

otata 34

October, 2018



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(October, 2018)

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from otata's bookshelf

Loren Goodman, *Non-Existent Facts*

TOKONOMA

“There are truths you can sense,” he said, “and there are truths which I know. And what I know is greater. In summer, I go and hunt the Lady of the Moons in sand-pits. The sand is motionless, but the air above is restless. Then the sand begins to move, and the females come out. Thus, while you saw nothing, the sand was all bored through inside under the push of the females ascending from the bottom of the earth to meet the males. You see, that brown earth whose surface is smooth and still, but which writhes in the dark like molten iron in the fire. So much for them. And it’s the same for others, green like chestnut shoots; for others again, blue like knife-blades, with a black spot on their heads; for brown ones like bricks; for those which are red all over; for black ones with green dots; for green ones with black dots; for round golden ones like small, dry onions; for long ones like pipe stems; for hard and soft ones; for the sightless ones which make love while sleeping like sacks being filled; and for the ones that shiver all over more restless than the wind, which can look all around with their large crystal eyes. So much for love.”

— Jean Giono, *The Song of the World (Jean le Bleu)*
trans. Henri Fluchère

Stefano d'Andrea

*campanili –
Umbilicus veneri
nelle fessure*

*(Umbilicus rupestris è una pianta carnosa, nota comunemente come
Ombelico di Venere.)*

bell towers –
Umbilicus veneri
in the cracks

*(Umbilicus rupestris is a fleshy plant, commonly known as the Navel
of Venus.)*

*cucina bianca –
c'era solo il diavolo
di color nero*

*(è un'antica cucina povera italiana legata alla pastorizia, realizzata
con alimenti di colore biancastro.)*

white cooking –
only the devil was black

(An ancient Italian poor-man's cooking connected to sheep-breeding,
made of whitish foods.)

*il gelo dentro. . .
polenta e Barbera
per fare finta*

(Il Barbera è un famoso vino rosso italiano.)

*freezing inside. . .
cornmeal mush and Barbera*
just for show*

(Barbera is a famous Italian red wine.)

*ubagu
lentamente l'ombra si nutre di foglie. . .*

*(ubagu, antico termine dialettale ligure, che sta ad indicare l'ombra
profonda e umida di un bosco.)*

*ubagu
slowly the shade feeds on leaves. . .*

*(ubagu, Ligurian dialect word, which indicates the deep and humid
shadow of a forest.)*

Robert Christian

FROM MY WINDOW

These are the folk
built on lines
as against
the seasons unremembered

passed except in
broad categories
- male/female
local/foreign...

So why unless
In some particular
come beauty
love or loss

17.9.19

Let the lorries
bearing the Fair
come and go
on the grass over

that part of the
Park for who
most of all I
would stop the real

Even as September
makes some leaves
yellow impossible
on that scale for me to do

23.5.87 FOR AMY

(G.F. Watts: 'Choosing', a portrait of Ellen Terry, c. 1863)

Violets and camellias, trust and mistake;
the argument is never finished which flower to take.

Loren Goodman

SENOI SAYING

If the dreams are strong
The soul will gravitate
To the place of its given design;

If the dreams are weak
The soul will pick another host
Or waiver between states until awake

POEM FOR HUMBERTO AK'ABAL

In the course of preparing your biographical
Note to accompany the upcoming publication
Of your poems in English translation, I notice
That in the language of the **K'iche'** Maya,
"**K'iche'**" means "many trees"—not only a
Savory open-faced pastry crust filled with
Broccoli, mushrooms and cheese—but also
The roots of the Nahuatl name for your country,
Guatemala, aka, "Place of many trees." From
My upstairs room, the trees also look like
Broccoli. Furthermore, I think it is interesting
That in **K'iche'** Mayan "K'i" means "many"
And "che" means "tree," because in Japanese
"Ki" means tree. It also means vital energy, the
Source of all life. And of course, as we all know,
"Che" means Guevara.

ON RHYME

Rhyme is a wonderful thing
But don't try to make things
Rhyme. The world's got no time
There'll be time for rhyme
When it's over

OUR RELATIONSHIP

Complications died
as a result of
childbirth

Escape

Justin says I can't leave
Korea until I write 50 poems
Already here over a year
Better get started
She won't wait forever—

But I'm a little afraid
There's no escape
The more I write
The more I'll want to stay

OASIS

Well
Well, well
There's a pyramid
At the bottom of my well

NINE HAIKU

From time to time
The clouds moon
Innocent by-standers.

In the cicada's cry
Almost anyone can foretell
How soon and how horribly
One must die.
Frog jumps in!
Laughter

Blowing from the west
Fallen leaves gather
No moss. In the east
A complete unknown
How does it feel?
I run like the wind.

Winter seclusion – halitosis
Listerine, that evening,
Gargling to the rain in the mountain.

Don't weep, insects –
Lovers, stars themselves,
Must part their hair
Without combs.

My life, -
How much more of it remains?
Tonight I sleep
Without briefs

No one travels
Alone this way but I,
This dumb evening.
Sad to say me & myself
Have gone elsewhere.

First autumn morning
the mirror I stare into
shows my father's face.
“Hi, Dad!”
“Find your own mirror, son”

The lamp once out
Cool bears enter
The tent frame.

Giuliana Ravaglia

*primo mattino:
le camelie bagnate
di luna piena*

early morning
the camelias bathed
in full moon

*fiori spezzati:
il respiro del prato
sul tavolino*

broken flowers —
the prairie's breath
at the small table

*senza la luna:
sentieri della notte
i gelsomini*

moonless
paths at night —
the jasmines

*la sedia vuota:
quando s'alza la luna
dondola ancora*

at moonrise
the empty chair
rocks again

*nubi di sabbia:
un filo d'acqua chiara
a precipizio*

clouds of sand —
a strand of clear water
over the precipice

*pioggia serale:
il profilo dell'acqua
sul caprifoglio*

evening rain —
water's profile
on the honeysuckle

*ultimo viaggio:
nel giardino d'ortensie
veglia la luna*

final voyage —
the moon keeps watch
on the hydrangeas

*bocca di ciliegia:
il rossetto sulla camicia*

cherry lips
lipstick on her blouse

*freschi giacinti:
il mio cuore scalzo ancorato al cielo*

fresh hyacinths:
my barefoot heart anchored in the sky

*quiete sul fiume:
profumo dei monti sull'acqua chiara*

quiet on the river:
the mountains perfuming clear water

mattino:
un ventaglio di sole ad ogni passo

morning:
the sun's folding fan at every step

inizio d'estate:
un fiordaliso sul seno bianco

beginning of summer:
a cornflower on the white breast

vento d'aprile:
profuma di bucato la nostalgia

april wind:
nostalgia in the smell of laundry

amaryllis:
in pieno sole danza la sposa

amaryllis:
the wife dancing in full sun

controvento:
l'alba verde delle fontane

upwind:
the green dawn of fountains

mare in burrasca:
la ruvida carezza della scogliera

sea-squall:
the rocks' rough caress

accappatoio:
profumi e tamerici sulla veranda

bathrobe:
perfumes and tamerisks on the veranda

mela verde:
di nascosto il primo amore

green apple
the first love in secret

amaca:
all'ombra dei glicini il dondolio delle onde

hammock:
the rocking of waves in wisteria shade

solstizio:
profuma di ginestre anche la luna

solstice:
perfume of broom flower and the moon too

le roselline:
il cuore di mio padre in cima al prato

the small roses:
my father's heart at the field's crest

Translations by John Martone

Peter Yovu

ELEVEN FOR SEA AND SKY

The darkness lies under me. My face is the hull of a great ship.

