Field Guide

Quilts, Blankets, and the Like from A Field Guide to North American Haiku¹ by Charles Trumbull

Our Field Guide topic this go-around, suggested by retired *Frogpond* editor Tom Sacramona, began as simply "quilts," but it quickly became apparent that title would not adequately cover the topic, so to speak. We realized so many aspects are involved that we would have to discuss *all* manner of bedclothes and catalog the differences between practices in Japan and the West, as immortalized by haiku poets.

Modern Japanese sleeping paraphernalia includes, from the bottom up: a tatami mat (畳) of woven rush grass with rice straw fill on the floor (to promote air circulation and resist mold growth); a *shikifuton* (敷き布団) or mattress with several inches of cotton batting in a cotton cover; a *kakefuton* (掛け布団), what Westerners usually call a *futon*—a duvet or coverlet; and topped by one or more *kukurimakura* (括り枕), buckwheat chaff–stuffed pillows. All these layers are intended to be rolled or folded up and stored away when not in use. *Futon* is a *kigo* basically for all winter, though many *futon* haiku have other seasonality.

> 親も子も同じふとんや別れじ霜 shimo no tsuru tsuchi ni futon mo kakerarezu

Parent and child Under the same quilt; The frost of parting.

Ogawa Shūshiki-jo, trans. R. H. Blyth²

あたまからふとんかぶればなまこかな atama kara futon kabureba namako kana

Pulled over your head, The blankets always remind you— Of sea cucumbers.

Buson, trans. Leon M. Zolbrod³

Fusuma/busuma (R) is an old-fashioned down-filled futon. The term is now considered archaic, but Issa used it in several haiku, often with the theme that creatures, such as cats, sparrows, mice, and crickets also enjoy a comfortable plush down quilt:

衾音聞しりて来る雀哉 fusuma oto kikishirite kuru suzume kana

hearing the winter quilt unfold, here comes sparrow Issa, trans. David G. Lanoue⁴

一番に猫が爪とぐ衾哉 ichiban ni neko ga tsume togu fusuma kana

the cat breaks it in sharpening claws ... winter *Issa*, trans. David G. Lanoue⁵

Kami fusuma or *kamibusuma* (紙ぶすま) is an inexpensive futon made of stitched crinkled paper stuffed with rice straw.

紙ぶすま折目正しくあはれ也 kamibusuma orime tadashiku aware nari

The neat folds make the stuffed paper quilt look even poorer

Buson, trans. trans. W.S. Merwin and Takako Lento⁶

いついつは鹿が餌食ぞ紙衾 itsu-itsu wa shika ga egui zo kami fusuma

soon enough the deer will eat it ... paper quilt Issa, trans. David G. Lanoue⁷

"Futon" in the West has come to mean primarily a low wooden frame to hold the mattress off the floor, often convertible to a sofa for daytime use, and secondarily the Japanese-style mattress itself. The English terms for bedcovers that we will be looking at in this essay are: *quilt* ("a bed coverlet of two layers of cloth filled with padding [such as down or batting] held in place by ties or stitched designs"⁸; *blanket* (a heavy cloth used for warmth or comfort); *comforter* (a North American word for a warm quilt); and *duvet* (in British and continental European usage, "a soft quilt filled with down, feathers, or a synthetic fiber, used instead of an upper sheet and blankets"⁹—called a "doona" in Australia).

Blankets, quilts, and especially futons are susceptible to moisture, mold, and dust mites and must be regularly dried and aired out. The process is called 蒲団干す *futon hosu*. The sight of futons hanging over the railings of *engawa* (縁側), the corridors on the outer side of traditional Japanese houses, has been an attractive topic for poets in Japan and abroad. first day of spring the slightly sour smell of my blanket Karma Tenzing Wangchuk¹⁰

airing the futon on the first day of sunshine bulbul fluffs his wings Margaret Chula¹¹

lice in my futon dream of a sleeping giant John Sandbach¹²

虫干やふとんの上のきりぎりす mushiboshi ya futon no ue no kirigirisu

airing out the bedding atop the futon a katydid *Issa*, trans. David G. Lanoue¹³

椽に干す蒲團の上の落葉 en ni hosu futon no ue no ochiba kana

on the verandah a futon airing out fallen leaves Shiki, trans. C. Trumbull¹⁴

蒲団干す未来へ旅に出るごとく futon hosu mirai e tabi ni deru gotoku

drying futon as if making a trip to the future

Shinada Shin, trans. Fay Aoyagi¹⁵

out for airing grandpa's blanket and grandpa

w. f. owen¹⁶

Bedcovers are basically utilitarian in nature, but haiku poets find many other aspects of interest. First, they are a necessity for all people—and can be a question of life or death for the poor, homeless, victims, and refugees.

