
Write Like Issa: A Haiku How-to by David G. Lanoue (2017, *Haiku Guy, New Orleans LA*) 122 pages, 5¼×8", perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9912840-7-8. \$9.99 from createspace.com/6847811.

Reviewed by Randy Brooks

If you are a prominent scholar and translator of Issa, and if you have learned the art of writing haiku through your studies of Issa, it makes so much sense to write a book titled *Write Like Issa: A Haiku How-to*. In the introduction David Lanoue explains that this book also is based on ten workshops on "Write like Issa" he has led at various conferences and gatherings of haiku poets. On the question of why Issa instead of Basho or other masters, he writes:

Issa's poetry isn't, as a rule, focused on doom and gloom. More typically, his haiku celebrate life on a living planet with appreciation, empathy, and good humor. Maybe this is why I and many of my fellow poets turn to Issa rather than to Basho for our deepest inspirations. So human, so compassionate, so insightful; Issa has a lot to teach poets today, two centuries after. To write like Issa means writing tenderly about one's fellow creatures, human and otherwise. It means writing with an attitude of childlike perceptiveness, keeping one's mind and heart wide open to the universe and its infinite surprises. It means writing with a willingness to laugh at life's intrinsic absurdities. It means writing with bold subjectivity, defying all teachers and pundits who harp about the need for "objectivity" in haiku. And, writing like Issa means writing with a kind of free-flowing imagination that discovers shockingly fresh juxtapositions and revelations. (8–9)

The book includes six lessons based on these reasons for writing like Issa, with many examples of haiku by Issa and contemporary English-language haiku. For example, in his lesson on bold subjectivity he discusses this haiku by Issa:

hole in the wall—
my harvest moon
comes in

which is followed by this haiku by Stanford M. Forrester:

autumn colors—
the scarecrow's shirt
nicer than mine

I especially enjoyed Lanoue's lesson 5 on the importance of imagination in writing haiku. He compares Issa's approach to the call from Robert Bly for poetry to provide surprise leaps from image to image. At the end of that lesson he claims:

To write like Issa one needs to rely not only on one's intimate sensory encounters with the universe, but also, sometimes, to combine those juxtapositions that lead to deeper insights. (85)

Lanoue concludes with an explanation of why he wrote this book. "Who, today, will guard over the fragile blossom of haiku? Who will protect it against the threats of societal indifference to all forms of poetry, of selfish materialism, and of a widespread blindness to nature and to our absolute inclusion in it? Who will defend haiku against the heresy, rampant on the Worldwide Web, that this type of poetry consists of any random string of words tossed together in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern? And who will save it from perhaps well-meaning but sadly misguided editors who publish books of 'haiku' filled with obtuse, abstract, and vapid language games? Instead of inviting readers into the intimacy of real experiences and the joy of real discoveries, such editors and the poets whom they champion threaten to rob haiku of its very essence" pages 102–03. This is a wonderful book on the literary art of writing "like Issa" and yes, in some ways, David Lanoue's unapologetic manifesto of the potential joys of haiku as a celebratory art if we write like Issa.