

Imagining Haiku Narrators

by Randy Brooks

Part 1 – where, what & how

All imaginative literature employs a narrator — the voice, perspective, cultural role — who is telling the story. Whether implied or explicitly designated by the writer, the narrator is the imagined speaker whose words create focus and imply attitudes toward the events being discussed. Even in autobiographical accounts and memoirs, the narrator is crafted by the writer as their writing identity.

In a previous essay, “Famous Japanese Haiku Narrators,” I focused on a macro-level theory of the haiku narrator as a writer’s persona, which is imagined by reading a large body of the author’s work. In the macro-level view, a writer’s narrator is their recognized reputation, ethos, cultural values, and common perspectives evident throughout their writing career. In this essay I want to explore the micro-level art of reading one English haiku (or senryu) at a time. I will focus on how readers imagine an implied narrator for each specific haiku.

In my college class on haiku, it is our habit to read every haiku out loud before discussing various interpretations. Millikin University is well known for its outstanding theater program, and I enjoy having theater majors in my class. As a result, I have employed a theater teaching approach to reading literary works out loud. I ask my students to imagine how they would perform or read the haiku and then they stand up and present their interpretation. We hear a variety of readings and voices. Consider the ways my students might read the following senryu by Alexis Rotella:

Lying —
I tell him I’m not looking
for a prince.

Alexis Rotella, *The Haiku Anthology*, 169

As you can imagine, this can be read with contempt or humor or confidentiality, or as an inward monologue. Readers change pacing, tone, nonverbal gestures, and bring this senryu alive. Some readings work better than others, so the class is ready for a discussion of what they love about this poem. I have used this same approach to reading each haiku out loud in workshops with students of all ages (K-12), graduate, undergraduate, and adult. Students enjoy imagining the narrator's voice for each poem and delight in the multiple possible interpretations available from most haiku.

As a literary art, haiku empowers readers to be significant contributors to the haiku they are reading. Originally called the "hokku" or "starting verse," this genre has always called for readers to respond imaginatively — filling in the blanks, connecting the haiku cut fragments, and making up what comes next. In this essay I explore how readers imagine the narrators of a haiku, who is speaking the words, what does their voice suggest about their attitudes or cultural perspectives, and how the narrator implies the reader's role as a collaborative partner in this brief communication exchange. As creative partners, readers and writers collaborate to imagine the unspoken significance or implied feeling that fulfills a haiku's promise of heartfelt awareness.

Some approaches to writing haiku or senryu downplay or ignore the role of narrators. Objective haiku poetics call for the writer to be an ego-less "everyman" who perceives nature or reality without subjective response or cultural bias. Subjective haiku poetics call for the writer to be autobiographical, to write about their own experiences and feelings from their view of the world. Both of these approaches downplay the significance of the haiku narrator. In the objective approach the implied haiku narrator is either a nature lover or an unemotional observer of the world. In the subjective approach the implied narrator is the writer themselves, as if everything was simply an expression of personal experiences or inner feelings. Reader collaboration is limited to two prescribed roles for readers. Readers should (1) be a nature lover or (2) imagine what it must be like to see things from the author's perspective.

On the other hand, both transactional and literary haiku poetics call for a more complex conception of the haiku narrator and readers of each haiku. The haiku narrator shifts depending upon at least five main implied questions: (1) Where are they speaking? (2) What are they speaking about? (3) How are they speaking? (4) Why are they speaking? and (5) Who is speaking? Each haiku provides clues to help readers imagine answers to these questions. Some haiku only hint at one of these questions and others hint at all five. In Part One I will briefly discuss the first three questions and provide readings of haiku and senryu as examples. In Part Two I will discuss the last two questions and end by summarizing how haiku narrators may prompt appropriate collaborative reader responses.

(1) Where are they speaking?

