







# Frogpond

**The Journal of the Haiku  
Society of America**

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## ABOUT FROGPOND

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

As I write this letter, the earth has just passed the Vernal Equinox. Every year the earth offers us a new beginning, the annual gift of a journey out of cold white into warm color. In the spirit of haiku egolessness, perhaps spring is also a time when each of us can turn outward and consider how we can help the haiku community. At this time of new growth, please consider some opportunities to support fellow poets and benefit our community as a whole: (1) as Robert Spiess always gently reminded us, buy haiku journals and books and consider donating your duplicates to school or public libraries; (2) sponsor a potential member who can't afford the HSA dues; (3) teach haiku to a child or friend or give a workshop at a school, library, community center, nursing home, or prison; (4) set up a reading at a local bookstore, library, or community/arts center; (5) bring haiku to a "mainstream" poetry workshop and teach your colleagues about the genre; (6) volunteer to present a workshop, talk, or reading at a local, regional, or national HSA meeting; (7) volunteer to serve on one of our new committees: Archives, Education, or Public Relations; (8) support HSA and other haiku contests by entering your poetry; (9) if your area doesn't have a local haiku group, consider starting one (public libraries and bookstores often offer free meeting space); (10) write an article or book review and submit it for publication; (11) send haiku to our annual members anthology and order a copy or a few (they make wonderful holiday gifts!); (12) and, finally, consider making a bequest to the Society in your will.

spring green  
a park bench stranger  
returns my grin

Wishing you all the joys of spring,  
*Pamela Miller Ness*



*Museum  
of Haiku  
Literature  
Award*

\$100 for the best unpublished work  
appearing in the previous issue of  
*Frogpond* as selected by vote of the  
H.S.A. Executive Committee



## From XXIX:1

circle of pines  
God absent  
from the wedding vows

*Carolyn Hall*



haiku



## Frogpond XXIX:2

lingering winter . . .  
renewing my subscriptions  
to everything

*Janelle Barrera*

early March  
the stream spreads  
over pond ice

*Hilary Tann*

spring sunlight  
the furrows in a field  
curve around a rock

*William Cullen Jr.*

frosty corral—  
the mare nibbles  
at my pocket

*Darrell Byrd*

rain showers  
between the steps  
a glimpse of color

*Ariel Lambert*



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spring funeral  
one chair separates  
widow from bride

*Laura Orabone*

in my head the pitter-patter of iris roots

*Marlene Mountain*

groundbreaking—  
a clump of weeds  
flung aside

*Peggy Willis Lyles*

spring floods—  
the speedboat  
on a one-way street

*Curtis Dunlap*

outdoor lecture—  
a sparrow  
takes my students away

*Yu Chang*

Frogpond XXIX:2

sparkling May—  
rowers pull together  
on their oars

*Barry George*

open scissors beside a vase of water

*Eve Luckring*

late-spring walk  
flattened grass  
where the ewe was sheared

*paul m*

whirling monks  
scent of musty silk  
fills the auditorium

*Dave Russo*

empty lockers  
the janitor sweeps  
a red mitten

*Michael Kriesel*



Haiku Society of America

her hand on my chest  
in the laundry room—  
the short night

*David Boyer*

morning glories  
crowd one another  
gracefully

*Brent Partridge*

a white butterfly  
over the germander—  
crunching rocks

*Lenard D. Moore*

fruit flies  
crowd the bitten peach—  
a lovers' quarrel

*Penny Harter*

heat haze  
the miles  
of boundary fence

*Lorin Ford*

## Frogpond XXIX:2

i can see us living  
where we pass through—  
summer travels

*Marcus Larsson*

to the Navajo  
the rock shaped like a left hand  
once held arrows

*Judson Evans*

beak to the wind  
the meadowlark's song  
in fire season

*an'ya*

orchestra concert—  
thousands listen and watch  
as the sun sets

*Joette Giorgis*

children's laughter  
hanging over dusk  
the evening star

*Jack Barry*



Haiku Society of America

summer heat  
the sheen of sweat  
on the ballet barre

*Susan A. Holdridge*

scallop shell . . .  
how perfectly this half  
fits my palm

*Connie Donleycott*

sunflowers  
at eye level—  
I lift my face

*Peggy Willis Lyles*

shoreline breeze . . .  
two princesses  
build a sandcastle

*Stanford M. Forrester*

too nice to argue  
white butterfly  
on a white stone

*Doreen King*

Frogpond XXIX:2

not much to the splash—  
the heat  
around the pond

*Gary Hotham*

August night—  
discussing world problems  
with a neighbor

*Adelaide B. Shaw*

lightning strike  
the uncertainty  
of everything

*Beverley George*

roses still fresh—  
the doctor's vague answers  
to my questions

*Rebecca Lilly*

camping alone one star then many

*Jim Kacian*



## **Dissection of the Haiku Tradition: Holidays and Observances**

*By Fay Aoyagi*

In my childhood home with three generations under the same roof, my grandfather controlled the TV channels. These were the years when Japanese loved the Yomiuri Giants (a baseball team), Taiho (the Grand Sumo Champion from 1961 to 1971) and tamagoyaki (a sweetened soy-flavored omelet). My grandfather liked all these things, too. He preferred a kimono to western clothes. He did not go out without a hat. He never served his own tea. He represents, in a way, the endangered traditions of Japan.

the Super Bowl—  
every now and then  
all the houses cheer

*Paul O. Williams <sup>(1)</sup>*

My boyfriend, from my New York days, loved football. He watched the New York Giants' game every Sunday. I decided not to be a football widow. I wanted to be a part of the American mainstream. Even after we split, I followed the career of Coach Bill Parcells (New York - New England - Dallas). I know football, don't I?

at dawn on Easter  
day laborers gathering  
as they always do

*Patricia J. Machmiller <sup>(2)</sup>*

Once upon a time, I dated a man from Venezuela. He never took off the cross that dangled from his neck. He was pro choice. Who knows how many girlfriends he had before, during, and after me? I was surprised when he showed up at my door in a suit and tie on Easter Sunday. He suggested we go to church. "You are a hat person," he said. "You can wear your most fa-



## Frogpond XXIX:2

favorite hat to the mass.” He knew how to push my buttons. I grew up in the society where people get married at a church and have a funeral at a Buddhist temple. I cannot say I believe in God. But I like the idea of everything—a tree, a flower, a lake, a stone, and a house—having its own spirit.

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

*Fay Aoyagi* <sup>(3)</sup>

When this haiku was first published, in Frogpond, I was very much surprised to hear some people say it was erotic. I use metaphor in haiku rather often. My haiku includes a lot of ‘I,’ ‘my,’ and ‘me.’ Haiku is a window for the reader to explore my world. Independence Day is my adopted holiday. I rely on the concept of ‘reading between the lines.’

Thanksgiving alone:  
ordering eggs and toast  
in an undertone

*Nicholas Virgilio* <sup>(4)</sup>

One of my friends confessed she was afraid to be alone on holidays. That is why she continued living with her estranged husband.

A painter will step back to look at his work. An ice skater may videotape her practice session to check her posture. The flickering of birthday candles on your tenth birthday was not the same as on your fiftieth.

I am a short person. I buy my pants in the children’s section. Some bathroom mirrors in hotels are too high for me to apply lipstick. My neck gets tired after a cocktail reception. Yet I bend when I walk under the tree branches. I squat to greet dogs on the street.

silent night  
the singing hands  
of the deaf child

*Jerry Kilbride* <sup>(5)</sup>



## Haiku Society of America

In junior high school, our English teacher told us that listening to American music would help our pronunciation. “Hyakuman nin no eig” (“One Million People’s English”), an educational radio program, always ended with an American popular song.

In the early eighties when I worked at a law firm in Tokyo, I went to a bar in Akasaka with my coworkers. A Japanese singer with a perfect accent performed a Billy Joel song. My boss, a British lawyer, went to talk to the singer. Surprisingly, the guy did not speak English at all. He said he just mimicked the record. It was a mystery to me how he could put such sentiment into the lyrics he did not understand.

*jyuunigatsu youka gotsugotsu ishi bakari*

December Eighth  
rough and hardened  
all these rocks

*Naoto Hirose* <sup>(6)</sup>

Pearl Harbor Day in Japan is December 8 due to the International Date Line. My Japanese *saijiki* lists a lot of holidays, festivals, religious events, and death anniversaries of famous people.

I often use Hiroshima Day or Nagasaki Anniversary in my haiku. Why do I come back to that theme again and again? I think about the relationship between myself and August 1945. I measure the distance between me and those August days. Sometimes my name becomes the fourth line of haiku. Because I am not Smith or Mary, my name could cast a light on a reader. I am not saying that I am entitled to write a haiku about Hiroshima Day just because I was born in Japan. I was born after World War II. I have never been to Hiroshima or Nagasaki. My point is: holidays and observances reveal different colors to different eyes. How I respect Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and how an African American celebrates it may not be the same. I may be too far from Columbus Day. I may be never satisfied with my St. Patrick’s Day haiku. I may write about “shigure-



## Frogpond XXIX:2

ki” (Basho’s death anniversary) only in Japanese.

Chinatown New Year—  
down to a dark alley  
to where my fortune is baking

*Janeth Ewald* <sup>(7)</sup>

I do not know exactly where my haiku path is leading me.  
Along the way, I zigzag, run, get lost, pause for a while.

I will discuss rivers and oceans next time.