> a man in a blanket on a steam grating halo around the moon *George Swede*¹⁷

a homeless man under a street light reading tonight's blanket

Harry Gilli¹⁸

十年の苦學毛の無き毛布哉 jūnen no kugaku ke no naki ketto kana

ten years of impoverished study a threadbare blanket

Shiki, trans. Shiki-Kinen Museum English Volunteers¹⁹

October sun the Zuni jewelry seller huddles in her blanket

Charles Trumbull²⁰

a coarse blanket on a thin pallet on cement Mandela's cell

Leanne Mumford²¹

Bed coverings are so essential that we take them for granted yet are often unjustly dissatisfied with the service they provide. This duvet keeps sliding off, that blanket isn't warm enough, the quilt is too short to keep my feet warm ...

> heat wave breaks dark fumbling for the kicked-off quilt Hayat Nancy Abuza²²

> Just two weeks ago complaining about the heat ... Another blanket Rengé²³

かしらへやかけん裾へや古衾 kashira e ya kaken suso e ya furu busuma

It's either my head Or my feet that I cover— Tattered old blankets.

Buson, trans. Leon M. Zolbrod²⁴

a flowered quilt not quite covering the corpse's feet

Helen Rul Lawler²⁵

But more than comfort and warmth, a blanket or quilt can provide a feeling of security or even refuge:

> black widow spider

hiding inside the blanket

a chilly morning

Donna Drake²⁶

under my duvet the monster softens his voice

John McManus²⁷

My brother's security blanket full of holes.

Alexis Rotella²⁸

one foot at a time learning of the things that lie beyond the duvet

David J Kelly²⁹

They can be a place for snuggling:

snug in the duvet her cat between us

John Barlow³⁰

doona time cat snuggles at my back as you once did

Joy Hutton³¹

... or a place for intimacy ...

first love of the year throwing off the blankets Kristen Deming³²

A winter love under the new & old blankets vincent tripi³³

after so many years the blanket we still share Kala Ramesh³⁴

touching toes under the worn quilt autumn sun

Pamela Miller Ness³⁵

... but on the other hand:

autumn night the duvet gathers between us

Matthew Paul³⁶

Quilts, etc. as metaphors

Bedcovers of all kinds are popular with poets for metaphorical uses. The most common things that "blanket" or "quilt" the landscape are (the numbers reflect the incidence in my Haiku Database): snow (89), stars (53), fog (26), leaves and pine needles (26), sky (21), clouds (18), and moonlight (10), as well as "silence" and various kinds of flowers. Here are a few of the more interesting uses of metaphor by haiku poets:

fragrance of night-blooming jasmine for a blanket Don Eulert³⁷

plaid and quilted poems stitching our words together our own piecemeal songs *Ayaz Daryl Nielsen*³⁸

crazy quilt lives i never touched

Frank K. Robinson³⁹

Other uses

Blankets can even be used for reality shifting and therapy:

neurotransmitters rising from beneath a weighted blanket *Robin Anna Smith*⁴⁰

> blanket shift ... watching the wind get up

Helen Buckingham⁴¹

Making quilts, preserving memories

Making quilts—quilting—is a popular pastime, craft, and even high art around the world. Some quilts are simple representational art, but often as not, quilters will create "memory quilts," patching together family memories, for example, in the form of pieces of a child's clothing gathered over the years, often made to celebrate a special occasion: stitch by stitch her life comes together memory quilt Kimberly Esser⁴²

His hunting shirt her winter skirt squared in the quilt

Richard Christ⁴³

wedding quilt each butterfly square a scrap of memory

Merle D. Hinchee⁴⁴

The notion of quilts as scrapbooks for the preservation of family memories expanded exponentially in the form of massive memorial quilts, usually assembled to remember victims of diseases or natural disasters. The first of these was the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt conceived in 1985 to celebrate persons who had died of AIDS-related causes. It was originally displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and has now grown to include more than 110,000 names.

