



frogpond



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**Bringing the Window Inside:
Psychological Haiku**
by Rod Willmot

(as presented to the HSA June 4, 1983)

Haiku is conventionally believed to focus always upon the objects of the outer world. However, a “new” type of haiku is emerging, which I loosely term psychological, whose primary focus is upon the poet’s most personal and immediate experience: his emotions, states of mind, participation in relationships, and related phenomena. Although such haiku have always been written — from time to time — by Japanese poets, North Americans have tended to avoid psychological haiku, both as an effect of the apprenticeship factor and for reasons of dogma.

The apprenticeship factor is dominant when a literature is young, as haiku certainly was in North America 10 or 15 years ago. As apprentice haiku-poets we *had* to focus on the external world because it was all we could clearly see. We did so too because some of us were deeply alienated from our cities and ourselves, and found that haiku permitted us to escape. Convenient dogmas urged us to be “selfless” — meaning ignore our personal reality — and to spend our haiku-time gazing at “Nature” — meaning shut our eyes to the reality of our cities and the society in which we lived.

The apprenticeship factor has diminished over the years. Until now we have a sizeable cohort of mature poets, numerous younger poets of undeniable talent, and an ever-broadening base by which haiku can be seen to have become a part of this culture. Nonetheless, the dogmas remain, and many poets and editors are, still, under their sway. For them, I present my ideas as an argument for what *ought* to be written, though by no means in exclusivity. But for the vanguard of poets who have already ventured into psychological haiku, I will merely be describing what *is* being written, while explaining it as a natural and necessary continuation of the flowering of haiku on this continent.

One dogma to kill right away is the notion that if your topic is human, your haiku is not a haiku but rather a *senryu*. The original meaning of this term is as follows: “Comic verse in 5-7-5 syllable patterns.” A very different definition is given by Betty Drevniok, who calls it “a poem written in the form of haiku . . . a moment of increased awareness, but of people and their doings.”¹ Drevniok’s definition is appended to a comment made by one of the contributors to her haiku primer, *Aware*². Writing about a haiku of his own, Robert Spiess remarks: “There is a certain senryu component in (this) haiku.

The touch of a senryu aspect can enhance the depth of associations in a haiku.” Here is the poem:

A farmer’s market . . .
the fondness for Concord grapes
that Grandpa had

Observe that Spiess is not saying his poem has a comical touch; he obviously shares Drevniok’s definition of senryu. Yet somehow he fails to recognize that by that definition his poem is not a haiku with a “senryu component,” it’s 100% senryu. I think he calls the poem a haiku because deep down inside he knows that’s what it is (even if it isn’t very successful). His talk of senryu is an apology for something that needs no apology: being human. To avoid such confusions, I suggest that the term senryu be strictly re-assigned to its original meaning: comic verse in a haiku-like pattern.

The dogma about senryu had to do with human experience as the main topic of a poem. Another dogma has to do with that experience in a secondary role, as the reaction or response to the main topic, conventionally a stimulus from the world of Nature. In his influential volume *The Wordless Poem*, published in 1969, Eric Amann wrote:

In the West the original poetic experience plus the poet’s intellectual and emotional reactions equal the finished poem. But in haiku the original experience *minus* the poet’s personal reaction equals the finished haiku.³

This statement can be read in three ways. It could be taken to mean that the poet should have experience but no reaction — none at all — a logical impossibility since experience consists of reactions to stimuli; when the brain stops reacting, you’re dead.

Beyond this neuro-psychological level, the second interpretation would be that the poet is expected to limit his higher-level reactions — emotional and intellectual responses — either by not having them at all, or by eliminating them *completely* from his poem. This approach would not have found agreement with Harold Henderson, for example, who wrote: “Strictly speaking, a haiku is not *about* nature at all. It is rather *about* some moment of human emotion.”⁴ Nor does it find agreement among the eighteen poets who contributed to Drevniok’s *Aware*; their prose observations leave no doubt as to just how much emotional and intellectual response they pour into their haiku — and hope the reader will get back out.

The third and most sensible interpretation of Amann’s statement is that the poet should avoid making explicit emotional and intellectual *commentaries* in his haiku. Here I should point out that when Dr. Amann wrote his little

book he was an apprentice writing for other apprentices. More important, he was an editor writing for the hordes of rank beginners, most of them quite bereft of any instinct for form. They badly needed rules, the stricter the better, to avoid the worst errors: emotional comments like “What a pity!” and “How beautiful!” — or intellectual comments like the third line of this: “The flowers have dried/petals grow dark, pods heavy —/ maidens to mothers.”⁵ Those are sins against form, technical blunders that only beginners would make. I am certain they are perpetrated far less often now than 10 or 15 years ago, both because there are more experienced poets around to show the way, and because the form itself, the literary movement, has matured.

I have been arguing that Amann’s 1969 equation, experience minus reaction equals haiku, was intended as a warning to beginners about a matter of *form*. On a deeper level, however, I think his warning was received by many poets as having to do with *content*. I think it struck a chord of self-denial, an underlying suspicion that the true aim in haiku was some kind of absolute perception, disembodied, heartless, mindless. Ironic evidence for this contention is found in an article entitled, “Toward a Definition of the Modern English Haiku,”⁶ co-authored by Eric Amann and George Swede, and published in 1980. The authors reassess seven haiku rules, one of them being: “In haiku the poet’s personal views and comments should not intrude on the poem.” This is an obvious re-phrasing of the 1969 rule, which in its proper interpretation was wholly justifiable. Astonishingly enough, the authors conclude that it is no longer valid, and quote *me* in support of their conclusion. In a review of a collection by John Wills, I had written: “There must be a sense of the man behind the work, the shaping personality that has itself been shaped by experience.”⁷ Do *you* see any resemblance between a “shaping personality” and the intrusion of “personal views and comments”? Do *you* see any resemblance between the rich and disciplined haiku of John Wills and the over-strained efforts of beginners? Clearly Amann and Swede were seeing something in the 1980 rule quite different from its literal meaning. I think their target was the unintended consequence of the 1969 rule, our neurotic fear that real self-expression in haiku was illegal. No longer preoccupied with the technical problems of beginners, which in 1969 were overwhelming, they were trying to say: “It’s time we grew up; it’s all right to be human.”