- 1) Unpublished at the time of writing this article. Used with permission from the poet.
- 2) *Blush of Winter Moon*, Jacaranda Press, San Jose, California 2001
- 3) *Chrysanthemum Love*, Blue Willow Press, San Francisco, 2003
- 4) *The Haiku Anthology*, edited by Cor van den Heuvel, W.W. Norton Company, New York and London, 1999
- 5) *The Day of Strawberries*, edited by Paul O. Williams, Two Autumns Press, Salinas, California, 2004
- 6) *Saijiki* (Modern Saijiki), edited by Tota Kaneko, Momoko Kuroda, Ban’ya Natsuishi, Seisei Shuppan, Tokyo, 1977. Translation by Fay Aoyagi
- 7) *Mariposa 9*, edited by Claire Gallagher and Carolyn Hall, published by Haiku Poets of Northern California, 2003



Haiku Society of America

open-air café  
after the diners have left  
the birds arrive

*Frank Williams*

a red frisbee  
half-filled with sand . . .  
summer's end

*John Barlow*

low tide—  
a bottle left  
pointing toward the bay

*Jeffrey Stillman*

fishing in reeds—  
somewhere or other  
people's voices

*H. F. Noyes*

September twilight—  
a dark tangle of kelp  
drifts out to sea

*Edward Zuk*

Frogpond XXIX:2

blue heron—  
the depth  
of the shadows

*George Dorsty*

empty beer can  
crickets  
chip away the light

*Michael Kriesel*

a quiet street—  
cats sleeping  
under the cars

*Jay Leeming*

morning drizzle  
the shifting shape  
of the apple sack

*paul m*

the shadow  
glides up a tree  
to meet the hawk

*Neil Moylan*



## Haiku Society of America

sun through yellow leaves  
the toddler swings his arms  
above his head

*A. C. Missias*

prayer ribbons  
fluttering, fluttering  
an autumn evening

*Michael McClintock*

Holocaust Museum  
a small pair of shoes  
hardly worn

*Bruce Ross*

perfume vial—  
the unstopped  
memory

*D. Claire Gallagher*

October breeze  
a yellow leaf  
falls into sunlight

*Richmond D. Williams*

## Frogpond XXIX:2

earthenware plate  
a few loose grapes  
and their stem

*Christopher Herold*

long shadows  
a stack  
of clean dishes

*Eve Luckring*

rural delivery . . .  
four or five letters  
and a colored leaf

*Robert Mainone*

day moon . . .  
I add more sugar  
to my oatmeal

*Marie Summers*

pumpkin soup  
in a blue and white bowl  
too good to eat

*Greg Piko*

Haiku Society of America

too late  
for the autumn colors  
home town visit

*Carolyn Hall*

surge of surf . . .  
an iron mooring ring  
lodged in stone

*Emily Romano*

Antlers twist in temperatures about to fall

*Michael Konsmo*

still warm  
the fixture that covers  
the burned-out bulb

*Tom Tico*

outside of town  
pick a star  
to live on

*John Martone*



## Frogpond XXIX:2

winter solstice—  
when she gets in,  
the water covers my heart  
*Scott Metz*

how to answer  
the snowflake  
that blew into my ear  
*Patrick Sweeney*

winter dusk  
snow to the very ends  
of branches  
*Burnell Lippy*

advent candles flicker  
the child's eyes  
flutter closed  
*Deb Baker*

under the mistletoe  
my dog  
holds his leash  
*John J. Dunphy*

Haiku Society of America

church bells  
at midnight  
snowflakes

*William Cullen Jr.*

Christmas morning  
a two-year-old's  
empty mitten thumbs

*E. J. Smith*

first Christmas—  
our baby sleeps through  
the unwrapping of his gifts

*Michael Dylan Welch*

Seattle winter  
dreaming of Mai Tais  
in Maui

*Peter Duppenthaler*

december moon  
parts of the river  
tested by teenagers

*Duro Jaiye*



## Frogpond XXIX:2

star dust  
running around shouting  
Happy New Year!

*Robert Mainone*

crossing the bridge  
over winter mist . . .  
random thoughts

*Andrea Grillo*

snowman  
on the front lawn  
of the retirement home

*Penny Harter*

winter sunshine  
another tooth  
in the baby's smile

*Collin Barber*

almost sunset  
the weekend dad  
drags a sled up the hill

*David Giacalone*

Haiku Society of America

winter camellia  
she's surprised to see me  
. . . whoever I am

*Carolyn Hall*

hospice meeting  
the first chairs taken  
look out on new snow

*Kirsty Karkow*

my daughter's grave—  
just the click of my pen  
in the cold

*Lenard D. Moore*

Winter afternoon:  
the last sip of cabernet  
in a scratched juice glass  
*Susan E. Carlisle*

colored bottles  
on the windowsill  
six more weeks of winter

*Scott Mason*



Frogpond XXIX:2

it snowed  
while i was gone  
and it melted

*Karma Tenzing Wangchuk*

the slant  
of her handwriting  
spring breeze

*Michael Fessler*

St. Peter's Square  
pigeons  
among the mourners

*Raffael de Gruttola*

spring sun—  
a little cash saved  
in the flowered teapot

*Janelle Barrera*

the limits  
of a wind sock  
Wyoming border

*Ann K. Schwader*

senryu



Frogpond XXIX:2

driving eighty  
in these days of war  
all defiance feels good

*Michael Ketchek*

karaoke night—  
the rose shaped  
from a bar napkin

*S. R. Spanyer*

poised  
at the baton's tip  
the student orchestra

*Yvonne Cabalona*

a piece of the stone god in its shadow

*Scott Metz*

no children  
the dead woman's wedding gown  
in its keepsake box

*Dorothy McLaughlin*

## Haiku Society of America

in Katrina's wake  
the sounds of jazz  
return to Basin Street

*Raffael de Gruttola*

hospital light  
a shirt turned  
inside out

*Stephen Peters*

bedtime prayers  
she pretends  
I'm not listening

*Tom Painting*

food bank line—  
a pigeon picks up crumbs  
too small to see

*Ruth Yarrow*

Mother's 96th—  
she tells us  
not to come

*Ruth Holzer*

## Frogpond XXIX:2

dinner discussion  
Mother rounds up  
her peas and carrots

*Anne LB Davidson*

yard sale  
an old love stops by  
to sell himself

*Susan A. Holdridge*

a vase  
considered too valuable  
for flowers

*Brent Partridge*

she says  
life is . . .  
as I pass by the couple

*K. Ramesh*

chewing lettuce,  
boots on caked snow:  
first hearing aid

*Janet Brof*



# Haiku Society of America

cell phone  
almost in tune  
with the woodwinds

*Cyril Childs*

migrating whales—  
some of us find  
our sea legs

*R. P. Carter*

early morning love  
the glow  
of the chandelier

*Pamela Miller Ness*

halfway through my story  
the printer  
runs out of ink

*Amitava Dasgupta*

the boy  
that dad was  
when he speaks of the slaughtered cow

*CarrieAnn Thunell*

## Frogpond XXIX:2

a cock crow  
a crow caw  
a harley

*Victor Ortiz*

standing out in the crowd  
a man in camouflage gear

*George Dorsty*

bachelor party  
two new fathers  
talk breast feeding

*Micheal Blaine*

insomnia . . .  
squeaky wheel  
in the gerbil cage

*John S. O'Connor*

senior moments  
last night I had one  
in a dream

*Richmond D. Williams*

Haiku Society of America

night landing—  
weight of the cross  
on my chest

*Thomas Patrick DeSisto*

I stand behind  
the man with roses  
behind his back

*C. Avery*

I woke up early—  
her breathing in  
and out

*Zoran Mimica*

Groundhog Day  
the shadow  
of war

*Margarita Engle*

tonight's hotel room—  
the stain on the rug  
nothing to worry about

*Gary Hotham*



Frogpond XXIX:2

blood spattered highway . . . the art of war

*David Gershator*

the sternness of my teacher's tombstone

*R. P. Carter*

her grown son's cheek

the feel of lettering

on a favorite book

*Greg Piko*

arguing about politics

dad feeds the dog

under the table

*Rob Scott*

divorce papers arrive

a passing truck hauls

a twisted wreck

*Rob Scott*

## Haiku Society of America

hard-to-peel  
tangerine—  
her citrus-scented fingers

*David Giacalone*

Pledge of Allegiance  
the veteran's hand covers  
his Purple Heart

*John J. Dunphy*

Drawing circles,  
finally one deformed enough  
to be the earth

*Kuniharu Shimizu*

old vinyl  
*In My Life*  
is the B side

*LeRoy Gorman*

small town—  
her lipstick on  
a little too tight

*Lane Parker*

## Frogpond XXIX:2

a circular saw  
through the middle  
of my nap

*Paul Pfleuger*

a long trip  
the final flip  
of the map

*Jim Kacian*

soggy cereal—  
I mull over  
the mail-in offer

*Sari Grandstaff*

dinner time—  
each night  
a fallen hero

*Tom Clausen*

sheepdog  
the herded pigeons  
take flight

*Christopher Herold*





## Rengay

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## Haibun

*Pages 40 - 45*

*Pages 47 - 49*

*Pages 51 - 55*

## Tan Renga

*Page 50*

**RENGAY**

**A World Turns**

a world turns  
toward winter  
North Star

*antler—  
surprisingly heavy*

work done  
the days grow  
shorter

*evening bell  
just as we reach  
the shrine gate*

*even the sounds  
in silhouette*

a throat cleared  
the shadows  
slip away

*Jason Sanford Brown (1, 3, 6)  
Scott Metz (2, 4, 5)*

## FLEET WEEK

*for Jerry Kilbride*

Fleet Week  
a flock of gulls pursues  
the incoming tide

LATE MAY, the best weather of the year, just the sort of thing to lift your spirits. And all these young sailors on the town in their immaculate whites, strolling through Central Park in groups—shyer than they'd care to admit.

During Fleet Week a few years ago I was sitting on a bench watching the famous Fifth Avenue hawks' nest with Maeve O'Riley. Maeve is a tall, slim, young-old woman with white hair hanging down her back, loosely tied with a black velvet ribbon in the style of a Heian court lady. Her youthful eyes are gray with charcoal-black lashes, her profile Gibson-Girl perfect. She is a retired teacher who "burned out" teaching math in the public schools. In the ensuing nervous breakdown, she forgot everything she ever knew about mathematics. Or so she says.

She is now a part time volunteer at the American Museum of Natural History. Her project is collecting owl pellets in Central Park for a study of their diet. She explains that owls retain indigestible items like bones, fur, and feathers in their crops. When they wake up, they throw up. Early in the morning Maeve tracks the owls to their roosts and later searches for pellets under the trees. I can see her lightly turning an icky owl hair ball in her long, elegant fingers, then putting it into a plastic baggie. Each is labeled: species, location, date, time. Her refrigerator is full of specimens awaiting delivery to the Museum.

in the owl's pellet  
delicate eye sockets  
cleansed of flesh and hair



## Frogpond XXIX:2

That day she had brought her telescope and was inviting people to view the nest, where three young hawks jumped up and down and flapped their wings. A band of sailors was walking past. Maeve beckoned them over, saying in seductive tone, “Hey, Sailor! Want to see some hawks?”

the hawklets look up  
their heads turning in circles-  
father circling above

*Doris Heitmeyer*

## A WINTER WALK

ON MY WEEKLY WALK around the lake, I come to a sign covered with an inch of snow. The sign, angled like a draftsman’s table and about the same size, stands in the middle of a hemlock grove next to Shaver’s Creek. On my walk thus far, I’ve been eagerly reading the stories recorded in snow—a rabbit passed here and veered off into the woods, a squirrel there went up an oak, turkeys milled around and scratched down to the ground. Now, on the sign, a blank slate.

