

<http://www.gendaihaiku.com/kacian/anti-story.html>

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Haiku as Anti-Story

Jim Kacian

Have you ever had to try to explain haiku to a family member, to a friend, to a stranger? Haiku are not really difficult, once you are willing to take the words at their own valuation. Either one is willing to accept the word “lily” to represent a lily or one isn't. And if you are, and the point of haiku is that a lily is a lily, not a symbol of peace or virginity, at least in its core meaning, then it's not asking very much of a reader or listener to “get” “lily.” So why is it so hard? Why does it need explanation? Because the mother, friend, reader is looking for story. “Yes, it's a lily, but what is it really?” Your audience is looking for story, but you're giving them — anti-story.

Everybody knows what story is. Ask anyone to tell their story — not only would they understand what you wanted, they would know to say, in what order, with what emphasis. Story is the form most people choose to explain themselves. More formally: story is a narrative of sequential and seemingly related events told with the intention of entertaining, elucidating or convincing the listener or reader. It generally follows rules: there is usually a beginning (which is not quite the same as saying that it begins somewhere); a middle, wherein there is some sort of conflict or impediment to make the certainty of resolution unclear; and an ending wherein that resolution is obtained or not. In our personal stories, of course, these resolutions are not finalized, since we inhabit that middle section, still working through those conflicts and impediments. Even so, most people, in telling their stories, tell them as though they are certain of where the story will end up. There's a shape to story to which we willingly accede. We are so conditioned to it that we take it for granted, and would notice instantly if it were to go missing.

All of which is to say, story is a habit of mind. Like all habits, it serves a purpose — we generally adopt habits because they permit us to function more comfortably in the universe, to multitask, perhaps, or to do odious tasks without thinking about them. Habit is the automation of a task in order to continue to function without giving entire consciousness to that task. I depend upon habit for my creative work — I find I do my best thinking and writing when part of me is engaged in some semi-automatic endeavor, such as driving a car long distances, or especially, paddling a kayak on an open sea. When I'm driving or paddling my body is active and purposeful but doesn't require my full concentration, and so that part of me which I identify with creativity seems somehow to be more available. I find that I solve all sorts of problems in this mode. This is probably the case with everyone here. Habit is a useful and necessary part of life.

The habit of story is of particular value to all of us. Story is the tool we use to take the disparate events of our lives and make coherence and perhaps even sense of them. Biologists tell us that we exchange every cell in our bodies every five years. So no cell of this body was part of the creature you and I identify as Jim Kacian when Jim Kacian traveled around the world in the name of haiku back in 2001. Yet part of my personal story includes that trip, and these cells, though no part of it, have adopted the story as their own. Story permits continuity, and continuity permits me the opportunity to maintain this Jim Kacian persona despite the entire cell make-over I've had since then. I rely upon this continuity, with its accumulation of experiences, to direct me into the unknown future. It's part of my story to do so.

To repeat: story is a habit of mind, and like all habits, it serves a purpose. But also like all habits, it distorts our sense of reality. The truth is that no cell of this body has been around the world. You probably have all engaged at some point in the philosophical enquiry of how many grains makes a pile? The most usual lay-person version of it is, how many replacement parts does it take to make a new car? If I begin swapping out components of my Prius, even if the replacement parts are identical at some point it will be a completely different vehicle. Does this take place when the very last part has been exchanged, and not before? Does it happen when one or several major components — say, an engine, or a transmission, or both — are replaced? When does this exchange process cease to create another version of Car A, and in fact create the first version of Car B? And as for cars, so for bodies — when does the alpha version of Jim Kacian cease to exist and the beta version replace him?

If you accept that indeed a change finally does happen at some point, you will have to say at that point this is no longer Car A. But it's much more difficult with people, and at least part of the reason it's more difficult is because we grant some power to this continuity derived from story. Story is important to us. So in honor of that fact, let me tell you a little story . . .

* * *

A dozen years ago or so, I was working on a cruise ship that had pulled into port in Ketchikan, Alaska. As was usual at that time, most of my shipboard duties took place when the ship was actually at sea, and so in port I had a few hours of time for myself. I chose to use this time as I had done many other times in Ketchikan, to hike the Tongass National Forest to Eagle Lake. I found the trail right where I had left it last time, and took off at a brisk pace, up through the temperate rainforest, across a few low-lying boggy spots, to an alpine meadow with a small granite-locked lake. Just past this lake the trail leads up precipitously and narrows, running a ridge that crests another mile along and affords a gorgeous view of Eagle Lake, so named for its twin bays which look like wings spread in flight. Right after this vista I came to a junction, a place where the man-made trail intersected with a path frequented by the local fauna — moose and fox and wolf, and especially bear. It was around 11 am when I crested and began the slight descent, and since I am small and edible, I was eager to let any of those creatures that might be around know I was coming.