§

I traced my ancestry all the way back to the ocean. And then I rose up to the sky.

§

The reason birds sing is to establish their territory, science affirms, and that's absolutely right, in a world with no sky.

§

The ocean is a flower cut from the stem of the moon.

§

After the funeral, I went back to her house. Pretty much as it was when I last saw her, everything in its familiar place, meticulously clean. With some hesitation, I opened the door to her bedroom. Perhaps it was her felt presence that held me at the threshold. There was sky all over the floor.

§

The sky never recovers from a fallen tree.

§

I have spies at the bottom of the ocean. They report to me while I sleep.

§

Self is to consciousness what salt is to sea.

§

The more you love the ocean the better you drown.

§

Waves, foliated with light, their roots indistinguishable from the sea.

§

I glimpsed the sky. It was a blue light around my heart.

John Levy

LETTER TO ROBERT LAX

Dear Bob,

I like addressing you, though
you no longer live on Patmos
or in New York, or anywhere on Earth. The last time

I visited, taking the ferry
to Patmos and arriving on December 31st,
1991 I found you in the coffeeshop

after I stood outside for a few minutes
watching the islanders
dance (divided into squares of window pane)

and heard the loud music. We
walked the short way uphill
to your small home, and then dynamite

began to explode, Happy New Year!
I hadn't known they'd set off dynamite and
you either forgot to mention it or

wanted me to be surprised. I was.
I remember that it was on that visit you described
Richard Avedon coming to Patmos to

photograph you. You thought his small
entourage of adoring assistants and hangers-on
was a bit objectionable. You, who objected

to almost nothing or no one, but they
were a little too much for you and then Avedon
wanted you to pose in a way

you thought silly. But you did it
and he took the photo of you
in a fashionable black leather jacket (did he

supply it? I don't remember you ever
dressing like that) leaning back on
a small grey shrub and looking solemn,

wise (which you are), compliant
rather than with the sparkle that
you radiated day and night. You were

a quiet sort of sparkler, but Avedon
(whose photos I often love)
dimmed you and literally put a dark cloud

behind your head. Yes, dramatic. And
a fine photo. But you told me you were
disappointed by it and also that you couldn't

give me a copy of it because Avedon
had only given you one. Or was it two?
As I recall you said it was the only time the islanders

didn't like people who had come to visit you.
And here I am, visiting you again, longing

for your warmth and acceptance. And joy.
I can find it, find you, in your poems and journals
and in the letters you sent me, often

with drawings, but while it isn't second-hand
it also isn't the same. I am tempted to
write something the way you might, say, such as

a list of colors
in which all the repetition
deepens

and brightens
the colors and the words
themselves and the silence

between the names of colors, a silence
like another name
for color.

I won't, not here. I'll reread
one of yours. Each line a single
color and in this poem

you alternate between
black and white, unpredictably
repeating sometimes

and constructing four columns.
You built so much with
what you wrote and these color poems

are a fraction of your body

of work. I can't recall speaking of
anyone else's
body of work, but

with you it seems right. I wish
more people owned all
your journals, plus

your other books. I wish
I were walking with you in Patmos
or were on the boat with Damianos and Leslie

and you, on our way
to that other island's
beach, where we swam

and had lunch
in 1985. I wish I could receive
an answer from you.

David Gross

endless
stars

in
a
quart
jar

one
last
firefly

worn-out sleeping-bag
reading Issa
by moonlight

sleepless
blooming
moonflowers

first light
hovering kingfisher
lifting fog

sunrise
starlings
gathering
shadows

over cornfields
heat shimmers
hawking dragonflies

Joseph Salvatore Aversano

IN THE MORNING & EVENING OF THE BODRUM PENIN- SULA (20.08.2018)

this morning it's clear
the leaves sing too
or more birds are singing
than there can possibly
be leaves

the whitecaps

trying to get the
white of this moon right

& as if without effort
but by barely

striking as the light of
the moon this
shore

the pupil dilated new moon

wind
chime
string
tangled
wind

Mark Young

SEVEN GEOGRAPHIES

SHAANXI

The traditional view
is that the earliest
advocates of change
in traditional China
received crucial
support from the
bad science that
produced song titles

like "the poet
continues his fight
for life" & "my first
taste of government-
run health-care on
a massive scale."

SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLANDS

A rancher builds
a barn with broken
veins beneath the
surface of a lake. He
inhales moisture,
but I haven't seen
his proboscis
actually in the water.

TAGUIG CITY

The initial calibration &
in-orbit performance of
the secrete-&-sense circuit

motif can look quite cool

& may explain why the
right to political opposition
has mouth-watering desserts.

BLANTYRE

Why not explore the
moonrise in an adult male
category 'C/D' resettlement
prison modeled after your
mother's ancestral home?

PAMPANGA

Radiocontrast induced
nephropathy follows
your friends & favorite
celebrities to ensure they'll
be totally safe from the
updated Death Match.

LAKE GARDA

It was quite calm
today. Small waves

lapped the shingle.
The Alps in the back-

ground, interspersed
with the odd outcrop-

ping of grass & hordes
of people descending

stunning snow-capped
train-station escalators.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Namaste, all. Kelp
is a fun & easy
way to find that the
official web site for
inputs used in inter-
state sales out of
Yerala is a low-
power television
station licensed to
a nun living in sin
in Garfield, Texas.

Tom Montag

More from
GYPSY POET TOUR

(518) WISDOM

Wisdom
will not

come down
the mountain

with you
unless

you walked
her up.

(531) HIGH PLAINS

Far is
not far

out here.

(544) SHADOW

Shadow
is the husk
of what

you think
it is
you want.

How far
that light
traveled,

never
to touch
the earth.

(560) HOW LATE

How late
sun shadows

the dark wind.
Mystery

is this world
turning.

Silence is
the offering

evening makes,
the only

gift we take.

(562) INSTRUCTIONS TO THE POET

Leave a door
open. Leave

a light on.
A way in

for those who
are coming.

You don't know
what solace

they may need.