Without betraying the essence of haiku, how can the human element be present not merely as reaction but as primary experience, the explicit topic of the poem? Let me return to a theoretical exposition begun in earlier issues of *Frogpond*, my “Structural Dynamics of Haiku.”⁸ In three articles I put forward six Propositions about haiku; here I would like to formulate two more.

Seventh Proposition: A haiku posits a subject as perceiver.

By “subject” I mean a first-person entity who happens to be the poet; in other words, “I.” This subject, this ever-present “I” whose presence is very often not even suggested, has one supreme function in every haiku: to perceive. And I know of no other form of literature in which this is the case. To look at it another way, if every haiku represents a perception then every haiku must imply a perceiver. This means that the *words* of a haiku must be read as conveying a perception, even if the same words in another context might convey something merely verbalized or imagined or deduced. If you read the words “I feel bad” in the manner of *other* literature (or as a person speaking), you read an ego that is entirely wrapped up in bad feeling and can only verbalize it. But if you read the same words in the manner appropriate to haiku, you read a subject for whom the feelings are an object of perception, and who is stating what it perceives. (I’ll return to this later for a view from the realm of psychotherapy.)

Before I go on, there are two secondary points of some interest. First, what the 7th Proposition describes is the assumptions or expectations of poet and reader. When we go to read a haiku, we expect to find perceiver and perceived, and if these expectations are frustrated we say the poem doesn’t work for us as haiku. But many poems are ambiguous in this respect, and so it is often our degree of confidence in the *poet* that determines whether we decide he has satisfied our expectations. Second, it is true that often the perceiving subject *must* be inferred by the reader, because the poem gives nothing but external objects. But whether by saying “I” or by using nouns and verbs of sensation, a good many haiku do make the perceiver quite explicit. Especially effective are sensation-verbs given as present participles (listening, tasting), but the same principle applies to *any* unattached participle whose human antecedent must be outside the poem, as in this non-psychological haiku by Alan Gettis: “talking/ to the cows:/ the heat.”

Although nearly everyone agrees that every haiku represents a perception, many people have reservations about which objects of perception are permissible in haiku. Even when confronted with the earthier moments of Basho and Issa, some individuals believe haiku should be all clear skies and chrysanthemums. The wider prejudice against things human is, in practice, willingly suspended as long as a given haiku contains a token reference to Nature. But the greatest prejudice of all is the belief that a haiku must deal only with “objects” in the sense of concrete things, or at least external phenomena such as light. Using the Latin word *perceptus* to denote anything perceived, be it natural or human, material or immaterial, external or internal, I contend that we should open wide our doors:

Eighth Proposition: Any *perceptus* is a potentially valid “object” in a haiku.

I say “potentially” because it must be communicable for the poem to work, and many *percepti* are too obscure to be received by the reader. But this limitation applies just as much to concrete perceptions as to psychological ones, if not more so, since there are so many things in the world whose names are familiar only to specialists.

Putting together the 7th and 8th Propositions, we can see a major component of haiku’s structural dynamics is the relationship between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, or at bottom, between “I” and “not-I.” There is a deep structural theory stating that all poetry is based upon the relationship Anthropos/Cosmos.⁹ Traditionalists in haiku are always trying to limit that fundamental relationship to one between Man and Nature. But what we commonly call Nature is really just one embodiment of Cosmos; another is of course the City, which can function toward the individual in all the same ways as Nature. In any case, it has been shown that *anything* perceived as not-I can be sensed as a manifestation of Cosmos, from a flower to a cockroach to the neighbourhood gang. This is not to say that every such manifestation must have a “cosmic feel,” nor is this something to ask of every poem, or of Issa’s mosquitoes. “Cosmic feel” or not, if a poem *works* as haiku there is necessarily something of Cosmos in it, and the same argument applies to any *perceptus* that works in a haiku: any not-I. My point is that the moment I perceive myself, or some aspect of myself, an emotion or an action or a thought, what is perceived immediately becomes not-I, with the potential to function in a haiku in exactly the same way as any other *perceptus*. Here are three examples, all having to do with anger:

leaving in anger —
the smell of someone else’s
fried fish

Ruth Yarrow

quarreling
our fingers draw warmth
from the teacups

Alexis Rotella

my whole being makes a fist
uprooting cornstalks
in the cold

LeRoy Gorman

In each of these poems there is more than the usual relationship between I and not-I, because in a sense not-I is given twice: in one form it is the poet perceiving himself, while in the other it is something outside him. Supposing

we call the internal not-I “me,” and the external not-I “it.” We can then see that haiku such as these possess a beautiful complex of interactions. There is the perception I/me, and the perception I/it, either of which might precede or predominate over the other. Then there is the perception of what Bill Higginson, in responding to these ideas, has called the “haiku relationship” between “me” and “it,” which comes out: I/ (me/it). It may well be that this triad of perceptions is implicit in all haiku, even though most conventional haiku eliminate the “me” and some psychological haiku eliminate the “it.”

The crucial point in all this is that what we normally think of as real parts of ourselves — our emotions, problems, states of mind — can and should be turned into not-I by an act of perception that is of the essence of haiku. There is a parallel to what I’m saying in psychotherapy. The American psychologist Eugene Gendlin has observed that the people who get the most benefit out of therapy have one thing in common: spontaneously, each engages in a certain mental procedure which he calls “focusing.”¹⁰ Realizing that this procedure can be taught to others, Gendlin has broken it down into five steps, or focusing movements, which are strikingly similar to things we do in connection with haiku. The first movement is “clearing a space” between oneself and one’s feelings or problems. This is the act of distinguishing between I and not-I, which is essential to *every* haiku. Most people look upon the outer world as though it were the furniture of their own mind, and this habit has to be exploded before even a conventional haiku can be written.

Once a “space” has been cleared, the focuser chooses (or allows to come forward) one problem area to deal with. The second movement is “getting a felt sense” of that problem. Gendlin emphasizes that this is not done intellectually; the focuser simply uses all of his inner sensing faculties to come to an intuitive awareness of all that is there in a given area. To my mind this is like the activity of the haiku-poet when he “becomes one” with an external object. Of course he does not “become one” with it at all; he perceives it in a way that can only be described with that impressionistic phrase.