“Hello, Mister Bear,” I called. “I'm coming down the path now, Mister Bear.” Now, though I am the narrator of this story, I can't presume to know where a bear comes from, be it a cruise ship on his off hours or some other place, but I do know that bears are creatures of habit, and follow a routine that makes them predictable. If there were an omniscient or particularly a reliable narrator in this story, someone who might be sitting on a higher peak further along with a good view in all directions, then we might know where this bear came from. What we do know is that at 11 am a bear on his bear path crossed the human trail overlooking Eagle Lake, with predictable consequences. I'm going to pause in my story right now and say a few words about anti-story, and specifically in terms of haiku. This is, after all, a haiku journal, and there are plenty of journals that feature story. But so far as I can discover, there has never been a journal about anti-story. In fact, only a single book has ever been published on the topic. But I think it a very important subject, and perhaps by the time I'm finished you'll agree to its importance, and perhaps also agree that haiku is nearly the only literary form that exploits it.

The problem with talking about anti-story is that it exists as a negative. Gertrude Stein, commenting on the Oakland of the early 20th century, famously said “There's no there there.” That's exactly how it feels to describe anti-story. It's nearly impossible to describe on its own terms, and therefore one is compelled to discuss it in terms of its opposite. And so I will, but I'm also going to invoke a metaphor from outside literature hopefully to give a sense of what effect anti-story might have, not only on story, but on our very perception of reality, and what value that might bring to this discussion.

We have discussed story, its shape and its conveyance of meaning. Add to this its utilization of time as a means to its effects. Story unfolds in time, like music or film, but unlike, say, painting. Story is therefore an inductive art — it depends on piling up sufficient quantities of data to make its resolution plausible (unless of course it's working to confound expectations, which is the same thing but inverted). It takes time to lay up this information, and time is one thing story has in abundance. The novelist John Irving once said “No matter how good a story, I can always make it better.” And we don't doubt that he can, in the usual ways of storytellers everywhere, by taking the time to lard up the details so that they seem to take on significance. The storyteller is usually holding the floor, and will continue to do so as long as his story holds the attention of the audience. Why would he willingly shorten this opportunity? Of course John Irving can make it a better story, and in fact he had better do so to keep his credentials as a storyteller. It is time and consequent detail that he adds to the story's shape that he means by "making it better," and which potentially expands its meaning.

* * *

So let us have before us some clean metaphor of story: think of it as a process with a definite shape evolving in time: a snake.

Anti-story is not the opposite of this process. Anti-story is the absence of it. In other words, don't think of a snake and then a no-snake. Think, instead, of a snake — and then cut right across it. An anti-snake.

Anti-story is this action, the anti-process of story. It is not cumulative but instantaneous, not inductive but intuitive. It could not exist without the story. Still it is not the story, but rather the lightning strike across it, that defines it.

When we call upon this kind of process, we are gathering an altogether different sort of information. Story gives us one kind: we use it all the time to determine things that matter to us in our linear lives. If I go to the doctor, one of the arcs of information she is likely to pursue is my story: how have I been? anything changing? sleeping well at night? My personal history might be useful in determining if anything is happening on the non-story level — that is, on the level of those changing cells. But this isn't the only information my doctor will want: she will also want to take some tests which are the equivalent of anti-story: an MRI, for instance, a cross-section image of, say, my kidney, one cell wide. When you look at that image will it look like a kidney? Not as it looks from outside, not as it looks in a narrative. But such an image provides a different kind of information that might prove helpful in determining its health. The means to this kind of information is that lightning stroke across the linear, biological reality.

We don't need to think of these two different sorts of information as antithetical in any way — in fact, we want both, both can help us to a larger understanding of the world. And in fact, we need both if we are to approach anything like an objective view of reality.

Anti-story's cut is like the moment we move from wakefulness to sleep — we can't predict it, we can't force it, we can only enter it and then be surprised when it happens (or that it happened). We lose the linear continuity of self when we fall into sleep and enter a world that is not linear, but cuts across the linearity we imagine our reality to be. Dreams are instantaneous electronic events that have infinite depth and only in “interpretation” seem to have coherent linearity. This is why exploring dreams can be a fruitful process, since it reveals the patterns the “self” imposes on these random impulses, while revealing almost nothing of dream itself.

