

**UNDERSTANDING THE LARGER POND:
RAISING AWARENESS AND SPREADING
HAIKU LITERACY**

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

Haiku has been appearing more frequently in the mainstream, from President Obama's haiku to the Japanese forms issue of *Rattle*. Haiku is also the perfect size for tweeting, and can be widely found across all social platforms. Is this a crack in the wall that has historically existed between the mainstream poetry community and the English-language haiku community? Many well-known and extensively-published mainstream poets still think haiku is defined by syllables, and if they realize that haiku is more than this, they are often quoted about the discipline of 5-7-5, saying something like Billy Collins said in his contributor note in the Spring 2015 issue of *Rattle*, "I follow the seventeen-syllable limit because it provides me with a pleasurable feeling of push-back,"¹ or take the position that haiku cannot be written in English, as Jim Natal implies in his afterward for his book of haibun, "My haiku are also not traditionally exact and probably never could be. Even Gary Snyder does not consider his haiku to be true haiku."²

So, how is haiku currently perceived outside of the English-language haiku community? What can we do to change this perception? In preparation for a presentation given at Haiku North America 2015 at Union College, I sent out questionnaires about haiku to the poetry editors of the top mainstream literary journals with the following questions:

1. Are you open to submissions of haiku or haibun or other related forms?
2. What would you expect a haiku to be, and would you consider a haiku that isn't 5-7-5 syllables?
3. How often do you receive haiku submissions, and how would you rank them as far as quality? (i.e., 1 is very bad, 10 is very good).
4. Have you ever published haiku?
5. Do you ever receive haibun submissions and have you ever published them?
6. What percentage of your submissions come from slush?

The first person to respond was the editor of *Poetry*, Don Share. *Poetry* has the distinction of being one of the earliest publishers of English-language haiku, having published Ezra Pound's famous poem in the April, 1914 issue.

"In a Station of the Metro"

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough.³

Poetry also published haiku in the 1960s, including these two by Raymond Roseliep in the September 1968 issue:

Cemetery owl,
plague you! I'll just whistle so
there'll be two of me.

Beauty, be patient,
be, while I shelve Aquinas:
hills, wait till I come.⁴

Share has edited *Poetry* since 2013. He told me that he receives 120,000 poems a year and is interested in publishing a wide variety of poetry of all styles and forms, but rarely receives haiku and haibun submissions.⁵ Those he does receive, he ranks at a 1

or 2 on the scale provided. He said, “Most are by amateur writers whose understanding of poetry even may be limited to haiku. I do not wish for this to sound condescending, but that’s the best I can describe it.”⁶

Share is open to non-5-7-5 haiku and potential contributors should submit through Submittable, an online submission management system. There is no submission service fee to submit to *Poetry*. Expect up to five months for a response and do not be discouraged. One poet with an upcoming poem in *Poetry* had seventy-eight poems rejected before one was accepted.⁷

Editor John Skoyles of *Ploughshares* said that he was open to haiku and haibun, but has not received any since he has been the editor. In response to the question about considering non-5-7-5 haiku, he said, “I would consider a haiku with variations on the form. Robert Hass has done this.”⁸ He later sent me an e-mail with a link to a poem by Mark Jarman that *Ploughshares* published in 2008:

“Haiku”

Things that can turn to shrapnel:
Steel and stone. Crockery.
Wood. Glass. And bone.⁹

Like *Poetry*, *Ploughshares* uses Submittable, but charges a \$3 submission fee. Although electronic submissions are preferred, poets can avoid the submission fee by mailing their submission to *Ploughshares*, Emerson College, 120 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116-4624. Submissions to *Ploughshares* reopen on June 1, 2016.