The third and fourth movements could be called “asking for the crux” of the problem, and “letting the name come.” Here too the non-intellectuality of the process is emphasized; Gendlin uses the term “wordless” for it, as did Amann for haiku. Thus the “name” when it comes may in fact be a visual image, so there is an obvious parallel to what happens when the haiku-poet, perhaps after long contemplation, is suddenly seized by the particular elements of a scene or situation that will go to make a haiku. They are in a sense the name of the whole, as indeed the finished haiku is the name of the total experience. A true name calls up the whole, as you do a person, without specifying or pretending to know its every detail.

The last of the five movements is “checking back” between the name and the original felt sense. This parallels the haiku-poet’s activity of verifying

whether his words have remained true to his experience — a procedure mentioned by several of the poets in Drevniok's *Aware*. And finally, as with haiku, focusing can take place over an extended period or in a flash of perception. But no matter how slow or how swift the process, when it works it culminates in what Gendlin calls a "body shift," an experience of transformation that is felt both emotionally and physically. Having compared them in my own experience, I see no significant difference between "body shift" and "haiku moment," except that the purpose of one is therapeutic while the purpose of the other is literary. Inasmuch as the writing of any poetry is known to be of therapeutic value, it may be that psychological haiku will prove to be specially worthwhile not only as literature but as agents of change (health) in the lives of those who write them.

Are psychological haiku likely to have any particular characteristics? The characteristics of haiku in general seem to follow from difficulties inherent in the form itself, such as its brevity. Of three difficulties that I foresee for psychological haiku, the most important will be the relative unavailability of useful words. External objects are denoted by words that can be highly particular and richly evocative, but the same cannot always be said of internal phenomena. I think we'll see poets resorting to three characteristic devices: objective correlatives, appropriate decor (or supporting cast), and implied scenarios.

Objective correlative is T.S. Eliot's term for something in the external world, whether objective or situation or event, that somehow evokes a phenomenon of the internal human world. It is not a symbol or a metaphor; the external thing is really there. As an example I offer a haiku of my own:

All day, thoughts unspoken
the eggshells
moisten her fingertips

The second device will be to find an appropriate physical decor, like a stage setting for the human drama, or to use external objects as, in a sense, the supporting cast. One example is Gorman's poem cited earlier on uprooting cornstalks. His labour and environment provide both decor and supporting cast for a defiance whose cause we never learn; like the cornstalks it is simply there, and seems universal for that reason. Other examples are the following:

In the guest room
where my mother slept
I look for comfort

Alexis Rotella

Smoking, I refuse to go to her
the straw blind
flaps at the window

Rod Willmot

from his shaking hand
I take the light package
of bib lettuce seeds

Ruth Yarrow

The last of these compels attention for all that is subtly “named” without being stated, starting with the sound: a papery rattle that is as ominous as death, yet as delicate as life.

The third device will be to provide the reader with a scenario, or dramatic context, surrounding the isolated moment given in the haiku. One way of doing this will be to place related haiku together or in proximity, so that each draws upon the background of the others. Ruth Yarrow does this in her sequence, “Last Visit to My Uncle,” which appeared recently in *Frogpond* (VI, 1):

this morning
his brown garden shoes
look too heavy

Because this haiku is fifth in the sequence, we know that the poet’s uncle is dying; we are prepared to discover complex and gentle emotions instead of the trivial misperception that might otherwise be suggested. The phrasing implies an acknowledgement of something that might be expressed as follows: “In the light of my caring the shoes really *are* too heavy, but in the light of my seeing they only “look” too heavy, since in themselves they are devoid of qualities.” Here the juxtaposition of emotion and perception is paired with a juxtaposition of human and non-human, or ultimately, Anthropos/Cosmos.

Another way to give context in psychological haiku will be to refer to situations that are in some way common to nearly everyone’s experience, yet are rich in associations, such that the reader immediately knows or imagines the scenario. Interpersonal relations will surely be the most important source of such material, as shown by three haiku on the subject of divorce:

Divorce? she echoes
I’m not thinking of it.
Thinking of it.

Ruth Yarrow

discussing divorce
he strokes
the lace tablecloth

Alexis Rotella

not yet divorced letting the soup-bones drain
Rod Willmot

In many ways, key words like “divorce” are the equivalent of season-words: they are human seasons. In my opinion the only functional argument for using kigo is that, like the human seasons, they help create context. Another human-season-word appears in this haiku by Ruth Yarrow:

pregnant
she leaves the hot phone booth
the cord goes slack

The next difficulty confronting the writer of psychological haiku will be the prejudices of editors and readers who continue to believe that haiku is all about Nature. As a characteristic solution, many haiku will be cleverly ambiguous. With a couple of trees or a bit of rain, the poet can be confident that any reader who wants to will bamboozle himself into mistaking the decor for the principal actor. Consider this by LeRoy Gorman:

all those miles
yet I smell the earth
Dad plows

If you want to — need to — you can see it as a poem about the soil.

The third and last difficulty awaits anyone with the courage to confront it, whether or not he writes haiku: the difficulty of being truly self-aware, and not while sitting in zazen, but while fully immersed in normal life. Can we expect a characteristic frequency of imperfect perceptions, manifested in sentimentality, self-pity, and so on? It is my impression that the strongest haiku emerge when conditions for perception are least comfortable: when we are under the pressure of a swirl of events, sensations, emotions, worries, all trying to keep us “wrapped up.” On the contrary then, psychological haiku are likely to possess a characteristic intensity, achieved without exclamation-marks. As in this poem by Alexis Rotella, a perception seized in the midst of turmoil is like a sword or a stiletto:

trying to forget him
stabbing
the potatoes

There may also be a characteristic toughness, a willingness to deal with painful emotions, and do so honestly, in a way that has rarely appeared in the haiku magazines so far.

humiliated again
bar-smoke in the sweater
I pull from my head

Rod Willmot

To conclude: I contend that as long as there is a basic mind-set excluding major areas of experience from our haiku, the total product of this literary movement will be deeply flawed. I have a certain faith that the underlying North American attitude toward haiku is oriented far more strongly toward any set of conventions. Without suggesting that a nature-haiku is necessarily inauthentic, I believe that at this point in our development our only guarantee of authenticity is for us to explore those areas that have hitherto been neglected or forbidden: the urban, the techno-industrial, the erotic, and the psychological. These have been considered non-haiku areas only because, I think, *we* weren't ready for them. Now that we are, we should recognize that they are not only permissible in haiku, but absolutely necessary.

