ancient and huge universe; the beginnings of things in “sun on the horizon,” and our ancestral beginnings and history of aggression and violence; and your well-chosen adjective “ancient” for the moon in contradistinction to the small recent lives of mole crabs; all of this reveals your humility here in the universe. Is the sense of being small and short-lived in the universe the primary source of your veneration?

pm: I'm going to use a definition of 'veneration' that means “respect and awe” of which I have plenty for the universe. I'm also going to put a footnote on mankind's “history of aggression and violence”: the universe is a plenty violent place on its own. But I am astonished by mankind's Dark Age claim, and in many ways our contemporary selfish insistence, that we are the center of the universe—or even of this planet. The universe is an unknowably huge and complicated place, and the more we look outward, or even inward, regarding our physical presence here and now, we prove time and again that we are really quite insignificant. And in the face of it, quite fragile. While I had recognized that fact in certain poems I hadn't seen that as a larger theme of my poetry, but upon reflection it certainly is

one. “A man with a visa” well describes my feelings—and perhaps us all. I think your question brings up an interesting point about poetry, especially haiku (if you’ll forgive the sidebar). If we want to write honest poems, and view the world honestly, we speak about leaving preconception aside when we approach our subjects. But that’s a two way street. If we are truly open in our confrontation with the world as it is we bring into the moment our true selves as well. Basho admonished us to go to the pine to learn of the pine. But in the process we don’t just learn the ‘true’ meaning of the pine; we also learn the ‘true’ meaning of ourselves.

JG: While it’s not unprecedented in haiku, your inclusion of the darker side of nature—the struggle to survive, mortality—gives rise to the virtue of compassion in your work. Here are a few examples:

returning geese
her ashes still
in the plain tin

spring morning
flies return
to a crab carcass

stern wind
the branch an osprey
adds to its nest

three new planets
the bitter roe
of a sea urchin

farewell walk
a stretch of shore
known for driftwood

Did compassion develop in you over the years as a result of observation of nature, or was compassion a quality you already possessed, but was perhaps enhanced by your practice of haiku?

pm: I don't know that you can honestly interact with the world and not gain more compassion—either through the practice of poetry, the observation of animals, or simply shopping in a store. Whether I already possessed it is a question for my mother, but I suspect you know the answer she'll give. I mentioned that the universe was a violent place on its own. I do see some poetry, haiku included, that seems to want to veer from that seeing, to only present the beautiful and uplifting, which I find false and a bit cowardly. The world is a complicated and messy place. If we are going to value honesty in poetry we need to represent all that we see.

JG: There is also a generosity in your haiku, Paul, that testifies to your willingness to share the world and your belief that there is room for all things in it. While this is trait of haiku, I find it markedly so in your work.

hand in hand
room enough
for each star

no voice
but for the stones
autumn brook

blue shadows
deep into the snow
split-hoof of a deer

a brook
with a name...
dancing mayflies

These are just a sample of the many instances in your book where you make way for existents in the world, appreciate them for what they are, do homage to life in its variegated forms, show respect, which is generosity of spirit. Having said this, I wonder if you think that the practice of haiku can create by constantly practicing it, generosity and respect beyond the confines of the page and into the world?

pm: I am reluctant to assign that kind of power to poetry, but I will add that I would hope so, but no more so than other literature or music or anything else that is shared between people. I wrote in the introduction to this book that “I believe that we don't share poetry to revel in our differences, but rather to seek comfort in our similarities.” I realize that people often approach haiku for its exoticness, its cultural ‘otherness’; yet I believe people are essentially the same everywhere, and love and fear the same things. After a time—especially after being exposed to other cultures’ arts—that desire for exoticness is hopefully replaced with a recognition of that fact.

