

TEACHING HAIKU IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION, PART I

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*The following is based upon the author's keynote at Haiku North
America 2015 at Union College.*

I come today wearing two hats. I have my dean's uniform—a necktie—but below the podium I am wearing my haiku poet's jeans. In this talk I will mostly take a dean's perspective—looking at an overview of teaching haiku in American higher education. One of the joys of being a dean is that I get to visit many different classes and see students and faculty from several academic disciplines. Today I am going to give you an overview, sort of a dean's perspective, of all the different approaches to research and teaching haiku currently evident in American higher education. I am giving you a broad perspective of the academic landscape, and then I am going to focus more narrowly on how I teach haiku at Millikin University to undergraduate students.

I don't write too many haiku with my dean's hat on, but I should start this talk with a haiku, of course. Here is probably the only haiku I have written about being a dean:

evening walk
after office politics
lilac scent¹

It is important to understand that I don't see a significant separation between teaching and research. Outstanding professors are

very passionate about what they are teaching because they have engaged in lifelong learning themselves as students and researchers. They have learned a great deal and are eager to share what they have discovered with their students. When they are engaged in research they are shaping new understandings, and they are eager to share with students in their classes and with others beyond their campus community. The best faculty members urgently desire to share what they know through presentations and publications. Professors want to teach people in any way possible. So I really see research and teaching as the same thing but with different audiences.

So my question is: what scholarship on haiku is underway in American higher education right now? In addition to my broad dean-like appreciation of diversity of approaches, this talk is based on my long-term bibliographical project related to scholarship and publications available in English. I am by nature a collector, a gatherer, and synthesizer. I try to find every specimen possible, then analyze, organize, and classify the collection. This overview talk is the result of a heavy two-year stint of trying to find all of the articles, theses and dissertations on haiku currently available in English through your typical academic library databases and resources.

Last year the first issue of a new journal, *Juxta*, was published featuring academic scholarship on haiku. This issue included the first of a series of planned bibliographies on haiku scholarship. In that article, “Haiku Resources: A Scholar’s Library of Haiku in English,”² the editors—myself, Jim Kacian, Aubrie Cox, and Steve Addiss—compiled and briefly introduced the books that we think are essential for someone trying to develop a good library for doing research in haiku. The bibliography of articles and theses, which is the basis of this talk, is about 76 pages long. When I look at all of these articles and dissertations, it’s really wonderful that there is such a rich array of studies and approaches. It’s very exciting to me and it’s been a great investigation reading these works over these last two years.

The haiku scholarship bibliography is organized into nine sections featuring articles and theses on: (1) American Haiku & Haiku in English, (2) American Poetry and Haiku, (3) Haiku Aesthetics & Literary Criticism, (4) Haiku & Linguistics, (5) Haiku as Therapy, (6) Creativity & Haiku, (7) Teaching Haiku as Literature, (8) Teaching Haiku as Writing, and (9) Using Haiku to Teach Other Subjects. The first section features research on the history of American haiku.

In 1981 the first dissertation on the history of American haiku, “Haiku Genre: the Nature and Origins of English Haiku,” was completed by Kirby Record at Indiana University.³ Record’s advisor was Kenneth Yasuda. In this study he examined haiku written in the 1960s and 70s including the work published in *American Haiku*, *High/Coo*, *Cicada*, *Modern Haiku*, and books by active haiku poets. 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” (223). He also notes: “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” (227). It was a very interesting first study noting a lack of coherence or chaos of experimentation in the haiku community. Kenneth Yasuda’s work promoted a poetic haiku in English with rhyme, very careful punctuation, and melodic phrasing. Based on this view of poetry and the way it resounds in our ears is part of why Kirby Record concluded that the experiment to write haiku in English had not yet succeeded.