Richard Gilbert

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

not much written
the silence of apples
awaken

what cannot reach —
being left behind —
a thoughtful moon

forbidden fruit there
provided it hopeless hang
where paradise is found

what is heaven?
colors of a cruising cloud
gambrel of sky

that day you praised me
sweet with summer
gloom of a vaster world

with summer
comes a conscious state —
no one sees the stone

be larger as the sea
dwell — a little — everywhere
ride
indefinite

we talk in careless
plummet again just
how deep

try the sky! among
redwood trees — co-self
emself: zir, unbound

behold the atom
and subterfuge is done —
a soul sways

seeds endow the day
mountain to the evening till
a sole cashier

my purple sowing
yet no art to say — to your
simplicity

fiction — when
its small enough — need not
be a haunted chamber

zirself behind zirself
concealed — an assassin
in our apartment

maker firmament metropolis
fragment — origin — sand and hue
to fetch make believe —

in music —
faint — filaments of
diviner things

far abroad — a summer's day
glimmers prove — dissolve — suggest
— enchant

flings in Paradise —
harrowed — a face among birch
iodine of the moon

to be alive —
existence in itself
— able as a god



cf. Amherst manuscript 187:

Forbidden Fruit
a flavor has
that lawful
Orchards mocks.
How luscious
lies within the
Pod
the Pea that
Duty locks —

Inspiration & extracts (here and there) from Emily Dickinson (Wikisource, Johnson, 88, 194, 239, 284, 659, 660, 663, 667, 670, 671, 673, 677, 931, 1681, 1740).

Alegria Imperial

SORROW

*in between the clock's baffles
the shrinking dusk*

sapped of sky her windows crack
moving chess pieces of fretwork shadows

a lawn mower the silenced rain coated
sheds off dead pollens

from her watering can tears soak his name
graveyard marigolds veil

she plants feathers swept by trolling winds into
eyeless storms on the oak's ribs

far off dark steam dying mountains exhale
lick sagging breasts of clouds

on her steps into night's whorls
wild stars sink

the moon's ripped seam
a wind-crease

i believe

nourishing drowned agonies the gutter drip in my ear
a barnacled well
forest of languished speech the potted begonia storm-driven
into my despondency
teen squirrel dodging arrest scrambles to lodge in my cortex
a tangled labyrinth
now a fistful of me bundled in grey sheen
the sparrow ceases as thought
pain screams through a gauntlet of blistered walls
finding reasons for my deafness

Kelly Sauvage Angel

the last flutter
of monarch wings
winter bonsai

temple crickets
the mantra extends
beyond the bell

Donna Fleischer

claws in . . .
feral cat paws my ankle
as I write

week-long Spring rains —
singing loudly to the screen
how much you're my sunshine

difficult to love
and easier than you think
valentine's day

river of grasses
greener with each day —
Spring's torrent

winter dark —
a dream of color
forms

bra off —
lickety-split she heads out
for the studio

summer sky —
burnt fried chicken
sea sucks at

black cat
on his side in the sun . . .
mourning doves strut

the cold warms
in mid air the bird calls
clearly through

waves ~
summer day
shimmers

waves ~
winter day
shivers

door bell
just rang — will be back
(some day)

— *for Takahashi Shinkichi (1901 – 1987)*

Bill Cooper

dawn fog
an egret sharpens her beak
on a rock

dawn hoofbeats
threading a black-eyed susan
into the garland

sideways bee bending crocus bending bee

old spoonbill
stretching the wing
more frayed

baby toes
curling and uncurling
a vigil for peace

culling iron
a large oyster whacked
from the clump

Elmedin Kadric

snow peaks
on a placid sea

two sides
to every story

warm breeze on a neat-to-know basis

my back
on the

field the
warmth of

it

it's
its

it
is

to
ward

a
ship

less
night

lonely
with it
inside
firefly

meaning well conditioned

turned to a large swivel stool by then

out of thin air out
of thin air out of thin air
out out of thin air

Patrick Sweeney

I don't step on ants
and yet I haven't called my sister
in years

November
diagramming her last
sentence

fallen from outer space
Jomon dolls
in a broken state

cedar stump ring
crossing through the year of my birth
a blade of light

memory foam
mama's side
of the bed

Galvani's green twitch
wheelchair access
to the lab

reunion:
the suicides we ran
in high school

tilting gravestone
the math king's
rate of inclination

crush of blue spear grass
those who have come
out of obligation

Holy Cross School incinerator:
the ashes of my long
division

the voice my father used
when he said:
'it's getting dark early, boys'