Haiku follows a tradition of being written in the present tense, with actions and perceptions depicted in the narrator's current time. Haiku is a poetry of being present and inviting the reader to imagine being present to the situation being shared. It is only natural that one of the key clues provided to readers about the narrator is where they are speaking and what they are doing. The scene or social context of the haiku helps readers shape an imagined narrator.

Narrators of Scene or Social Situation

Many haiku provide a clear indication of the social situation. Consider the narrators of these two haiku that focus on children:

first snow . . .
half the class drifts
to the window

Brad Bennett, *A Turn in the River* [*Books without page numbers will not cite page.*]

In this one, we are in a classroom during a snowstorm. Half the class is distracted and more interested in the snow coming down than whatever is going on in the classroom. The narrator seems to be a teacher or teacher's aide. It is open for interpretation whether the teacher is irritated by this competition for attention outside the classroom or merely pleased to see the students' enthusiasm for a first snow.

hot afternoon . . .
only the slap slap slap
of a jump rope

Anita Virgil, *The Haiku Anthology*, 241

In Virgil's haiku the scene is a playground or sidewalk on a hot afternoon. Children are jumping rope and we can hear the "slap slap slap" of the rope hitting the pavement. Who is the implied speaker of this haiku? I can imagine a teacher at a playground or a parent or neighbor of the children. I envision at least three girls involved — two turning the rope and one jumping. But it could be just one child jumping rope by themselves. The essential thing is the rhythmic enjoyment of the "slap slap slap" on a hot afternoon. Yes, I imagine there is sweat involved.

In this next haiku, we are on a train as it leaves the station:

yesterday's paper
in the next seat —
the train picks up speed

Gary Hotham, *The Haiku Anthology*, 81

This haiku suggests familiarity with riding the train, so the speaker is probably a commuter. We don't know if they are headed home or going to work. Maybe they will read "yesterday's paper" because there's nothing better to do. The narrator seems to be speaking to themselves making this a stream of consciousness haiku.

Squeeze play
umpire whisk brooming
home plate.

Arthur Goodrich, *Midwest Haiku Anthology*, 35

Goodrich puts us in the stands watching a baseball game (in Arthur's case that would have been a Chicago Cubs game at Wrigley Field). The narrator is a baseball fan. We have just watched a squeeze play between the catcher and third baseman, and now the umpire is "whisk brooming / home plate" to prepare for the next batter. The excitement is over. The dust has settled. Play ball.

Narrators of Holidays or Special Events

Sometimes the scene is based around holidays or specific events. Here are some Christmas scenes that provide clues about narrator perspectives.

Snow falling
on the empty parking lot:
Christmas eve . . .

Eric Amann, *Cicada Voices*, 10

In this haiku, we are in an empty parking lot on Christmas eve. The snow is falling peacefully covering up the parking lot. The emptiness of the lot makes us consider the narrator's perspective. Why is the speaker there? Why is the lot empty except for their presence? Is everyone else home with families? There is a peaceful aloneness to this haiku and yet a sadness as well. For this narrator, this is a quiet Christmas eve.

home for Christmas:
my childhood desk drawer
empty

Michael Dylan Welch, *Global Haiku*, 103

The narrator of this haiku is an adult who has returned “home for Christmas” and finds that things have changed. It is a “coming-of-age” haiku. The speaker seems to be glad to be home but perhaps sad that his childhood mementos are no longer kept in the desk drawer.

dog-eared script
I prompt a wiseman
from the wings

Peggy Lyles, *To Hear the Rain*, 118

In this haiku, Lyles employs the first-person narrator to place the speaker directly in the middle of the action. The scene is backstage or in the wings of a theater. I can see the narrator behind a curtain prompting “a wise man” to speak their lines. We can imagine the narrator mouthing the words the wise man is supposed to say. It has been a long rehearsal season and the script is “dog-eared” showing how hard the narrator has worked with these actors who are probably children in a church play. Lyles’ approach invites the reader to imagine being the director and acting coach for these amateur actors.

