

GEPPO

the haiku study-work journal
of the

Yuki Teikei Haiku Society

Volume XX:5

September-October 1997

Members' Haiku for Study and Appreciation

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| 2401 | autumn afternoon
street fairs with artists
bring memories | 2411 | Autumn crescent moon
spills golden dubbloons, making
the brooding pond smile |
| 2402 | colorful pumpkins
growing in farmer's field
Thanksgiving pies | 2412 | Huge ripe peach hovers
over our sleeping village
October's full moon |
| 2403 | colorful leaves fall
on marathon runners
wandering wind | 2413 | crisp and cool,
our church clothes ...
autumn morning |
| 2404 | end of summer vacation
returning home
very slowly | 2414 | horizon to horizon
one long flight
of geese |
| 2405 | pomegranate juice
drips on the stone floor
in the painting | 2415 | discussing the gold standard,
the professor
strokes his hair |
| 2406 | remains of summer
fading hibiscus bloom
the setting sun | 2416 | white hedge-flowers gone
but see the glorious
Rose of Sharon |
| 2407 | wine, a verse
early Autumn rain, a fire
Forget-Me-Nots | 2417 | the new school fence
and
morning glories |
| 2408 | hearing
the word 'cancer'
in silence | 2418 | after supper ride
chasing the moon
down the hill |
| 2409 | empty window . . .
an old tin watering can
left on my doorstep | 2419 | work cubicle ~
the supervisor's heels
echoing in the aisle |
| 2410 | Woodland faeries
play "ring-around-the-rosy"
Wind blown oak leaves | 2420 | no rain ~
dry lightning cracks
the sun-baked soil |

2421	heron on the river holding court above the drifting mallards	2433	light rain here and there a bamboo leaf gives a little jump
2422	Green foliage splattered with pale yellow. A lemon tree.	2434	With quick mincing steps quail play follow-the-leader; head plumes keep the beat.
2423	Last night the snow fell. In early morning grandpa ignited the stove soon.	2435	Harvest moon pausing swollen on the horizon shrinks to climb the sky.
2424	Dead yellow leaves are like reminiscences. The wind carries both away.	2436	Yellow aspen leaf trembles at the brink of fall; my throat swallows words.
2425	smashing a pumpkin— one crow & another at the heart of it	2437	Life and death of ours is in God's hand. I believe silver leaf flowers
2426	a kid with kids down the slide I go... hair & skirts askew	2438	Spring is over. now Michigan lake I visited was mirrored surface
2427	early frost— a few scraggly onions curling into pumpkin stems	2439	A summer tea room here I sit with my best friends Wonderful green tea
2428	sunbeams streaming through cedar leaves autumn butterfly	2440	still august and gray geese call from the night sky
2429	seasonal worker with strong provincial accent harvest festival	2441	fallen leaves watching the old man rake them away
2430	your prayer will be answered a praying mantis	2442	days grow shorter tinted leaves falling falling
2431	cold rain only a piece of truck tire driving on again	2443	the quadriplegic in his electric wheelchair buys the caged cricket
2432	foggy night fallen leaves muffle our footsteps	2444	for Grandmother I pick wildflowers again, my fortieth birthday

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| 2445 | now i can hear it . . .
the sound of his breathing
fills-in the darkness | 2457 | grazing at dusk
in the short-needle pine—
a porcupine |
| 2446 | touching lake's water
no need to be colder
but it will be | 2458 | leaves falling
empty nests revealed
along the drying stream |
| 2447 | dead butterfly
I brought it home
next day its wings folded | 2459 | glistening strands of web
in the early morning sun
glint and disappear |
| 2448 | uprooted tree
hangs on its green neighbor
and turns yellow | 2460 | span of my window
and flight of a swallowtail
day's sole excitement |
| 2449 | Autumn sky at dawn—
framed through the kitchen window
Orion stretching | 2461 | in the maze
white handkerchief left behind
full moon |
| 2450 | Bon Festival dance
circles the tower — spirits
circle the dancers | 2462 | at the hotel bar
surrounded with tourists
I view the moon |
| 2451 | At his hospice bed—
gazing out the windowpane
swallows departing | 2463 | in the moonlight
a women opening
the door of her death |
| 2452 | one pigeon flies
from temple roof
all fly | 2464 | "few-flowered" anemones
filling the tundra
scenting the wind |
| 2453 | tide flowing -
sandpiper shifts
its position | 2465 | Arctic breeze —
river ice fragments
tinkling like wind chimes |
| 2454 | scattered clouds
almost reach me
through the airplane window | 2466 | June Arctic ice
the orange twilight
glittering all night |
| 2455 | placid stream —
shadows of bare sycamores
crossing over | 2467 | Late autumn . . .
the roof sheds
another shingle |
| 2456 | courtyard walls
the mourning dove's echoing
ooah-ooo-oo-o | 2468 | shadows streaming
down the wall
- guttering candle |