NOTES:

¹From the Glossary of *From the Country of Eight Islands*, H. Sato and B. Watson, eds. and transs., Doubleday (1981), p. 629.

²Betty Drevniok, *Aware — a haiku primer*, Portal Publications, (n.d.), p. 71.

³Eric Amann, *The Wordless Poem*, Haiku Publications (1969), p. 12. Recently re-issued by the Haiku Society of Canada.

⁴Harold G. Henderson, *Haiku in English*, Tuttle (1967), p. 49.

⁵This haiku by Jennifer Swedberg appeared in *Frogpond* (I, 4), p. 23.

⁶Eric Amann and George Swede, "Toward a Definition of the Modern English Haiku," in *Cicada* (IV, 4), pp. 3-12. See pp. 9-10.

⁷Rod Willmot, review in *Cicada* (IV, 3), p. 34.

⁸In *Frogpond* Vol. II, nos. 1 and 2, and Vol. IV, No. 1.

⁹See for example *Rhetorique de la poesie*, J. Dubois *et al.*, Editions complexe (Brussels, 1977), *passim*.

¹⁰Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, Everest House (1978), *passim*.

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LATE SPRING FREEZE

A Linked Verse

by

Evelyn Tooley Hunt

Annette Burr Stowmann

Patricia Allen Bott

- late spring freeze
 all the petals fallen
 from the snowball bush H
- the frog-singing pool . . .
a thirsty jersey cow S
- a luna moth
 dries its unfolding wings —
 the empty cocoon B
- at her mirror the old lady
flicks open the antique fan S
- wind stirs the grasses . . .
 from somewhere in the hedgerow
 the first katydid H
- in the shadowed cave
a lion cub . . . the lioness B
- poem dreamed at midnight
 forgotten by morning —
 my empty notebook S
- grandmother bends slowly,
her eye on the four-leaf clover H
- woman at the zoo
 smiles at the Bengal tiger
 purring B

applauding the string trio — light rain on the roof	H
buzzing through my afternoon nap that winter fly	S
in the dusk of evening the owl opens one eye	B
twisted pines their shadows on the green grave — autumn wind	H
the new mother counting her baby's toes	S
from the tall earth mound termites fly out to swarm — African landscape	B
old barn: square nails holding shards of storm-ripped shingles	H
teen-age grave robbers take shelter in the church sanctuary	S
ski tow out of order: two-way traffic on the slope	H
meandering brook: on the bank white flowers — Star-of-Bethlehem	B
moonlight glimmers on the frosty lawn — the rabbit	S

sealed in a glass jar the bouquet of dried roses and one blue feather	H
owl hunched against the tree trunk — raucous crows flock to attack	S
feet on the railing the old man on his porch beer stein full of stars	B
linking these unkempt backyards paths worn by dogs and children	S
drought ended — the village fountain spurting rusty water	H
creaking on iron H-hinges the attic door swings open	B
the orchard grass strewn with small hard cinnamon pears windfall for hornets	S
winter: the woodbox filled — a mug of mulled cider	H
the race horse runs free — near his empty stall, the goat waiting for him	B
through this thick fog a blind man tapping, crosses the highway	H

with iced-up windows	
the red car sliding backward	
toward the stalled truck	S
sparks rise from a meager fire —	
I dream of the summer forest	B
April showers —	
even the bronze buddha	
is turning green	H
outdoor art show —	
young artist sketching artists	B
a mockingbird	
practices	
oriole notes	S
the blacksnake rattles his tail	
among the dry leaves	B

Bob Boldman

shirt off
i accompany
a cloud

my unfinished note
finished by the twilling
of the whip-poor-will

moving the vase
so i can hear
her distant laugh

on the long drive home
moonlight touching me
where the heart is

returning from the zendo
i wash the smell
of incense from my face

locking my jaw
i shut the car door
softly

Ross Kremer

In the hurricane's eye
this silence
of windchimes

Fall paper drive :
the Boy Scout lifts a bundle
of folded yesterdays

Separated —
just this electric heater
in the gray March morning

David E. LeCount

last night's soft rain —
a curl in the leaf where
a caterpillar sleeps.

drink from the rainbow:
the passing hummingbird
shines through the sprinkler.

turtle skeleton —
ants going in one leg
and out the other.

calf's hunger at dawn —
in my dream I awake in
the old dairy barn.

one touch of the toad,
and I laugh to feel my skin
fifty years older.

sitting on pine needles —
this picnic I discover
her wrinkles in the wind.

the Oregon Trail —
where it winds around the bluff
sits a cloud's shadow.

mountain frost —
the shape of a hiker's breath
follows like a train.

old calligrapher —
how straight he sits in the scratch
of his slumping brush —

tiring of the heat . . .
her mind tries out a divorce,
or maybe new shoes.