To return to literary terms, then, and to approach haiku: anti-story intersects story at 90° to its flow, yielding a cross-section of its content that surrenders one dimension (time) to gain another (depth). And, I contend, this is what the very best haiku have always done.

Before we explore a few of these haiku, it's worth saying that haiku does not deny story — in fact, you can often feel story on both sides of it, just as you can see snake on both sides of that cut. And it's also worth saying that haiku have traditionally existed within their own story, and that this story might be termed “the pageant of the seasons.” Latterly haiku have adopted a larger canvas, but it is still largely within the realm of the interaction of natural impetus and human emotion that haiku reside. But haiku have never been about the narrative of the seasons, except in the broadest epistemological way. Rather, they have always been concerned with incident, that is, with cross-sectional cuts across that seasonal narrative which highlight specific events as though they were the apotheoses of such events — the full harvest moon, the peak of cherries blossoming, that one butterfly that is all butterflies. In fact, what I consider to be the single most identifiable characteristic of haiku is the *kire* — not 5-7-5, not three lines — the *kire*, the cut, which not only identifies relationship (and all haiku are about relationship) but also removes the haiku from linear narrative. The *kire* is exactly that lightning stroke across narrative we've been discussing — is, in fact, anti-story.

* * *

Haiku leaps above merely descriptive short lyric precisely through this literary masterstroke — without it, it would be simply another way to layer up the effects of narrative. In short, haiku would be prose, would be tale-telling, would have no birthright of its own, without *kire*.

This is easily proven: let's contrast a pair of haiku with and without *kire* and consider what literary value they have. Take, as an example, this poem by Deborah Coates, chosen at random from her collection *Cat Haiku* (Century Press, 2001):

You say chocolate
Is bad for cats, but I think
You are just greedy.

and this one by James W. Hackett from *The Zen Haiku and Other Zen Poems of J. W. Hackett* (Japan Publications, 1983):

A bitter morning:
sparrows sitting together
without any necks.

It's apparent both are intended to be haiku: the choices of form are evident, and the titles of the books leave no doubt. Both poems speak of other creatures. Coates presumes to speak for the inner reality of cats. Her poem is, in fact, a “cute” anthropomorphism in prose, arranged to superficially imitate haiku. The author wishes us to be caught up in the narrative of herself and her cat, and presumes this will be sufficient to hold our interest. There is nothing at all that disturbs the narrative line here: it is a little story, with its beginning and middle and end, and nothing interrupts its flow.

Whereas Hackett makes a simple and pointed observation about the reality of sparrows. This is a significant difference, certainly. But even if we were to grant that this is simply a matter of style (I'm not, but some might), there is a much larger difference — Hackett's poem has a *kire*. This is typographically marked by the colon at the end of the first line, but even without this device it would be evident. The first line, or the context line, establishes the first image — “A bitter morning”. Stop for a moment and consider that phrase — “a bitter morning.” It could lead anywhere, and the typographical pause is meant to allow us the time and space to do just that. The poet then adds his own selected idea, the unforgettable image of huddled birds. That's it. It's that pause that allows the reader or listener to stop the flow, to remove himself from the narrative, to move outside of time. This is the art of haiku,

and this is what the cat haiku so patently lacks. Imagine if Hackett had played for narrative flow, if he had written instead:

A bitter morning
and sparrows sit together
without any necks.

Here we have the same content, in the same order, but the poem — and the poetry — has been destroyed. It is the *kire* that makes the poem, that cut across time, and it is haiku, of all the literary forms in the world, that performs this action best.

Haiku, as we have said, is always about relationship — here, between the bitterness of the morning and the crowding of the sparrows — and that the handling of that relationship by cutting across its story by its anti-story often realizes its finest poetry. Worlds are conjured in that pause. Time stops. The Russian philologist Bakhtin suggested a little game to make this point: given any two words, he conjectures, it is impossible to guess the third. Of course it's possible to provide sufficient cultural context, or to appeal to well-known phrases — what are you likely to guess, for instance, if given the two words "Alice in . . ."? Most people of a certain age would say Wonderland, despite the fact that Wonderland is such an odd word in itself. We know it well enough that it's become a default for us. But if you had grown up in another culture, or another time, there would be nothing inevitable about Wonderland, and then what might you have chosen? Another age demographic would just as likely say "Chains." And these are just the defaults. If we chose to respond outside the defaults, we could try all day long and never be certain of guessing correctly, because, as Bakhtin has noted, there is no correct or automatic answer. Try this with your friends: it isn't a question of how well someone knows you, it's a matter of how free the language is, and we might see this freedom as extending to mind itself.