- 2469 floating orange coals -
a camaraderie of two . . .
pipe smokers at night
- 2470 the air quiet
after meditation
—falling leaves
- 2471 thunderheads
shadows and sunlight
to the horizon
- 2472 the pattern of rain
in the sand—a tuft
of dry grass
- 2473 Enoshima ya
surrounded by homeless cats
bask in winter sun
- 2474 along an old road
treading on the fallen leaves
I wander all day
- 2475 on the roof gable
a crow flicks its shiny wings
—heavy autumn rain
- 2476 after the cloudburst
single thread of spider silk
between the deck rails
- 2477 a russet glow
where pine needles have fallen
among dry grasses
- 2478 the dove on her nest
loose sticks and wierd stuff drooping
from a narrow limb
- 2479 Blue Jays partying
in my bird bath
Drinks are free
- 2480 The shining sun
rushing clouds play hide and seek
Shadows come and go

Chestnut*Haiku with the challenge kigo "chestnut"*

autumn wind brings
the smell of roasting chestnuts
shorter days, long nights
Eve Jeanette Blohm

feeling the smoothness
of the chestnut
in my pocket
Carolyn Rohrig

registration day
new students gingerly picking
Old World chestnuts
Maureen Sanders

August holiday
first early chestnut falling
its split green husk
Sheila Hyland

On the fireplace
chestnuts. Outdoor
early evening
Ertore José Palmero

chestnut trees
releasing their bounty—
a small boat sets sail
Gloria H. Procsal

Mary and babe wait
patiently while Joseph whacks
dusty chestnuts down.
Anne M. Homan

out of the Metro exit
aroma in the air
roasted chestnuts
Naomi Y. Brown

wages of sin
the neighbor's stolen chestnuts
full of worms
Yvonne Hardenbrook

long, long ago
chestnuts in class forbidden
our pockets bulging
George A. Knox

the lowest of yakuza caste. . .
my childhood friend
selling chestnuts
Fay Aoyagi

Chestnut (continued)

battle scarred chestnut
 threaded onto a shoelace
 - twenty one breaker !!!
 Alec Kowalczyk

quickly tossing it
 from one hand to the other—
 the hot chestnut!
 Alice Benedict

in the gutter
 on Chestnut Street
 chestnuts
 Alex Benedict

my ancient grandfather
 eating last year's chestnuts
 little worms also
 Richard Bruckart

skin ripped free
 a tongue flicks its moist prey
 pungent chestnut
 Thomas Ingalz

Notes from the 1997 Asilomar Retreat

The annual gathering of haiku newcomers and long-time Yūki Teikei Society members at Asilomar was on a glorious October weekend. As we zipped down the coast road, pumpkins piled in rows in fields by the sea glowed in sunset light. A perfect prelude to the retreat's theme of transience...

After clearing our heads with deep breaths of sea air, we gathered for a ceremony of welcome, led by Christopher Herold. Our senses were awakened, one by one, followed by minutes of silent meditation. Then, Alex Benedict asked everyone to relate a story of their first experience of the sea. Such a variety of tales! At the end we felt we knew just a little more about each other.

Ebba Story started the series of workshops with remarks and readings on the subject of time. She talked about the scale of time and space, and how people have shown this in haiku. As we went off to write, she asked us to notice specific things: the smell of a pine cone, the sensation of wind, the temperature of the soil just below the surface—and to write haiku.