David Baker, the editor of *The Kenyon Review*, also said he was open to haiku and haibun submissions. “I would consider haiku in syllabic and nonsyllabic forms. I have a sense of its traditional parameters (à la Buson, Issa, etc.) and its Western parameters. I

would prefer that poets show me what to expect, rather than tell them what to expect.”¹⁰ In regard to haibun, Baker said, “We have occasionally published textual mixtures of prose and poetry.” *The Kenyon Review* receives 20,000 poems in a four-month period, of which they publish 40–50. *The Kenyon Review* uses Submittable for submissions. There is no fee.

With a slim chance of being accepted, why should a haiku poet bother? Instead of placing quality haiku in limbo for months, the haiku could be published in any of the quarterly haiku journals before even hearing back from a submission to *Poetry* or *The Kenyon Review*.

If we are to ever increase haiku literacy among the mainstream poetry community, we need high-quality haiku to at least occasionally grace the pages of the mainstream literary journals. What appears to be happening is that these journals publish very little haiku and when they do, they are often “haiku” by well-published poets in other forms of poetry who probably have never seen an issue of *Frogpond*. Worse, people who have just discovered haiku and decide to try their hand at it, appear to be sending these first time clunkers to the journals they know about, often *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, or *The New Yorker*, because they are completely unaware of the haiku journals. Meanwhile, haiku poets who know how to write haiku are sending them to the haiku journals.

When Timothy Green, the editor of *Rattle*, published a Japanese forms issue in 2015, he told me that he received submissions from over 2,000 individual poets, who were invited to submit up to four pages of small poems. Of these submissions, roughly half were written in an awkward 5-7-5 pattern and might be about a frog or cherry blossoms. Of the haiku that appeared to be written by someone who knew what they were doing, perhaps half were by a mainstream poet who was going through a haiku “phase.” He theorized that poets who know how to write good haiku are sending them to haiku journals and poets who do not know

how to write haiku are submitting them to mainstream poetry journals, creating a bad reputation of haiku among editors of non-haiku poetry journals.

Testing this theory thoroughly would be another research project, but among the editors I corresponded with, this seems to be the reality.

One editor of an online poetry journal, who wishes to remain anonymous because he doesn't want to discourage would-be haiku writers, had to shut down his haiku section because he received so many bad haiku and he just didn't have the staff to deal with them all. Most haiku writers didn't even know about his fledgling haiku section before it ever got off the ground.¹²

So, what does the larger poetic publishing pond look like outside of the haiku community?

Literary Journals – Rankings (Pushcart)¹³

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Kenyon Review</i> | 15. <i>Five Points</i> |
| 2. <i>Poetry</i> | 15. <i>AGNI</i> |
| 3. <i>Ploughshares</i> | 16. <i>Sugar House Review</i> |
| 4. <i>American Poetry Review</i> | 16. <i>Southern Review</i> |
| 5. <i>Threepenny Review</i> | 19. <i>Alice James Books</i> |
| 6. <i>New England Review</i> | 19. <i>Yale Review</i> |
| 7. <i>Georgia Review</i> | 21. <i>New Ohio Review</i> |
| 8. <i>FIELD</i> | 21. <i>Sugar House Review</i> |
| 9. <i>Gettysburg Review</i> | 23. <i>Michigan Quarterly Review</i> |
| 9. <i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i> | 24. <i>Rattle</i> |
| 11. <i>BOA Editions</i> | 24. <i>Blackbird</i> |
| 12. <i>Poetry Review</i> | 26. <i>Smartish Pace</i> |
| 12. <i>TriQuarterly</i> | 26. <i>Spillway</i> |
| 14. <i>Tin House</i> | |

Literary Journals – Rankings (*The Best American Poetry*)¹⁴

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>The New Yorker</i> | 11. <i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i> |
| 2. <i>American Poetry Review</i> | 12. <i>Sentence</i> (out of print) |
| 3. <i>Poetry</i> | 13. <i>Antioch Review</i> |
| 4. <i>Five Points</i> | 14. <i>Sugar House Review</i> |
| 5. <i>New England Review</i> | 15. <i>Boston Review</i> |
| 6. <i>Ploughshares</i> | 16. <i>Michigan Quarterly Review</i> |
| 7. <i>Kenyon Review</i> | 17. <i>POOL</i> |
| 8. <i>Georgia Review</i> | 18. <i>SHINY</i> |
| 9. <i>Barrow Street</i> | 19. <i>Crazy Horse</i> |
| 10. <i>New American Writing</i> | |

There are two ranking systems: one looks at the number of nominations accepted for the Pushcart anthologies; the other looks at the journals that originally published the poems included in *The Best American Poetry*. One distinct difference between these two ranking systems is that *The Best American Poetry* also includes poems from commercial magazines like *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*.