Two new divorcees —
their words of nostalgic hate
over Big Macs —

Geraldine C. Little

MEDITATION AFTER THE LOSS OF A
FRIEND

holding dawn
and one mallard feather,
the pool she fashioned

contemplating
the stand of white iris
for a long time

wood dove — its voice
on the pebbled walk
we walked

tenacious roots
of lichens on the boulder
hailed here long ago

the tattered web
in the tattered bathhouse
full of old laughter

at dusk
the hush of one white goose
winging to water

R. W. Grandinetti-Rader

rain puddle:
the bum rinses
an apple core

pool hall:
eight ball misses
the roach

chalk outline
of the pimp's body:
first snowflakes

Frank W. Robinson

seeing her again
in the roses
she planted

still water
a frog
enters the silence

bit of fluff
in her navel
slow spring clouds

too many hands
in the museum —
her nipples grimy

GREENTIME TO WHITE

escape hatch
in the cocoon;
we too alone

black raspberries
your name breaking
in the soft burst

bones of our boat
crack in the wind
 love, this wineskin

eclipse of moon:
between two fires
earth dark and yours

loving another
while still loving you
 winter thunder

our silence
the where
of snow

George Swede

August heat

the junkyard fan tries

to turn

Abandoned farm

peapods rattle

in the wind

Used bookstore

a row of forgotten authors lit

by a sunset beam

Hal Roth

drumbeat of rain

the parrot cracks

sunflower seeds

quarter century married

a partridge calls

halfway through the sermon katydid

releasing its burden
of blackbird, the reed springs up
to a butterfly

slipping past the guard
and over the barbed wire fence:
wind-blown newspaper

In the attic trunk,
looking through his dead wife's things:
crying drunk

Rod Willmot

away from eyes
the stairwell holding
us in its arms

(Honored the Haiku Museum of Tokyo Award)

so like a snake
her question-mark —
the note tucked under my keys

the faint sweet scorch
beside her again
as she irons

bathing, I think of you
and lift the straw blind
to the rain

Geraldine C. Little

we open
the picnic basket in a field
of daisies — lark song

whorls of this seashell
my life

escaping again,
water over the dam —
the constant moon

glucose bottle:
the steady drip drip drip
of starlight

on the wall
Degas dancer unmoved
by the rock beat

one pale gold chrysanthemum
the ache
of autumn

BEWARE OF WOMEN'S ISSUES

*a linked poem (of 'talking haiku') June '82 - February '83
Marlene Mountain and Hal Roth (Tennessee and Maryland)*

- beware of women's issues they lack humor he Marlene
says humorlessly
- era dead she sighs no more guilt trips for a while Hal
- lunar eclipse the false names you have been called astarte M
- a room of one's own on 59¢ of a man's dollar H
- employment office anybody wanting a feminist M
billboard painter
- she becoming the man i always wanted to marry H
- request for maternity leave how can you treat them Hal
equal
- we used the girls until they died Marlene
- most of my best friends are women he adds H
quantitatively
- i've not ruled out women came with her third wine M
- what's a nice girl like you doing in a mid-life career H
change

mary beth says your 5000 years are up	M
all rhetoric aside still nothing without a man	H
this fall not remembering the day he left	M
what do you mean i don't treat you like a woman	H
in boots ditch-digging and of her flowers	M
you'd tell me wouldn't you if you had something i could catch	H
female has no etymological connection with male at all	M
over kids' screams we should write a book about exwives of phds	Marlene
can ladies really write books	Hal
don't see how you know what you know way in the mountains & not a dyke	M
it was the duty of a saint to be happy	H
qadistu holy women translated by men temple prostitutes	M
woe to the women the bible tells me so	H
innin inanna nana nut anat anahita istar isis au set ishara asherah	M

it's a girl the fetus aborted	H
we who made it perfumed she writes in big print and called gash	M
be a doll baby and get me some coffee	H
she admitted just beginning to understand what bra-burning was all about	M
i'm all his was more than enough once	H
she is happy enough as she is am i not the head of my house	Hal
d.a.: hell the kid asked for rape asked him for a beer	Marlene
cats as a matter of fact do not go to heaven (and women)	H
he is the Absolute — she is the Other	M
Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged	H
her song Power to the witch and to the woman in me	M

GUIDELINES FOR RENGA IN ENGLISH

(This is the talk Hiroaki Sato gave at Japan House, New York, on May 16, 1983, at the publication party for "One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English" (John Weatherhill, 1983).)

One Hundred Frogs started out as a collection of English translations of Basho's hokku, *Furuike ya kawazu tobikomuz mizu no oto*, which, in my translation that is unlikely to jolt anybody into enlightenment, goes, in one line: "An old pond: a frog jumps in — the sound of water." The collection, as it stands now, has more than one hundred forty translations. The shortest of them consists of only three words, and the longest, of five hundred ninety-seven — a parody, as you may be relieved to know, of Henry James. The compilation also has my kind of forgery: a piece purported to have been found pinned to a lapel of a drowned mafia hit-man's double-breasted suit.

The intended manuscript ended up as a book with much of its space given to the history and explications of renga, linked poetry, and samplings of poems in this form written in English. This came about because the best way of explaining Basho's hokku, I thought, was to describe renga, the parent of the seventeen-syllable form.

This evening I wish to propose some guidelines for renga in English. But before doing so, I'd like to add two more frog translations I came across after *One Hundred Frogs* went to the press. One of them is an inexcusable oversight. It was in a magazine lying about for years in my apartment — a magazine published by my alma mater, besides. It's in three lines, and reads:

old pond
frog having leapt
splash

Susumu Kamaike, "Wordsworth and Basho,"
Doshisha Literature, No. 25, February 1969

Mr. Kamaike, the translator of this version, worked with Cid Corman, and this piece is reminiscent of Mr. Corman's, which is in the book. Mr. Corman's translation, however, was published ten years earlier.

The other translation is in Leon Zolbrod's *Haiku Painting* — the first book, as far as I know, on the subject of *haiga* which Kodansha International recently published. The translation is also in three lines, but longer:

There, in the old pond —
A frog has just jumped in
With a splash of water.

Leon Zolbrod, *Haiku Painting*, Kodansha
International, 1982

As you may have been able to tell, Mr. Zolbrod tries to preserve the original syllabic count, more or less.