Since then we’ve seen several additional historical studies. Elizabeth Searle Lamb did a four-part study of the history of haiku in English in America published in *Cicada* magazine.⁴ In this

historical series Elizabeth writes about several misconceptions of early haiku, based on the Imagist poets. The exciting thing for her was to see the writers in the magazines such as *American Haiku*, *Modern Haiku*, and *Cicada* starting to talk, critique, respond, and argue about the art of writing haiku. Charlie Trumbull has also written some wonderful histories, including his two-part series in *Modern Haiku* about the American haiku movement.⁵

When I look at these histories one of the themes is the poetics of American haiku. Poetics refers to the broad trends or approaches, the large-scale questions. Is haiku lyric poetry? Is haiku a poetry stretching beyond Western conceptions of writing? Is haiku about the zen spiritual life or personality of the individual? Is haiku a method of writing in a constrained, closed form? Is haiku about imitation of life and things, a form of literary representation? This avenue of inquiry has been constant in haiku research from the 1970s to the present.

In 1976, Raymond Roseliep wrote “This Haiku of Ours”⁶ published in *Bonsai*. In this piece, Roseliep calls for a haiku poetics of creativity. He writes that “Creation is still more exciting than imitation” (12). Raymond celebrates that “we are preserving the quintessence of haiku if we do what the earliest practitioners did: use it to express our own culture, our own spirit, our own enlightened experience, putting to service the riches of our land and language, summoning the dexterity of Western writing tools” (11). Roseliep encourages American haiku poets to use all of our amazing tools of language and to embrace our Western perspectives and traditions in American haiku. In this and subsequent essays he writes about the importance of metaphor in haiku, narrative voice, the role of imagination and importance of cultural allusions, including literary, musical, and artistic allusions. In his practice as well as his essays on poetics, Roseliep challenges writers to embrace creative opportunities to experiment with American haiku.

Several of the early articles on haiku poetics focus on questions of definition. Eric Amann and George Swede co-authored “Toward a Definition of the Modern English Haiku” published in *Cicada* in 1980⁷. About every five years the Haiku Society of America attempts to define English haiku and once unsuccessfully sought to change the definition in common dictionaries. In 2001, A.C. Missias provided a short overview of various attempts in “Struggling for Definition.”⁸ The debate continues without resolution. What is the definition? I don’t know. So we talk about it again.

A really interesting part of poetics research focuses on motivations; the purposes or aims for writing. Why do people do this? Why are they drawn to it? Why do they continue doing haiku for so long? With haiku studies, the motivation considers everything from “general awareness” or “personal expression” or “conveying the universals of being human” or “being in the universe with nature.” Does haiku come from lived experience or do haiku come from poets crafting a literary artifact? These questions are explored in articles and essays about the motives for writing haiku. This is the why question—why do we write haiku?

A poetics of haiku as nature writing and observation has been championed by Bruce Ross in his essay “The Essence of Haiku”⁹ and demonstrated by haiku presented in his anthology, *The Haiku Moment*. In Tom Lynch's thesis, “An Original Relation To The Universe: Emersonian Poetics Of Immanence And Contemporary American Haiku,”¹⁰ he argues that North American haiku has grown rapidly “as a current manifestation of a trend in American poetics that begins in earnest in the writings of the transcendentalists—in particular, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman—and that has continued under various guises in the work of, among others, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wright, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Robert Haas, and in fact a sizeable number of other contemporary poets” (introduction). To summarize, Lynch argues that American haiku writers have been seeking significance and

insight or awareness that goes beyond the surface level of things to something deeper in our lives. Lynch concludes:

The poetry of this tradition is a poetry of exploration; a poetry more concerned with revelation than with creation; more concerned with what is said than with how; a poetry that attempts to see, feel, smell, taste, touch the world anew, and to transmit those sensations, and whatever insights the poet may have gained from them, to the reader; a poetry, as Emerson said, of receiving and imparting; and a poetry the veracity of whose report we expect to be able to verify (introduction).