school-crossing
the older students fight the urge
to turn and bow

spoiling the story:
mister no-such-thing
as a falling star

flea circus:
Madame Zola's harness
is cutting her in half

another autumn
the transportation director's
new elephant joke

Louise Hopewell

the love letter
I'm still waiting for
peeling paperbark

Tarzan rope
pigtails swing
through the air

burger joint
our argument comes
with the lot

beach combing
a mollusc shell
tangled in seaweed

shooting star
you say you don't see
the point

Lucy Whitehead

driftwood
how lightly you wash up
on my shores

in the hammock
where we lay all summer
fallen leaves

deep in the maize maze
we lose ourselves
in laughter

I dream of giant flowers
hanging in the sky
summer's end

handfuls of blackberries
and purple smiles
autumn twilight

blackberry wine
I ferment
another poem

the red dress
I never wear
autumn leaves

Alessandra Delle Fratte

*orme su orme
nel fango a primavera —
senza una meta*

tracks on tracks
through spring mud
without a goal

*lungo il cammino
di passo in passo un'ombra —
seguo la luna*

along the way
step by step a shadow —
I follow the moon

*vagabondando —
fra petali di neve
trovo me stessa*

wandering away —
among snow petals
I find myself

*tramonto d'autunno —
solo ieri conchiglie fra le mani*

autumn sunset —
just yesterday shells in the hands

*canti stonati nei boschi d'autunno —
io e il mio sorriso*

tuneless songs in the autumn woods -
my smile and I

Corrado Aiello

*pendolarismo —
il viavai ininterrotto
d'un'ape ubriaca*

commuting —
the restless back and forth
of a tipsy bee

Angela Giordano

*sopra la pelle
gli origami di luna —
tenda di pizzo*

the moon's origami
on the skin —
a lace curtain

*vecchi in ospizio —
la fragranza d'arancia
sotto le unghie*

the old in hospice —
orange fragrance
under the nails

*dentro le tasche
i granelli di sabbia-
fine d'estate*

sand in
the pockets —
summer's end

*i primi freddi —
la punta delle foglie
tutte arricciate*

first cold —
leaf-tips
all curled

*sprazzi di viola —
melanzane autunnali
nell'orto accanto*

flashes of purple —
autumnal aubergines
in the next garden

*fili sottili
riannoda il pescatore —
le nubi sfilacciate*

thin threads —
a fisherman reties
ragged clouds

Claudia Messelodi

rising sun
even in my dreams
bird song

Elisa Bernardinis

wind on the shore —
the baby tries to escape
his shadow

*nel palmo aperto
tutta la rotondità
della cipolla*

in my hand
all the roundness
of the onion

*prime luci autunnali —
sul sonno del rifugiato
passi affrettati*

early autumn light —
hurried footsteps
in the refugee's sleep

Lucia Cardillo

*poesia ...
nascono margherite
tra l'insalata*

poetry ...
daisies sprout
in the salad

*libellula rossa ...
leggo per due volte
la stessa pagina*

red dragonfly...
I read the same
page twice

*rosso crepuscolo ...
farfalle si scontrano
coi miei pensieri*

red twilight
butterflies collide
with my thoughts

*tiepido sole ...
macchie di ciclamini
tra foglie secche*

pale sun ...
patches of cyclamen
among dry leaves

Angiola Inglese

*nuvole—
il vento di stasera
sposta la luna*

clouds —
tonight the wind
moves the moon

*autostrada—
in un lampo
i girasoli*

highway—
sunflowers
in a lightning flash

*rondini in volo —
fiori della cicoria
colorano il cielo*

swallows in flight —
chicory flowers
color the sky

*equinozio —
l'ombra lunga
del melograno*

equinox —
the persimmon's
long shadow

*equinozio —
il colore brunito
del girasole*

equinox —
the burnished color
of a sunflower

Margherita Petriccione

*chiesa rupestre —
il fresco gocciolio
di una piccola fonte*

stone church —
the refreshing trickle
from a small source

mountain pass —
the wind's scented
push

*passo montano —
l'impatto odoroso
del vento*

*rose sfiorite —
sulle cesoie di mio padre
un pò di ruggine*

faded roses —
on my father's shears
some rust

*profumo preso in abbazia
mio marito avvolto dalle api*

perfume brought from the abbey
my husband enveloped by bees

*rocce abbaglianti —
odore caldo e secco
del sentiero*

dazzling rocks —
hot and dry smell
of the path

*giri di un falco —
profumo di origano
a ondate*

the hawk's gyres
waves of perfume —
oregano

Peter Newton

a r c i n g
over the interstate
a bridge of birds

a pancake on a stem
the
mush
room
hall
ucino
genic

Labor Day time and a half

a
top
the
cairn
an
apple
bow
season

napping my mother's death mask

Mark Levy

moonlit sea
incandescence
of the one mind

dawn

dark angels depart

here is what is

Minh-Triết Pham

freckles
on her cheekbones —
cherry blossoms

heavy summer heat —
the desert crossing
of her bed

Madhuri Pillai

a plane through my insomnia the silence after

stepping into the garden the noisy miner silent

Sonam Chhoki

MEMORIES: ANOTHER NAME FOR LOVE

My friend's son has started his first year at university. Photos of him jostle on the wall. There, he is as a warrior-king with an ill-fitting crown and black-daubed cotton wool beard. In another, astride his first bike, he grins at the camera. Several show him looking solemn in his school colours. She has framed the selfie he took recently. There's a self-mocking assurance in his smile.

'It all goes so quickly, ' she says wiping the invisible dust on the frame.

'One moment, he is asking endless questions: 'Why do I have only one grandfather?' 'Why is sugar sweet if it is bad for you?'; The next, he doesn't want to talk to us. He slammed the door of his room if we asked him anything.' She shows me the warped door, 'my husband changed the hinges and rehung it, but there it is,' she says with a rueful smile.

I try to reassure her: 'He is in a reputable university. He will make friends and discover a different place and way of life.' But my words only seem to deepen the palpable silence of her 'empty nest'.

*trees in fog
in answer to the barbet
leaves fall*

*growing chill
the whistling thrush
more shrill each dawn*

SOME THINGS BEGIN WITH A NO . . .

‘You look different.’ Tashi is accustomed to jibes at work. He knows that it is not so much to mock him as to cover their own embarrassment that his colleagues banter about his appearance.

‘Have you stopped walking into doors?’

Tashi does not wince but his hand instinctively goes to his face. It is a relief to feel no sore welts.

‘You seem happier,’ another colleague remarks.

Tashi smiles slightly and continues to scan his desktop screen.

Later that evening for the first time in months he opens the door to the bedroom. Her perfume lingers in the room. It had been hers ever since she threw the iron frying pan at him. BASTARD she scrawled in kohl on his side of the bed. He still tiptoes from room to room. ‘She isn’t here,’ he chides himself. She has stripped the thang-kas off the walls. Even the prayer room is bare of statues and the offering bowls.

The house seems bigger without her and the single ceiling bulb shorn of its pendant shade fills the corners once hidden behind the furniture.

*prayer flag clouds
strung across the sky
the glow of sunrise*

*in the insistent call
of the hawk cuckoo
the gift of spring rain*

leaning to the moon
the old cypress
full of crows

clinic window
dark and wind-sculpted
the hills of my childhood

not yet dark
the scops owl's call
startles a crow

pale light
filling the gorge shrine
the wail of a hill partridge

Guliz Mutlu

GYNOECIA

HERA Once upon a time there was a goddess who had a golden apple.

PYRE A bowl of pink peppers, our raspberry liquor and some bergamots... Will you come to my banquet? **Eos** Fiery eyes! Hurling balls of fire! Who shaped the forest? Who shaped the death? I cry for the goldfinches, the jays and green woodpeckers! I cry for the dewy, drowsy peacocks with some ornaments on their feet! I cry for the dock-sorrels with delicate skin! The sweetest of all, the sunny marjoram amid the cloudy, white thistles! **THETIS** From the depths I heard your cry, my only son!

PENELOPEIA Tiny, because inseparable by the shore, Ithaca and the sea. White cedars, half of the sea white. Cedar forest, the quail **EGG** moon. Behind the subtle woven web, untouched. Archaic smiles, the bow left on the knees. I am not daring, darling. A sage woman, her necklaces of red clovers.

ANDROMACHE A bride adorned, bejeweled, disappeared! **Helen of Troy** Love is the strength of guiltiness! **HECUBA** Sons of my bosom, I am only a mother! Women ease the war. **CASSANDRA** All my disbelieved words, the country and sword!

CLYTEMNESTRA Are you pure in mind, dog-faced! Am I the king carrying these purple tapestries on my strong shoulders! Am I the king drying these purple tapestries under the golden blaze of the sun! I take away the ashes of my king from the altar! I spread these purple tapestries on the altar! These are the great works of fine linen! Behold! Do not touch the tapestries! Take a look at these! You will see my light!

HERMIONE Tell my darling, the neroli in bloom! Helene Hymen! Gather us, garland weaver, the orange blossoms and neroli blooms! Long lasting and true! Deep

and sweet! His love is the omen of purity! Her love is the fruitfulness and fertility!
Of jonquil and tuberose, our adoration boughs! Farewell my gynoeceia!

HECUBA AND THE MULE

SLAVE: Queen of Troy spinning around, roaring aloud! Who will determine her punishment? She is the chief of jackdaws! One, who is far from the boundaries of slavery, will give the right judgement!

AGAMEMNON: What's up, slave? The rumor whirls round! The mule's saddle is an easy paddled saddle! Where is the four footed?

HECUBA: Troy is not your mule to hunt wild beasts! Slaughter me by cutting throat, not the mule!