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What opens the door to this almost infinite possibility is that anti-story cut, that moment's pause, that *kire*. The haiku poet wishes you to savor the vast panoply of possibility before sharing the special relationship he has noted. In fact, it's that pause that makes you appreciate just what a task it is to find the right thread and to present it so that it seems inevitable. I'm certain you've all had the experience of reading the first phrase of a haiku and having a conviction of where the poem was going next, and then being utterly confounded by the reality of the text. It's the pause outside of time that makes the unexpected not only possible, but desirable.

Whereas just the opposite is true in narrative: it's not in story's, or the story teller's, best interest for the reader to have control over so much possibility — the story teller wants to remain in charge of where the story leads, and so the onrush of narrative is critical. Story has every bit as much potential for freedom within it, but nothing like the same openness. Story is invested in keeping the clock running, or, if it's very good, speeding up, as it winds its way ineluctably forward. Story, it follows, is in alliance with time. Anti-story, to the contrary, opposes it.

Doesn't it follow, then, that every such cut across relationship in time would yield haiku? That every still point in time is potentially a poem, or several? The answer is, yes, but we won't necessarily be the ones to recognize it. We all bring our own stories to our lives, we all have the story habit, and we are bound up in maintaining its arc, its momentum, since it is through story that we identify ourselves. And such stories are as limiting as they are preserving. What is available to me in this story arc — what I would accept and nurture as a haiku — may be utterly blind to the relationship of this moment, and so no poem might suggest itself to me at the very moment that same relationship is forcing you to get out your pencils. This is my story and I am doomed to it — just as it is somehow important to me to speak

to you about these things, and to maintain this fiction of Jim Kacian to you and to myself for a little while longer before my atoms are once again distributed across the universe. Part of that personal fiction involves a bear in Alaska — remember? Of course you do — we retain story effortlessly, it's like breathing to us, the habit is so deep. So what happened that time when I crossed the bear path on my way down to Eagle Lake?

Nothing!

You see, I was there at 11 am on a Tuesday, and the Mister Bear was there on a Thursday. What a lousy story — anybody could improve it. And how would you do it? Almost certainly by having me and the bear arrive at the same point on the same day, no? In other words, coincidence — I repeat, coincidence: simultaneous happenstance. The story teller manufactures these things as a matter of course — consider the history of the novel without the letter that slips under the door but also under the rug, not to be found until too late, and so on . . . Co-incidence. This sort of thing undoubtedly works, for story, but anti-story is something else, as we have seen. It is not about this larding up of invented value, even if this effect can seem to add up to some sort of conclusion or argument. And likewise, haiku are not about the added value of greater detail and coincidence. The sparrow poem does not get better if you are told that there were three birds in the nest, or that their feathers were brown, or that an owl was perched on a branch above them: it realizes its significance by renouncing story, through anti-story, and no amount of elaboration can match it. On the other hand, greater elaboration can only help the cat poem, but not as haiku, only as a greater record of the author's supposed identification with her subject. In other words, not the lightning stroke of poetry, but the long rumble of prose.

Haiku contain their own incidence, and certainly we choose those we find to be most interesting, most striking, most significant, to record and share, of course we do, if for no other reason than to satisfy our story of ourselves as poets. It means we trust the cross-section method to reveal something to us that cannot be had simply by telling more story. Haiku can never tell the story of the Trojan War, for instance (despite of recent book of "popular" haiku which purports to do exactly this for a hundred of the west's best-known literary masterpieces), and we know that story can be told in great poetry. But it can tell the significance of this moment right now, and the next, and how they relate to this further one and the one down the road. Haiku is always about relationship, as are stories, but when you take the story out of them, something quite different happens, something not narratable, something poetic. Haiku comes to delineate mind by looking at these non-narratable moments and taking them for itself.