A number of other memorial quilts have been inspired by the NAMES Project. Canadian haikuist David McMurray, the editor of the *Asahi Haiku Network* website, describes such a project involving students in Canada and Japan.⁴⁵

> When the March 11, 2011 tsunami devastated Japan, [Canadian art teacher] Linda Ohama was spurred into thinking of a way to synergistically combine these practical [art] skills the children had learned from their teachers in Canada and Japan. Ohama ... reveals, "A day after the earthquake, I dreamt of helping the young

people and letting them know that there are other young people in the world who care and think about them." Ohama invited her colleagues in Canada to ask their students to draw, paint, and embroider messages on cloth for children in Japan to read.... The cloth squares were then sewn together into quilts, which they dubbed "cloth letters." More than 20 quilts with messages from children all around Canada were delivered to schools affected by the tsunami and earthquake in Tohoku, Japan. in Japan who The students read the letters from Canada, responded by painting their own cloth letters and these became the Tohoku Cloth Letters. Since October 13, 2011, the Canada-Tohoku Cloth Letters have been on an exhibition tour, beginning with an exhibition at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo....When the Canada-Tohoku Cloth Letters were displayed at the International University of Kagoshima, students responded by penning 105 haiku about the sea onto a cloth quilt. A visiting graduate student from China, Yili Zhou, contributed the following haiku to the blue colored mosaic.

> Beyond blue hydrangea blooms home sweet home

Quilting and weaving as folk art and craft

Quilting and weaving are true folk arts in the United States. Pioneer women patched together quilts from scraps of cloth, originally to save money, but over time the human propensity to create things of beauty as well as utility soon manifested itself. ad for quilts "Charming Americana" (Imported) Yvonne Hardenbrook⁴⁶

small town festival: the quilting champion wins an electric blanket

Mike Dillon⁴⁷

morning birdsong the old woman weaves it into her blanket

Frank Higgins⁴⁸

It probably won't be surprising that patchwork quilting of purely decorative futons is an ancient art and craft in Japan as well as in the West. As one online article explains:

> Japanese makers have been making quilts and patchwork for centuries and developed many unique styles, one of which was called Yosegire [寄せ切れ]. Yosegire was a means of piecing together scraps of cloth to make clothing, screens, and other household items. Yosegire means "to collect" or "to gather" and stemmed from the need to extend the life of fabric which was at the time very scarce.

> Japanese patchwork had religious significance. In Shinto, the predominant religion, all things, both animate and inanimate, were imbued with the spirit—this, of course, included fabric. In ancient Japan, fabric was so revered and valuable that it was often used as currency.⁴⁹

What may be surprising, however, is that for Japanese haiku poets the futon seems to be a utilitarian or metaphoric thing. We have not found any *haikai* by Japanese poets that celebrate *yosegire*.

Haiku by American quilters or in their work

The situation is very different in the United States, where many fabric artists also compose haiku. Oregon-based haiku poet Margaret Chula, for example, has taken an interest in the World War II–era internment camps for Japanese Americans. She chose to illustrate her 2009 book *What Remains: Japanese Americans in Internment Camps* with images of art quilts by Cathy Erickson. Chula's poems in the book are longer narratives and cannot be considered haiku, but Erickson ends the volume with a haiku of her own:

> Freedom at last flying far away from this place on a piece of fabric.

> > Cathy Erickson⁵⁰

New York–based fabric artist RaNae Merrill is a passionate quilter and teacher; she has published several how-to books on the craft and edits an active website. She has also coined the term "haikuilt" to describe the combination of haiku + quilt and presented a paper titled "Haikuilts & Quilts in Haiku" at the Haiku Northwest conference in October 2014. Under the rubric "quilt haiga," Merrill's creations have been featured in leading haiku journals.⁵¹

> acupuncture after sewing all day I am the pincushion

RaNae Merrill⁵²

Perhaps the most extensive interaction between quilts and haiku has taken place in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. L. Teresa Church, a resident of Durham, N.C., pens haiku, plays, poems, and articles and is an expert on quilts and quilting. Like her friend and associate Lenard D. Moore, Church writes primarily about nature, family, and life in rural North Carolina.