In Christopher Herold's workshop on common themes in haiku, participants presented haiku written during the afternoon ginko: the topic of pine needles seemed to be one almost everyone had written about, so these were collected for a discussion on Saturday. Everyone wrote haibun in response to a poem by Hank Dunlap, who couldn't be present. Each poet's distinctive voice and attitude emerged clearly in these short prose pieces with haiku.

Friday evening we met in imposing Merrill Hall, where Patricia Machmiller and June Hymas presented 'Cherry Blossoms Meet By-the-wind Sailors'—slides, music, and readings about travelling in Japan and meeting haiku and renku poets. Ellen Brooks, of San Francisco's Theater of Yūgen, took the role of our guide, the poet Saigyō. In impressive style and magnificent costumes, she chanted ancient Japanese poetry. The performance was videotaped by John Schippert.

Saturday morning, Jerry Ball talked about the process of giving names to parts of our experience. We create boundaries and connections within an unbounded cosmos: this is an essential element of the evocative power of season words, and the other images in a poem. Lively discussion ensued... After a break, Jerry and Patricia Machmiller led a *sekidai*, a traditional session for reading and critiquing haiku. Everyone chose ten worthy haiku from those posted (without names)

...continued on Page 12 (back page)

**Challenge Kigo for
 November/December**

Cold Wind
 by ALice Benedict

.....

The cold wind of winter can whisk away even the idea of warmth. Yet even in this, there seems to be something exhilarating!

Dunes in a cold wind—
 the shape they take before me,
 the shape of today
kanpū no sakyū kyō miru kyō no katachi

Seishi Yamaguchi

a gust of cold wind
 humming across the dark mouth
 of the iron bell

Alice Benedict

.....

July-August Haiku
Voted as Best by the readers of Geppo

evening shower
 she shakes the rain
 from a peony
 Echo Goodmansen

new answering machine
 finding out how many people
 don't call
 Deborah Beachboard

SMACK
 of the beaver's tail
 brings me back
 Robert Gibson

cat's midday nap
 stretching into evening...
 August heat
 Carolyn Thomas

japanese pear
 heavy with fruit
 returning its bow
 Echo Goodmansen

house to distant house
 the dogs telegraph the news
 STRANGER PASSING THROUGH
 Alec Kowalczyk

a cricket
 lending the scarecrow
 a voice
 John Stevenson

this night of stars
 his letter, on the desk
 still unopened
 Alice Benedict

a cloud of egrets
 vanish into mist—
 distant sea bells
 Gloria Procsal

Dusting shelves. . .
 the old woman stops
 to wind a music box
 Deborah Beachboard

The mocking bird sings
 something..something else..something
 then sings it again
 Richard Bruckart

Summer evening stroll
 conversations drift and fade
 as we pass porches
 Edward Grastorf

bathed in sunset
 Japanese lanterns
 a richer glow
 Mary Fran Meer

summer day
 when nothing happens
 all day long
 Echo Goodmansen

starry night
 my son in a tent
 with the flashlight on
 Carolyne Rohrig

Members' Votes:
July-August 1997 Issue

* * * * *

Robin Chancefellow - 2311-1 2312-0 2313-0
 Richard Bruckart - 2314-12 2315-0 2316-1
 John Stevenson - 2317-4 2318-14 2319-6
 Alec Kowalczyk - 2320-3 2321-5 2322-8
 Deborah Beachboard - 2323-9 2324-7 2325-13
 Robert Gibson - 2326-5 2327-16 2328-6
 Edward Grastorf - 2329-12 2330-2
 Teruo Yamagata - 2331-2 2332-1 2333-0
 Zinovy Vayman - 2334-6 2335-0 2336-0
 Roger Abe - 2337-7 2338-1
 Echo Goodmansen - 2339-15 2340-17 2341-11
 Eve Jeanette Blohm - 2342-0 2343-1 2344-5
 C. Garvin-Jameison - 2345-2 2346-2 2347-1
 Gloria Procsal - 2348-14 2349-1 2350-2
 George Knox - 2351-1 2352-0 2353-0
 Carolyn Thomas - 2354-3 2355-9 2356-7
 Fay Aoyagi - 2357-0 2358-1 2359-1
 Carolyne Rohrig - 2360-1 2361-11 2362-6
 Joan Zimmerman - 2364-0 2365-5 2366-5
 Steve Bertrand - 2366-0 2367-2 2368-1
 Masaharu Ikuta - 2369-0 2370-1 2371-0
 Mary Fran Meer - 2372-12 2373-2 2374-1
 Naomi Y. Brown - 2375-2 2376-2 2377-1
 David Bachelor - 2378-1 2379-0 2380-5
 Margaret Elliott - 2381-0 2382-0 2383-0
 Yvonne Hardenbrook - 2384-6 2385-6 2386-3
 Sheila Hyland - 2387-6 2388-1
 Eric L. Houck - 2389-0 2390-1 2391-3
 Alex Benedict - 2392-0 2393-1 2394-1
 Alice Benedict - 2395-3 2396-8 2397-3
 Ertore José Palmero - 2398-0 2399-2 2400-0