JG: Paul, regardless of the fact that you write haiku in the traditional style, there is something uncommon, distinctive about your work. I can literally feel your engagement in each poem, your participation

as observer/creator, so much so that I would say you are not only a man “in” the world, but a man within which is the world. I feel in your works the common divide between subject and object, self and non-self is discarded and no such dividing line exists. The Zen Buddhist monk and writer Thich Nhat Hanh calls such a state of being “inter-being,” or inter-penetration, or co-dependent origination. Few would argue that opposites, the whole range of them, are not contingent upon one another, not defined by one another, but can exist independently. This is not only ancient wisdom, but wisdom shared by modern psychology/psychoanalysis, , modern science in general.

So, though you write classical haiku, you are still modern. As Jorge Luis Borges put it in his book This Craft Of Verse (Harvard University Press, 2000) “we are modern by the very simple fact that we live in the present . . . We are modern whether we want to be or not.”

The question remains how you achieve this state of inter-being and I would venture to say that it is because of your intense observation, love, involvement in your work and subjects that this comes about. And, this in turn, derives from your vigorous, exacting craft of the use of language. I’ll show you what I consider some of the more telling examples.

river of stars
a burning stick
from a neighboring fire

Here we have hermeticism: that which is below corresponds to that which is above...to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing. The divine sparks and the camping sparks: there’s a sense of community, and though there is no ostensible witness, the poet as

crafter is what I call man as metaphor maker, the actual joiner of above and below. Or here:

early dusk...
an inch of snow
on a half inch branch

Though the poem works on the literal level and seems perfectly objective, there is also the metaphoric at play, the slow progress of dusk, spreading beyond the confines of things of the world, larger than them in size, in reach. Again, though the author is literally absent, the world is understood through its migration and transformation through him. Or this:

ring around the moon
the broken face
of a tidal berm

Again, the comparison of the halo round the moon to the elevated berm above the backshore, both round, both with implied faces, is the world as created by the poet, with assonance and consonance both holding the edifice in place, joining it, serves well to illustrate how as a poet you don't merely present images to evoke a mood, but actively create further meaning through association. Or here,

rib shadows
on a loping coyote
a field of cut hay

river in flood-
from low brush
a second moose calf

These two poems you set on the same page. The one, a starving, perishing coyote, the second another new calf, new life. We would not know the state of the coyote if the author did not give us words like “rib shadows” and compare them to “cut hay,” or would we fully feel the impact of starvation without the rising “flood” of the river and its metaphoric relationship to bursting second (additional) life in the birth of the “calf.”

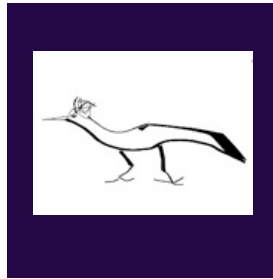
In these poems, and throughout the entire book, we can feel the presence of an author, an author who is complex, dedicated, sophisticated, gentle, compassionate, aware always and attentive to the smallest of details. How do you regard your energetic engagement with the world as envisioned in your poems, Paul?

pm: Thank you for your kind appreciation of my work. To answer your question, while I’m not overtly conscious of the activity, I can only say that I hope I show the interdependence/interpenetration of things that you say. The world is a large and complex place. And I’ll add, a messy one. You are right that I feel life is short, fragile, and that I am but a “man with a visa.” I think if I didn’t try to anchor myself to it somehow I’d get lost, the way ancient sailors feared falling off the edge of the world. For me the only way to get that anchor is by engagement. You can’t hide yourself in a cloister. Yet despite the world’s messiness, it is filled with great wonder, so it is a joy to engage. In my poetic journey (which is just a fancy way of saying how I’ve changed and hopefully grown as a poet over the

years) I've picked up advice from a number of very sharp people. Fay Aoyagi, in the introduction to her first collection Chrysanthemum Love (2003), famously wrote "I don't write haiku to report the weather. I write to tell my stories." That's an idea I carry with me. So when I use a kigo to anchor myself to this world, such as 'winter sun', it isn't just to tell you that it's winter and the sun is shining, but also to ask you to feel the chill in the air, your hands warm in your pockets, perhaps collar turned up against a bracing wind, yet also feeling worn down by the length of another long year, perhaps thoughts of mortality... and that the sun is shining weakly through the bare branches of a tree—because that's what I was experiencing when I wrote the poem. The haiku is a short poem, possibly the shortest, and it needs all the help it can get to impart information to the reader. That's why I use kigo, as a shorthand for all that seasonal and cultural information. So when I make the leap from the kigo to the rest of the poem I can't help but be more engaged. Hopefully it shows in the poems.