I’ve been here before, so I know what is written on the sign. It’s a guide to “reading the landscape,” pointing out the nearby clues that tell us the natural history of the place. The row of roots between hemlocks shows where a fallen tree once served as a “nurse log” for new growth. The dead trees in the open space around the creek give evidence of a beaver dam that once flooded the area. The work of the beavers can also be seen in the gnawed-round hemlock trunk. They were not trying to cut the hemlock for food or lodging materials, though—just trying to kill the hemlock in order to open up sunlit space for other, more preferred species to grow.

The empty page of the snow-covered sign is irresistible. With the earth-touching end of my walking stick (how’s that George Swede haiku go? “At the end of myself pencil tip”?), I write a haiku. As I write, the words below partially show



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through my inscribed letters, enough to indicate there are words there, but not enough to read them. This is what literary criticism is all about, I think, words on top of words. It's an open question whether the words on top help clarify or obscure the words below. Perhaps their purpose has less to do with the words below than with the snow on top.

In this case, even the words on top are illegible. As I write, the snow clumps in places, slides away in others. The clearest word is "snow," in script formed by the absence of snow.

under snow  
a description of the world  
before me

*Ian Marshall*

## CARIBBEAN BLUES

At death's door  
the buzzer's  
not working

THE LAST TIME WE SAW EACH OTHER, she told me I seemed sad. Well, maybe there's a reason. Aren't there enough reasons for sadness?

She's the cliché psychologist: perceptive and insightful about the lives of others but now with her life at stake, she denies she is in denial, refuses the normal protocols. Once a dark beauty, she's getting thinner and weaker by the day—gaunt and frail and too weak to keep up with the needs of her tropical house.

at death's door  
the door needs  
a paint job

She complains about real estate people sniffing around, knocking at her door, bothering her. Maybe if the house was in



## Frogpond XXIX:2

better shape and the front door was freshly painted they'd leave her alone. Should I volunteer for the job? Me and my bad back?

Maybe I seemed sad because she made me sad knowing that she won't be around much longer, though she doesn't acknowledge what's happening. It's maddening but we don't discuss it any more. She flies back and forth to the mainland and then dismisses the most expensive advice. According to her, the doctors are incompetent, out of touch, too Western, or the personal chemistry isn't there. What she needs is a wonder-working doctor to produce a tailor-made miracle for her. Painless, potent, and without side effects.

Does she have a year or two left? What are the odds? When the odds were better than sixty/forty, she refused chemotherapy. Why? Why did she refuse a good gamble? Threat of baldness, nausea? The unsure victory at too great a price? But what's the alternative? There's something too complex for words going on here.

at death's door  
tripping  
over the threshold

Her friends talked their heads off to her. One by one they gave up. That was some time ago and now it's too late. She plays around with different diets, with supplements, with herbs, what she calls a holistic approach. She talks about long range plans to remodel the house and plant bougainvillea and oleander, maybe even cultivate orchids beneath a trellis covered with passion fruit. She talks as if she wants to take advantage of the unusual amounts of rain we've been having and I agree it's a good thing to get things into the ground before the next rainy season.

at death's door  
the weeds taking over  
the flower boxes

I am becoming one sad disabled enabler, playing along,



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though inside I feel a squelched primal scream in the face of her irrational resolve. One doctor tells me that talking truth to her is like talking to a cloud. I find now that I am inevitably humoring her. The next time I visit I'll bring her a vanda orchid. It should do well.

Passing by to drop off some groceries and the Sunday N.Y. Times, an island luxury, I look at her blue front door, the blue color fading and flaking. I should go buy a bucket of paint and do the job once and for all—bring it back to life. I'll just tell her the block association of local iguanas has voted me their representative to paint her door in one of two colors—cobalt blue or ultramarine: your choice.

at death's door  
she opens it  
and smiles

Every time I pass her door it gives me the flashback blues, and the blues don't fade.

*David Gershator*

## IN THE EYES OF . . .

I'D STOPPED GOING TO CHURCH. I felt the statues' eyes watching me, following me everywhere—ever since I found a twenty during mass, and kept it.

What to do? My brother was getting married, so I had to go inside. I thought, maybe . . .

On entering, I put a fifty in the poor box.

the scent  
of orange blossoms  
sunlit windows

*Allen McGill*

## ON THE F TRAIN

READING THE COPY OF HOWL you gave me years ago  
on some birthday a tote bag filled with all the poetry books it  
could hold and when you left me all the books a little worse for  
wear but the tote bag still intact

old subway car  
the cane seat's  
broken weave

*Roberta Beary*

\*\*\*

## MOUNTAIN

THERE WAS A VERY BIG SNOWSTORM. Cars couldn't  
move. The streets went unplowed for days.

Next to my Papa's store there was a huge empty lot. Papa  
agreed to have some of the snow dumped there and we woke  
up the next morning to a mountain two stories tall!

My sisters and I welcomed the neighborhood children to  
our personal Alp. We built forts. We had snowball fights. We  
climbed to the peak and slid down again and again.

That one year, we lamented the coming of spring.

my Papa  
in the basement,  
his curse words

*Betty Kaplan*



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**SILENT MOMENT**

*A six-person rengay written 9/22/05 at Haiku North America*

zen room  
in half lotus rb  
she blots her lips

seagulls squawk  
on the commons lp

a green pebble  
from the beach walk ec  
I didn't take

pair of Ray-Bans  
reserving the seat cc

gun turrets  
we discuss haiga lmp  
. . . and the view

silent moment  
someone's stomach rumbles js

*Roberta Beary - rb  
Lane Parker - lp  
Ellen Compton - ec  
Carlos Colon - cc  
Linda Papanicolaou - lmp  
Jim Swift - js*



## A PERFECT SIGNAL

SOME DAYS AGO, they tell me at the gas station, a weather system from off the Great Lakes dumped two feet of snow on this part of upstate New York. The local roads and parking lots are still narrowed by heavy plowing, and last night I pulled up as close as possible to the door of my motel room, to avoid wading through a deep slush. But this morning dawns clear and bright as I loop through the town and over the Pulaski River to get back onto the interstate, northbound again. Within less than half an hour it is time to abandon the highway that has brought me all the way from Virginia, to swing northwest on Route 37 for the Canadian border at Ogdensburg Bridge.

Almost immediately I begin to lose the public radio station to which I was listening all yesterday afternoon. Skimming the wavebands for an alternative, suddenly in the car with me I recognize the measured tones of our civilized neighbor to the north: it is CBC One, broadcasting from Ottawa. I am quickly drawn in by a lively and intelligent conversation between the interviewer and her guest, who is the woman conductor of a men's choir in Vancouver. Within a few miles, however, the signal begins to break up, warping and hissing into incomprehensibility. Then tantalizingly, it briefly returns—a phrase or two, a laughing reply, slip through in the clear. But the thread is lost.

Frustration surges within me, springing from a very American impatience with deficient technology. And then, just as one radio station can abruptly drown out another, an altogether different response presents itself. It is suddenly obvious that I can choose to hear this incoherent stream of sound as the perfect expression, from moment to moment, of an interplay between many variables: the strength and direction of the transmission, its frequency, the prevailing weather, barometric pressure, interference from other signals. And then the landscape itself—this electrical substation that I am passing now, those wooded hills to the north, that cluster of farm silos.



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I have not even yet named all of the possible influences, which in any case are beyond verification. But this is certain: everything relevant is impeccably translated (if only by silence) and the result is a phenomenon that is intrinsically beautiful, being a kind of music in its own right.

horse and buggy  
the driver's face invisible  
in my rearview mirror

*Dee Evetts*

## WHAT I HOPE

TO SAY wearing my jade is not that i wish to appear maori, or to usurp their sacred symbols, but that something that moves them moves me, and that I too respond to the significance of this simple geometry: sharp vertices pointing to head and genitals, wide angle pointing to heart, and the whole of it, worn next to the skin, acquiring a soft patina and the heat of blood

first summer day  
the whole of the mountain  
one green

*Jim Kacian*

## WINTER VISION

CERTAIN THINGS become clearer in the winter. For example, one realizes how close the road is to the house. And how close the next closest road is. In short, how little unbroken ground there is in one's community.

eighteen wheelers,  
riding  
the hilltop trees

*William Fraenkel*

## JUNIPER

DURING RECENT WEEKS ANETTE AND I have been drawing hundreds of horses for our three year old son. It made us tired but we persisted because we understood that his biggest dream at that moment was to be able to draw a horse. My wife's horses were happy, proportional, and exuded confidence. Mine were different. Whatever I started to draw, ended up being something else. For a while I got away with the trick of adding some black stripes and calling it a zebra. Today Aron drew his first horse. He considers his horse to be better than mine.

winter afternoon  
i move the bird feeder  
to another tree

*Marcus Larsson*

## WALK

NO INTELLIGENT PERSON would be out exercising in this midmorning heat: the blistering sun (skin cancer); the fever-high temperature (my blood pressure); the humidity (my asthma); the 45-degree hills (my ex-martial artist's arthritic knees); the rhythmic pounding of sneakers on the burning pavement (my sciatica).

hot tea in August—  
not knowing why  
I thirst for it now

But the farther I walk, the better I feel . . . the faster I walk . . . the harder I push. And all around me: birdsong, white light, and the lush, enveloping green of deep summer.

head bowed  
I lean into  
the final hill

*Cathy Drinkwater Better*



**TAN RENGA:**

October sun  
a white koi surfaces  
among the lilies

*a cowboy rides up  
on his tricycle*

cold spell  
the oatmeal  
thickens

*you read the comics  
without laughing*

Pamela Miller Ness  
*Michael Dylan Welch*

## VISITING FAMILY IN WEST VIRGINIA

A GOOD-LOOKING, MUSCULAR YOUNG MAN in a football helmet. For him the helmet is a hateful thing. He wants it off, but lacks the understanding needed to unbuckle it. There is a makeshift dutch door that excludes access to the kitchen. Otherwise he has the run of the house. And run he does. But he doesn't unintentionally run into things. No more than you or I would. When he beats his head against the wall, you know he means it.

checking out  
every nook and cranny—  
new puppy

After supper the dishes are cleared and we drink coffee. Hank lunges for the dinning table and we grab our cups. Not just to prevent spills. Hank loves coffee. He'll snatch and down your cup lickety-split if you're not on guard.

waiting for  
the fog to lift—  
morning tea

Now Uncle Junior holds Hank on his lap as a child. He takes off the helmet, speaks softly to him as a lover might. Words no one but Hank hears. He is calmed if only for a while. As we drive away, I wonder what my wife thinks. She talks of the love for Hank she saw in my uncle's eyes.

coal mining town—  
wet grimy streets  
and a rainbow

*Zane Parks*



## BABY WORK

MY SECOND CHILD, miya, is seven months old. she's already discovered the usefulness of crawling; her style at this point is more like a snake— slithering about. virtually everything within her reach is likely to go into her mouth; her brother's small colorful toys, and the wheels on our tv stand, are among her favorites. if she can't get to where she wants to fast enough, she uses an effective uh, uh, uh, moan for getting attention. it's quite a treat to be able to see her interact with her ever-expanding world.

first snow—  
tiny handprints  
on the window

*Duro Jaiye*

## SHADES OF BLUE

gift shops closed—  
a low mist  
shrouds the glacier

AFTER THE LAST CRUISE SHIP of the season casts off and heads into the rainy fog, downtown Juneau pretty much rolls up the sidewalks. A few old standbys—bookshops, coffee shops, the “five and dime store” and others—hang on for the rest of us through the sparse winter months, but there's a ghost town aspect down near the docks.