Professor Richard Gilbert has questioned the nature approach in the essay, “Plausible Deniability: Nature as Hypothesis in English-Language Haiku.” Based on studies of modernist Japanese haiku writers and their poetics, in several essays, including “The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A Study of Disjunctive Method And Definitions In Contemporary English-Language Haiku,”¹¹ Gilbert has argued for an emphasis on the value of haiku as disjunctive language with a resulting postmodern poetics of haiku as various states of consciousness. In the 1980s several Canadian haiku poets, such as Nick Avis, George Swede and LeRoy Gorman, were calling for a language approach to haiku, based on visual and concrete poetry traditions. Several haiku poets from the 1980s to the present have explored this approach to writing haiku, with Marlene Mountain being an example of bold shifts in language, visual elements on the page and surprising psychological shifts.

Another thread of haiku poetics emphasizes haiku as a psychological poetry of various states of consciousness. Poets write haiku to explore human relations and inner states of being, an approach that is often associated with therapy. An example of this approach is the essay “Bringing the Window Inside: Psychological Haiku” by Rod Willmot.¹² There is a tradition of haiku poetics related to conveying relationships and personal feelings—a psychological approach to writing haiku.

Another part of the bibliography features articles on the craft of writing haiku. These articles take up the question of how to be an effective haiku poet. Several articles and a few theses focus on specific techniques of writing haiku in English. Most of these articles are written by haiku poets, such as Robert Spiess' essay, "The Problem of Craftsmanship in English Language Haiku."¹³ A quick overview of haiku craft articles shows that several poets address questions of form, structure and prosody. Paul O. Williams addressed minimalist approaches to haiku in his essay, "Tontoism in American Haiku"¹⁴ in which he warned writers about the problem of artificial, broken syntax. He also wrote a fun satire about visual haiku, "An Apology for Bird Track Haiku."¹⁵

In the bibliography, it was very clear that only a few American haiku poets are gaining a body of secondary criticism: Raymond Roseliep, Robert Spiess, Nicholas Virgilio, Gerald Vizenor, and Richard Wright. Raymond Roseliep had already established his reputation as a lyric poet before turning to haiku, and has continued to have reviews and critical studies both in and beyond the haiku community. I am pleased to announce that a full-length literary biography, *Raymond Roseliep: Man of Art Who Loves the Rose*, by Donna Bauerly, has been published by the Haiku Foundation.¹⁶ As a writer and leading editor, Robert Spiess has been studied as part of the history of American haiku, as well as for his practice as a haiku writer whose work exemplifies his call for craft, experimentation and poetic playfulness. Nicholas Virgilio has a significant body of research based on his collection of haiku housed at Rutgers University. However, the two haiku poets that really stand out are Gerald Vizenor, who has gained critical attention because of his Native American background and his long term career as a writer of American haiku, and Richard Wright, who also has a very extensive body of literature on his haiku written over his very productive last few years as an exiled American writer in France.

I have to mention some very interesting research on Japanese American haiku coming out of World War II and the internment

experiences of the Japanese Americans. These studies come from a wide range of academic disciplines—from anthropology, multicultural studies, comparative literature, and feminist studies. For example, Ayaka Yoshimizu’s master’s thesis, “Performing Heteroglossia: Contesting ‘War Bride’ Discourses, Exploring ‘Histories of Kokoro’ with Four Senryu Writers”¹⁷ is a very interesting feminist literary theory account of a small community of bi-cultural women who came together to share their “Kokoro” through the art of writing senryu. This interesting study explores how war brides were disenfranchised from both their Japanese community and American community. They are between cultures, so they bond together and write tanka in order to share their experience with each other. What is so interesting about those studies is that it shows a community of writers going through a terrible hardship in which haiku and tanka become a way to preserve culture but also to support each other.

It is quite amazing how much research is available to us for all periods of Japanese literature. To summarize some categories of the bibliography there are articles on several haiku masters, studies on translating haiku, studies on haiku as comparative literature, and studies on Japanese haiku in other languages besides English.