JG: Impermanence is one of the characteristics of living we often find most discomfoting. When we are enjoying ourselves, it is especially difficult to let go of the moment. However, we know it can't be otherwise and without it life would be static, no new experiences could arise, so we accept it willingly or not. I have so enjoyed this exchange of ideas and poems with you that I am very reluctant to end it. I am glad I had the chance to read your poems closely, to unveil their and your many virtues and artistry. I feel as if we took a long walk in the woods together, talking as we went along and stopping sometimes to look at something that struck us as interesting. Mainly, though, I am glad I had the chance to get to know you. You are a standard bearer of the values we cherish in humanity. I hope we have a chance again in the future to work together on other projects. And, thank you for giving of your time and thoughts and self, for your generosity.

pm: It was my pleasure, Jack. You've been a most kind host, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't gain from this as well. Michael Dylan Welch reminded me yesterday about a position I apparently held a year ago which I have softened a bit on. I doubt I'll ever reach a place where my convictions are fixed and I completely understand my poetics (wouldn't that be boring!), so exchanges like this give me lots to think about. And for that I thank you.

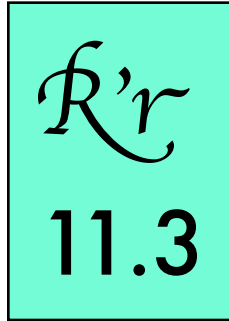


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-December 2011-

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Outré Haiku of Katō Ikuya (1)

by Hiroaki Sato

Among the many anti-traditionalist haiku writers of Japan, Katō Ikuya (加藤郁乎) stands out. He began by writing seemingly conventional (albeit “modern”) haiku but soon turned to the heavy use of such puns—yes, we all know that early hokku and (later) senryū relied on puns—and esoteric, “private” allusions and references that he ended up “slaughtering words,” in the approving assessment of the Japanese authority on the Marquis de Sade Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (澁澤龍彦). (Ikuya laid Tatsuhiko’s wife, the writer Yagawa Sumiko (矢川澄子), and blatantly wrote about it, but that’s another story.) At the same time he started to ignore the haiku format, save the monolinear aspect of it, to such an extent that you can categorize his one-liners as haiku only because he calls them “*ku*.”

(Here I am talking about Ikuya’s eight or so books up to the early 1970s. Born in 1929, he went on to live long despite vaunted binge-drinking with Shibusawa and other *outré* writers, producing, in the process, a great many more books, including commentaries on Edo haikai. His latest, according to the Wikipedia site for him, was published in 2010, and won the Yamamoto Kenkichi (山本健吉) Prize—an interesting turn of events when you

consider that Yamamoto was one of the most knowledgeable explicators of traditional haiku.)

So Ikuya opened his first book of haiku *Kyūtai Kankaku* (球體感覺), published in 1959, with this one:

冬の波冬の波止場に来て返す

Fuyu no nami fuyu nu hatoba ni kite kaesu

Winter waves roll in and out on the winter breakwater

Written in a perfect 5-7-5-syllabic alignment, this piece may bring to mind any of the haiku written by the “modernists” in the 1930s—such as the following by Saitō Sanki (西東三鬼):

水枕ガバリと寒い海がある

Mizumakura gabari to samui umi ga aru

The water pillow zwoomps there's the chilly sea

Yet discordant notes set in even as the majority of pieces included in this book appear to be in 5-7-5 formations.