* * *

In story there is always a destination, a place, an event — which is its point and impetus. But in anti-story, in haiku, it is consciousness itself which is the place or event that is the point, which is where the important occasions of one's history have taken place, and in the retelling there is the potential expressiveness not merely of what is fit for the narrative line, but rather what is possible — for the conscious can contain all potentialities — and at the same time because of its endless capacity, it cannot be nailed down. What results then is a self-estranging perplexity, not so much a mystery as a my-story, all the richer for the impossibility of prediction, all the more difficult to achieve for the exquisiteness required to find the tenuosity that is indeed the connecting thread. This is not to say that narrative cannot contain emotion, but rather that the receptacles of emotion are private in their individuality, and however Hollywood and Nashville might exploit the mythic elements of such similarities, what gives them life is our personalizing them — not so much “I identify with that movie” as “that movie identifies me.” And of course this is not true only to haiku, but to all sensibilities which cherish, as Wordsworth suggests in his “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,” “that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.” It is the feeling of the cut, of the anti-story, that makes us value the poem of the sparrows in the way we do, and

likewise the feeling of the expansiveness of the story of the cat poem that makes us value that poem as we do. It is not the sun that moves me, though it may bake me — it is how I move the sun that determines the value I might have of it. It is the human in these poems of nature that make us return to them, or to read them, or to bother to write them at all. Without that emotional content, we are no better off than if we had never had the experience at all. And it is the asperity of anti-story that contains the energy and interest within them, in a way that the substantive additions of story cannot. But of course you, as haiku poets, already know this, even if few others do.

Here are a few poems I'd like to share with you that cut across our habit of story and instead exemplify that lightning stroke. They are all selected from the recently published *A New Resonance 6: Emerging Voices in English-Language Haiku*. I chose this source to illustrate that anti-story is not only a tool for the masters of the craft, but in fact of every serious practitioner regardless of their relative stage on the haiku path.

Kind of Blue the smell of rain

Allan Burns

Your experience of this poem as listeners is more nuanced than if you had encountered it solely on the page, since you can hear the first three words as a familiar colloquial phrase, and need only secondarily identify it as the title of an album of jazz by the late Miles Davis. The identification of both the mood and the music with the sensual element of the final phrase is the necessary relationship, and the *kire* here is unstressed because of the one-line format of the poem, but apparent typographically (the album title is in italics and nothing else is) and from the sense of the phrasing.

house inspection
a stranger plucks
the violin

Glenn Coats

This poem's embodiment of the sense of invasion would be enough to give me cold feet about selling the house. A clear *kire* after the first line — and think of all the places we could go after "house inspection." This stoppage of time gives the resonance of that lonely pizzicato an even greater sadness.

sand fleas
the bites don't stop
at her tan line

Susan Constable

It is difficult to make good humor of sand fleas, but this poem uses them as perfect foils to human foible. Again there is a clear *kire* which stops the story, only to be picked up in a completely unexpected direction. And how is it that the poet knows the bites go on past the visible barrier?

casualty lists —
smaller and smaller
print

Kristen Deming

This poem heartens us only to dishearten us. The first phrase is its own story, and could lead us so many places. The *kire* lets us linger there a bit, and then the poet takes us to a deeper despair with the misdirection between the second and third lines, where we feel not only the initial sadness again but the cynicism of our cultural response. Three emotions in three short lines.

all the boys
stop to watch the train —
spring wind

David Grayson

Here the *kire* is delayed to the end of the second line, which means much of a story is already apparent by the time we pause — and the resolution of that pause is a stock phrase from the haiku world. But it is the right one, the one that keeps open everything we don't know in the story, and still tells us everything we need to know.

woodsmoke
a fleeting feeling
of madness

Andrea Grillo

The *kire* follows a single word, but the word opens the mind wide. The mind's eye follows the rise of smoke into turbulence, and the suggestion that such turbulence is emblematic of the emotional state, especially in the season of cabin fever, seems a natural and convincing relationship.

far from home —
I find a shell
by the Tokko River

Paul Hodder

This one begins like a novel, and just as the story is getting revved up, the poet gives it that anti-story cut: and the result has more resonance than any “far from home” story I can remember. That shell is a perfect symbol for what the poet wants — a token that he has traveled, but also a portable home to ease travel's pain.

dusk —
father and son
scything the meadow

Jørgen Johansson

Another home tale made all the more meaningful for not giving in to Irving's axiom: you certainly could make a better “story” out of this by adding details, but as it is this is a perfect tableau, with all its meaning inherent and nothing to waste. The dusk is of course actual and necessary, but it is also figurative and predictive, and so carries that much more pathos.