Damir Damir

life as it comes
silence of an orange
cut in two

Antonio Mangiameli

*un palloncino —
nella mano di un bimbo
il laccio rotto*

a balloon —
in a child's hand
the broken thread

*marito
padre
figlio —
la mia occupazione*

husband
father
son —
my job

Eufemia Griffo

*alba invernale
i bucaneve fioriscono
come in un sogno*

winter dawn
dreamlike
snowdrops bloom

*sciropo d'acero
il gusto selvaggio
dei boschi autunnali*

maple syrup
the wild taste
of autumn woods

*riunione di famiglia
quella vecchia foto color seppia
dove tu scompari*

family reunion
that old sepia photo
where you disappear

*non ti scordar di me
da qualche parte
il profumo dei ricordi*

from somewhere
the smell of memories
forget-me-not

*campi di riso
la faccia triste
di una giovane raccoglitrice*

rice fields
the sad face
of a young gatherer

*campi innevati
l'invisibile fioritura
del primo croco*

snowy fields
the first crocus blooms
invisibly

Christina Sng

we make do
with whatever we have
carpet grass

moonlit porch
a book asleep
on grandma

Jack Galmitz

If you kill an ant
you go to hell
for a moment

I live
to feed the cat
and that's it

Jeannie Martin

closes
before I am ready
morning glory

smooshing my face
into the heliotrope —
end of summer

Spy Pond

approaching storm
children's voices
across the water

Ogunquit beach

takes it time
to open -
mollusk

the speed of light
now
I see you



Supplement

Clayton Beach

The Pig and the Boar, or: The Limits to Brevity and Simplicity in Haiku

Richard Gilbert

Pig & Boar, in the Haiku Wild: An Appreciation

The Pig and the Boar, or: The Limits to Brevity and Simplicity in Haiku

The earliest treatments of haiku in English were riddled with half-truths, inaccuracies, and oversimplifications, such that as later scholarship began to show the Japanese haiku in a more accurate light, the nascent practice of haiku in English has from time to time found some of its fundamental assumptions shaken, with its focus shifting over time from syllabics, to “haiku mind,” and later to use of language and “disjunction.” Rather than threatening to dissolve the English language haiku as we know it, each period of further scholarship in fact has continued to inform an expansive, generous definition of haiku that allows for greater artistic freedom while at the same time offering novel techniques for exploring heightened perceptions and linguistic play so characteristic of the genre, always allowing previous conceptions to find a space within the varied and dynamic cluster of poetic approaches that we call “haiku,” while bringing English language haiku practice closer to consilience with the Japanese haiku.

Two of the most important elements of haiku craft are held to be its brevity and simplicity, factors which undoubtedly will remain essential to any understanding of haiku. However, English-language haiku has stressed the concepts of brevity and simplicity to a further extent than has traditional Japanese haiku, pushing minimalism as far as humanly possible short of saying nothing, aiming at the Zen-inspired idea of the haiku as a free-verse, “wordless poem.” The way in which early translators and theorists approached the original often failed to acknowledge many literary and linguistic features of Japanese haiku, largely ignoring haiku as language-poetry and instead reading them through a lens of Zen inspired simplicity, with a focus on the psychological aspect of capturing heightened, “haiku moments” in a diaristic fashion, or else interpreting the images in Japanese poems through free association or Zen parable, even when the original poems were highly stylized and followed poetic clichés with precise meaning and complex use of literary language.

At the heart of this essay lie two well known haiku, one about a pig and the other about a boar, the first by Marlene Mountain, the second by Kaneko Tohta. Through comparing and contrasting these two poems and exploring the issues these differences raise, I will examine the ways in which prevailing ideas on the nature of brevity and simplicity in haiku have affected meter, diction, length, punctuation and aesthetics in English-language haiku, and show how we can use knowledge of how these factors differ in Japanese to further inform the development of haiku in English in terms of the aforementioned elements of poesy.

There has been a tendency toward what Richard Gilbert has called “atomization” in contemporary haiku in English. This uber-minimalist approach is never more apparent than in Cor van den Huevel's “tundra,” a single-word poem that is perhaps the perfect example of the fullest extent to which this tendency can be taken, though it lacks the two part structure many hold to be necessary of proper haiku.¹

The single portmanteau word—poem-word, or “pwoermd”—remains a popular trend on the experimental side of Anglophone haiku. Nick Virgilio's “fossilence”² is an excellent early example; instead of mere juxtaposition of two concepts—fossil and silence—they are concentrated and blended into a single word, creating what is perhaps the shortest possible distillation of the idea of “haiku” that still allows for the characteristic base section and superposed fragment in what is already perhaps the shortest form of poetry in the world. However, composite neologisms have precedent in English language poetry outside of haiku, thus while we might extend the definition of haiku to embrace this practice, it is a technique that is neither novel nor unique to the world of haiku in English; some haiku are pwoermds, but not all pwoermds are haiku.

While some theorists demand rigid adherence to the 2 part formula for haiku in the English language, others allow for the occasional artful exception to the fragment and phrase ideal, for there are

a variety of examples in both contemporary and classic Japanese haiku of “one image” *ku*, though these are of course generally seen as deviations from the standard formula and still contain some kind of disjunctive effect. For the purpose of this essay, putting aside the controversial, “one image *ku*,” I will concentrate exclusively on haiku that contain a bipartite structure centered on blending and juxtaposition.

The tendency toward extreme brevity in haiku in English is often touted as being more authentic and true to the spirit of Japanese haiku than a fuller treatment in longer, more lyrical lines, with well meaning poets admonishing beginners for writing in “5-7-5,” the syllabic pattern often associated with haiku due to its extensive (but not exclusive) use in the original Japanese. Charles Trumbull writes:

“Haiku has been described as “the wordless poem.” Because of need for brevity, the haiku poet must use language with extreme economy and accuracy and employ techniques that are very different from those used in crafting Western style poems.”³

This idea of haiku as a “wordless poem” completely different than Western poetry was put forward by popular Zen philosopher Alan Watts, and the extreme brevity advocated in the name of wordlessness is held to be a reflection of the spare minimalism, nonliterary and economical language supposedly found in the poetry of Bashō.⁴ However, while these assumptions have attained the status of “common knowledge” in the world of haiku in English by virtue of repetition, they are not accurate reflections of the more complicated truth regarding Japanese haiku.

While I'm not opposed to brevity and simplicity in haiku, pursuit of them as an end or prerequisite rather than a means—at the cost of creative liberty and poetic value—is, in my view, ultimately short-sighted, restrictive and antithetical to both Japanese tradition and good poetics in general. Some in the haiku in English community have taken up a crusade against syllabics, disenfranchising poems that they deem unsuitably long or wordy, or else eyeing an poem over 15 syllables with suspicion.

Perhaps the extreme position some take on the issue of brevity is an heirloom of the Anglophone “haiku wars” of the 1970's, when die-hard 5-7-5 syllable counters squared off in vigorous debate with a new generation of free verse haiku enthusiasts who were pushing the form in new artistic directions. The interpretation of haiku was shifting from a syllabic form to a more conceptual, perceptual poetry with a Zen-inspired outlook, brought to popular consciousness by Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation. In order to gain artistic freedom, the chains of the past had to be broken—and the bean counters did not give up without a fight—so some poets in the world of haiku in English took a more severe, all-or-nothing stance than was really justified; rather than saying “haiku in English need not be 5-7-5,” the dictum became “haiku in English *should not* be 5-7-5.”

Lingering vestiges of the bitter enmities formed in this period can be seen in the exclusionary “no 5-7-5” motto of the NaHaiWriMo (National Haiku Writing Month)⁵ and a general preference for poems around or less than 12 syllables—an approach suggested by William Higginson in the 1980's to be a more accurate reflection of the amount of space it takes to say in English what would have taken 17 morae in Japanese.⁶ Thus (the argument goes) the shorter, free verse haiku is a closer approximation to the original Japanese than a strict 5-7-5 in English, because morae are shorter than syllables and the Japanese take longer to say something; brevity is the soul of haiku.