Public celebrations often provide a social context for haiku narrators. Consider this one about a father and son preparing for commencement:

graduation day
my son & I side by side
knotting our ties

Lee Gurga, *Global Haiku*, 56

In this scene, the father and son are standing “side by side / knotting our ties.” The first-person voice of the narrator allows us to imagine ourselves standing by “my son” preparing for graduation day. Perhaps the father is teaching the son how to tie a tie. This is a scene of sharing in a simple act that evokes a sense of pride, a sharing of accomplishment. More significant perhaps than the actual walk across the stage, this is a moment of togetherness and teamwork.

Narrators of Urban Scenes

Urban or rural scenes often provide a social context for the haiku narrator. Consider these three urban landscapes:

deserted schoolyard
the fence he climbed over
to Iraq

Chuck Brickley, *Earthshine*, 54

The scene of Brickley's haiku is a "deserted schoolyard" with a run-down fence. The narrator recalls a time when someone "climbed over" the fence to get away. Presumably, the boy was running away from school. Perhaps he did not do well in school or hated being in school. The last line suddenly shifts "to Iraq" suggesting that he quit school and joined the military where he ended up climbing over other fences or deserted schools. Perhaps the narrator is a parent or teacher or friend of this young man? I imagine a sense of loss and frustration at the sight of the deserted school and perhaps the boy's unfulfilled dreams and hopes.

high above the city
dawn flares
from a window-washer's pail

Cor van den Heuvel, *Global Haiku*, 92

In this urban haiku, van den Heuvel places us in a high-rise building. Outside the window, we notice a flash of the reflected sunrise in the window-washer's pail. For a moment the narrator shares the awesome view "high above the city" with the window-washer.

skinny young men
grouped around the car's raised hood
spring's here

Winona Baker, *The Haiku Anthology*, 9

This haiku focuses on a strong sense of belonging seen with this group of young men. The narrator admires how they are gathered around a car, trying to fix whatever is broken. They are eager to get the car up and running so that they can go cruising on this beautiful spring day. Perhaps the narrator remembers when they were a young person enjoying a spring day with a group of friends.

Narrators of Rural Scenes

In contrast to these cityscapes, consider these haiku that feature rural landscapes and how they are written by narrators who are at home in the countryside:

Farm country back road:
just like them i lift one finger
from the steering wheel

Tom Clausen, *The Haiku Anthology*, 24

Employing a first-person narrator, Clausen puts the reader behind the wheel driving on a “Farm country back road.” Lifting “one finger” to wave is an act of recognition, of knowing each other. The narrator is using a simple gesture of belonging in the farm community.

from the dark barn
stanchions rattling . . .
snow finally letting up

Edward J. Rielly, *Midwest Haiku Anthology*, 80

Rielly places us on a farm in the middle of a blizzard. The narrator is a farmer or farm hand concerned about the cattle in the barn. The animals are restless and frightened by the storm and can be heard rattling the stanchions. Perhaps the narrator has stayed up throughout the storm, checking on the livestock from time to time. He is pleased to see the “snow finally letting up.”

Narrators of Indoor Scenes

jampackedelevator every button pushed

John Stevenson, *My Red*, 94

In this enjambed one-liner, the narrator is in the elevator, which is very crowded with people standing shoulder to shoulder. Perhaps the narrator is feeling a bit claustrophobic. Unfortunately, this uncomfortable feeling will not be resolved soon because every button is pushed. This haiku works because of previous experiences as elevator riders. My students always say this haiku reminds them of the scene in the movie, *Elf*. The haiku narrator's perspective is one of frustration — they will just have to hold their breath until this long ride is over.

distant thunder —
the dog's toenails click
against the linoleum

Gary Hotham, *The Haiku Anthology*, 86

In this haiku, a dog in the kitchen is reacting to the “distant thunder.” We imagine that the narrator is the dog's owner or companion who knows how scared the dog gets. He or she hears the “toenails click / against the linoleum” as the dog scrambles to hide. The narrator is clearly in the house with the dog listening to the “distant thunder” as well.