We rarely visit the glacier during the summer because busloads of tourists don't add much to the ambiance. But we go often the rest of the year—to see what shade of blue the ice might be—or just to take a deep breath and regroup. After a hectic meeting about my client's latest time crunch, and a drive through the boarded-up end of town, I decided a visit to



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the glacier was in order. But when I arrived, it wasn't there. The same fog that swallowed the cruise ship had claimed the glacier.

Don't get me wrong. I like tourists. Not the pushy, demanding, self-important ones who flash three-carat diamonds and nine-carat tans. But the ones who seem awestruck and grateful just to be in Alaska. I still feel blessed after more than 40 years, and I want to hug them as they stand in the middle of South Franklin Street, blocking traffic and pointing toward the mountains.

I try to be a good tourist when we travel, having heard how unwelcome we'd be in some places. Some locals in some locales have grounds for their resentment. They were born there. Their great, great, great grandparents were born there. I understand and respect that. And I walk softly when I visit their sacred land. But most of us are sojourners, wayfarers. Wherever we live, we've come from somewhere else. And if we feel lucky to be where we are, it's likely others will think so too, and flock to visit the area we call home.

In some regard, we're all tourists. Chief Seattle, it turns out, may not really have said, "The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth." Nevertheless, we will forever be drawn to those few unpaved spots on earth that still speak of mystery and awe. They will beckon to us, and they will call upon us to be a little bit more than we might have known we could be.

coffee break—  
I walk across the skybridge  
just to see some sky

*Billie Wilson*

## TWO PLACES IN TIME

SUNLIGHT BURNS THE BACK of his neck as the fisherman waits patiently for a nibble on his line. There are many footprints on the muddy bank of the river, where other fishermen have stood to cast their lines, but just now he has the place to himself. He is filled with expectation, as the day warms and the sun beats relentlessly down. There is no wind, but something ripples the water.

iv drips . . .  
the harsh cry  
of a crow

*Emily Romano*

## SPRING MOON

IT WAS EARLY SPRING when I cleaned out my father's house. Swept away the past, left nothing but space.

fall of the broom handle—  
cold sound bouncing  
off every wall

I wandered about the yard saying farewell to what I would leave behind.

empty space  
where the cherry used to be  
clear sky

That was five years ago.

rising spring moon—  
shore breeze rustling  
my neighbor's palms

*Carolyn Thomas*



## IN HIGH HUSKS

I WALK ROWS WHERE HARVEST ONCE WAS, here with its bulging, its sagging vine, all its growth on the verge of being blessed and eaten. It was among stalks browning early, before we began filling the belly of a bushel that word of the stillborn came. Sisters and I to bend, to climb, to pick hunger's medicine from heavy tangles, carefully haul some home. But near where broken and dormant corn still rustles, we met in high husks, swore to grind god back to grain. All we wanted was a name, recognition of her having once lived, once writhed in the same dark blood. But only I have come back, the one still drawn to thoughts of the dead's long life in memory, the thoughts of a sister possibly rising.

empty basket—  
apples scattered  
across the path

*Mark Smith*

## AUTUMN BREEZE

YOU GET A CLEAN FEELING in basketball when a long shot hits only the net, and swishes through. Its opposite is the air ball. It misses the rim, misses the net, and even misses the backboard. You might then hear the standard heckle: "air ball," or you might hear nothing but nothing

air ball  
the swish of leaves  
by the chain-link fence

*Lee Giesecke*



# Essays

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## J. D. SALINGER AND HAIKU

David Grayson

J. D. SALINGER IS BEST KNOWN as the author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, the controversial novel of teenage angst. Salinger is also famous for his reclusiveness: he has not published in forty years and fiercely guards his privacy. For haiku writers, there's another, equally intriguing Salinger: haiku devotee. Haiku figure prominently in Salinger's stories about the fictional Glass family, and it is clear that Salinger studied, and was strongly attracted to, haiku.

### I.

*The Catcher in the Rye* was Salinger's first novel and vaulted him to fame in 1951. However, the majority of Salinger's published work focuses on the fictional Glass family. This eccentric family is comprised of two parents—retired vaudeville performers—and their seven precocious children, each of whom starred at different times on a children's radio quiz show from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-forties.

Salinger published two books and several short stories about the Glass family. Published in 1961, *Franny and Zooey* focuses on the two youngest siblings. In 1963, Salinger published a book comprised of two stories: *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* and *Seymour: An Introduction*. The former relates the story of the eldest child's (Seymour) wedding day, and the latter is a reminiscence of Seymour by the second eldest sibling, Buddy. The collection *Nine Stories* contains three Glass family short stories.

While the stories involve different members of the family, a principal subject of all of the stories is Seymour. Seymour was the driving force behind many of the younger siblings. Seymour became the family's central trauma when he committed suicide at the age of thirty-one, haunted by his experiences as a soldier in World War II. Coping with this event is a central



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theme elaborated in all of the stories.

### II.

Seymour became interested in Buddhism and Hinduism, and Eastern poetry, at an early age. In *Seymour: An Introduction*, Buddy writes, “During much of his adolescence, and all his adult life, Seymour was drawn, first, to Chinese poetry, and then, as deeply, to Japanese poetry, and to both in ways that he was drawn to no other poetry in the world.”<sup>1</sup> According to Buddy, Seymour’s greatest passion was haiku: “Seymour probably loved the classical Japanese three-line, seventeen-syllable haiku as he loved no other form of poetry, and . . . he himself wrote—bled—haiku.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, even when Seymour wasn’t writing haiku, his poetry was still influenced by the form. Buddy describes Seymour’s later poetry as “substantially like an English translation of a sort of double haiku . . . a six-line verse, of no certain accent but usually more iambic than not . . . deliberately held down to thirty-four syllables, or twice the number of the classical haiku.”<sup>3</sup> These poems were “as bare as possible, and invariably ungarnished.”<sup>4</sup>

The reader sees Seymour’s attachment to haiku in other ways, too. For instance, Seymour wrote in his diary that when he and his fiancé debated the merits of a movie, he quoted R. H. Blyth’s definition of sentimentality to bolster his point: “we are being sentimental when we give to a thing more tenderness than God gives to it.”<sup>5</sup> Later in the same passage, Seymour turns to the poet Saigyō to describe the tenderness he feels towards his fiancé: “What it is I know not / But with the gratitude / my tears fall.”<sup>6</sup>

Buddy, too, has been deeply influenced by haiku. He says that haiku can enlighten and impact him “to within an inch of his life.”<sup>7</sup> While explaining Seymour’s interest in haiku in *Seymour: An Introduction*, Buddy digresses from the narrative and launches into a discussion of the merits of haiku, inviting the reader to learn more about Chinese poetry and haiku. He even comments upon the quality of available English transla-



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tions. He declares: “If, in the line of duty, I should incidentally titillate a few young people’s interest in Chinese and Japanese poetry, it would be very good news to me.”<sup>8</sup>

Besides the prominence of haiku in his characters’ lives, the importance of haiku to Salinger can be seen in another way: its pivotal role in plot and theme. Buddy writes that when he arrived at the hotel room where Seymour committed suicide, he found a haiku that Seymour wrote that day: “The little girl on the plane / Who turned her doll’s head around / To look at me.”<sup>9</sup>

That a haiku occupies such a key place in the story is instructive. It’s a symbol of its importance to Seymour—and to Salinger, who relies on it to say something about his character.

The same is true in another story, this one not about the Glass family. In the story “Teddy,” the main character is a ten-year old, religious-mystical prodigy of sorts. He is thought to be able to predict the future, and is being studied by academics. Shortly before the climax, Teddy quotes two haiku by Basho:

“ ‘Nothing in the voice of the cicada intimates how soon it will die,’ ” Teddy said suddenly. “ ‘Along this road goes no one, this autumn eve.’ ”<sup>10</sup>

These poems foreshadow the climax of the story, and offer a possible explanation of Teddy’s motives.

In summary, in Salinger’s stories, haiku are important to the main characters and also play a key role in the story line. That is, Salinger uses haiku not only to add texture to his characters, but also to provide keys to his stories’ plots and themes.

### III.

Salinger was clearly well read on the subject of haiku and was deeply attracted to the form. However, the details of his interest in haiku remain a mystery—much like other facets of his life. It is known that Salinger was interested in Zen Buddhism for many years, and his love of haiku was probably related to this. But the exact relationship is impossible to ascertain.

So, too, is an even more intriguing possibility: Salinger writ-



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ing haiku. Was the haiku by his character Seymour the only one Salinger wrote, or are there others? Is Salinger, today, still interested in haiku? Is he writing any? Like other mysteries of J. D. Salinger, the answer will have to wait.

### *Notes*

1 J. D. Salinger. *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981: p. 117.

2 Ibid, pp. 126-7.

3 Ibid, p. 127.

4 Ibid, p. 129.

5 Ibid, p. 67.

6 Ibid, pp. 67-8.

7 Ibid, p. 118.

8 Ibid, p. 118.

9 J. D. Salinger. *Franny and Zooey*. New York: Bantam Books, 1985: p. 64. I have quoted the poem exactly as it appears in the book. This format does not show whether Salinger intended all three lines to be flush left, or arranged in a different way.

10 J. D. Salinger. *Nine Stories*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991: p. 185.

Note: It's notable that none of the haiku used in the stories (all quoted above) follow the five-seven-five syllable format. Even though Buddy describes haiku as a three-line, seventeen syllable form, it's unknown what Salinger's opinions were on this matter.