And indeed, if we look at a haiku such as:

静けさや岩に染み入る蟬の声
shizukesa ya iwa ni shimi iru semi no koe

Matsuo Bashō⁷

quietude. the cicada's voice permeates the cliffs

trans. Clayton Beach

My translation here follows a pattern of 3-5-5, just slightly more than Higginson's ideal of 12 syllables,

so he is on the mark in this case. However, if a haiku has a few words that are short in Japanese but long in English, the translation can just as easily balloon out as shrink down:

つちふるやつり革で読む三国志
tsuchifuru ya tsurikawa de yomu sangokushi

*Hiroaki Fukumoto*⁸

Yellow dust from China—
hanging from the train strap while I read
Romance of the Three Kingdoms

*trans. Clayton Beach**

At 6-9-7, the 17 morae in Japanese have expanded to 22 syllables in English. So a few words or concepts that take more space for expression in English can radically change the proportion between the length of a translation and the original 17 morae. Add this to the facts that Japanese is a language of implication and insinuation, can naturally leave out parts of a sentence (elision) that would seem strange to do in English, and that Japanese haiku has developed many symbolic associations over the years to pack more and more information into the same receptacle, and all of these factors can often make up for any slight discrepancies between the length of the English syllable and the Japanese mora.

On average, the simplest haiku in Japanese can indeed come between 12 and 17 syllables in English, depending on one's approach to translation, while more complex haiku can translate to 20 syllables or more. In other words, the haiku in Japanese still translates to about 17 syllables, with a plus or minus 5 syllable margin of error. This is without even considering Japanese haiku that break the 5-7-5 rhythm by exceeding the standard of 17 morae, a practice not uncommon in Bashō's time and that would become part of an entire movement of “free verse” haiku in early 20th century Japan.

Some Anglophone haikuists are perhaps touchy on the topic of syllabics in haiku because of widespread ignorance regarding the topic of haiku in English in the general public, and the default assumption by the uninitiated that haiku is defined by the 5-7-5 count and little else. However, once one is past the stage of the rankest neophyte, it quickly becomes obvious that the 5-7-5 model is not anywhere near as onerous or clunky as some would have us think, and well-crafted haiku in English can fall naturally to within a few syllables of this general rubric. Some accomplished poets still enjoy the challenge of following a set form, and many ku naturally break down into *almost* 5-7-5, with small adjustments like 3-7-5. or 5-7-2. In these almost 5-7-5 poems, the superposed section is generally slightly shorter, but the base section often fits within 10 and 12 syllables. Other variations find each line short for 4-6-4, or all even at 5-5-5. Thus, while rigid adherence to syllable counting is anathema to the writing of good haiku in English, it is equally true that any strict aversion to poems that approach or exceed 17 syllables is unfounded, with little evidence to suggest that poems under 12 syllables reflect the existence of enough content to fill a 5-7-5 haiku, were they to be back-translated into Japanese. There are many haiku in English that have counts as brief as 2-3-2 or 2-2-2, but are these really more *authentic* to Japanese haiku tradition than a 5-7-5, as advocates of brevity claim?

One of the biggest perceived sins that comes from counting 5-7-5 is “padding” the poetry—adding an extraneous “and,” “a,” or “the” in places where they aren't completely necessary, or else filling the verse with extraneous imagery or adjectives, cluttering the poem just so that every syllable is filled. Some haiku enthusiasts take their admonishments to such an extreme that beginning students end up afraid to use any connective tissue whatsoever, thus the dictum of eliminating all extraneous material can lead to a choppy delivery. In the name of wordlessness, even veteran poets (who may remember the tyrannical reign of the 5-7-5) can be overzealous in their fear of flowing language and western poesy. In fact, a strong sense of poetics and meter is often descried as inauthentic to haiku.

Some perhaps take this tendency as fidelity to the direct transliteration of Japanese syntax, such that

* adjusted from a translation by David Burleigh

Bashō's earlier *ku* would be rendered more along the lines of “stillness / enters into rocks / voice of cicada;” a wordless poem. Japanese syntax puts the verb at the end of a phrase (rocks into enters), but beside that slight adjustment for the sake of coherence, stripped of any words not directly equivalent to the Japanese, and giving the images in as close of an order to the original as possible, this style of “Japonism” in haiku in English is accurate in the sense of literal word-for-word transcription of the Japanese original, but unfortunately results in what is often an artless contortion of the haiku itself, as well as the English language. Literal translations of Japanese actually can completely miss the thoughts and ideas being expressed—by ignoring idioms, poetic clichés and implications that are apparent to those in the native culture but that aren't reflected by a literal word-for-word translation. So fidelity to the original sometimes requires adding what is unsaid in the Japanese.

For my own ear and sense of poetic rhythm, such stilted delivery also results in a unpleasant chopiness, a list of verbs and nouns telegraphed like the grunted speech of Tarzan, or the comedic syncopation of William Shatner's exaggerated delivery of spoken word poetry. Overt telegraphing is unpoetic, inelegant and ultimately culturally insensitive in the way that it dons an Orientalist mask and mimics non-native English speakers for rather arbitrary reasons. There are times when it's difficult to tell whether a poet is trying too hard to be terse and edgy, or is simply not fluent in the English language. Japanese haiku does indeed twist language to artful effect, but this is at crucial points of juncture through breaks in syntax or cutting words (*kireji*), and oftentimes the sections separated are still full of particles, adjectives and connective words that function as normal, flowing—even *poetic*—phrases. *Katakoto*, or “baby talk,” is held up as a justification for extreme derangement of syntax, but *katakoto* in Japanese has more to do with a simplicity of mind and childlike innocence that is a stylistic evolution of previous concepts like elegant confusion and poetic madness, and is used with skill and precision as linguistic play, an aesthetic with an affinity to Dadaism.⁹ *Katakoto* certainly has nothing to do with wordlessness as it is interpreted through a lens of Zen mysticism.

Because I still regularly see poems that are being work-shopped in online groups being taken to task for having too many articles like “and” or “the,” poems being criticized for following a count of 5-7-5, since I still regularly come across telegraphed haiku published by beginning as well as experienced poets that sound forced in their syntactic derangement, and since I still see punctuation largely abandoned or simplicity being touted as an absolute requisite for haiku among writers of the English language haiku, I believe it is necessary to carefully examine the premise that less is better, or that less is more “authentic” to tradition—when it comes to dropping certain elements of speech, telegraphing lines or eliminating punctuation in haiku in English.

pig and i spring rain

*Marlene Mountain*¹⁰

This *ku* was written in the 1970's, early in Mountain's career, and has remained a favorite for its wordlessness and child-like simplicity. Compared to the fluffed up 5-7-5 of the day, Mountain's poetry glinted sharp and brilliant as Occam's Razor itself, providing many with the answer to a question they didn't even know they had asked, clearing the way for an artful, literary English-language haiku that was not bogged down by Japonism and artificial constraints. Mountain was an early adopter of the “one-line haiku,” an approach that some now suggest is more authentic due to the single line presentation in Japanese. This poem is important and beloved in the Anglophone haiku community, and rightly so; it helped lay the ground for a new poetics centered on exploring what haiku could mean in English without the monkey of 5-7-5 hanging on its back, and it established a new voice and visual format that would influence several generations of haiku poets.