* * * * *

**Submission Guidelines
for GEPP0**

Deadline for the next issue is December 10!

- Print your name, address and all poems and votes on a single, full size sheet of paper. You can include:
- **Haiku** - send up to three haiku appropriate to the season. Poems must be in three lines; they will be printed as submitted.
- **Challenge Kigo Haiku** - send one 3-line haiku with the current issue's Challenge Kigo. Try to use just the one season word. This poem will be printed with your name.
- **Votes** - Write the numbers of up to ten poems from the current issue you especially appreciate. Circle or otherwise indicate up to three poems to receive 5 points each; the others will receive 1 point each. Poems with the top number of votes are reprinted with the author's name in the subsequent issue.

Send to:
Jean Hale

Challenge Kigo Challenge! Members are encouraged to submit candidate Challenge Kigo essays, to include a season word for your area, a 1-paragraph description, and 1 to 3 haiku (at least one of which should be your own) using the word. Send your Challenge Kigo essay to:

Alex Benedict

The Art of Haiku, edited by Christopher Herold, is an invited series of articles on haiku writing and awareness.

GEPP0

is the bimonthly study-work journal of the Yūki Teikei Haiku Society. Haiku are published as submitted, and members may cast votes for haiku from the preceding issue. In this way we learn by studying the work of others, and by the response to our own work. Subscription is \$15.00 per year, which includes membership in the Society.

**Editor • Jean Hale
Design • Alice Benedict**

Yūki Teikei Haiku Society

1996-97 Officers

Alex Benedict, *President* • Roger Abe, *Vice President*
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**SEASON WORDS
for early winter**

selected from the lists in the 1994 Members' Anthology.
Season: early winter months: November, December, chilly night, departing autumn, start of winter, depth of winter, short day, winter day, winter morning, winter night.

Sky and Elements: sardine cloud, frost/hoarfrost, freeze, hail, ice, icicle, north wind, sleet, snow/first snow, winter cloud, winter moon, winter rain, winter solstice, winter wind.

Landscape: reaped or harvested fields, stubble fields, vineyards, winter creek or stream, winter mountain, winter sea or ocean, winter seashore, winter garden, withered moor.

Human Affairs: gleaning, harvest, Thanksgiving; bean soup, blanket, brazier, hot chocolate, charcoal fire, cold or flu, cough, foot warmer, gloves/mittens, grog, heater, hunting, falconer, fish trapper, overcoat/fur coat, popcorn, quilted clothes, shawl, skiing.

Animals: deer, shrike (butcher bird), siskin, snipe, woodpecker, bear, hibernation, fox, marten or sable, oyster, owl, perch, rabbit, reindeer, sardine, sea slug, swan, weasel, winter bee, winter fly, winter sparrow, winter wild geese, wolf, whale.

Plants: cranberry, pomegranate, dried persimmon, heavenly bamboo(Nandina), pine nuts, radish, scallion, tangerine /mandarin orange, turnip, winter chrysanthemum, winter grass, winter tree or grove, withered or frost-nipped plants.

COMING EVENTS

**Yūki Teikei South: November 22
Long Beach branch of Borders Books**

Jerry Ball continues to organize meetings of Southern California members of the Yūki Teikei Haiku Society, at Borders Books, Long Beach. Contact Jerry at for more details.