Renga is a sequential poetic form which, in its original format, alternates 5-7-5- and 7-7-syllable parts or stanzas. It has two distinct features. For one, it is composed by two or more persons — at least in principle. For the other, and what makes it unique, it requires the narrative sequence to be changed at every other turn. In this arrangement, any two consecutive stanzas must make a coherent whole, but three may not. To show what a renga is like, I will quote the last section of a 36-stanza sequence, which Basho composed with Shita Yaba, a shop clerk, in the spring of 1694. Yaba says in 5-7-5 syllables:

dono ie mo higashi no ho ni mado o ake 5-7-5
every house has its eastside window open Yaba

Coming after a stanza that describes a healthy growth of wheat, this link adds to the positive image by suggesting an eastwind, which in Japan is synonymous with a spring breeze. But if everybody is uniform in doing something, as the Japanese are reputed to be inclined to, such as opening all the windows in the same direction, it can be monotonous. So Basho, writing the next stanza, depicts someone bored:

uo ni kui aku hama no zosui 7-7
“I’m sick of eating fish stew on this shore” Basho

Someone who notices the monotony of a place is likely to be a traveler — or so the reasoning goes. Yaba, next, enhances the image of such a person by bringing in a sense of desolation:

chidori naku ichiya ichiya ni samu nari 5-7-5
plovers call, and night by night it gets cold Yaba

By convention, “plovers” suggests winter. So a description of a spring day has changed to one of a winter night with the interpolation of a single stanza describing a complainer. The sense of desolation or helplessness prompts Basho to think of tax payers:

mishin no taka no hatenu san'yo 7-7
they try endlessly to figure the amount of
unpaid tax Basho

Here, someone complaining about food changes to people engrossed in tax calculation after a stanza describing a winter night. Now, persons with I.O.U.'s to the government may not necessarily be poor, but Yaba thinks of a couple too poor to have a wedding for their son's bride:

tonari e mo shirasezu yome o tsurete kite 5-7-5
they've brought in a bride without even letting
their neighbors know Yaba

To this Basho adds a simple but acutely suggestive observation to end the sequence. It is a description for which he has been much praised:

byobu no kage ni miyuru kashi-bon 7-7
by a screen I see a tray of cookies Basho

So, in a renga, scenes and situations described shift in focus from stanza to stanza, from link to link. In the section we have looked at, the changes occur from a possible spring to a griping traveler; from a traveler who isn't exactly having a great time, to a winter night; from a not-too-encouraging seasonal change to taxpayers under duress; from harrassed taxpayers to a couple too poor to afford a normal wedding; and from such a couple to an object that inadvertently betrays their plight.

Read in pairs, the section goes:

every house has its eastside window open
"I'm sick of eating fish stew on this shore"

*

"I'm sick of eating fish stew on this shore"
plovers call, and night by night it gets cold

*

plovers call, and night by night it gets cold
they try endlessly to figure the amount of unpaid tax

*

they try endlessly to figure the amount of unpaid tax
they've brought in a bride without even letting their
neighbors know

*

they've brought in a bride without even letting their
neighbors know
By a screen I see a tray of cookies

Breaking the narrative sequence at every other stanzaic turn — or “disjunctive linking,” as Professor Earl Miner of Princeton has aptly called the technique — is the principal characteristic of renga. But as you can expect from such an old — it dates from the tenth century — and eccentric poetic form, “disjunctive linking” and the multiparticipatory format aren't all there is to renga. It is governed by a network of complex, fine-tuned rules and restrictions — so complex and fine-tuned, indeed, that a “master” of orthodox renga used to say, gleefully no doubt, it would take twenty years to simply digest them. We aren't of course patient enough to stomach that. If we are to adopt this poetic form in English, we must use a set of rules that are simple but retain the flavor of the original intent.

Rules for renga in English were first proposed in this country, I think, by Bill Higginson and Tadashi Kondo in *Haiku Magazine Special*, which was published in 1976. Other proposals are likely to have been made since then. The guidelines I'm going to propose are based on my experience in writing renga with my friends. In my discussion, “disjunctive linking” will be taken for granted as the inalienable feature of renga composition.

Length and Stanzas

The sequence consisting of 36 stanzas may be used as the norm for the moment. The length favored by Basho and his friends, this, happily, is also the most commonly used one here. Actually any length should be acceptable. But renga writing is still young in this country, and by using this format for a while we may be able to come up with some useful discoveries. (I may note in this connection that because renga are usually composed by mail here, a 36-stanza sequence may take eight months to a year to complete.)

The stanzas should be relatively short. The longer the stanza, the less maneuverable it becomes. The alternation of long and short stanzas might as well be preserved to give a sense of variety to the participants. At the moment the prevalent practice is to alternate three-line and two-line stanzas. Alternating long and short one-line stanzas is also tried.

Development

In the old days Japanese poets used the musical concept of *jo-ha-kyu* (introduction, elaboration, and finale) to describe the desired pattern of a sequence. In that format, the first section would be positive in tone, and uneventful; the second, eventful with interesting twists and turns; and the third section, dramatic, but smooth. Some such idea may be used in our attempts, too.

Moon and Flowers, or Recurrent Images

Original renga have two recurrent images, the moon and flowers, in the more or less specified positions. In the 36-stanza sequence, for example, the moon is to be described in the 5th, 14th, and the 29th stanzas, while a flower is to be mentioned in the 17th and 35th. Because renga avoid linear narrative development, recurrent images in the specified positions provide welcome points to go back to or to be anticipated. So this is another feature we may adopt in English renga.

The problem for us is that in English poetry the moon and flowers — which, in traditional Japanese poetry, usually mean cherry flowers — do not carry the same weight they do in Japanese poetry. There, the moon of autumn and the cherry flowers of spring are prized topics whose symbolic meanings appear to derive from esoteric Buddhism. Of the two images, the moon may be less problematic in English, for its appeal is equally intense, if different. The cherry flowers do not enjoy any such stature. If by flower we are to mean any flower, as we can, then a rule that limits the mention of flowers to two stanzas in a sequence will be found too restrictive. One thing we can do is to select each time a specific flower, let's say, a rose, for the fixed positions and allow other kinds of flowers to be mentioned elsewhere if the participants want to.

Avoiding Repetition

The moon and flowers are required to recur. In contrast, with most of the other things, including certain grammatical constructions, recurrence must be handled with great care. Indeed, when the complexity of original renga rules is talked about, what is meant is the long list of instructions on which word or phrase, phenomenon or situation may recur, how often, and under what circumstances. Such prescriptions mostly have little practical use for us. But their general intent of discouraging recurrence deserves consideration.

Themes

One outstanding aspect of renga is the absence of narrative development. Sequences have been written, however, that deal exclusively with the theme of love, each stanza describing some manifestation of this most worthy of human sentiments — if you allow me to say such a corny thing. As we go

along, we may also try, for sequential themes, plants, birds, animals, and other categories of things.