豚とわれも春雨

buta to ware mo harusame

trans. Clayton Beach

Here I have made a rough translation of Mountain's famous ku into Japanese, to see exactly how it translates mora-wise. In its concision, Mountain's ku has fallen far short of a full haiku, even by the standards of brevity in Japanese—breaking down into a 3-3-4 count that sounds a bit unpoetic and reductive in Japanese, lacking as it does any allusions to previous Japanese haiku tradition or layers of meaning through word associations or pivots. Adding the kireji “kana” to the end would stretch the poem to a roughly bipartite 6-6 and make the language sound slightly more literary, but still, this is a full 5 morae short of a standard haiku, even shorter than the 7-7 flat verses from linked verse. In this case, the Anglophone penchant for brevity has far exceeded that of the Japanese, rendering what in Japanese comes across as a rather flat verse that lacks the usual nuance of traditional haiku. The pure imagism of early haiku in English often avoided verbs, which is not a practice reflected in Japanese, where many kireji are auxiliary verb endings and verbs are often central to the structure of a haiku.

And that's the strange thing—while in the west we often talk about simplicity of language in English haiku, the Japanese haiku still retains a large amount of “bungo,” the classical, formal literary language residual from the courtly tanka, or “waka.” Kireji, the cutting words so often touted as a requisite for haiku, are in fact often inflected verb tenses or particles that are no longer used (or now used differently) in normal speech than in written language. Even some common verbs or nouns will have more poetic alternatives used only in writing that are not part of common vernacular, and archaic spellings and obsolete graphemes are even used. In short, traditional haiku uses a distinctly *literary* language. Bungo also was developed to fit the 5-7-5 meter, so it is more rhythmic and poetic sounding than Modern Japanese.

Medieval haikai differentiated itself from classical poetry by using the old formal language in playful, ironic ways: twisting conventions and adding slang, unrefined imagery and focusing more on the everyday world outside of the Imperial palace and its elegant clichés. Compared to the highly elevated, ornate language of emperors and princes, haiku was simple—but it was still elevated above common speech, and it remains separate and elevated in tone from modern Japanese. Even today, many of the most progressive haiku still use some of these ancient conventions that have long fallen out of use in regular speech and retain an air of literary elevation on a linguistic level. Bashō's poetry, while often presented as simple and austere in English, was actually often quite literary and complex, multifaceted, allusive and playful in its contortions of language and poetic tradition. It was only seen as simple because of shallow readings and biased exposition by theorists who came to haiku via an interest in Zen.

It was Shiki in the late 19th century who criticized the literati and drifted away from the literary elitism of previous generations, and his disciple Kyoshi who insisted on unadorned description of nature. However, Shiki despised tired tropes and cliché used without honest feeling, not necessarily all literary language, and he could be quite playful, while Kyoshi turned away from modernism and wanted to go back to traditional culture, at times reviving archaic phrases that would have been seen as formal even for Bashō—he simply wanted to take the trends of radical politics and social commentary out of modern haiku and focus on nature and an idyllic vision of Japanese tradition, rejecting *modernism*, rather than elevated diction. It was certainly not an embrace of colloquial, modern Japanese language.

Mountain's ku is pure and honest—an open page—but there is no elevated diction, there aren't even any specific details beyond the pig, the authorial “i” and the rain. One gets a sense of interbeing in connection with the land and nature through “and i,” and perhaps a smell of the farm pungent with a raw, animal scent from the “pig” and the fresh “spring rain.” But what the pig is doing, its personality, whether or not it really feels like spending time with the “i” there in the rain, even why “i” is there—to slaughter the pig or feed it slop, or is the speaker merely trespassing across the field on their way somewhere else?—beyond that amorphous feeling of unity and contentment implied by “spring rain,” there is very little detail or particularity. There is not a single action or adjective beyond the seasonal setting: just pig, person and impersonal nature. What they're doing, beyond coexisting, is completely

unsaid. Even the sense of contentment and peace relies on assuming that the rain is a light mist falling on the speaker's face and the relation with the pig is amicable, and assuming a Zen calm and serenity as the default tone of haiku. It very well might be the torrential downpour of a mid-Atlantic thunderstorm in May with a surly and uncouth sow who the speaker needs to wrestle into its pen—in English, seasonal references are not necessarily precise, normative evocations of emotional tone. The pig could be one of any sort, and so too with the spring rain, like the storm that lashed my windows as I first wrote this on an April evening.

That said, of course the general tone seems does seem to suggest a peaceful, contemplative scene, but such is the problem with unspecific wordlessness—the reader can interpret it as they will, and often they will.

In English, the haiku is often presented as a poem that is finished by the reader in a creative act, thus this level of minimalism and incompleteness is seen as an invitation for open interpretation, the poem is opened to the “white space” in which the reader is invited to interpret the poem as a kind of literary Rorschach test. This wordlessness is actually expected by many in the West to be a defining feature of the genre, and poets can be criticized for supplying too much detail. Mountain's poem is imprecise and subjective, so there are no wrong answers, thus reading it takes an individualist approach in discerning the significance of an ostensibly objective portrayal of reality, in the absence of symbolism or metaphor. In that sense, contemporary English language haiku is a poetry of indeterminacy and subjective reader experience.

In contrast, the most traditional of Japanese theorists insist that a haiku only have one meaning—only in the post-war period have some poets embraced the idea of multiple possible readings. In traditional Japanese haiku, while the reader must recognize the signs that point toward hidden meaning, these are generally a set group of topical tropes (topoi), or else precise seasonal indications (kigo) that have established normative connotations over the centuries through poetic tradition. Thus, “autumn evening” immediately conjures up the idea of loneliness and melancholy. “Summer moon” brings up the romance of the shortest nights of summer, when one cannot stay with their lover long and the dreams in which lovers visit each other are ended all too soon. “Cherry blossoms” calls to mind a deep longing and attachment for the fleeting and ephemeral beauty of the world that puts one at odds with their spiritual goals of non-attachment—cherry blossoms in poetry are Zen only in the ironic way their beauty puts a poet at odds with the Zen goal of having no regrets or lingering attachments to the dewdrop world, poetry interacts with Zen by contrast—one is so moved by the world as to sing, but spiritual salvation requires a sublimation of such emotions. In a sense, while defined by its tension against a Zen background, Japanese poetry is often very much at odds with Zen.

Personal, subjective interpretations do not belong to the world of Bashō's haikai, for images have an “essential implication” called hon-i, meaning they represent something specific, decided a priori by normative cultural values, thus seasonal references not only target a very specific, codified period of time within a highly graduated progression through the calendar year, but also have fixed emotional attributes and set connotations.¹¹ Every kigo exists within a matrix with three axes, the chronological (in terms of calendar year), the intertextual (in terms of referring to a history of past usage), and the evocative (in terms of normative emotional value through hon-i).