<<Que sais-je? >>傾き立てるいたどり

<<*Que sais-je?* >>*katamuki tateru itadori*

<<Que sais-je? >>leaning as they stand knotweeds

Incorporating foreign language into haiku was no Ikuya innovation, but how do you parse this? Count the syllables of *Que sais-je* in the standard

Japanese way (*ku-se-ju*), and you get 3, so the haiku consists of 3-7-4. What about the meaning? Did Ikuya imagine the volumes in the famous French series for *haute vulgarisation* (Wiki description) from a stand of Japanese knotweeds with stems looking like bamboo? If Ikuya included a pun or puns in this piece, I fail to detect them.

In *Ektoplasma*, his second book of haiku, in 1962 (republished in an extravagant edition twelve years later), his writings suddenly turn mostly unintelligible—at least on the face of it. Here’s the opening piece:

落丁一騎対岸の草の葉

Rakuchō taigan no kusa no ha

Defective copy single mounted soldier on the other shore blade of grass

The syllabic count may be 4-3-5-4. The “translation” here is nothing more than a word-for-word tracing in English. With this piece we can at least recognize individual words. But what the heck does the thing mean? “A poem should not mean / But be,” Archibald MacLeish said, but unintelligibility was not what the Librarian of Congress, whom my gentle teacher of poetry Lindley Williams Hubbell used to dismiss as miserable and worthless, promoted, was it?

How about the second one?

四月、やはられ矢場のやたがらす

Shigatsu, yarahare yaba no yatagarasu

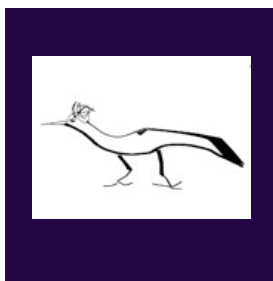
The Roman transliteration is a literal reading (Japanese orthography aside). From the straight reading, I know: *Shigatsu* is April; *yaba* is an archery

ground; and *yatagarasu* is the crow that is said to have guided the first Japanese emperor Jinmu (神武)—a mythology figure—when he set out to conquer the East; he started the conquest of the Japanese archipelago from the southern island of Kyūshū. (Perhaps the transliteration of the crow should be *Yatagarasu*, with the first letter capitalized.) But what does *yarahare* mean? Is it a word?

Noticing that the syllabic formation is 3-7-5, I wonder: Could there be a trick with the first word, *Shigatsu*? After all, there were a number of *poetic* (if you will) names for each of the twelve months before the lunar calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in the second half of the 19th century, when *Shigatsu* is so damned prosaic, no more than specifying the order in which it appears in the year, “fourth month.” So I check and see, among about twenty old names on one list, one with five syllables, *Torikutsuki* (鳥来月), “birds-come-month.” Intrigued, because the reference to birds may be an associative introductory to the crow, I check the word *yaba*, “archery ground,” and see that it has another meaning, “house of ill repute,” “brothel.” Then I realize that the mythological Imperial avian guide—Jinmu had another guide: monkey—is said to have had three legs. Then it dawns on me that *yarahare* may be two words *yara* and *hare*, the first of which can mean “is it?” or “it must be” and the second, an exclamation, “good!” or “wonderful!”

So what does the haiku *mean* or describe overall? Perhaps it is saying, in a deliberately abstruse way, something like: Oh April, I’ve come out of a wonderful brothel, with my phallus swollen!

Are such extended *interpretations* warranted?



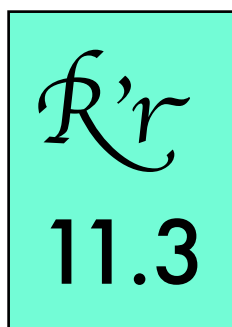
Roadrunner 11.3

-December 2011-

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Haiku by Ginema

translated by Eric Selland

translator's note: I was asked to translate these two haijin (the other being Tadato Nakatsuka) for the Tokyo Poetry Festival held in September 2011. They were amongst a fairly large and eclectic group selected by organizer Natsuishi Ban 'ya. As far as I know, the poets themselves chose the haiku to be included. [Here are some photos](#) taken from Ginema's performance.