I will close the discussion of how scene or setting provides hints about the haiku narrator with this favorite from Peggy Lyles:

attic sun
from Grandmother's gown
a grain of rice

Peggy Lyles, *To Hear the Rain*, 69

The haiku starts with the scene image “attic sun,” which we can imagine as not very bright. Perhaps sunbeams are filtering in through a small window near the roof with dust floating in the sunlight. What are they doing in the attic? Who’s there? Who is the narrator? As we read the rest of the haiku, we get more clues. The speaker is evidently a grandchild, perhaps a granddaughter who is engaged to be married. She could be alone or with a group of family members. They have retrieved “Grandmother’s gown” from an old cedar chest or box. When it is unfolded for a better viewing, “a grain of rice” falls from it. That grain of rice has been caught in the lace of the gown since the wedding day. It gives everyone pause.

(2) What are they speaking about?

Haiku tradition calls for haiku to be written with images without commentary or explanation. However, sensory details and images often imply a certain perspective or point of view. The content of a haiku may come from observing human experiences, observing the world we live in, or from imaginary experiences. Even so-called “objective” nature haiku usually provide both images and subjective responses to the things being discussed. The content or details of haiku provide readers with clues about who is the narrator. Is the haiku narrator an observer of people, a nature lover, or someone who enjoys fantasy and speculations about the future?

Narrators Observing People

When haiku and senryu writers focus on people, the narrator is often an observer. Such haiku are written like miniature stories, featuring dialogue or the actions of characters. Consider the narrator of this one by George Swede:

at the height
of the argument the old couple
pour each other tea

George Swede, *Almost Unseen*, 109

The narrator of this haiku observes “the old couple” and notices that even “at the height / of the argument” they are still considerate and polite with each other. They take care of each other and know how to argue without it threatening their relationship.

On the other hand, when the narrator is one of the actors in the scene, we get a monologue:

after the all-clear
not remembering the bombs
only the kiss

David Cobb, *Global Haiku*, 44

The narrator of this haiku is in a bomb shelter during a war. The bombs have shaken everyone, but when he realizes he has survived, he remembers “only the kiss,” not the bombs. Love lasts. Although Cobb does not use the first-person pronoun, the implied voice is that of the bomb shelter survivor sharing his inner thoughts.

In this next senryu, Lawrence Howard employs the first-person voice. He lets the reader join in his state of consciousness:

The shock
to hear my waitress
call another man “hon”

Lawrence Howard, *Midwest Haiku Anthology*, 44

This is, of course, an exaggeration about endearments at the local diner. The narrator is not really shocked. He is joking about “my waitress” in his banter with other local customers.

Narrators Observing Nature or Reality

When haiku focus on experiences of nature, they often employ images of sensory perception. However, these haiku are rarely objective descriptions. More often they include clues that help the reader imagine the subjective experience of the narrator. For example, in this haiku by Allan Burns the narrator notices and thinks about claw marks on a post:

blackberry briar
an old boundary post
clawed by bears

Allan Burns, *Where the River Goes*, 372

The narrator is someone out picking blackberries. They are focused on gathering the berries when they notice “an old boundary post / clawed by bears.” I imagine that the narrator is thinking about those bears who also like to pick blackberries. He needs to be on the lookout just in case. Bears pay no attention to boundary fences and human concepts such as property that require fences.

frog pond —
a leaf falls in
without a sound

Bernard Lionel Einbond, *The Haiku Anthology*, 37

In this famous haiku, the implied narrator is someone standing near the “frog pond” and noticing the tranquility of the scene. The narrator sees a leaf fall into the pond and the slight ripples it creates. The narrator notes that this occurs “without a sound,” which is true. But the significance of this haiku is that the narrator knows the history of Japanese haiku and Bashō’s famous “old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water” poem which his leaf haiku echoes. The implied narrator is a student of Japanese haiku who enjoys creating a variation that emphasizes the silence of a leaf entering the pond.