Directorship

Renga is often described as *za no bungei*, or “a literary art for a gathering of people.” So, except for a few die-hard religionists, renga poets stressed the enjoyment of the gathering itself. Basho, for example, went so far as to say, “Take the renga sheets off the desk, and they become waste paper.”

Renga sequences in English are mostly composed through correspondence, as I noted earlier. It is said that for a sequence of 36 stanzas Basho and his friends spent on the average three hours and thirty minutes, or six minutes for a stanza. We seldom get together and sit around for such a long time; even if we did, we might not be quick enough to come up with an acceptable link in six minutes. At any rate, our writing renga by mail does not obviate the need for one participant to assume the role played by Basho and other so-called “masters.” The person in that role will look after the welfare of the renga being written — changing the tone, shuffling the participants’ turns, pointing out that the latest link contains a word or an image that occurred too recently, and so forth.

For renga in English, these are the only guidelines I can think of at the moment. But even the term “guidelines” may be too strong. Renga is a poetic game, whose main goal is leisure. Rules are necessary, but they shouldn’t be too restrictive. I am hoping that all of you will try to write renga so that we may continue to refine the form.

Thank you very much.

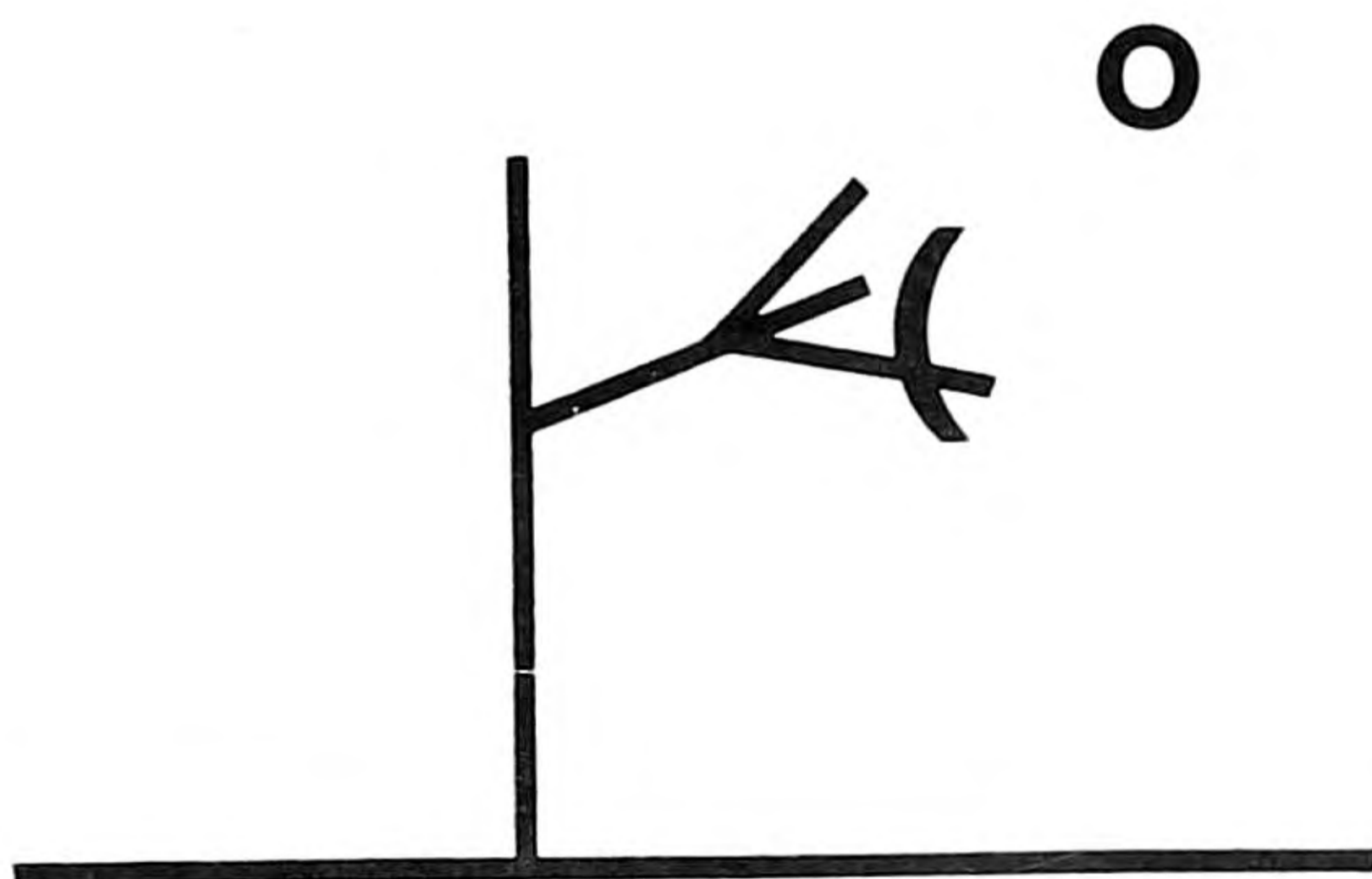
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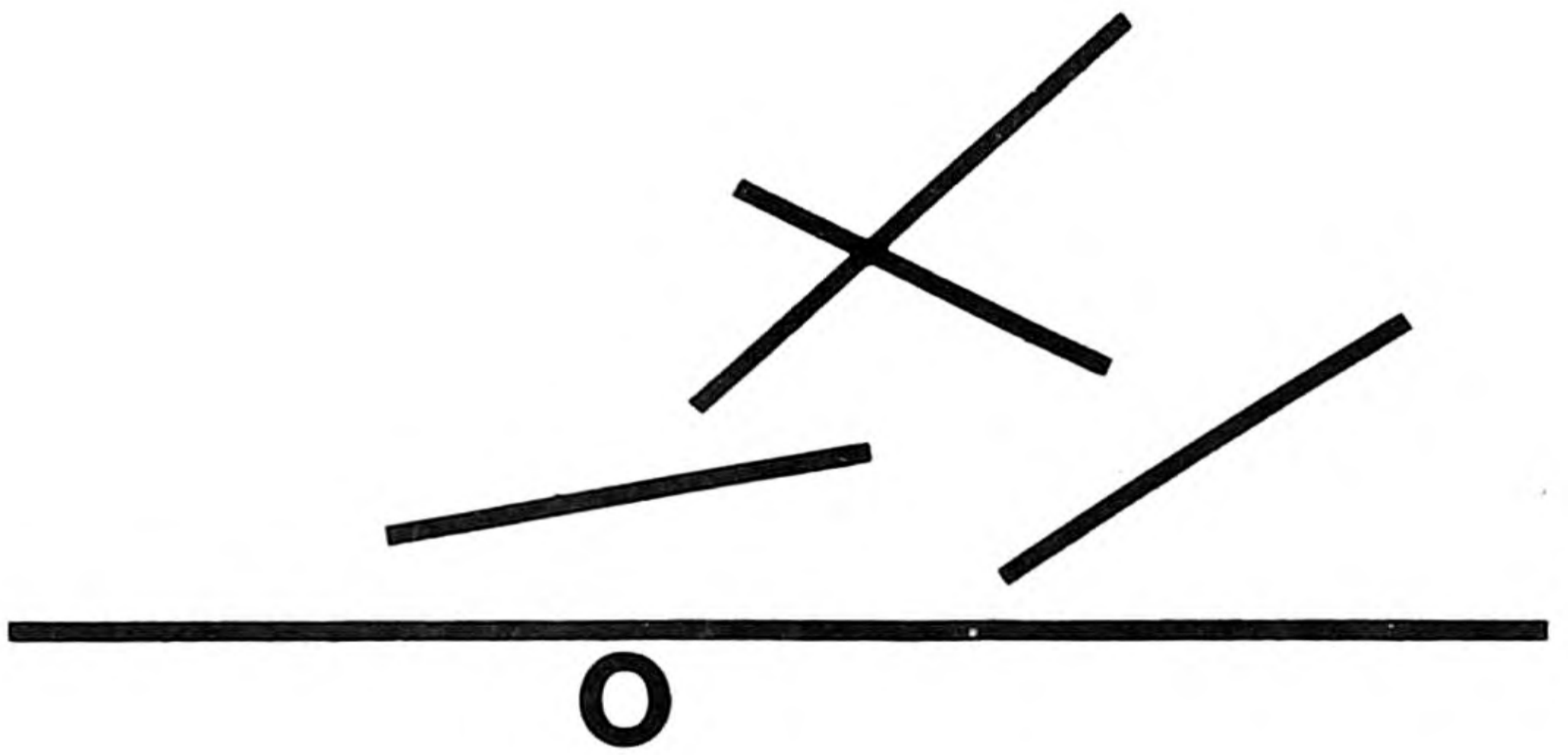
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LeRoy Gorman