## WESTERN USES OF KIGO

*Paul Miller*

MANY JAPANESE HAIKU POETS believe that non-Japanese cannot write haiku. I was reminded of this bias in an essay in the latest *World Haiku 2006* by editor Ban'ya Natsuishi who wrote “we must establish some depth in the western understanding of haiku.” A familiar Japanese sentiment, which in his case seems hypocritical considering his own deviations from the form. I take these and similar comments to mean that when he or poets such as Hekigoto, Santoka, or Ippekiro deviate from the established tradition they are forming a new school of haiku thought; westerners are merely ignorant. But perhaps western deviations come from educated but different poetic needs and goals instead of a simple lack of understanding.

Haiku in Japan has always been about tradition, what Haruo Shirane calls the vertical axis—the communal nature of haiku poetry where each poetic moment reaches across time “. . . to participate in the larger accumulated experience of past poets . . .”<sup>(1)</sup>—whether embracing it or working against it. Western haiku has always seemed to be more concerned with the individual moment, something borne of a democratic but highly individualistic society. And while it is arguable that this is from a lack of understanding dating back to Blyth's insistence that haiku was Zen, the west has since had the opportunity to correct this misunderstanding, but seems to have chosen not to. We in the west are creating our own school of haiku thought. A good example of this is in the western use of the kigo.

No matter how you define a haiku—whether seventeen syllables, breath length, or as a short nature poem—everyone will agree that size is a major component of the definition. As such, a haiku has the same main problem every other short poem has: how to transfer meaning to a reader, given its limited space. In many ways, the rules of haiku seem counter-intuitive to this goal. The rules insist on probably the least amount of words of any poetic form and an almost feverish insistence on objectiv-



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ity. The rule on objectivity seems especially odd since we are trying to get more than simply a picture across to the reader. In a way, we are trying to say something without actually saying it. To aid the poet against these obstacles, the Japanese haiku has a powerful tool: the kigo.

The kigo is the anchor of a Japanese haiku. It gives the reader a well-grounded starting place from which to work, and there are numerous books (saijiki) that train the reader on how to think when they encounter a certain kigo. R. H. Blyth described kigo as giving “atmospheric background . . . a trigger which releases a whole world of emotion, of sounds and scents and colours.”<sup>(2)</sup> As Koji Kawamoto explains in *The Poetics of Japanese Verse*, each kigo contains “. . . what was called yomubeki yoshi, or ‘normative purport,’ referring to a particular feeling or response deemed appropriate to the intent of that particular topic . . . . Convention demanded that a ‘winter rain’ (shigure) be treated so as to evoke a sad dreariness. Thus, whenever it appeared in a poem, the inconstant sound of the winter rain falling lightly and intermittently upon one’s roof, causing the leaves to flutter down from the trees, invariably had the effect of turning people’s thoughts to life’s evanescence or to reflections upon unrequited love.”<sup>(3)</sup> “Invariably” is a key word here.

This is a powerful tool, for it infuses the small poem with numerous associations not specifically spelled out in the poem itself. For example, when Matsuo Basho wrote his famous old pond poem in 1686,

an old pond . . .  
a frog leaps in,  
the sound of water<sup>(4)</sup>

he made use of the traditional spring kigo ‘frog.’ According to the renga handbook *Gathered Gems (Renju gappeki shu; 1476)*, its associations are “. . . globeflower [yamabuki], lodging together [aiyadori], beneath a hut [kaiya ga shita], water bed for rice seedlings [nawashiro mizu], living in water [mizu ni sumu], and song [uta].”<sup>(5)</sup> These background associations make sense: plants found by the water, the way frogs gather in groups, the



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life-giving power of fresh water, and in a poetic way the songs they sing. These initial associations allow the reader to ground themselves in the poem, giving it larger context, so that when Basho pulls his haiku twist at the end—the sound of a splash instead of the expected frog song—the educated reader is better prepared and thus able to appreciate it.

A further quality of kigo is that it links Basho's frog poem to all previous poems on frogs. As mentioned earlier, when we read his old pond poem, we are to think of all its "normative purports" like globeflower and frog song, but also the famous waka poems on frogs in the fourteenth century classic *Fubokusho*. This linking across time to other poems is what Haruo Shirane calls the haiku vertical axis: a connected literary tradition based on the poetic essences attached to each kigo. Logically, this additional, unspoken context is welcome. In the case of Basho's frog haiku it only cost a single word. But I wonder how much tradition and back-story a particular poem can stand? Basho's poem, for example, in turn spawned hundreds more frog poems, including ones by Buson and Ryokan, as well as Bernard Einbond's,

frog pond . . .  
a leaf falls in  
without a sound

As each poem references the numerous prior poems, which of course reference others, the literary baggage gets a bit heavy. It is walls of mirrors that face each other. Additionally, to a famous poem such as Basho's we can add numerous volumes of scholarly biography and commentary. That is a lot of meaning for one poem to carry, and in the particular case of Basho's poem, it leaves the reader a bit unfocused.

This asks haiku poets a question: what are they writing for? Are they writing to be part of a larger literary tradition as is the case of most Japanese haiku poets—in which case, fine and good—or are they trying to share their own independent "records" of moments of awareness"<sup>(6)</sup>—as seems to be particular to the Western haiku tradition? And if the latter, is the



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kigo, or more likely a stripped-down version of it, available to add meaning to the haiku without overpowering the desired individual moment?

I'm like many western writers. It isn't important to me to be part of a literary tradition in the Japanese sense, but I can easily see the value that some qualities of the kigo can add. As mentioned, a kigo loads the short haiku with additional associations that aren't specifically spelled out in the poem itself. For example, the kigo 'frog' invariably indicates spring. Even if a frog is seen in the summertime, in the case of using it in a haiku, the reader is to always place this poem in spring. These markers may seem artificial and occasionally constrictive to the writer, but they stem from the season when a frog is its most frog-like and apparent to the human eye. More importantly, they are the initial grounding to the reader. Additionally, 'frog' brings its subtext of ". . . globeflower . . . lodging together . . . beneath a hut . . . water bed for rice seedlings . . . living in water . . . and song . . . ." Some of these associations are logical and would be felt in the poem without any knowledge of haiku or having ever read a saijiki, but some such as "globeflower" and "lodging together" seem contrived. I suspect "globeflower" is an association that "frog" picked up in a classical Japanese poem, and that "lodging together" is a personification of finding frogs in large numbers. A flaw of the kigo is its insistence on these illogical pairings. When I look at what I want my readers to take away from this particular kigo, it is the added subtext of water, plant-life, and song (things I think the educated reader naturally thinks of when they think of a frog), as well as a sense of season and the emotional optimism I associate with it. While a kigo's "normative purports" aren't necessary to satisfy my first need, something of them will be to satisfy the latter seasonal and emotional qualities I seek.

As mentioned, a kigo also acts as the bridge between the present poem and prior ones. I find little value in this for my writing since I am not trying to link to another poem, and in fact don't want the requisite baggage that poem will naturally bring to overshadow my poetic discovery. I have never gotten



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much from Einbond's frog pond haiku because all I see is Basho's poem. Einbond's is a clever intellectual nod to the prior, but nothing more. I want a focused reality with focused feeling. That focus is easily lost when it is forced to compete with the focus of other poems.

If the kigo is going to be shaped to suit western poetic needs, it will need to lose its illogical historical associations and especially the vertical axis with its heavy accompanying baggage. As pointed out, the kigo "frog" had a series of natural associations. Similarly, for "cherry blossoms" (sakura) we naturally think of their frail short-lived blossoms, a brightness, perhaps clear running water from a nearby creek, the warming air, and birdsong—things we easily associate with spring. For billowing clouds (kumo no mine): the color white, the regular rhythm of a sea, a warm breeze—think summer. Since some topics will not be so easily placed in a particular season, a seasonal saijiki such as Bill Higginson's *The Haiku Seasons* or knowledge of the haiku tradition will still be needed to place a certain kigo in a certain season. But a reader shouldn't need either to find a kigo's accompanying natural associations.

When I read a spring haiku, I always think of R. H. Blyth's introductory paragraph to his Spring section: ". . . but when spring comes, not only waters in fields and valleys but skylarks in the blue heaven and birds in the groves fill the air with cheerful sounds." And a bit later, "Frogs are a solemnly cheerful, ungainly tribe . . ." <sup>(7)</sup> These are the emotions of spring! Optimistic, rough activity in all directions. Likewise, from his Summer section: ". . . something of infinity and eternity . . . of flowers, the peony is the flower of pride." <sup>(8)</sup> Autumn: "The fall of the year is . . . the fall of the vital powers in all natural things including man . . . . The wind of autumn also has a different voice from that of any other season; we can hear perhaps the rustle of death in it." <sup>(9)</sup> And Winter: ". . . connected with fear and loneliness." <sup>(10)</sup> These to me are the archetypal emotions of the seasons and what I wish any reader of my poetry to bring to a kigo.

After stripping out the qualities of the kigo that to me burden the poem, it is left with three main components that assist



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in adding larger context and meaning: an admittedly forced season (which is defined by tradition or the community), which brings in naturally thought of associations (already known by living in the world), and a seasonal emotional archetype (part of the haiku tradition but also fairly intuitive). As far as special education or experience, the stripped-down kigo will still require the reader to be knowledgeable of its traditional season, but it will not require the reader to be familiar with obscure meanings. In fact, since most kigo can readily be placed in a season intuitively, this special knowledge may not even be needed. As readers read more and more haiku, they will also begin to understand the emotional landscape of each season intuitively as well. These stripped-down components allow the reader a grounded, and better fleshed out poem without the intrusion of illogical allusions and overwhelming poetic references. It allows a western writer their moment of immediacy, without sacrificing intimacy. One of the obstacles in the short poem, conveying meaning in an objective scene, is overcome.

Given haiku's origins in the party-game renku, it is understandable that Japanese haiku would continue to have a communal foundation. The west's understanding of haiku, however, has its firmest roots in a group of highly individualistic poets—the Beats—who sought the same spiritual qualities of the form that Blyth recognized years earlier. This understanding was later coupled with America's environmental awakening and a naturalist movement that lauded the self-discovery of American writers such as Thoreau, Muir, and Burroughs. Thoreau's writing, in particular, has a strong homegrown Zen feel about it that has led author Thomas Lynch<sup>(11)</sup> to suggest that American poetics would have possibly developed a haiku-like form independent of Japan. Like it or not, the western tradition is different from the Japanese. It is not different out of spite or ignorance, but because we are a different people with different goals and a different cultural history. As such, our haiku require different tools. The use of the western kigo is one such tool. Yet there is something of the indefinable haiku spirit that joins the western haiku to its parent in the east. Basho advised his students to go to the pine to learn of the pine. Our pine is here, in North America.