At a quarterly meeting of the Haiku Society of America in Winston-Salem, N.C., in September 2006, Church displayed a selection of her patchwork creations and, together with Moore, led a discussion of the arts and crafts of quilting and haiku, followed by a workshop in which attendees were invited to write haiku prompted by the quilts. One example:

> resin pops in the fire the quilter eyes her daughter's frock *Charles Trumbull*⁵³

The following year, at Haiku North America 2007, again in Winston-Salem, Church and Moore presented a program titled "African American Quilts and the Women Who Make Them." Moore and Church traced a century of life, stories, and stitches pertaining to African American women in rural Virginia and suburban North Carolina. Featured was a display of Church's quilts as well as works collected from her maternal relatives over a twenty-year period. Moore again discussed artistic elements incorporated into Church's collection, read poetry inspired by these works, and led workshop participants in a haiku-writing exercise.

> tobacco harvest women in lamplight tie the quilt

L. Teresa Church⁵⁴

summer evening coarseness of gingham prints Lenard D. Moore⁵⁵ in the quilt

In 2009 Moore teamed up with illustrator Diane Katz to publish a collection of work by pioneering North Carolina haiku poet Rebecca Ball Rust: "Lively, colorful quilt illustrations by Diane Katz use traditional quilt blocks and authentic vintage fabric designs to connect meaningfully with the poetry."⁵⁶ Susan Delphine Delaney, a widely published haiku poet and noted fabric artist, is a practicing psychiatrist and author of a column on women's health for Quilt World magazine. She has written a prize-winning health care guide, Rx for Quilters: Stitcher-Friendly Advice for Every Body.⁵⁷ As far as we can determine, however, Delaney has not composed haiku about quilting.

Pamela Miller Ness is not only a top haiku poet but also a fabric artist who has featured some of her haiku as needlepoint haiga, for example this one:

> after chemo wanting only to read seed catalogs

Pamela Miller Ness⁵⁸

Out from under the blanket

To finish up—just for fun—here are a few more examples where blankets and quilts are put to use:

> pigs in a blanket to see the world through eyes of a child

Michael Henry Lee⁵⁹

winter storm his blanket fort monster-proof	Annette Makino ⁶⁰
Carpathians a haystack covered with blankets	Bruce Ross ⁶¹
Smoke words in the sky Above a large crackling fire The blackened red blanket.	Thomas Phelan ⁶²
wet blanket paper covers rock	Olivier Schopfer ⁶³
family-held blanket	

a girl steps out in a bikini Marian Olson⁶⁴

summer's eve a last shake of the picnic blanket Helen Gaen⁶⁵

Notes:

1. A Field Guide to North American Haiku is a long-term project along the lines of a haiku encyclopedia-cum-*saijiki*, a selection of the best haiku in English arranged by topic and illustrating what it is about a given topic that attracts poets to write. When complete, the Field Guide project will comprise multiple thick volumes keyed to the several topics in traditional Japanese *saijiki* (haiku almanacs) and Western counterparts, notably William J. Higginson's *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996). These

topics are Season, Sky & Elements, Landscape, Plants, Animals, Human Affairs, and Observances. The haiku in this essay are taken from my Haiku Database, currently containing more than 530,000 entries, and selected from about 1,100 haiku indexed under Human Affairs: bedclothes. Critique and suggestions of this article or the Field Guide project are warmly invited; please comment by e-mail to cptrumbull\at\comcast.net.