Most of the literary journals are using Submittable, with some charging a submission fee. Most accept simultaneous submissions which creates a system where a poet might submit the same poems to *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, and *Kenyon Review* at the same time. This causes an inflation in the number of active poetry submissions because the same poems may be pending at several magazines simultaneously.

I would like to challenge every reader of this issue of *Frogpond* to send at least one submission to one of the literary journals listed above. Some strategies you might consider:

1. Send haibun. Many editors have expressed particular interest in haibun. For example, Susan Terris of *Spillway* said, “I really love haibun as a form. But I don’t want any one form to predominate in *Spillway*.”¹⁵

2. Send haiku sequences with a title and don't tell them it's haiku.
3. *Rattle*, in particular, wants to continue receiving haiku submissions for any of its general or themed issues.

Beyond the top tier literary journals, I would also like to encourage haiku poets to submit to regional poetry journals, anthologies, and webzines. Regional journals are often open to haiku, haibun, and haiku sequences, and they provide a networking opportunities for local haiku poets to interact with other poets in their area.

taking the last
of the sun with them
departing geese

—Gregory Longenecker¹⁶
San Diego Poetry Annual 2014–15

There are often poetry readings to launch regional journal issues and anthologies. Members of the public attending these readings often appreciate the brevity of a haiku when performed or read after a three page narrative poem! I have had many poets come up to me after one of these types of readings, wanting to know more about haiku.

Literary magazines and regional publications are not the only venues available for raising awareness of haiku for the general reading public. Specialty journals provide niche reading for aficionados of interests ranging from speculative poetry (science fiction, fantasy, and horror-themed poetry) to religious/spiritual poetry, as well as journals featuring various forms of poetry such as prose poetry or short poetry.

Shot Glass Journal, which specializes in poetry of sixteen lines or less, and accepts submissions via Submittable, has published tanka, haiku, and tan renga, among other short forms:

April darkness
 a tinge of green to the clouds
 as sirens whine

*the poppy about to
 burst*

—Kathe L. Palka & Peter Newton¹⁷

Other examples of “short poem” specialty journals include *Hummingbird*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *hedgerow*, and *Lilliput Review*. Speculative poetry journals which have published haiku and haibun include *Star*Line*, *Grievous Angel*, *Mythic Delirium*, *Strange Horizons*, *Scifaikuest*, and *Dreams and Nightmares*. *Star*Line*, edited by F. J. Bergmann, is also the journal of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and publishes an average of 5-7-5 haiku per issue, paying \$3 per haiku. Submissions can be sent to Bergmann via e-mail to starline@sfpoetry.com.

time portal wedding
 an exchange
 of nows

—Leroy Gorman¹⁸

*Star*Line* is not an exception. Many journals associated with poetry societies often publish haiku, in part to recognize the diversity of poetry forms written by their members. *Sandcutters*, the journal of the Arizona State Poetry Society, *California Quarterly*, the journal of the California State Poetry Society, *Pasque Petals*, the journal of the South Dakota State Poetry Society, and *Seven Hills Review*, the journal of the Tallahassee Writers Group, have published haiku. Poetry societies are often the most resistant to haiku beyond a 5-7-5 pattern and may need a haiku poet volunteer to help bring them into a greater understanding of haiku. One way to combat this might be to offer to judge a haiku contest.