HSA Sampler

Because of the transference of material from Bruce Kennedy, as well as the change in editorship, we apologize for the brevity of the Sampler this issue.

Evelyn Tooley Hunt

late poker game . . .
the cuckoo begins to sing
just before dawn

Paul O. Williams

after the zinnias
the gardener too
drinks from the hose

a June morning walk —
the turtle closes his shell
with a hush of air

HAIKU NEWS

Merit Book Awards Committee

The 1985 Merit Book Awards Committee will be chaired by R. W. Grandinetti-Rader (Passaic, N.J.). Ruth Yarrow and Frank Robinson also graciously agreed to judge this contest. Chapbooks (for 1983 and 1984) should be sent directly to Frank Robinson, Townview Terrace, F42, Knoxville, TN 37915. In order to objectify the results, a point system will be used. The deadline for this contest will be December 1, 1984. Enquiries should be sent to Mr. Rader at 73 Pennington Ave., Passaic, NJ 07055.

Frogpond Editorship

The HSA wishes to express its gratitude to Bruce Kennedy for having served as Frogpond editor. Because of Bruce's time schedule and his desires to spend more time on his own writing, he will no longer be continuing in an editorial capacity. Bruce will be contributing future articles and haiku to *Frogpond*. We are looking for a qualified editor. Alexis Rotella will serve as editor for the remainder of 1983. Send submissions directly to her at P.O. Box 72, Mt. Lakes, NJ 07046.

New Nominating Chairman

Ross Kremer has agreed to act as nominating chairman. A ballot listing officers for 1984 is included with this journal.

September 24 Meeting

The HSA will hold its next meeting on September 24 at 1:00 p.m. Moto Oi will give a sumi-e and haiga demonstration. Members of his school will also attend the meeting. We are sorry to report that effective September 24, Japan House can no longer allow us to hold our meetings at 333 East 47th Street, NYC. As we understand, they have nothing against the Haiku Society. It is a new policy. Other groups such as the Ikebana Society have also been asked to leave. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Japan House for opening its doors to us over the past years. We are currently looking into new headquarters.

An Introduction To Haiku

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAIKU by Harold G. Henderson, a limited number of first editions, are available at \$26.00 each. Order from Alexis Rotella, P.O. Box 72, Mt. Lakes, NJ 07046. These are collector's items which have been donated to the HSA by Mrs. Henderson.

A Special Thank You

We would like to express our gratitude to Elizabeth Searle Lamb for judging the 1983 Henderson contest. Here are the results:

HENDERSON CONTEST AWARDS

1st prize \$100	heart drawn in dust by the old Indian . . . rain	Bill Pauly
2nd prize \$50	whispered dusk — a fox picks its way across the ice	Ross Figgins
3rd prize \$25	mist lifting the loon's cry	Ruth Yarrow

HONORABLE MENTIONS

(in no particular order)

snowman's eye/sinking in/the spring rain	(Yarrow)
Autumn afternoon:/I stand on the shadow/of the sparrow	(Joyce Currier)
ten below zero:/man and boy walk through their breath/to read old tombstones	(Pauly)
hot wind/the roadrunner's beak/opens and closes	(Margarita Mondrus Engle)
Blackbirds descend/through the floaters/in his eye	(Charles L. Cutler)
the old man/closes the shadow/in his hand	(Darold D. Braid)
spring drizzle/rounding the thorn/a drop of light	(Yarrow)