- 2. R. H. Blyth, A History of Haiku. Volume 1: From the Beginnings up to Issa. (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1963), 215.
- 3. Leon M. Zolbrod, "Reluctant Genius: The Life and Work of Buson, a Japanese Master of Haiku and Painting—Second Installment," *Modern Haiku* 23:3 (Fall 1992).
- 4. David G. Lanoue, *Haiku of Kobayashi Issa* website: http://haikuguy.com/issa/.
- 5. Lanoue, Haiku of Kobayashi Issa website.
- 6. Collected Haiku of Yosa Buson, translated by W.S. Merwin and Takako Lento (Port Townsend, Wash.: Copper Canyon Press, 2013), #828.
- 7. Lanoue, Haiku of Kobayashi Issa website.
- 8. Merriam-Webster online dictionary: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quilt.
- "What is a duvet?" Alexa Answers, Amazon.com website: https:// alexaanswers.amazon.com/question/BxTUpBMf7v96KMm3xIl3g.
- 10. Karma Tenzing Wangchuk, in *Modern Haiku* 36:1 (Winter–Spring 2005), 76.
- 11. Margaret Chula, *Grinding My Ink: Haiku* (Lake Oswego, Ore.: Katsura Press, 1993).
- 12. John Sandbach, *Invisible Castle: The Collected Haiku* (self-published, 2013), #264.
- 13. Lanoue, Haiku of Kobayashi Issa website.
- 14. Matsuyama Municipal Shiki-Kinen Museum, Shiki haiku database, Winter 4090; translation by C. Trumbull, unpublished.
- 15. Shinada Shin, *Hayabusa no mune* (Falcon's Chest, 2011); translation from Fay Aoyagi, ed., *Blue Willow Haiku World*, January 11, 2019.
- 16. W.F. Owen, in *Modern Haiku* 34:3 (Autumn 2003), 68.
- 17. George Swede, in Blithe Spirit 9:2 (June 1999).
- 18. Harry Gilli, in Shiki Internet Kukai, June 29, 1997.
- 19. Masaoka Shiki, in Shiki-Kinen Museum English Volunteers, ed. and trans., *If Someone Asks* ... (2001), 57.
- 20. Charles Trumbull, *A Five-Balloon Morning* (Santa Fe, N.M: Red Mountain Press, 2013).
- 21. Leanne Mumford, from the sequence "Robben Island, August 2018," *The Mamba* 8 (September 2019), 72.
- 22. Hayat Nancy Abuza, in John Sheirer, ed., *Bridge Traffic: Haiku and Related Poetry by People of the Massachusetts Pioneer Valley* (Enfield, Conn. / Colrain, Mass.: Tiny Poems Press / Winfred Press, 1998).

- 23. Rengé [David Priebe], in *The Red Pagoda* 3:2 (October 1985), 13.
- 24. Zolbrod, *Reluctant Genius*, Twenty-first Installment, *Modern Haiku* 30:3 (Fall 1999), 51.
- 25. Helen Rul Lawler, from the sequence "Visit to Mainland China: Peking," *Modern Haiku* 10:2 (Summer 1979), 25.
- 26. Donna Drake, in Modern Haiku 28:3 (Fall 1997), 8.
- 27. John McManus, in Moongarlic E-zine 3 (November 2014), 11.
- 28. Alexis Rotella, Star Power (Haiku Canada Sheet 1990–91).
- 29. Wales Haiku Journal, Spring 2018.
- 30. John Barlow, in *Frogpond* 21:3 (1998), 43.
- 31. Joy Hutton, in Paper Wasp 6:4 (Spring 2000).
- 32. Kristen Deming, in Modern Haiku 37:3 (Autumn 2006), 14.
- 33. Vincent Tripi, Somewhere Among the Clouds (1999).
- 34. Kala Ramesh, verse from the rasika renku "Buddha Poornima," *A Hundred Gourds* 4:4 (September 2015), Renku page 3.
- 35. Pamela Miller Ness, in Modern Haiku 32:3 (Fall 2001), 27.
- 36. Matthew Paul, Pinewood Haiku Contest 2007, 2nd Place; *Wisteria* 5 (April 2007), 6.
- 37. Don Eulert, in Naia, ed., *What the Wind Can't Touch* (2016 Southern California Haiku Study Group Anthology), 36.
- 38. Ayaz Daryl Nielsen, *100 Haiku* (Allahabad, India: Cyberwit.net, 2019), 33.
- 39. Frank K. Robinson, from "Ten Poems," *Modern Haiku* 13:1 (Winter– Spring 1982), 51.
- 40. Robin Anna Smith, in *FemkuMag* 8 (January 2019).
- 41. Helen Buckingham, in *Haiku Scotland* 11 [2006].
- 42. Kimberly Esser, in Naia, ed., What the Wind Can't Touch (2016).
- 43. Richard Christ, in Modern Haiku 9:3 (Autumn 1978), 27.
- 44. Merle D. Hinchee, in Tanya McDonald, ed., *A Moment's Longing* (Haiku Society of America Members' Anthology 2019).
- 45. David McMurray, "Quilting Bees in Canada and Japan," *The Language Teacher* 36:5 (September 2012) and posted on the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) website: https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/outreach/ articles/1887-quilting-bees-canada-and-japan.
- 46. Yvonne Hardenbrook, in Piedmont Literary Review 22:2 (1998), 16.
- 47. Mike Dillon, in *Simply Haiku* 4:2 (Summer 2006).
- 48. Frank Higgins, from the sequence "Navajo Land," *Frogpond* 41:3 (2018), 77.
- 49. "Introduction Japanese Yosegire Quilt-Making," Shannon Brinkley Studio website: https://shannon-brinkley.com/blogs/shannonbrinkley-studio-1/yosegire. This site features photographs of several styles of yosegire. A Web search on "Japanese quilts" will yield dozens more links to this fascinating topic.