Marlene Mountain was known to reject traditional nature haiku and often wrote “anti-nature” poems. Let’s consider the narrator of this example:

old pond a frog rises belly up

Marlene Mountain, *The Haiku Anthology*, 135

On first reading, we can imagine that this is simply an observation of nature gone wrong. The old pond is polluted. A frog does not leap into its water sound. Instead, it “rises belly up” apparently dying or dead. Nature has failed to sustain the frog. Such a reading would imply that our haiku narrator is someone decrying the polluted state of our earth, a champion of ecological improvements needed. That would be an appropriate narrator to imagine for this haiku. However, as in the Einbond poem, for those who know the Japanese haiku tradition and Bashō’s original old pond haiku, the narrator is a twentieth-century haiku poet who no longer accepts that it is enough to celebrate the ideal nature of frogs leaping into ponds. By example, this new haiku narrator is saying that we need to write about the reality of our fallen world.

Consider the narrator of this classic nature haiku by Robert Spiess:

Muttering thunder . . .
 the bottom of the river
 scattered with clams

Robert Spiess, *The Haiku Anthology*, 198

I love the way this haiku begins with “Muttering thunder” which is, of course, half metaphor and half personification. Thunder doesn’t mutter. People do that. And yet, metaphoric personification is a perfect way to convey that the narrator was listening to the distant thunder, and that he tries to understand what it is saying. Perhaps the thunder is muttering that it may rain soon, and that lightning may be coming too. Now, if I imagine our haiku narrator as someone out on a hike, this would be good to know. Or, knowing that Robert Spiess was an avid kayaker, I imagine that our haiku narrator is on a kayak. The thunderstorm may affect his journey home. The second half of the haiku shifts attention to our narrator looking into the clear water of the river. He sees “the bottom of the river / scattered with clams” which is a reminder of

both life and death in the river. The entire nature haiku makes sense because we imagine the narrator's shifting attention and thoughts.

moon
and melon cooling
with us in the stream

Peggy Lyles, *To Hear the Rain*, 55

In this haiku, Lyles again takes the first-person plural perspective. What is brilliant about this narrator is how she includes the moon, the melon, and at least one more person as "with us in the stream." It is a hot late-summer evening, and they are all cooling in the stream together. We can imaginatively join the narrator in this cool refreshing soak (and ultimate watermelon feast).

Narrators Imagining Experiences

How do science fiction or fantasy haiku writers provide clues about their narrators? They don't rely on observations of Earth as nature, nor do they focus only on people. Instead, they provide clues that the narrator may be telling stories of adventures, myths, the future, or science fiction experiences.

Sometimes the narrator's perspective does not venture far from reality:

In the snow
around the carousel
tracks of a horse

Vincent Tripi, *The Haiku Anthology*, 225

At first, the narrator of this haiku appears to be a nature observer looking at the snow around the carousel. What does our narrator

see but “tracks of a horse” which could be a realistic scene but seems kind of weird. Who would ride horses near a carousel or why would horses walk around a carousel? Perhaps we should imagine a different kind of narrator. If we approach this haiku with the imagination of a child, it’s not hard for us to dream up a vision of the carousel horses running about in the snow. Don’t groan, but you could see this as a winter scene from *Mary Poppins*. Or maybe we just have a narrator who likes the idea of horses befriending the carousel horses.

rib bones
in the meadow
the boys have a sword fight

John Stevenson, *My Red*, 117

In this haiku by Stevenson, the narrator is noticing the playful imagination of the boys. They take the “rib bones / in the meadow” and are instantly transported back to the days of knights and kings. They are on an adventure to help King Arthur. The haiku narrator recognizes this spirit of adventure and play. Perhaps the narrator remembers such adventures from his own childhood?