Ginema

I have been participating in the haiku magazine *Mononofukai* since 1996. I began writing pieces little by little, and gradually became more deeply involved. To tell the truth, I'm a "low-grade" haikuist who has never done much proper study of haiku. I come from a family where bloody things like murder and suicide have been unceasing, and this produced an environment ripe for "underground haiku". I have been performing regularly in the "Solo! Haiku Live" readings started by *Mononofukai* since 1998, where I continue to explore the possibilities of haiku reading.

I'm basically just a hick from the remote countryside of Shikoku island . . . ain't got nuthin', got nuthin' to lose . . . low education/low income; bug-eyed and scaly skinned. My bug-eyes and the creases between my brows are my most charming point . . .

夜啼き石

The Night-Crying Stone

川へ行け石を喰え

Go to the river! Eat rocks!

大男おっちんじまって蚊もはらえねえ

The huge man, dead as a doornail – can't brush off the mosquitoes now

指を吸ってよ月夜の犬みたいに

C'mon, suck my finger! Like a dog on a moonlit night

赤痣にデンデン虫よ恋しいか

Oh snail, do you long for the red birthmark?

漆喰から昔の男を呼び戻す

From the plaster, calling back an old boyfriend

逢えぬ夜の熟柿を吸う冷たさよ

Oh coldness sucking the ripe persimmons out of the night we cannot meet

[Translator's note: "ripe persimmons" means waiting it out or biding one's time]

約束は足の小指に結びけり

Tied a promise on my little toe

痩せ犬があたしの背中に生えてくるの

A scraggly dog grows from my back

村興しの末の子供だ

A child who is the result of village development

誰かいただろうスイカの縞が証拠だ

Someone's been here – the proof is in the watermelon's stripes

先祖代々粘着紐の家系なり

They're a family that's stuck to things for generations

[Translator's note: Literally “adhesive bonding”]

眠ってはならん母が糸を吹く虞がある

Mustn't fall asleep – mother might start spinning yarn

縫い針が奥歯に挟まる彼岸かな

The equinox – a sewing needle wedged between my molars

畦道で失くしたおへそが痛いよお

The belly button I lost on the path through the rice field hurts

激しく生きたミミズが激しく腐っていく

The earthworm that lived with intensity – now intensely rancid

足も無い手も無い虫の歌である

There's an insect song without feet or hands

私のペニスは車輪だと思っていました

I thought my penis was a cartwheel

蜂を抱く 深く私を刺して下さい

I embrace a bee – oh thrust your sting into me, deeply

山影は月夜の兄の喉仏

Mountain shadow - my elder brother's Adam's apple on a moonlit night

夜融ける貴方を口にふくみたし

Tried whistling – you in the night that melts

救われた命だから倍にして薄めねば

A life that has been saved should not be diluted twice over

帰るたび乾いたミミズが落ちている

Whenever I go home there's a dried up worm fallen on the ground

実刑はデキモノが広がる夜の自慰とする

Prison sentence – self-stimulation of night on which an abscess grows

子殺しがペンペン草を撫でにけり

Infanticide caresses the shepherd's-purse

どうしても砂地がいいというカニに見せたい花があった

There was a flower I just had to show to a crab who insists on sand

生まれつき甲羅がついている 神よ私を信じますか？

I have a shell I was born with – oh God, do you believe me?