Holiday Potluck and Party: December 13

The Annual Holiday Potluck and Party will be at Patricia Machmillers house at 6:00 p.m., Saturday December 13th. Please bring a haiku gift with enough copies for about 25 people. Also, lots of poems to read! Call to let Pat know you will be there (so there will be enough forks)—

**still life with stars
the 1996 Members Anthology**

is finally finished! Our apologies for the long delay. If you are a contributor, you will receive your copy by mail. Additional copies are available for \$5.00. Please send requests with payment to Alice Benedict,

Early Notice: Retreat at Jikoji in January

Christopher Herold will be leading another haiku consciousness weekend at Jikoji Zen Retreat Center, January 17 and 18. For information, call contact him by e-mail at

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the first of a six-part series (edited by Alice Benedict)—a diary of the process of writing a traditional kasen renku in Japanese. It has often been said that the form of haiku is derived from the much older tradition of composing collaborative linked verse. In particular, ideas about what is appropriate in a hokku, or first verse of a renku, have strongly shaped the development of haiku aesthetics. This may be especially true for English speaking haiku poets: Bashō, whose work is a touchstone for many of us, was a renku master whose so-called haiku were composed as possible first verses for renku. The way the verses of a renku are thought to connect to one another, and the artistic decisions that are made to create a satisfying whole are still matters of some mystery to writers in the English language. This series is a fascinating glimpse of Japanese renku poets at work. We are most grateful to Fay Aoyagi for translating her experience for us.*

Writing traditional kasen renku in Japanese

Part 1. Omote – the first six verses.

by Fay Aoyagi

Since I went to Sado Island in April and wrote traditional Bashō-style renku in English and Japanese with experienced Japanese poets of the Milky Way renku group, my interest in renku has kept growing, along with my curiosity about traditional rules. I had never written renku in Japanese. In fact, I have not composed anything creative in my native language, Japanese, since high school. So, I approached Prof. M. Shinkū Fukuda and Mrs. Fumiko Tachibana who I met on Sado Island and asked if they would write renku with me, and teach me about the tradition. The following is a record of my struggles, discoveries, lessons and joyful experiences with two renku masters.

Prof. Fukuda (Shinkū) is a Bashō scholar, professor at Kokushikan University in Tokyo, and leader of the Milky Way renku group (with whom Yūki Teikei Society members had written renku). Mrs. Tachibana (Fumiko) belongs to both the Milky Way renku group and the Nekomino renku group, whose leader, Prof. Meiga Higashi, is a famous renku master and scholar.

A kasen renku is 36 linked verses, or links, in four parts; *omote* (front - 6 links), *ura* (back - 12 links), *nagori-omote* (front of second half - 12 links), and *nagori-ura* (back of second half - 6 links). It must contain three moon links, two sets of love links, of either two or three consecutive verses, and two flower links. Renku writers in Japan follow a *shikimoku* (set of basic renku rules). It is strict, but how the renku master interprets it can vary. We followed the *shikimoku* the Nekomino Group uses.* This first installment is about what happened as we wrote the *omote*—the first six links, or front section. Translation of verses from Japanese to English is mine, with help from Ebba Story. In Japanese the verses are 5-7-5 (for a long verse) and 7-7 (for a short verse), but the English translation does not reflect syllable counts. *Kigo* are underlined.

Even when I write renku in English, the first six links are always tough. This section, I supposed to be calm, but I have a tendency to go wild. In these links we must avoid God, Buddha, religion, love, death, sorrow, and the name of a place or person. The exception is that in the *hokku*, or first verse, we can use the name of a place or person. We wrote an autumn renku, so the seasonal progression in the first six links is: autumn–moon–autumn–no season–summer–summer.

Because this is *bunin*—writing through the mail (actually, by fax), we took turns writing. The order was Shinkū–Fay–Fumiko in the first 18 links and Fay–Fumiko–Shinkū in the second half. Fumiko and I sent five candidate verses to Prof. Fukuda. He acted as renku master: selecting and even modifying verses!