blazing sun
I tell her
what I really think

Eve Luckring

This one follows Wordsworth's dictum perfectly in that “the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.” The sun is not the agent of truth here; rather, it is the feeling engendered and then projected upon the sun. And what a fit object for the heat of this truth, the telling, presumably after some time, of what's what.

cold drizzle —
a goodnight kiss
on my bald spot

Bob Lucky

If this kiss had been administered nearly anywhere else, the poet probably wouldn't have even noticed the rain, or perhaps he would have been singing in it. But as it is, what a perfectly emasculating moment: again, heightened by that full stop of anti-story after the weather report. The poet manages to make us squirm with his mortality and enjoy his sense of irony at the same time.

how deer
materialize
twilight

Scott Mason

This poem carries two stops, and oddly, one of them is at the end of the poem. Not that every poem doesn't carry a stop by ending, but this one is like a tuning fork we strain to hear until its very last vibration. The story here never really gets started — rather there is a kind of enquiry, and the reader takes a step, then another, when the double cut deepens the wonder.

Berlin Wall
a smooth stone
in my pocket

Gene Murtha

Unlike the previous poem, this one bristles with what is unsaid. The first line not only locates the poem, but charges it with significance — and then stops. We pause a moment, wondering what else has happened on this spot. Then the poet tells us: he has a smooth stone in his pocket. It is a piece of the fallen wall? Or the first stone to be thrown in a further demonstration? Or a personal memento from other walls and other wars? Or something else again? Any storyteller could tell us exactly what it is. A poet lets it be everything it could be.

fingers poised
above the keyboard
spring rain

Michele Root-Bernstein

It should be apparent by now that haiku is full of story, that incident after incident recommends itself as a storehold of emotion, and that good poets choose from amongst these incidents to achieve

their ends. These fingers will play, and that will be the continuation of the story. But in this haiku they will be forever hovering above the keys, and their potential never exhausted, just as the possibilities arising out of the spring rain are endless.

hazy moon hung over the new year

Jeff Stillman

This is another multiple-stop poem, and depending on the choice of cuts, either an apotheosis of the incoming year or a self-deprecating and humorous jab at the poet. It's impossible to read this poem only once, since alternative readings demand equal time, similar to those cleverly crafted drawings that look one way in positive space and another way in negative space. This poem is the same process rendered in words.

field's edge . . .
those flowers
the mower missed

Richard Straw

The poet suggests worlds in that opening line — and its subsequent halt. He also manages a complex optimism in the remainder of the poem, noting our casual routine of death in the name of aesthetics or property value, and at the same time how true beauty and true value manage to elude our best-laid plans.

waiting room
the obituary page
folded in half

Tony Thompson

Just as the first line in the preceding poem opens to nearly everything, so too does this, only in the human realm. All manner of story could be suggested here, but the poet, after giving the reader time to recognize this immensity, suggests one — and obliquely — that might have consequence to any number of those waiting. It is not the multiplying of images, but the one incisive one, without telling the whole story, that permits the range of emotion that accompanies this brief notice.

january thaw those stories just stories

Roland Packer

This last one, taken out of alphabetical sequence because its subject matter is so germane to this topic, recognizes the truth of story: that it is dependent on the weather, or at least the emotional weather. As these poems show, it isn't necessary or automatic to ask what happens next? How does it end? Such questions presume a great deal of our reality, and privilege story, an artificial conception, over process, which is the truth of our lives. It's not possible for us to know how it all ends, but it is possible to recognize what is of significance along the way. We have the tool. All we need is the willingness to confound our habits, and use it.

To return to Alaska one last time: even though we crossed paths on different days, that bear was present for me when I was there. In my mind we related, and haiku is always about relationship. The

bear who was not there in story was present enough for anti-story, and so for a haiku: calling the bear who might be there “mister.”

If this poem can make any claim to value, it must reside in that word “might.” “Might” is not a very good story word, at least not very good if it remains unresolved — we don't want to read a story wherein Ahab might have caught up with Moby Dick, but might not. We want resolution. But in this haiku, “might” will never be resolved. It is a cut — the cut of anti-story — right through the real story, or the real lack of story, which my tale is. “Might” ultimately is not good enough for story, but it is the very underpinning of anti-story, and what makes haiku possible.

I don't expect we will forego story in the future. We will tell our tales, and embellish them, and pretend they round us out and make us whole. We seem to need story, and for just these things. But those of us who know anti-story, who can confront the truth in all its jagged, unfinished, momentary magnificence, will keep returning to haiku. Haiku, to those who know, is the real story.

Ottawa, Canada
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