- 50. Margaret Chula, What Remains: Japanese Americans in Internment Camps (Lake Oswego, Ore.: Katsura Press, 2009). Erickson's quilts can be viewed on her website: https://www.cathyericksonquilts.com/#/japanese-americaninternment-quilts/. "Using arashi shibori, a Japanese resist dye technique, quilter Judith Content of Palo Alto, Calif., creates what she calls "visual haiku," kimono-like art quilts to be displayed on walls. An example was shown on the PBS Craft in America TV program in December 2019 and may be viewed online at https:// www.pbs.org/craft-in-america/tv-series/quilts/.
- 51. Full-color images of Merrill's quilts are accessible on the Web: "Quilt haiga," *A Hundred Gourds* 4:2 (March 2015), Haiga pages 5 and 6: http:// ahundredgourds.com/ahg42/haigao6.html, and on Merrill's website: https://ranaemerrillquilts.com/products/haiku-quilt-haikuilt, with links to four haikuilts in the Poetry Gallery of *Modern Haiku*'s Fall 2016 issue.
- 52. RaNae Merrill, "Haikuilts & Quilts in Haiku," *Haiku Northwest*, October 17, 2014.
- 53. Written at the workshop; unpublished.
- 54. L. Teresa Church, in The Heron's Nest 10:1 (March 2008).
- 55. Lenard D. Moore, in Michael Dylan Welch and Lenard D. Moore, eds., *Dandelion Wind* (Haiku North America 2007 conference anthology), 21.
- 56. Rebecca Ball Rust, *In the Night Shallows: Selected Haiku*, edited by Lenard D. Moore and Dave Russo; illustrated by Diane Katz (Pittsboro, N.C.: Rosenberry Books, 2009). The quote is from the publisher's blurb at http://rosenberrybooks.com/hand-boundeditions/haiku/in-the-night-shallows/.
- 57. Susan Delaney Mech, *Rx for Quilters: Stitcher-Friendly Advice for Every Body* (Concord, Calif.: C&T Publishing, 2000).
- 58. Pamela Miller Ness, in *Reeds* 1 (2003); the haiku was originally published in *Acorn* 2 (Spring 1999).
- 59. Michael Henry Lee, in *Bottle Rockets* 40 (January 2019), 19.
- 60. Annette Makino, in A Hundred Gourds 2:2 (March 2013), Haiku page 2.
- 61. Bruce Ross, in Michael Dylan Welch and Ruth Yarrow, eds., *Standing Still* (Haiku North America 2011 conference anthology).
- 62. Thomas Phelan, in Brussels Sprout 9:2 (May 1992), 43.
- 63. Olivier Schopfer, in Failed Haiku 2:14 (March 2017).
- 64. Marian Olson, *Sketches of Mexico* (Northfield, Mass.: Lily Pool Press, 2012), 58.
- 65. Helen Gaen, in Blithe Spirit 30:3 (August 2020).