## Frogpond XXIX:2

### NOTES:

- 1 Shirane, Haruo, "Beyond the Haiku Moment", *Modern Haiku* 31:1
- 2 Blyth, R. H., *Haiku – Volume 1*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1982. Pg 382.
- 3 Kawamoto, Koji. *The Poetics of Japanese Verse*.
- 4 Shirane, Haruo, *Traces of Dream – Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Basho*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998. Pg 60.
- 5 Ibid. Pg 187
- 6 Spiess, Robert, *A Year's Speculations on Haiku*. Wisconsin: Modern Haiku Press, 1995. Pg 10.
- 7 Blyth, R. H., *Haiku – Volume 2*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1982. Pg 376.
- 8 Blyth, R. H., *Haiku – Volume 3*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1982. Pg 650.
- 9 Blyth, R. H., *Haiku – Volume 3*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1982. Pg 888.
- 10 Blyth, R. H., *Haiku – Volume 4*. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1982. Pg 1134.
11. LYNCH, T.P. (1989), *An Original Relation to The Universe: Emersonian Poetics of Immanence and Contemporary American Haiku*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon. (as presented in <http://pages.infinit.net/haiku/histnortham.htm>)



## TWO SEASON WORDS IN HAIKU

“gôsô-yo dare-mo irazaru kôbai-yo”

oh how deep, the frost  
no one here beside me now  
oh how red, plum blossoms

*Katô Shûson*

*(translated by Dhugal J. Lindsay)*

A CARDINAL RULE of traditional haiku writing is that one should use just one season word in each haiku (this is even a stated rule for the annual Tokutomi haiku contest sponsored by the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society). Generally, this advice helps focus the poem in an immediate time (here and now), helping to keep it from presenting two widely separated points in time. The preceding poem, however, is just one example of a haiku from Japan with two season words—in this case, “frost” (winter) and “plum blossoms” (spring). When two season words might seem necessary in a haiku, whether to reflect an actual experience or the occurrence of some phenomenon out of season, one is encouraged to craft the poem so that one season or the other is clearly dominant. For example, you may want to write about a freak snowstorm occurring in early summer (as has been my experience in Alberta—not just a light snowfall but a full-blown blizzard). In such a poem, summer is the dominant season, and the out-of-season phenomenon gains notoriety and interest by being out of season. Yet such poems are rare and difficult to pull off. In Katô Shûson’s poem, the present season is spring, and the focus is on the plum blossoms, whitened with frost. As one reads line by line, the poem first seems to be set in winter, which echoes with the aloneness of the middle line, but unfolds to being set in spring when one reads about the plum blossoms. While it is good advice to write most traditional haiku with one season word, such advice, taken unthinkingly, could too easily eliminate possible events at the transition between seasons or that happen out of season. While the chronology of nature tends to follow a reliable seasonal progression, this is not always so, and our poetry need not be routinely straightjacketed into the classification of seasonal phenomena dictated by season-word almanacs.

*Michael Dylan Welch*



## Re:Readings

**Tom Painting on Burnell Lippy** (“the barn door / closes on the hay wagon / evening fields”) “Lippy’s haiku, while paying attention to the particular, take in the landscape and invite the senses. This one stirs a fine memory for me. As a child I received a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle for my birthday. It was of a farm scene much like the one Lippy describes in his poem. As I assembled the puzzle over many days, I became attentive to the point of intimacy with the scene. The miracle of a well-crafted haiku is that intimacy occurs in a moment and can provide the same lasting impression as that puzzle did for me.”

**CarrieAnn Thunell on Tom Clausen** (“daybreak— / the spider centered / in its web”) “This poem begins with a lovely time-of-day reference, a device that works much like a kigo to anchor the experience in time, drawing us into the setting. We can picture the web, gilded by light from the just-rising sun. The last two lines tell us that the spider is sitting, perfectly balanced, in its web. We picture an orb spider, . . . centered in its appointed place in the universe. The Native Americans held their ceremonies in a circle, which was thought to create a sacred space of great power. Lastly, we see in this poem that what humans strive so mightily to achieve, that sense of having found our place and being at one with the universe, even the smallest of creatures achieves effortlessly, thoughtlessly, as a natural expression of its innate nature. Like the concentric rings it contains, this poem expands in ever-widening rings of meaning, reverberating within the mind.”

**CarrieAnn Thunell on Stanford Forrester** (“late afternoon sun . . . / the glow / in each marble”) “No one consistently evokes the nostalgia of childhood with as much poignancy! In my childhood neighborhood there was a field where marble shooting competitions were held in deadly seriousness. The winners had coffee cans of marbles stacked in their bedrooms. The losers often had to borrow a shooter just to join in. I remember being transfixed by the little lights shining up from the sought-after “clearies”. You could look through the bubbles in them at the curved world beyond. This haiku acts like a time machine, focusing the lens on a moment in time and transporting the consciousness back.

**Dee Evetts on Ruth Yarrow** (“mastectomy: / the surgeon’s word massive / in my mouth”) “With the help of alliteration Yarrow uses just eight words to devastating effect. This poem is notable for its emphasis on the verbal, while remaining profoundly physical—one could say visceral. The poet makes us feel the enormity of trying to utter at this moment what was hitherto a medical



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term, and must now be accepted into the core of her vocabulary, and her being.

**Carmen Sterba on William Cullen Jr.** (“full moon / mist from my whisper / on her silver earring”) “This haiku is visually provocative in a refined manner. As the wee circular puff disappears, the succinctness in the breathless sounds of ‘mist,’ ‘whisper,’ and ‘silver’ add to the sense of intimacy.”

**Carmen Sterba on H. F. Noyes** (“vanishing deer— / each small twig distinct / in the mountain air”) “Did Noyes hear the twigs crackle and break before he saw the deer disappear into the forest? The disappearance is palpable in the disarray of the twigs and there is even a hint of movement in the clear air as if it had parted when the fleet-footed deer passed through.”

**Carmen Sterba on John Barlow** (“rusted wheels . . . / the scrape of squirrel claws / on pine bark”) “The juxtaposition in this haiku relies on similar sounds by implying one and demonstrating the other. This haiku is an example of superior craftsmanship, as are those of Noyes and Cullen Jr.”

**Linda Jeannette Ward on Ferris Gilli** (“lull in Iraq / the sparrow feeds / its cowbird chick”) “This evenly balanced haiku manages to say everything about the US/Iraq situation in sixteen syllables. The sparrow, burdened with the chick of a cowbird that has parasitized its nest, must continue to provide nourishment, even as the young bird grows bigger than its foster parent. This subtle use of metaphor will stay with me throughout the war.”

**Christopher Patchel on Chad Lee Robinson** (“first warm day / my finger fills / the wedding ring”) “The felt physicality, of warm spring expansion following the cold contraction of winter, provides a nice unstated parallel for renewed romantic feelings.”

**Christopher Patchel on Yu Chang** (“small town / my accent starts / a conversation”) “Will folks in this small town be closed or open towards an outsider? The first two lines anticipate the possibility of the former, while setting up the last line to bring a welcome turn. Or another reading of it: so little is going on that anything, even an accent, is likely to be the talk of the town. However viewed, I admire the lightness of the rendering.”

**Billie Wilson on Stephanie Harper** (“Into the Night”- haibun) “Powerfully reminiscent of Dalton Trumbo’s classic *Johnny Got His Gun*, Stephanie Harper’s haibun “Into the Night” continues to haunt me. Her contrasting poignant memories of home and her childhood in the midst of war’s fear, uncertainty, and ugliness is beautifully accomplished. That would have been enough to establish this as a solid work. At least it seemed enough, until I read the closing haiku and felt tears sting my eyes as the image of her tiny son “playing war” made it perfect.



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**Dee Evetts on Michael Dylan Welch** (“wedding reception— / the weight of her bottle / on the lip of my cup”) “Here is a delightfully enigmatic poem. We are given no clue as to the nature of the relationship in this picture. We could as easily imagine the encounter as being with an ex-partner, a tipsy bridesmaid, or somebody’s desparate sister. Alcohol is part of the equation, and pressure is being brough to bear: something is being suggested or demanded, or pleaded for. This is humor rooted in pathos, and the fact that the poet is drinking from a cup rather than a glass is a happy bonus.”

**Joe Kirshner on David Gershator** (“water damaged paperback romance falling apart”) “Just copying this verse with my pen, one word at a time, evokes so many layers of meaning. Stop anywhere you choose and there is a message. A paperback is damaged; so is a romance. A paperback fell apart from many re-readings. It is interesting to wonder if there’s a ‘who’ involved in ‘falling apart.’ Isolating the last word can evoke a poem in itself.”

**Joe Kirshner on Duro Jaiye** (“easy listening— / somebody else’s child / having a tantrum”) “. . . ‘easy listening’ sets one up for an experience with ‘wallpaper’ music; a kind that annoys me, at least. Then line two springs a surprise—whose child? Now I wonder what’s the connection with line one. And finally line three offers the delicious schadenfreude.”

**Michael Dylan Welch on Peggy Willis Lyles** (“deep winter / we agree that the lost thing / is in a safe place”) “A couple has been searching for something but comes to a temporary resolution in deciding that it must be somewhere safe. Perhaps they have searched for a long time, and only in deep winter, a season of potential despair, do they give up searching with a mental rationalization.”

**Michael Dylan Welch on Carolyn Hall** (“circle of pines / God absent / from the wedding vows”) “If one does not believe in God, one would be more likely to have a wedding outdoors among the pines than in a church. Thus, it is no surprise that an outdoor wedding might make no mention of God. The gentle irony of this poem is that, if God exists, he is still present in nature—in the pines that encircle them.”

**Michael Dylan Welch on Harriot West** (“lazy day / a croquet ball / rolls into long grass”) “The languidness of the rolling ball echoes the laziness of this summer day. Perhaps the ball has rolled far enough that no one wants to get it, underscoring how laid back everyone might be. Even the grass is uncut, for no one has had the energy to cut it. Yet the people in this poem would rather play a relaxed game that attend to chores. Every detail works together in this poem.”



# BOOK REVIEWS

**By Ruth Franke**

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McClintock

**By Jim Kacian**

*Pages 76 - 77      haiku wars*  
Lanoue

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McClintock, Michael *Letters in Time, Sixty Short Poems* (Hermitage West, PO Box 124, S. Pasadena CA 91031, 2005.) ISBN:0-9770239-0-X. 78 pp., 5.25" x 6.75", perfect softbound. \$10 from the publisher.