Before we started, Prof. Fukuda sent me these tips about writing renku:

The following are points you should remember when you write renku:

1. Do not repeat *ji* (self), *ta* (other), *han* (interaction with others), *ba* (scene) in the *uchikoshi-ku* (two verses above the one you are writing). For example, if the *uchikoshi-ku* is set outside, do not write about the outside.
2. Try to avoid similar topics, materials and feelings, or emotions.
3. Do not link too closely. Shift is very important.
4. We have tremendous materials to write about and draw from. Do not feel limited. A renku is a mandala of human life!

Also, when you write the *waki-ku* (the second verse), bear in mind:

1. The *hokku* is a greeting from a guest.
2. The *waki-ku* is the response from a host. It should be in the same season, time, and scene as the *hokku*.

*For a copy of the *shikimoku*, or basic renku rules (translated into English) please send SASE to Fay Aoyagi at

Milky Waya *kasen renku* byShinkū Fukuda, Fay Aoyagi and Fumiko Tachibana
August 17–November 7, 1997

Omote (front)

銀漢や佐渡加州掛く連句橋

ginkan¹ ya sado kashū kaku renku-bashi

Shinkū early autumn (ba)

Milky Waya *renku* bridge between

Sado and California

弧を描き飛ぶ月影の鷺

ko wo egaki tobu tsuki-kage no sagi

Fay moon (ba)

heron flies

making an arc in the moonlight

客を待つ壺に白菊投げ入れて

kyaku wo matsu tsubo ni shira-giku nage-irete

Fumiko autumn (han)

waiting for the guests

I toss

white chrysanthemums into a vase

紫襖紗祝襷差し出す

murasaki fukusa shūgi sashi-dasu

Shinkū no season (han)

congratulatory gift
in purple wrapping

夏場所の最後の一番取り直し

natsu-basho no saigo no ichiban tori-naoshi

Fay early summer (ta)

the last game

of summer sumō tournament

judges call a re-match

オープンカーにあがる歓声

ōpun-kaa² ni agaru kansei

Fumiko summer (ta)

at a passing convertible

cheers

I sent these five possibilities for the *waki-ku*:

A: 弧を描き飛ぶ月への一矢

ko wo egaki tobu tsuki e no ichiya

an arrow making an arc/flies to the moon

B: 月の都へ始めの一步

tsuki no miyako e hajime no ippo

my first small step/to the capital in the moon

C: 月の砂漠で踊る私

tsuki no sabaku de odoru watakushi

I dance/in the moon desert

D: 兎影見えぬと貴男ぶつぶつ

toei mienu to anata butsubutsu

your complaint/'I cannot see the rabbit's shadow'

E: 初のお座敷文披月

hatsu no ozashiki fumi-hirome-zuki

my first banquet/in the month of July

In Plan D, I wrote without using the word 'moon.' In my *saijiki*, *toei* (rabbit's shadow) is another way of saying 'moon.' In Plan E, I used a character for 'month' which is the same for 'moon.' In Japanese, months are *ichi-gatsu* (1st month: January), *ni-gatsu* (2nd month: February), etc. *Fumi-hirome-zuki* is an ancient name for July, an autumn month, so it would fit the season. 'Hirome' in Japanese means 'to be exposed,' or 'to be introduced.' I wrote from the point of view of someone (like a geisha) whose first banquet fell in July.

However, Prof. Fukuda told me that unless someone before you has used the character for 'moon'—'*san-gatsu* (March)', for example, you must use the word 'moon', not 'rabbit's shadow,' even though it refers to the moon. Also, '*fumi-hirome-zuki*' contains the character for moon, but doesn't mean 'moon'. Therefore, both Plan D and Plan E were not selected. He added that in the *waki-ku*, you should not introduce a new idea—should be read as a pair with the *hokku*.

A *renku* master can change a verse without consulting the poet. This process is called *itchoku*—it's how my *waki-ku*, 'heron in the moonlight' finally came about.