Literary critics are expanding the cannon and looking at haiku in ways beyond the question of form or as an example of a type of structural poetry. They are starting to read English-language haiku, and they are realizing that there is something else going on here besides form. Literary critics are bringing cognitive approaches to literature—studying how people read and process haiku. In 1999, I wrote an essay “Gestalt Psychology and Haiku: A Poetics of Imagistic Thinking”¹⁸ arguing that the reader’s psychological movement between the two phrases of a haiku is often a dynamic shifting of foreground and background. Some critics are using phenomenological approach to haiku—an integration of philosophy and aesthetics—studying how perception is a way of seeing the world, a means of creating your

own space, and a means of shaping your own world view. These studies consider haiku as poetry of perception through which the poet expresses their own sense of “being in the world.”

Literary critics are also bringing postmodern approaches to studies of haiku. Ian Marshall has employed deconstruction and biopoetics. In his essay, “Stalking The Gaps: The Biopoetics of Haiku” published in *Mosaic: A Journal For The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Marshall asks “But what of haiku? Given how popular the form has become even beyond its culture and country of origin, it seems that here too is a form of literature that speaks to our species in some important way.”¹⁹ He says haiku is a contemporary version of a hunter reading the signs of an animal, the tracks, the scat. What was that animal doing, what was that animal eating? Marshall quotes Kawamoto in his essay, noting that contemporary haiku is like a detective novel, where the reader has to assume that even the smallest piece of information in that haiku contains something important. So learning how to read the squiggles on a page carefully and meticulously, helps us survive in a contemporary world full of language.

In addition to the literary critics, there are several studies of haiku from the discipline of linguistics. The linguists are very interested in semiotics, epistemology, and metaphor in haiku. These scholars are not typically haiku writers, but when they start examining haiku as examples of text, they become very interested in haiku as a medium of symbolic language. In one interesting dissertation, “Haiku East and West: A Semiogenetic Approach” by Yoriko Yamada-Bochynek,²⁰ he starts with “the dilemma of how can we have a one word haiku ‘tundra’ on a blank page and Basho’s ‘old pond / frog jumps in / kerplop’ and they are both considered haiku some way.” The whole dissertation is an analysis of all of the different directions and paths of haiku and how you have these changes in style and yet they still are considered haiku. Another branch of linguistics examines language conventions and stylistic elements of haiku. These linguistic studies are often focused on the fragmentation of haiku—the use of ellipses, the

dash, arrangement of the pause, or the tradition of the haiku cut in English. Several linguistic studies also examine the acoustics, sounds, and the way phrasing adds significance in haiku.

Psychologists have been studying haiku as a means of poetry therapy, as creativity studies, and as positive psychology. The idea of haiku as a powerful way of creating empathy has been around quite awhile. Shirley and I first discovered that when we were looking at a manuscript from Edward Tick called *On Sacred Mountain*, a collection of haiku about the Vietnam War and the experiences of Vietnam veterans.²¹ Tick was a therapist working with Vietnam veterans who came back with what we now call PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). In therapy with Edward Tick, the veterans were writing about their horrible nightmare images in haiku. This was a means of release, a way of letting go of these horrors. The healing power of haiku has been studied and reported in several articles in *The Journal of Poetry Therapy* and *The Journal of Loss and Trauma*. Others, including nursing faculty and hospice professionals, have also studied the value of writing haiku as a means of connecting and creating empathy with patients.

Creativity is a growing academic discipline, so it is not surprising that there are several studies of creativity and haiku. An example of an article on creativity is Michele Root-Bernstein's essay, "Haiku as Emblem of Creative Discovery: Another Path to Craft."²² While studies of creativity focus on individual processes, it is often related to the study of long-term benefits of creative engagement. This approach is sometimes called positive psychology. Instead of working with the trauma and the use of haiku as therapy for someone who is so broken, positive psychology examines the benefits of being engaged in a creative art like haiku. Ongoing, long-term participation turns out to have a lot of benefits related to happiness and connectedness with others. Sharing your life with others through haiku can contribute to happiness and satisfaction. So haiku itself is being studied as a way of having a healthy life. It's not just to overcome something.

