

The Human Experience

A Haiku Mid-Term

Introduction

Haiku often resemble painting more than writing, demanding a genesis in images and an end point that doubles as a beginning. It seeks not to tell a tale of experience, but to lead us into one. I remember once taking a hike through the Columbia Gorge on a beautiful summer day. Moss covered the trees to the left and a chorus of birds mingled with the rustling creek below. The only two clouds in the sky sat across the creek on opposing sides of Mount Hood, as if balancing its pointy tip. I stood silently, fully engaged in my surroundings and as my friend came to my side to see what I was seeing, I said, “this is haiku.” He responded, “ok, let’s hear it,” and I said, “no,” holding out my hands and spinning in a circle, “*this* is haiku,” and after pausing for a moment, I continued, “you just have to find it.”

The essence of haiku is in the experience itself, it’s in the noticing, it’s in whichever subtlety or similarity the experiencer explores. The conversion into language mostly serves to permit sharing, like drawing a picture, but with words instead of paint tubes. It’s precisely here that this art form becomes a very writerly craft, seeking to say everything while saying almost nothing. The greatest haiku poet of all, Matsuo Basho, offers an example:

Inside the temple
Visitors cannot know
Cherries are blooming

There is much to be said about rules in haiku, for as we pour these experiences into words they take on the August scent of poetry, and as Robert Frost once said, “poetry without rules is like tennis without a net.”

In search of these underlying tenets, separate studies conducted by A.C. Missias and Max Verhart surveyed dozens of the most prominent English language haiku poets. Their results were far from conclusive. The common responses of *nature / seasonality, poetry, brevity, a-base-in-reality & heightened awareness* were offered by many, but not one of these principles was agreed upon by all. It’s to say that just as tennis is not defined by a net, haiku is not defined by its rules but by what they facilitate: the expression of human experience, of deep feeling and subtle sensation in our world of space and time. In response to Verhart’s call for a haiku definition, one poet simply responded:

A short rendezvous
Scented with the perfume
“eternity”

The haiku in this collection are offered as short poems, as snapshots of art that present snippets of the human experience. They aspire to unlock the door to deeper parts of ourselves, to dust our hidden shelves and to awaken us to the surrounding world.

Finally, this intro wouldn't be complete without sharing my favorite haiku, written by the Japanese master Kobayashi Issa after the death of one of his young children:

the world of dew
is yes, a world of dew
and yet

David Sudar
January 2012

Summer

Under the pine tree
I count ten me's
To the top

Street fair
The faces of people
Fascinated by faces

Blazing sun
The sitting stone
Shares its feelings

From stop sign
Cars, bikes, birds
To stop sign

Wild roses
She steps off the trail
With my hand

Kissing his mistress
He tastes the pineapple
He turned down

Deep inside the rabbit hole
A porcupine

Sequoia shadows
Overshadow
Spruce shadows

In one hand in the other
a lantern hers

You and I
Bumbling streams
From the same pond

Street fair
Strolling like a butterfly
In a spring meadow

Climbed by a child
the
vined
fence
between
neighbors

Letting down her hair
Slowly, slowly
She removes her top

Morning dew
On the leaf under
The caterpillar

The ups
And downs
Of bird flight

Canyon Creek
Bringing glitz and glamour
Midday sun

She didn't plan to hurt me
I just got too close
The bumblebee

Mister chipmunk
It looks like we're neighbors
My name's David

Autumn

Falling in the storm
Ripe ones, raw ones
Apples in the grove

Without moss
The uprooted tree
Would be naked

The humming subway
Even in New York
Solitude hides in song

Field of pinecones
The unbearable weight
Of every step

This old mountain
Knows more about me
Than I do

Across that river
The people who labor and love
Are called Canadians

Almost settled
A gust of autumn
Disrupts the pond

Airport lobby
The man she waits for
Departed long ago

Roadside puddle
The lonely crow
Stops for a drink

Late autumn – the cowboy,
Flying to Argentina
For summer rodeos

Rain in my face
Bicycle on my butt –
The Portland life

Not knowing
My neighbor's name
Until a lunar eclipse

A city girl
Peeing in the woods
With a grin

Autumn breeze
Under the apple tree
A noun hits my foot

Day after Halloween
I put on
My business costume

Leaving home
Some things don't fit
In boxes

Earthquake
Seeing only now
Her soft core

Its dewdrops are planets
The Milky Way

Winter

Winter sun
The birds too
Chirping

 If laughter is bonding...
 The writer with herself
 In friendship

Stray flurries
Into my open mouth
The moonlight

After a misty sunset
I awake
To a frosty morning

Fluttering fireplace...
A winter companion
Warming my heart

Suburban chimneys
Exhaling their everything
Side-by-side

Joy and sorrow
The same pursuit
In this world of time

Winter
Wraps itself around
A sleeping squirrel

With my dad
The memories
Have a canvas

A few fluffy clouds
 Moonlighting
As the winter sky

Lying in bed
He offers parts of himself
She can't touch

Dawn – the lawyer
Without time for a wife, looks
At himself in the mirror

Chitter chatter
The onomatopoeia
Of old friends

Low on acorns
The chipmunk leaves her burrow
Reluctantly

The sneaky moon changes clouds

Only his wife turns
When he says *honeybee*
At the party

Winter deepens...
Branches droop towards
Interlaced roots

Us and them
Out of a womb
Into the ground

Spring

Overcast morning
The cute barista
Calls my name

Fallen blossoms
Line the sidewalk
Of my past

Almost midnight
In the family home
One light flickers on

A doctor's wife
The life she could have had
A sailor's wife

The word ALMOST
A thing of my past
Almost

A new community...
Countless mysteries
Underneath each rock

Surrounded by people
He retreats inside himself
The turtle

After the breakup
She takes a dance class
In need of a partner

Poets picking lilies
And somewhere
Would-be poets fighting wars

Each car entering
The misty trail of another
Spring night

Between steps
A misty rain
Fills the silence

Inside the garden
Inside the insides
Of the gardenia

How I love this woman
Who just tripped
Over a twig

the
year giant
another
sequoia
growing
still

Rainy, cloudy
Misty, sunny
Rainbowey

Poetry
Combines
Skibilities

The morning sun
Brightens everything
Even the pessimists