The hunter returns —
in his gamebag
the moon and stars

Robert Mainone, *Midwest Haiku Anthology*, 65

Mainone wrote several haiku employing a Native American outlook or implied narrator. In this one, we get a mythic creation story about a hunter. He invites readers to imagine the narrator as a bigger-than-life hunter. What has he caught this time? His gamebag is full of “the moon and stars.”

In this next haiku, we get a similar embodiment of Shinto-like things spirited to life:

The old rooster crows . . .

Out of the mist come the rocks
and the twisted pine

O. Mabson Southard, *The Haiku Anthology*, 191

Here the narrator is awake at dawn. He hears the “old rooster” and sees the awakened “rocks and the twisted pine” come out of the mist. This narrator seems to be telling a fairytale story like the walking trees in *The Lord of the Rings*. Everything comes alive when called on.

Sometimes this mythic or speculative narrator conveys a spiritual consciousness. Consider this haiku by Bill Pauly that seems to intertwine a Christian perspective with the earth goddess of spring:

snowmelt . . .
she enters
the earth on her knees

Bill Pauly, *Walking Uneven Ground*, 67

The narrator is noticing something sacred. While the snow is melting, a woman is on her knees, perhaps praying. She “enters the earth” on her knees. This is a sort of mythic dissolving of the self into a spring garden of new growth and potential.

I will conclude this section with an example of a science fiction haiku narrator:

space walk
the blues
of our planet

Deborah P Kolodji, *Highway of Sleeping Towns*, 96

The narrator is an astronaut on a space walk. They are in a space suit, connected to a spaceship with a life-support cord. Written in the first-person plural voice, the narrator invites us to look at “our planet” from outer space. The narrator especially notices “the blues” of our planet, which is both visual (blue sky) as well as a pun for the sad reality of the challenges facing the earth. It is both a glorious vision as well as a realization of the limits and finitude of earth compared to the universe.

(3) How are they speaking?

Haiku in English are usually written with a conversational tone with everyday language. The language or voice of a haiku can provide significant clues to help readers imagine the narrator. We rarely use Middle English or Old English or old poetic words such as “thou” or “sayeth,” although there are no widely held restrictions on language use in general. We rarely see significant use of formal language or scientific terminology, or extremely localized dialects in haiku. Some haiku are more musical than others but that is a different consideration that is rarely a basis for prompting how we imagine the narrator. In this section of the essay, I will discuss the use of conversational tone and everyday expressions or literary/artistic allusions and expressions as clues to a haiku speaker’s narrative voice or attitude.

Narrators Using Conversational Tone and Everyday Expressions

sudden shower
we catch up on each other
under the marquee

Chuck Brickley, *Earthshine*, 22

English is a difficult language to learn because of our extensive use of colloquial phrases such as “catch up on each other” as seen in this haiku. The chance meeting “under the marquee” during a “sudden shower” suggests that these two people are acquaintances or old friends. They probably would not have stopped to say hello except for the fact that they are waiting for the rain to let up. The first-person plural voice indicates that the narrator and old friend are in this together. It is a pleasant exchange but doesn’t last much longer than the sudden shower.

Those birds sitting
 out there on the fence —
 They’re all going to die.

Jack Kerouac, *Scattered Poems*, 74

Kerouac is known to champion spontaneous expression, but we know from interviews and studies of his work that this was a well-crafted narrative voice. He wanted his haiku to sound spontaneous but still have a depth of insight beyond the conversational tone. In this case, the narrator is considering “Those birds sitting / out there on the fence.” Readers can easily imagine this scene and ask “what about them?” Then the narrator states that “They’re all going to die.” Apparently, this Beat poet narrator is not asking us to admire or enjoy the birds. The narrator is making an observation on the impermanence of life. The voice is spontaneous and light, but the conclusion is a dark submission to the inevitable.