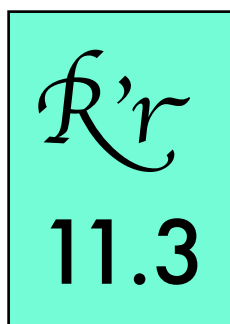
Roadrunner 11.3

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Tadato Nakatsuka

Born 1949 in Tokyo. In 1915 my grandfather, Ippeki Nakatsuka, became publisher of the free-verse haiku magazine, *Kaikō*, edited by Hekigotō Kawahigashi. My father, Mayumi Nakatsuka, was publisher until his sudden passing in 1993, at which point I became the third generation owner and publisher of the magazine. The magazine reached its 1,000th issue in 2004. In 2008, along with a group of friends who share a love of free-verse haiku¹, I started the Tokyo Free-Verse Haiku Association as a means of moving beyond the limits of the magazine framework. Through this new organization

¹ *translator's note:* "Free-verse haiku" is haiku which does not use the 5-7-5 pattern, or allows itself to fall somewhat outside those constraints. The lack of seasonal words (kigo) may sometimes come along in the same package, though not necessarily. This innovation has been one that has been available to haikuists ever since early experiments of the Modernist period (1916-1938). Some haikuists, such as Nagata Koi, may occasionally be loose with the count, but this does not necessarily make them "officially" a free-verse haikuist. I personally do not like the term "free-verse haiku" because it ties haiku too much to English language assumptions, and is ultimately meaningless to us since by the time it is translated there will be no more 5-7-5 pattern anyway.

we are working toward a resurgence of free-verse haiku, as well as its improvement.
Last year we held a combined meeting with a fixed-form haiku group. I continue to
work toward the building of a better future for haiku.

神と自然と人間

Gods, Nature, and Humans

元旦金魚ブクブク去年のあぶく

New Year's day – gold fish blow last year's bubbles

春はまだだよ辛夷間抜けな欠伸

It's not spring yet – its absence emerging from between the magnolias

笑顔でずかずかやってきて春になる海

Barging in with a big smile, ocean becomes spring

春の蛇口からこぼれ出たさくら

Cherry blossoms spill from the faucet of spring

春へのホーム電車は右肩上がりですやってきます

The train heading toward the platform of spring
Comes in with its right shoulder raised

この日わたし身に余るほどの桜

On this day, more cherry blossoms than I deserve

サイダーしゅわわわ夏のト・キ・メ・キ
Cider like swoosh! Summer's heart-throb

ゴギブリの夏にシュッと一吹きしてしまいました
Shooh! Blew one puff at cockroach summer

終戦記念日僕には死んだ金魚の方が悲しい
On the day to commemorate war's end
I'm more sad about the dead goldfish

いいわけみつけれず夏の陽は暮れる
Summer sun sets, having found no excuse

コンビニで買った夏の恋がとけちゃった
Summer love I purchased at the convenience store has melted

拝啓。金木犀がお騒がせしています
Dear sir, the osmanthus flowers are raising a fuss

夕焼け小焼けで柘榴が割れる
The pomegranate splits open to the tune of a well-known children's song

枯葉が落ちるそれはクラシックなせんべいの音
Dry leaves falling – that's the classic sound of rice crackers being eaten

寒い 煩悩の出入りするドアを閉める
Cold – I close the door where earthly desires come and go

ポチ袋に入ってた日本晴れ
The clear blue sky kept in a little envelope

お尻から冬の体重を持ち上げる

Raising up the weight of the winter from its rear end

春を壊してしまった海が泣いている

The ocean, which wrecked spring, is crying

空青くにんげん泥だらけ海もあお

Sky blue, humans covered with mud – the ocean is blue too

行く先のない怒りはは神様のせいにしておく

I'll blame this anger which has nowhere to go on the gods

自在に春を操りさくら咲かせたのはだれ

Who is it who manipulates spring at will and makes the cherry blossoms bloom

もう大丈夫サクラがそっと眼を開けた

It's alright now – the cherry blossoms have gently opened their eyes

我が儘いうなら桜の木の下に集まりなさい

If I may say something selfish – all you gather around under the cherry blossoms

三月津波四月原発事故五月はさつき

Tsunami in March, nuclear meltdown in April,
and in May a no confidence vote

宇宙戦艦ヤマトは帰ってくるとさくら散った

When spaceship Yamato returns the cherry blossoms fall



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