

**MUSEUM OF HAIKU LITERATURE AWARDS:
A RETROSPECTIVE SELECTION**

Michael Dylan Welch

The Haiku Society of America is rich with traditions. One of these traditions, worth celebrating with *Frogpond's* fortieth anniversary in 2017, is the Museum of Haiku Literature Award, which has sought to recognize the best contribution to each issue of *Frogpond*, as selected by the HSA executive committee. The award began in 1981 by honoring the following poem by Tadashi Kondō from *Frogpond* 4:1:

hoping the shape
of the navel will be good
father cuts the cord

Since then, selections have included mostly individual haiku, but also tanka, haiku sequences, and renku or other linked verse. Each award has included a cash prize of \$100. Total prize money has now exceeded \$12,000, with funding provided by the Museum of Haiku Literature in Tokyo—a place well worth a visit if you ever have the chance. The Haiku Society of America and its members are grateful for this ongoing support.

Some Museum of Haiku Literature Award selections have remained memorable, others less so. Either way, they reflect the changing tastes and perspectives of HSA leadership, and may serve, as the following selections indicate, as a microcosm of English-language haiku development over the last several decades. The award continues to encourage the submission of each person's best poems for publication in *Frogpond*. Long may this tradition continue.

1981

hot rock by the stream
each of the baby's toeprints
evaporating *Ruth Yarrow*

This poem is 5-7-5, though completely natural. *Frogpond* had by this time largely moved on from the predominance of 5-7-5 syllables found in early English-language haiku journals (the first such journal was *American Haiku*, which started in 1963, and *Frogpond* started in 1978).

1982

the old garden fence
now keeps the goldenrod
from the goldenrod *Paul O. Williams*

1983

Against his coat
I brush my lips—
the silence of snowflakes *Alexis Kaye Rotella*

1984

The sound of scissors
through quilt stuffing:
chill autumn moon *David LeCount*

1985

The family gathered—
a tear of embalming fluid runs
from my brother's eye *George Swede*

1986

a steady rain
the dentist's drill
turning to snow

Jane Reichhold

1987

still in the taste
of afternoon tea,
my grandmother's brogue

Jerry Kilbride

1988

snow geese
Sarah discovers
the letter V

James Minor

The year 1988 saw the first selection of sequences for the Museum of Haiku Literature Award. In fact, each issue that year honored a sequence *and* an individual haiku, a practice that was continued through 1992, for a total of five years.

1989

gone from the woods
the bird I knew
by song alone

Paul O. Williams

This selection is one of the classics of English-language haiku. It was written as a memorial poem for Nicholas Virgilio, who had died in January of 1989. Paul had never met Nick, but knew him only by the "song" of his poems in haiku journals.

1990

Into old pots and pans
 thrown out in the backyard—
 the musical rain *Tom Tico*

In 1990 a sequence of tanka was selected, as was a renku, both for the first time. Back then there were no separate journals for tanka, and thus tanka were welcomed in *Frogpond*. But later, with the emergence of various tanka journals, starting with *Five Lines Down* in 1994, and my founding of the Tanka Society of America in 2000, tanka came to be excluded from *Frogpond*.

1991

in a backyard
 two women folding sunlight
 into sheets *Sandra Fuhringer*

One highlight from 1991 was the selection of a hundred-verse renku—something that has rarely been attempted in English. This renku was “Green-a-Glitter,” led by Hiroaki Sato, with twelve other writers.

1992

falling leaves
 day by day
 the house grows brighter *Peter Duppenthaler*

The year 1992 also saw the selection of “Windswept Walk,” a kasen renku by thirty-six different participants, which I started. My calculation, in those days before everyone emailed, was that this renku traveled at least 32,000 miles before it was completed, even though it stayed entirely within North America.

1993

the petals scatter
over graves swept
and unswept

Kohjin Sakamoto

1994

bird shadow
from tree shadow
to fence shadow

Christopher Herold

1995

leaving the park—
glimpses of cherry petals
on the soles of shoes

Ebba Story

1996

spring planting
her refusal
to compromise

Anthony J. Pupello

In 1996, *Frogpond* switched from four issues a year to three, making it a little harder to be honored, not just because there was one less award each year, but because the number of poems in each issue also increased. Indeed, *Frogpond* has grown in size, making the Museum of Haiku Literature Award a rarer and greater honor as the years go by.

1997

undefended:
in the cold rain
their snow fort

Tom Clausen

faint city stars...
 the moth's copper dust
 in my palm *Ebba Story*

Father's funeral
 Mother
 suddenly small *Celia Stuart-Powles*

porch swing
 now and then a breeze
 from the river *Robert Gibson*

January thaw
 the narrow path
 fading away *Mark Alan Osterhaus*

Of all the years that the Museum of Haiku Literature Award has been given, 1997 has been my favourite, thus I present all five selections (two each were selected for the first and second issues of the year).

1998

starry night—
 biting into a melon
 full of seeds *Yu Chang*

1999

garden work—
 talking to each other
 back to back *Dimitar Anakiev*

2000

snake hunting the boy sheds his shirt

Makiko

whistling
he
hangs
the
birdhouse
he
built

Carolyn Thomas

These two poems show variety—horizontal and vertical. A one-liner was first selected in 1981. Other one-liners have been chosen since this first year, mostly in the last decade, but only about five percent of all individual award selections have been one-liners.

2001

Independence Day—
I let him touch
a little bit of me

Fay Aoyagi

2002

spring plowing
a flock of blackbirds
turns inside out

Tom Painting

2003

dim light
the night nurse
describes the rain

Joann Klontz

2004

jackknifed rig
the trooper waves us
into wildflowers

Robert Gilliland

2005

spring evening
the children's promise
not to get cold

Marcus Larsson

2006

circle of pines
God absent
from the wedding vows

Carolyn Hall

open scissors beside a vase of water

Eve Luckring

2007

distant singing—
the winter stars
almost touch

Ian Daw

2008

the glare off snow
has the run of the house
February's extra day

Burnell Lippy

2009

bare maple
my daughter says
she'll come back

Yu Chang

2010

woodsmoke ...
the guilt of living
on

Roland Packer

2011

whale songs ...
when did we stop
talking

Bud Cole

2012

summer heat
the strands of hair not captured
by her braid

Michael Ketchek

2013

silence of snow
we listen to the house
grow smaller

John Parsons

2014

her letter ...
I'd forgotten
paper can cut

Tom Tico

2015

afternoon rain
emptying a book
of its words

Peter Newton

2016

third deployment
the unfinished dollhouse
beneath a sheet

Steve Hodge

What might we learn from the preceding poems, and from selections not represented here? We might expect to see a progression toward shorter poems, or perhaps toward more variation and experimentation, but I don't think this occurs, at least not strongly. The sweep of this award may raise more questions than answers. The technique of juxtaposition seems to have been used steadily, but have seasonal references been changing? How are genders and nationalities represented? Should the award limit itself to individual haiku, or should sequences or linked verse again be recognized? And what about haibun and haiga? And are some of these poems possibly senryu rather than haiku? Perhaps a more psychological vein has emerged at times, but overall the selections seem steady and reliable in quality, even while the nature of committee selection may have overlooked possibly stronger poems in some issues. Ultimately, it is a pleasure to read and reread these poems, and that's really what haiku — and the Museum of Haiku Literature Award — is all about.