Sometimes the way the narrator speaks indicates an awareness of social expectations in daily conversations. Consider the following two examples:

three times I’ve said
 “your husband . . .”
 now we can just talk

John Stevenson, *My Red*, 31

In this haiku, Stevenson draws attention to the dialogue between the narrator and the woman. Sometimes it is difficult to overcome social barriers to conversation unless both parties understand that the relationship is not intended to be more than friendship. I imagine the narrator of this haiku as someone who cares and wants to talk but is careful not to be misunderstood as someone who wants to be in a romantic relationship. This is an interesting use of dialogue, told in first person.

In this first-person haiku, the narrator appears to be talking to themselves:

starry night
lost track of all
my told-you-so's

Bill Pauly, *Walking Uneven Ground*, 109

This haiku employs a conversational tone to summarize his previous state of mind. The narrator was counting misdeeds or injustices and simply lumps them together with the phrase “told-you-so’s.” But under the beautiful “starry night” the narrator was able to lose track of that worry. Instead, he can just take in the beauty of the night. Of course, “starry night” is the name of a famous Van Gogh painting which depicted some of the artist’s darkest anxieties and mental health challenges. In this haiku, the starry night seems to provide the narrator with healing.

Narrators Using Literary / Artistic Allusions and Expressions

Haiku writers enjoy writing about poets and other artists, so it is not surprising that their haiku narrators can speak or make allusions to art. Here is a haiku narrator who enjoys reading Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poetry:

A page of Shelley
brightens and dims
with passing clouds

Rod Willmot, *The Haiku Anthology*, 281

This is a simple haiku in which the narrator notices that this page of Shelley's poetry "brightens and dims / with passing clouds." The narrator is a reader of Shelley's poetry and would know that "passing clouds" was a key image for impermanence in his work. We imagine a narrator who is well-versed in British Romanticism and how Shelley was drawn to certain Buddhist principles such as the impermanence of life.

light the path
to Walden Pond —
my bedside lamp

Ebba Story, *The Haiku Anthology*, 207

This haiku by Story features a narrator who has a copy of *Walden Pond* on their bedside table. The narrator makes a joke about going to the pond by reading the book. The narrator asks the "bedside lamp" to "light the path / to Walden Pond" which refers to both the illumination that will come from reading as well as the literal light on the pages of the book. Most of us have only gone to Walden Pond by reading Thoreau's book and imagining what he experienced.

we follow the fence
through knee-deep snowdrifts . . .
Pasternak's grave

Charles Trumbull, *Haiku in English*, 179

Trumbull employs the first-person plural voice for his narrator. They are on a literary landmark journey to Pasternak's grave. The cemetery is appropriately covered in snow, making the adventure more fitting to the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. The narrator implies that it takes a long time to get there.

Paris pond
a frog Picassos
my face

George Swede, *Almost Unseen*, 49

In this haiku, Swede's narrator playfully turns Picasso into a verb. The narrator is in Paris, standing on a bridge looking down into the water. A frog jumps in (yes, another literary allusion to Bashō's old pond haiku), and the water ripples over the narrator's reflection. His face becomes distorted in an interesting, artistic way, quite naturally.

midsummer moon
who will I be
when I wake up?

John Stevenson, *My Red*, 42

In this haiku, the narrator is an actor in a comedy by Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play has a play within a play with shifts and changes of lovers and identities. This is a wonderful haiku version of the play, in which all the players are under the magical fairy kingdom influence of the moon. The narrator expresses the idea of how we never know who we will be or how things will end up in our lives.

moonflower
a love letter
to Captain Kirk

Deborah P Kolodji, *Highway of Sleeping Towns*, 94

In this example, Kolodji has written a haiku which features the voice of a Trekie. Again, under the magical influence of the moon, this haiku narrator writes “a love letter / to Captain Kirk.” This playful haiku features a moonflower which is a night-blooming morning glory and a late-night person who chases her dreams.

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