Finally, to complete our understanding of the landscape of the greater poetry pond, there are numerous independent poetry journals, webzines, and blogs, as well as newspaper columns that feature haiku. One example is *The Aurorean*, edited by Cynthia Bracket-Vincent, which has published a haiku section in each issue for the past 20 years. Submissions are accepted through Submittable, up to five poems or pages of haiku.

no sign of it
then overnight—
the blood root

—Ruth Holzer¹⁹

Other examples of independent journals and webzines which have published haiku include *Off the Coast*, *Poeticdiversity*, *Sonic Boom*, and *Eskimo Pie*.

Small newspapers like *The Cub* in Bear Valley Springs, California and *ColoradoBoulevard.Net*, which publishes web-based news and features for residents of Pasadena, California, publish poetry columns that often include haiku. Many local papers would welcome a volunteer who might run a poetry or haiku column.

The number of possibilities are overwhelming, but each is an opportunity to inform poetry readers about haiku. No one poet could possibly submit to all of these publications and still have haiku left to submit to the haiku journals, so my hope is that you will consider doing the following in 2016:

1. Submit haiku to at least one of the top-tier literary journals. If it comes back, don't be discouraged, there are plenty of haiku journals that would love those poems.
2. See if there are any regional poetry publications in your area and submit to one of them.

3. Look for poetry journals that publish poems about things which interest you whether it be science fiction or fishing and try sending them a haiku.

If every reader of *Frogpond* added three non-haiku journals in 2016 beyond their normal submissions, one to a literary journal, one to a regional journal, and one to an independent or specialty poetry journal, at least some of this haiku would reach an entirely new audience and increase haiku literacy in the greater poetry community. I would like to challenge you to do this and let me know what happens via email to dkolodji@aol.com.

Notes

1. Billy Collins, "Contributor Notes," *Rattle* 47, Spring 2015, 99.
2. Jim Natal, *52 Views: The Haibun Variations* (Huntington Beach: Tebot Bach, 2013): 67.
3. Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," *Poetry*, April 1914, 12.
4. Raymond Roseliep, "Two Haiku," *Poetry*, September 1968, 388.
5. Don Share, e-mail message to author, October 1, 2015.
6. Don Share, e-mail message to author, October 1, 2015.
7. Name withheld by request, e-mail message to author, November, 2015.
8. John Skoyles, e-mail message to author, October 7, 2015.
9. Mark Jarman, "Haiku," *Ploughshares*, Spring 2008, <http://pshares.tumblr.com/post/7418067333/haiku-by-mark-jarman-things-that-can-turn-to>.
10. David Baker, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015.
11. Timothy Green, telephone conversation with the author, September 30, 2015.
12. Name withheld by request, e-mail message to the author, October 29, 2015.
13. Clifford Garstang, "2015 Pushcart Prize Ranking of Literary Magazines."

Clifford Garstang (blog), November 13, 2014, <http://cliffordgarstang.com/?p=4785>.

14. Jeffery Bahr, "Number of Occurrences of Literary Publications in Best American Poetry," *Jeffery Bahr*, <http://www.jefferybahr.com/Publications/BAPRanks.html>.

15. Susan Terris, e-mail message to the author, October 5, 2016

16. Gregory Longenecker, "Haiku," *San Diego Poetry Annual 2014-2015*, 226.

17. Kathe L. Palka & Peter Newton, "April darkness," *Shot Glass Journal* #16, May 2015, http://www.musepiepress.com/shotglass/issue16/palka_newton1.html.

18. Leroy Gorman, "time portal wedding," *Star*Line*, Summer 2015, 16.

19. Ruth Holzer "no sign of it," *The Aurorean*, Summer 2015, 59.

*Deborah P Kolodji moderates the Southern California Haiku Study Group and serves as California Regional Coordinator. She has published over 900 haiku, including some in non-haiku journals like Rattle, Star*Line, and Off the Coast. Her full-length book of haiku, highway of sleeping towns, is upcoming from Shabda Press.*