## Emotion and Thought

A review of an American author's book from a German perspective may be something of a rarity, but haiku and its related forms express values beyond cultural differences, they can be shared anywhere in the world, and are fascinating in their diversity.

When I first encountered Michael McClintock's poems and learned something of his poetic journey, I was impressed by the priorities he had set in his life, apparently following the guiding principle: "Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly." Remarkably, having already made his mark as an author and theoretician, after graduation he quit the haiku scene to get on with his professional life, and didn't come back to it until twenty years later when he had the freedom to immerse himself in poetry as before.

Now he has published the first collection since his return: *Letters in Time*. The sixty short poems, mainly tanka, also feature eleven haiku, some of them familiar, having already been published in international journals, some having won awards in contests. They are characterized by sensuous imagery that immediately creates pictures in the reader's mind:

letting sand fall  
from my hand  
countless suns

Some of his more recent nature haiku express a longing for something we don't really possess; they convey feelings of sadness, loss, and loneliness. The feeling of loss is implied in a poem that is made available to us both in tanka and in haiku form, and it is rewarding to compare the two:



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all the spring day  
the deer cross the high meadow  
and into the clouds

through rain  
all day in spring  
deer cross the high meadow  
into the clouds, always  
into the clouds . . .

In both poems the same image is pictured. In the haiku version, the language is objective, and it is left to the reader to complete the poem with his empathy and imagination. When we look at the tanka version, we see that the observation has been expanded from “all the spring day” to “all day in spring,” but the initial unit of three lines is still objective. What makes it a tanka is the additional development in the final two lines that may be more subjective, more lyrical or personal, and gives us the poet’s response to the previous image. In this example, there is no personal comment. The second component completes the image of the first unit and the subjectivity exists only in the repetition of carefully selected words. We sense the poet’s feeling of sadness and irretrievable loss—a continuous loss—stronger than in the haiku version and understand why Michael McClintock is so much attracted by tanka with its larger range of poetic devices.

All the tanka in *Letters in Time* are in free verse form, divided into five lines. The arrangement is for the most part left-aligned. They vary in style and length, including minimalist poems, one breath in length, like a haiku. Tumbling structures are also employed, ending with just a single word to highlight the meaning. Some poems are intended after three lines to emphasize the poet’s reflections in the final unit. Often the subjective voice is used throughout the poem, and the author’s personality shines through; some tanka even read like notes from a diary. We are struck by his reflections, which give us “tanka moments” of insight, warmed by sensitivity and colored with introspection:

between sun and shade  
a butterfly pauses  
like none I’ve seen—  
who ever falls in love  
with someone they know?



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The poems reflect a variety of traditional subject matter, but the main topic is love—the story of an intimate loving relationship passing through all its stages: yearning, passion, loneliness and despair, fulfillment. The writer's emotional life correlates and harmonizes with the elements of nature, his lyrical tone and mood show tenderness and imagination so that we are reminded of those old Japanese love songs in which feelings are expressed through the medium of natural images:

apart,  
our love is a thrush  
we carry in a thought  
light as air it sings  
within the dark

Here the sense of love grows more and more ethereal as it moves through four phases: thrush / air / thought / dark. Light and lyrical, this tanka is an aesthetic whole of pure poetry, leaving deep impressions on both eye and ear.

Though letters play a role in this book—they are burned or the sender's "heart fell out" when they are opened—any idea that the title refers to "love letters" would be a misrepresentation. Rather, *Letters in Time* is an allusion to the evanescence of time, but even more: it implies McClintock's attitude to time and his theory of subjective realism. The sense and comprehension of our lives are a part of memory, and memories of the past are still significant for us in the present, as subjective modifiers, coloring and shaping our experience of the present.

In tanka—much more than in haiku—a poet is able to relate natural imagery to personal introspection and reflection by taking subjective decisions about subject matter and language, and this is what gives the poems their depth. In the case of *Letters in Time*, they combine to make a universal love song beyond time and place, with enduring resonance.

The volume is dedicated to Karen Jeanne Harlow, and features her portrait on its cover, a sketch in charcoal by Nancy A. Knight. Reading Michael McClintock's poems, I realized the truth of H. F. Noyes' remark about fine tanka: ". . . words that both reach the heart and are good for the spirit."

*Reviewed by Ruth Franke, Germany*



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Lanoue, David *haiku wars* (self-published 2006). No ISBN. 172 pp., 5.5" x 8.5" perfect softbound. \$15 from the author.

This breezy new novel from David Lanoue (*Haiku Guy, Laughing Buddha*) includes the usual disclaimer: "This book is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is coincidental." Well, of course it is, in the same sense that everything is a work of fiction, and that everything is coincidental. Beyond that, it's not quite so clear-cut.

The plot follows the difficulties of hosting a haiku conference in the Big (No Longer So) Easy, which we know only happened once and certainly couldn't have been the basis for this work. It centers primarily on the conflicts between two Japanese poets, Muya Akibi and Kusuban Harubi, and a missing manuscript. So it's a mystery of sorts, and a vendetta novel, and also one of the very best rants and ventings to be found in the catty world of haiku: send-ups of poets, editors, publishers, hangers-on, zennists, even groupies (we wish!). So much fun was had in the making of this book that the author probably ought to pay us for making it possible.

However, the reason you want to put your money down is the charm and inventiveness of this work. Start, for instance, with the narrator of the tale: a ferret who just happens to be a bodhisattva. That's probably only been done once or twice before. Being a bodhisattva, the ferret is telepathic, both ways: he can read minds, and he can channel his thoughts to his target, in this case the hero of the book, whom he calls Poet (whose similarities to the author are coincidental). Through these unusual and probably illegal talents the mystery of the missing manuscript is ultimately solved, but not before we get to meet a large and interesting cross-section of the haiku community, question the merits of the haiku enterprise, theorize the meaning of our lives, and so on. The usual ferret things.

Oscar (the ferret) is a wonderful narrator, reliable and earnest, good and enlightened: the reader can relax and let him take the lead. For his comfort and engagement the author can probably be forgiven for the self-aggrandizement of his part in the plot: happy sex, good beer. In fact, we might wish we had



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such a ferret helping us to steer our lives. Or not.

In the end, this winds up a satisfying read. The good guys win, the bad guys get slammed, and everyone goes home happy, even the “villain” who is responsible for the mystery (who must be forgiven for acting on the best of motives). If the actual haiku community is not quite so easily smoothed, it is enough in the short term to enjoy these simple pleasures, and to hope that even though Oscar has moved on to further adventures, the author has a few more in him. Recommended.

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Barnhill, David Landis (editor) *Basho's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Basho* (State University of New York Press, Albany NY 2005). ISBN 0-7914-6414-8. 208 pp., 5.5" x 8.5" perfect softbound. No price. Inquire with the publisher.

I have set out several times to review this volume, and settled down to reading it with a critical eye. But each time, before more than a handful of pages have gone by, I find myself simply immersed in the fine work, and my reviewer's intentions disappear. This is, I believe, high praise. So, *caveat emptor*: this may not be the greatest translation work of all time (and equally, it just might be). But it's hard to put down, and the translator doesn't get in the way. What else could a reader want? Highly recommended.

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Dyck, Marje A. *A Piece of the Moon* (Calisto Press, 7 Richmond Place North, Saskatoon SK S7K 1A6 Canada, 2005) ISBN 0-9739249-0-X. 44 pp., 5.5" x 8.5" saddlestapled softbound. No price. Inquire with the publisher.

This is the volume we all have wanted to put out: a collection of our best work, gleaned from our involvement in several genres over several years, with our own accompanying illustrations, on quality paper with a nice cover, nothing too flashy,



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but quietly confident. It is a statement of exactly what our practice has been, without excess and with promise of more, equally well-judged, down the road. The author is making a claim, and in a sense, review is beside the point: that such meticulous care has been taken in creating this artifact is its own review. We all hope we will find it in ourselves to do as well.

For the record, the author is capable in all her genres, and her care in excision is a success: there are very few loose moments here. All her work might be considered to emanate from the “contemplative” school of haikai, and so has a traditional and meditative quality. The art might be considered the least of her accomplishments, but it is only marginally less successful than the rest, and does not detract from the book. Recommended.

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Baker, Ed *Things Just Come Through* (Red Ochre Press, 8215 Flower Avenue Takoma Park MD 20912, 2006) No ISBN. 30 pp., 5.5" x 7.25" staple & tape softbound. No price. Inquire with the publisher.

The poet continues his obsession with orchids, eroticism, and asiatic beauty in this self-made collection of brief poems, Korean translations, and (a few) illustrations. Not for everyone, but a characteristic and interesting effort.

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*Magpie Haiku Poets A Piece of Egg Shell* (Magpie Haiku Poets, 2005). ISBN 0-9734761-0-9. 96 pp., 5.5" x 8.5" perfect softbound. No price. Inquire with the publisher.

An attractive record of the best work of this Calgary-based haiku group, and it is considerable, not just for their accumulated prizes, but for the way their poems hold up to subsequent years and readings. We look forward to more of their work, singly and collectively.

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Cabalona, Yvonne and w. f. owen (eds.) *feel of the handrail* (Leaning Bamboo Press, 709 Auburn Street, Modesto CA 95350 USA, 2005). No ISBN. 32 pp., 5" x 8" saddlestapled softbound. \$7 from the publisher.

This uneven but beautifully presented collected is a state-of-the-art expression of the central valley haiku club. We can see they are going places, and we will find beauty in their travels, but it is hardly a smooth ride. Perhaps this makes us more appreciative of the truly wonderful moments, like the title poem, which are to be found.

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Sexton, John W. *Shadows Bloom/Scáthanna Faoi Bhláth* (Doghouse, Tralee, Ireland 2004). ISBN 0-9546487-4-9. 68 pp., 5.5" x 8.5" perfect softbound. \$? from the publisher at <doghouse312@eircom.net>.

An interesting take. The poet's quirky sense of humor pervades the volume, and is perhaps the most salient aspect of it. But instead of leavening the book, it manages to deepen it, no mean feat. The book features Irish translations, upon which I cannot comment, but if it captures the justesse of these poems for a new readership, it can only be a good thing. Recommended.

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Gourlay, Caroline *Lull Before Dark: Haiku by Caroline Gourlay* edited by Randy M. Brooks & Katherine Steimann (Brooks Books, 3720 N. Woodridge Drive, Decatur IL 62526, 2005). ISBN 1-929820-09-7. 64 pp., 5" x 6.5" perfect softbound. \$10 from the publisher.