Part II will appear in *Frogpond* 39:2.

Notes

1 Brooks, Randy & Emily Evans, Melanie McLay, Rick Bearce, Editors. *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*. Decatur, IL: Bronze Man Books, 2008, 148.

2 Randy Brooks and the Juxtaposition editors, Stephen Addiss, Bill Cooper, Aubrie Cox, Jim Kacian, and Peter McDonald. "Haiku Resources: A Scholar's Library of Haiku in English." in *Juxtapositions: The Journal of Haiku Research and Scholarship* 1.1, The Haiku Foundation, (Winchester, VA), 2015.

3 Record, Kirby. "Haiku Genre: the Nature and Origins of English Haiku." Indiana University, 1981. Dissertation. 269 pages.

4 Lamb, Elizabeth Searle. "A History of Western Haiku." *Cicada*, published in four parts starting with issue 3.1 (1979): 3-9; issue 3.2 (1979): 3-9; issue 3.3 (1979): 3-10, and issue 3.4 (1980): 3-11.

5 Trumbull, Charles. "The American Haiku Movement Part 1." *Modern Haiku* 36.3 (2005): 33-73; and "Part 2." *Modern Haiku* 37.1 (2005): 29-54.

6 Roseliep, Raymond. "This Haiku of Ours." *Bonsai* 1.3 (1976): 11-20.

7 Amann, Eric and George Swede. "Toward a Definition of the Modern English Haiku." *Cicada* 4.4 (1980): 3-12.

8 Missias, A.C. "Struggling for Definition." *Frogpond* 24:3 (2001): 53-63.

9 Ross, Bruce. "The Essence of Haiku." *Modern Haiku* 38.3 (2007): 51-62.

10 Lynch, Thomas Paul. "An Original Relation To The Universe: Emersonian Poetics Of Immanence And Contemporary American Haiku." University of Oregon, 1989. Dissertation. 321 pages.

11 Gilbert, Richard. "The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A Study of Disjunctive Method And Definitions In Contemporary English-Language Haiku." *Kumamoto Daigaku Eigo Eibungaku/Kumamoto Studies In English Language And Literature* 47 (2004): 27-66.

12 Willmot, Rod. "Bringing the Window Inside: Psychological Haiku." *Frogpond* 6.3 (1983): 3-7.

13 Spiess, Robert. "The Problem of Craftsmanship in English Language Haiku." *Modern Haiku* 8.3 (1977): 7-10.

14 Williams, Paul Osborne. "Tontoism in American Haiku." *Dragonfly* 3.2 (1975): 9.

15 Williams, Paul Osborne. "An Apology for Bird Track Haiku." *Modern Haiku* 12.3 (1981): 35-36.

16 Bauerly, Donna. *Raymond Roseliep: Man of Art Who Loves the Rose*. Winchester, VA: The Haiku Foundation, 2015.

17 Yoshimizu, Ayaka. "Performing Heteroglossia: Contesting 'War Bride' Discourses, Exploring 'Histories of Kokoro' with Four Senryu Writers." Simon Fraser University, 2008. MA in Communication. 202 pages.

18 Brooks, Randy. "Gestalt Psychology and Haiku: A Poetics of Imagistic Thinking." *My Neighbor's Life: The San Damiano Anthology*. 90-93. Bellevue, WA: Laughing Cypress Press, 1999.

19 Marshall, Ian. "Stalking The Gaps: The Biopoetics of Haiku." *Mosaic: A Journal For The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 46.4 (2013): 91-107.

20 Yamada-Bochynek, Yoriko. "Haiku East and West: A Semiogenetic Approach." Bochum University, 1985.

21 Tick, Edward. *On Sacred Mountain: Vietnam Remembered*. Battle Ground, IN: High/Coo Press, 1984.

22 Root-Bernstein, Michele. "Haiku as Emblem of Creative Discovery: Another Path to Craft." *Modern Haiku* 41.3 (2010): 16-25.

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