However, my fifth link, 'sumo tournament' was not edited! My five candidates for link #5 were:

A: 夏場所の最後の一番取り直し

natsu-basho no saigo no ichiban tori-naoshi

the last game/of summer sumō tournament/judges call a re-match

B: 旧姓に戻りし友の夏帽子

kyūsei ni modorishi tomo no natsu bōshi

a summer hat/belonging to my friend/who returned to her maiden name

C: 金色に次女髪染める半夏雨

kin-iro ni jijiyo kami someru hange-ame

mid-summer rain/the second daughter/dyes her hair golden

D: 堂々の女指揮官蟻の国

dōdō no onna shikikan ari no kuni

in the ants' empire/a proud commander/is female

E: 虹の帯葉巻きを配る若社長

niji no obi hamaki wo kubaru waka-shachō

rainbow/a young president/distributes cigars

¹ ginkan: *amano-gawa* (the Milky Way). The character for 'gin' means 'silver' and 'kan' means 'alien.'

² ōpun-kaa: open car (convertible)

The Art of Haiku

Now—where were we?

by Alice Benedict

Haiku are human-scale poems. They speak of the world that human beings participate in—both what might be called the physical world, and the world of imagination and emotion. In addition to presenting objective images, a haiku directs the focus, intensity, and movement of consciousness. From the infinity of details of any given moment, we select just a few. These we place in convincing proportion to ourselves, and to each other. To write a haiku is to become a guide, perhaps even a host, as we invite someone else—reader or listener—to be present at our evocation of the world at a particular time and place.

purple shadows fall
across the Rio Grande—
wild geese streak the sky

—Gloria Procsal¹

deep within the stream
the huge fish lie motionless
facing the current

—James W. Hackett²

In the first poem the observer blends into a huge autumnal Western landscape even as she describes it— and by doing so, has invited us, the readers, to join her in this act of immersion. In the second poem, with the words ‘deep’ and ‘huge’, we are asked to compare ourselves with both the stream and the fish, and if possible to imagine ourselves as those things. In both of these poems we are present as at a celebration: participating in the expanse of sky, the sight of migrating geese, the strength of the current met by the powerful and patient fish. Poet and reader alike have in effect come into being along with the world of the haiku.

The things the poet mentions determine the scale, and direct our consciousness to move about in its compass. We are asked to contemplate things in a particular sequence:

among dry grasses
a herd of cattle standing
the cloudless sky

—Alex Benedict³

Here we move from the dry grasses, to the cattle, to the sky. With each new thing, the focus enlarges the world. When the poet falls silent, we are free to go on with this expansion. And we can see how, by leaving grasses and cattle indefinite: just ‘dry grasses’, and ‘a herd’, the poet draws our attention most vividly to the sky.

clouds escape over the mountains leaving me the thunder

—Pamela A. Babusci⁴

These clouds do not just recede or disappear, they ‘escape’ over the mountains. From our vantage point, which is implied in the foreground, we inhabit a rapidly expanding world, as the clouds speed out and away. But with the word ‘leaving’ the focus turns back to the poet, who connects the idea of all this space with the sensation of thunder—a huge world now contained in a human being present in the poem. When the poet is present, the haiku can feel very intimate: after all, we are being invited to identify with that person, or someone the poet knows, and to participate directly in the poet’s consciousness.

an old man's love
 while trying to forget it
 a winter rainfall
oi ga koi wasuren to sureba shigure kana

—Buson⁵

at my hut
 all that I have to offer you
 is that the mosquitoes are small
waga yado wa ka no chiisaki wo chisō kana

— Bashō⁶

With Buson, we imagine the pain of reconciling ourselves to lost (perhaps ill-advised) love, then, the qualities of winter rain: its bone-piercing cold, a certain bleak sound, perhaps—and again, the feeling of misery and desperation this can bring on. The continual movement of focus between human emotion and the outer world intensifies and deepens our ability to recreate the moment as the poet experienced it. In Bashō's poem, despite apparent poverty, the host's humorous and expansive spirit prompts him to offer the only hospitality possible in this humble home. As I accept the invitation—the hut crowded with host, visitor, and small mosquitoes—I somehow feel a deeper empathy with the poet—and for me, the character of the people in the poem becomes the main focus of consciousness.

In a poem seemingly imagined from an outside vantage point, we participate from the larger continuum of space and time in which we all are present.