A strong collection from one of the best UK haiku poets, proof that work from across the sea is not so far removed from "our" sensibility that it can't be enjoyed and appreciated. Recommended.

*Reviews by Jim Kacian*



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*HSA*  
*NEWS*

*Pages 81 - 90 Einbond Awards*

**The Bernard Lionel Einbond  
Renku Competition 2005**

*Judges: Judson Evans  
William J. Higginson  
hortensia anderson*

**First Place: City on the Hill**

*John Stevenson and Merrill Ann Gonzales*

*Opening Section:*

city on the hill  
offering up                      John  
an aura of green

prize peonies  
grow in your garden        Merrill

the language  
of the honeybee              John  
in wide use

Bach's Little Fugue  
fills the room                Merrill

*First Back Section:*

crescent moon  
at the tip                      John  
of a mitten

under Orion I long  
for an embracing warmth    Merrrill



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Juliet awakens,  
as she was promised,     John  
in a tomb

gypsum chandeliers  
dazzle in the cave     Merrill

tandoori chicken  
arrives at the table     John  
with a sizzle

the feathers must be tied  
in just the right way     Merrill

### *Second Back Section:*

we wander  
pathless heavens     Merrill  
in our hot air balloon

fewer this year  
at the class reunion     John

along the boardwalk  
the words and looks     Merrill  
of those in love

brushing fallen leaves  
from your hair     John

bright moon  
turns the shack     Merrill  
to gold

“I’m supposed to be  
Rumplestiltskin!”     John

## Frogpond XXIX:2

### *Closing Section:*

the day  
draws near                      Merrill  
for the birth

bluffing  
with a pair of deuces      John

morning shadows  
strawberry blossoms      Merrill  
for us to find

the beachcomber's  
widening smile . . .      John

### **Judges' Comments:**

There were seven entries for the renku contest this year, six kasen of thirty-six stanzas and one nijûin of twenty stanzas, all of which we received without knowing who had written them. After an initial read-through, we found that each of us had selected the same four entries, including the nijûin, as the best of the group. On re-reading, we were able to agree on a rank order for the three kasen, and we all felt that the nijûin ranked very close to the top. While our initial feelings were that a kasen is more work, being longer and requiring more time, we also considered that the shorter form is more challenging in some respects, as the verses must cover a range of topics comparable to that in a longer kasen while maintaining a sense of continuity. On closer inspection, we each felt that the nijûin had done the best job of offering a thoroughly enjoyable reading experience while exhibiting the renku ideal of linking and shifting.

While it maintains variety and forward momentum, “City on the Hill” simultaneously establishes a sense of complex unity by the cross-association of several overarching themes. It establishes a sense of doubleness—“city on the hill” seems both a real and present place and a utopian space in imagination. This doubleness works through the preface; after a more gen



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eral opening verse, the wakiku brings the context of the city down to earth—this is a real place, home to one particular urban person, with a specific plant in a real garden. Then, the daisan opens up the fanciful, utopian dimension of this place: “the language / of the honeybee / in wide use”. The *wide* is particularly effective in letting the reader re-contextualize the “place” as an imaginative invention like the spaces of Hesiod’s *Works and Days* or Thoreau’s *Walden* channeled through Yeats. The fourth stanza moves further into the realm of the shaping imagination and its connection to patterns in nature with Bach’s “Little Fugue”. Thus the opening section suggests a link between a utopian community and a real human place in nature, between the community at large and the individual, with the emphasis on the community.

The piece shows some wonderful tonal control. For example, the move from “we wander / pathless heavens / in our hot air balloon” to “fewer this year / at the class reunion”. On one level there is a mysterious elegiac backward pull that can let us read the hot air balloon ride as a kind of afterlife of the dead classmates. On another, there’s the link between hot air and the empty small talk of the reunion that pulls in another direction without canceling or muting the previous association. We enjoyed these subtleties here and again, as in the expostulation that identifies “I’m supposed to be / Rumpelstiltskin!” as relating to Hallowe’en, rather than using an obvious season word. This humorous tone plays well against an unpretentious use of cultural references that includes Bach and Shakespeare as well as the fairy tale. The images are concrete, but a subtle sub-text of relationships between people and between us and our environments runs throughout. All this despite the great variety of shifting images and situations that renku demands.

One interesting note: The authors of “City on the Hill” apparently chose consciously to observe the common “astronomical” seasons, rather than the traditional seasons of Japanese poetry that govern virtually all season-word lists. For example, we have “peonies” in the wakiku, which are normally an early summer topic in renku; here they serve to continue the spring imagery of the hokku. Later on, “fallen leaves” appears in a



## Frogpond XXIX:2

verse that must be in autumn according to its position and surroundings, though the set phrase “fallen leaves” is firmly in winter in the traditional Japanese view of the seasons. These references clearly alert the reader to which seasonal system is in play, and since the whole poem works consistently within this common understanding of the seasons, this feature seems an aspect of the poem’s uniqueness, not a fault. (It’s a bit like the use of a dictionary in Scrabble; the group has to agree on one, and then stick to it.)

There are a few problems with “City on the Hill” which kept us from moving it to a Grand Prize level, as could happen in this contest. In the preface, there is an immediate throwback of place-person-place. This kind of throwback did not reappear, however, and the general observance of the fine points of person-place variation in this poem is part of what set it above all of the kasen. At the same time, greater variety in linking methods would have improved this poem. A spate of linking by word rather than meaning or scent on the second side threatened to slow down the development, then the third side shifted to mainly meaning linkages. And the stanzas of “City on the Hill” often seem a bit shorter than they need be, with an occasional movement from a very brief three-liner to a two-liner actually longer both aurally and in syllable count. This tends to upset the prosodic rhythm, and is an area that all of our renku poets could pay more attention to. Finally, having two verses about blossoming flowers is nice, though not required in this short form; but having used a non-traditional blossom in the opening, if one wanted a blossom at the end it would be more traditional to at least use a blossoming tree.

These comments should not discourage the authors, however, as “City on the Hill” reads well and was enjoyed by all three judges on each round of reading and commenting on the renku.



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**Honorable Mention: Twitter**

*Peggy Willis Lyles, Mark Brooks, Christopher Herold, Paul MacNeil, Billie Wilson, Carol O'Dell*

the twitter  
growing louder . . .                      pwl  
sunrise

snowmelt creeks gather                      mb  
into a mountain stream

rust I've filed  
from lawnmower blades                      ch  
falls to the shed floor

her #2 pencils                                      pm  
all perfect points

for now  
only the moon                                      bw  
and the outlined pine

Dad pours the sweet smell of apples      co  
into jam jars

are those trick-or-treat bags  
on the trunk                                      pwl  
of the stretch limousine?

yoga students stop to watch                      ch  
a cat lick its loins

the grit  
of beach sand                                      mb  
between us

so slowly he slips off                              co  
my silk stockings

## Frogpond XXIX:2

after the bellman leaves  
the sudden arc pm  
of champagne

a frayed Macbeth bw  
forgotten in the rain

moonlight fades  
blood on a street mb  
through Pamplona

another base hit pwl  
for the hometown girls

once organic carbon  
now a famous diamond co  
on display

the death row inmate bw  
describes her cotillion

wisteria blooming  
in the shadows pm  
of a crenelated wall

your beehives stacked ch  
by a furrowed field

“Honey,  
help me tie these balloons co  
and then clean up that room.”

poof! ch  
no more debt

fingers crossed  
as they fervently pledge bw  
eternal love





## Frogpond XXIX:2

ten thimbles	
on consignment	pwl
at the needlework shop	
an old lady twirls	pm
then catches her cane	
dervishes	
mesmerized	bw
by cherry blossoms	
becoming part of your dream	co
rhythms of the spring sea	

“Twitter” seems particularly fresh with its move from auditory to visual to tactile sensory images in the first three stanzas. And what has already been a sensuously rich opening ends with smell, from pine to apple. The seasons are particularly well handled throughout.

A number of linked pairs seem memorable: the #2 pencils suggest the beginning of school while also introducing the yellow/orange color of an autumn moon. The writers create first an exotic scene in “moonlight fades / blood on a street / through Pamplona,” then move to a more mundane, local contest “another base hit / for the hometown girls.” This pair’s scent link is followed by a word link with “once organic carbon / now a famous diamond / on display”. One judge laughed out loud at the link from a spouse asking “Honey” to help “tie these balloons / and then clean up that room” to “poof! / no more debt”. This kind of variety in linking and the shifting meaning as a stanza plays first against the previous verse, then against the following, greatly enhances the readability of the renku.

The main problem with “Twitter” is the authors’ apparent lack of awareness of the need for variety in person-place, which tended to bog down in runs of verses all from the same point of view, such as the run of “other” verses from 18 to 24 (verses about an apparent third person), and a preponderance of place verses (no people present) from 25 to 30, with the last three



also all “other”. Greater variety in this department, along with a little more attention to alternating stanza length and weight and avoiding almost telegraphically short stanzas, would have placed “Twitter” at the top of our list.

We hope our comments will help all who read the renku to enjoy them even more, and those who write renku to deepen their art. We each enjoyed reading all of the entries, and encourage renku authors to prepare poems in all three allowed lengths for next year’s contest. Though on first appearance the shorter forms may seem less impressive than the full-length kasen, in fact each length offers particular challenges. Perhaps in the next year or two we can have winners in each division, for 12-, 20-, and 36-stanza renku, with a “best of show” Grand Prize.

\*\*\*

## **A FAVORITE HAIKU, by Paul Miller**

moonshot  
with his peashooter  
falls short

*H.F. Noyes*

I don't recall ever seeing the word ‘moonshot’ in a haiku, yet it is a wonderfully fresh and evocative choice that, given NASA’s current ambitions, immediately brings to mind all things nostalgic. In that shot lie the dreams of numerous young boys, and in a way the larger, but similar dreams of humanity. Despite the shot’s failure, we are confident the boy will try again as humanity always does. The poem is a tale of Sisyphean pursuit—or perhaps Camus’ Absurd Man’s. That all this can be found in such a seemingly insignificant event illustrates the power of the short poem.

## ERRATA

From XXVIII:3

near the end  
of Easter Sunday . . .  
hazy moonrise

*Robert Mainone*

From XXIX:1

the old fish market  
hawks and crows fight for control  
of a plastic bag

*Ian Willey*

From XXIX:1

Independence Day  
I struggle to free myself  
from a wet swimsuit

*Susan Antolin*



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