Spring river rushing—
 on each bank where the bridge was
 someone stares across

—Donna Claire Gallagher⁷

With 'each bank', the poet and I view this scene from an unstated spot—for example, I could be floating on the river, glimpsing the stares of people on either bank, and the roads leading to the bridge abutments as I am whirled on past. Oddly enough, a feeling of calm or detachment arises in the midst of all this hair-raising turmoil.

leaf pile blazing
 white flakes of ash
 drift up through the rain

—Christopher Herold⁸

Here, the play of imagination among motion-charged images creates balance, and the moment blossoms in its particulars. There is also contrast between this moment and the ground in which it is set—that is, everything not of that time and place.

Haiku, more than other forms of literature, invite the reader to be aware of what is outside of, or implied by the poem, as well as what is shown. Since almost everything that is evoked by a haiku is absent in the poem itself, our experience of it gives play to imagination, and this unfolding creates a sense of space, movement, and life.

¹Gloria Procsal, *Honorable Mention, 1997 Kiyoshi Tokutomi Memorial Haiku Contest*

²*The Zen Haiku and other Zen Poems of J.W. Hackett, Japan Publications, Inc. 1983, p. 8*

³*A Shadowed Path, 1995 Members' Anthology, Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, p. 14*

⁴*frogpond, XIX:2 September 1996, p. 14*

⁵*Haiku Master Buson, Yuki Sawa and Edith Shiffert, Heian International Publishing, 1978, p. 135*

⁶Blyth, R.H. *Haiku, Volume 3, Summer-Autumn, The Hokuseido Press, 1982, p. 801*

⁷*Into the Wind, 1994 Members' Anthology, Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, p. 7*

⁸*Woodnotes, no.28, Spring 1996, p. 19*

Notes from the 1997 Asilomar Retreat

(continued from p. 5)

on bulletin boards. The merits of the haiku receiving the most votes were discussed. Patricia and Jerry, as *dōjin*, led the discussion about form, season words, and other qualities that seemed to make the poems more (or less) successful as haiku. They noted that it is unusual for one or even a few haiku to receive most of the votes: a poem that appeals to one person may not strike someone else at all. Their skill at keeping remarks focused and helpful made this an enjoyable as well as informative session. After lunch, another ginko, after which we returned to make haiku posters with the wide variety of paper and art supplies that seemed to have appeared magically. Everyone seemed especially creative this year—the room was papered with interesting haiku, laid out with considerable panache!

At the Saturday night renku party, two groups each composed 10-link *omote-awase*. Amid friendly discussion, helped along by liberal amounts of wine and snacks, we wrote right up until the magic hour of midnight, when we had to be out of the meeting room. Sunday morning, we said goodbyes amid final rounds of reading—haiku, tanka, and haibun that had been composed over the weekend. Another year...another wonderful Retreat!



Calendar of Events

-
- Nov 8 **Regular Meeting 1:30 p.m.**
Saratoga Public Library
- Dec 13 **Holiday Party and Potluck**
Patricia Machmiller's 6 p.m.
- Jan 10 **Regular Meeting 1:30 p.m.**
Saratoga Public Library

Deadlines

- Dec 10 Submissions to Nov-Dec GEPP0.

Writing Renku with Japanese poets

(continued from p. 9)

I had to consult the saijiki intensively because I do not know many kigo. A word that caught my attention was *hange-ame* (midsummer rain). The saijiki explains 'farmers are afraid of mid-summer rain because it may flood their fields' The word 'afraid' stirs my imagination—a second daughter dyes her hair despite her mother's protest!

Fumiko wrote to me:

Your Plan B has 'divorce' flavor. Divorce belongs to the love links. 'Golden' in your Plan C is not appropriate because there is 'moon' which shines. Also, because there are stars in the *hokku* and moon in the *waki-ku*, you should not use a sky-related word in the remaining first 6 links. 'Rainbow' in your Plan E is a sky-related word, too.

As you can imagine, there are many things to think about! But, kind Fumiko added the following encouragement:

I like your Plan D, but the *omote* should have calm tones. Perhaps that is the only reason Prof. Fukuda didn't choose this one.

... To be continued in the next issue.

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