Thus, traditionalist Japanese haijin orient themselves within a cultural framework, navigating the meaning of a poem by a very complicated set of assumptions about the essential nature of the seasonal imagery, its historic use and immediate relevance to the haiku at hand. The lack of such a formal system of short-hand cultural markers in haiku in the English language is perhaps the most fundamental difference between the two traditions, and raises questions about how much the haiku in English can ever be called “traditional” when it fails to incorporate such a major component of what “traditional” means to the Japanese haiku.

猪がきて空気を食べる春の峠

inoshishi ga kite kūki o taberu haru no tōge

*Kaneko Tohta*¹²

a wild boar arrives, and eats the air. spring mountain pass

trans. Clayton Beach

Our boar arrives with a stamped hoof and gnashing of its teeth. Here the base section is not the chopped up, broken jumble of syntax modern Japanese haiku is sometimes described as, but a straightforward, declarative statement just as I have translated it. At 5-4-4, the translation clocks in just over Higginson's ideal of 12 syllables, but well over Mountain's terse 5. Interestingly, this ku is irregular in its count, breaking down to something like 7-7-6 in Japanese. In my translation, the period could also have been indicated by an em dash, semi-colon, line break or a mere space; in Japanese the previous phrase has ended conclusively with the infinitive of the verb, and a new thought is started, but no classical kireji has been used. The juxtaposition is created merely through a single break in syntax, almost exactly the same way Mountain created the cut between “i” and “spring rain.” Thus, there is no need to worry about “translating” the kireji—in this case the sense of cutting in English is largely the same as it is in Japanese, without classical kireji.

However, punctuation can be of great help in English. In the Japanese language, punctuation is largely enunciated through particles, verb inflections etc. and the written language technically needs no extra punctuation for clarity. That's the main reason haiku has no external punctuation marks, the verb endings in Tohta's ku effectively pause the sentence mid phrase (-て) as with a comma and end the phrase clearly as a period (-る). Certain kireji, like yo and ka (よ, か), are actually the (spoken) Japanese equivalents of the exclamation point and question mark, respectively. In English, punctuation is generated through rhythms of speech and tone when spoken and in the written word it creates ambiguity to leave the marks out, whereas Japanese punctuation is often through enunciated emphatic particles or verb endings, giving the punctuation weight in the meter and making added visual punctuation marks superfluous.

Unless the multiple possible readings created through lack of punctuation in English are desired, the practice of dropping all punctuation in as an imitation of a natural feature of Japanese that doesn't function neutrally in English the way it does in the source language calls great attention to itself in an affected sense of transliteration—and thus can distract from the poem. It can make sense as an artistic choice and is often used to great effect. But if anything, in terms of fidelity to the Japanese original, abandoning punctuation ignores the emphatic particles that often serve as kireji and fails to translate them into an English equivalent, it is using English to good effect in a way that is not possible in Japanese. Punctuation marks are often our best equivalent to the function of cutting words, so we would benefit from using them sparingly, but artfully, rather than completely discarding them. When we do exploit the ambiguity of unpunctuated lines, we are adding something unique to our own poetics, not necessarily importing a feature of the original haiku.

As haiku in English has developed, the ambiguity caused through the practice of no punctuation has given rise to layered pieces that break down into several possible readings, especially in one line haiku. However, in cases where a question mark might be called for, echoing the cutting word ka (か), for instance, leaving it out is the very opposite of fidelity to the Japanese haiku. Increasingly, in the more experimental journals, some one-line haiku in English have begun to utilize punctuation again in order to reflect the more varied use of cutting one finds in Japanese haiku and to prevent unwanted blending:

half autumn color. Come take my hand in the ghost land and

*David Boyer*¹³

Here the period separates the seasonal reference and calls attention to it, keeping it from flowing in one uninterrupted train of thought, much in the way ya (や) is used in Bashō's “quietude” (shizukesa ya), while the “and” creates further cutting by adding a sense of incompleteness akin to the -te form of

a verb, which while not listed as a classical kireji by Haruo Shirane,¹⁴ is used extensively in haiku to create cuts and leave verses with a sense of open-endedness. In that sense, this treatment of punctuation is much more in line with Japanese tradition than a ku like Mountain's

just a touch of deer within tall things that just grow

*Marlene Mountain*¹⁵

Without punctuation, this haiku tempts us to read it as a single thought, but when that becomes paradoxical, we are then forced to start parsing the language into smaller, digestible phrases. Is it “just a touch of deer within. tall things that just grow,” or is it “just a touch of deer / within tall things / that just grow.” Without any punctuation, the poem is left open ended, and in this case that adds some depth and a tendency to read the poem as several simultaneous superpositions of possibility. At its best, the one line format exploits the ambiguity inherent in not giving line breaks that shape the content, and yet there are times when the effect is jarring or unwanted, thus completely abandoning all punctuation for stylistic purposes can end up with unwanted implications, innuendos or unintended comic effect through bathos in bizarrely blended/yolked images and alternate readings.

Regarding Tohta's boar, there is a two step action on the part of the animal; it bursts upon the scene, and then eats the air. This is a dynamic pig, alive and full of spirit and vigor, eating the air greedily, perhaps tasting the scent of the poem's speaker in the breeze. The seasonal reference, “spring mountain pass” also has a secondary connotation of danger or excitement; the character for the word “mountain pass” has a secondary meaning of “crisis” the way the word crossroads has both a literal and figurative meaning in English. So there is a bit of a pun in the superposed section, indicating that the unexpected encounter with this feisty animal is climactic, a bit of a “spring crisis.”¹⁶ In fact, haiku in Japanese often use irregular meter to express heightened emotion or distress on the part of the poet, thus the extraneous syllables are a conscious distortion of meter with a traditional implication, adding a sense of tension and chaos to the ku.

Both of our porcine friends share a warm vitalism and sense of vivid nature, of being alive and in the moment, both share a connection between a human speaker and the natural world. But in Tohta's ku we have a much more detailed picture: the setting, a mountain pass in spring; the action, a boar bursting onto the path and snapping at the air; and then we have secondary clues to the speaker's emotional reaction to the events through punning on the kigo, not to mention a tendency toward extending length beyond the normal 5-7-5, playing with the meter in a way that is the opposite of brevity.

Yet, Tohta is hardly one of the more obscurantist, avant-garde gendai poets who revels in excessive literary games—on the contrary. His work took post-war haiku into a more humanist vein, and he was vocally against literary pretension, looking to the humble, direct simplicity of Issa as the ideal haiku poet.¹⁷ While his juxtapositions could be surrealist or metaphorical, he's not the kind of poet one would call effete or over-intellectual. And yet, his poem is considerably more complex, literary and full of detail than Mountain's idealistic simplicity, and he errs on the side of extending the haiku, of making it more expansive and explicit rather than open-ended and amorphous. This doesn't make his ku flat or too literal through a lack of “white space”—there still remain some unanswered questions and a feeling of wanting to know more—it still piques the interest and gets the imagination going.

The interesting thing about Japanese haiku masters is that they're often disparaging literary pretentiousness while simultaneously taking their own poetry quite seriously and putting an enormous amount of effort and craft into their work, which sounds to me a lot like the pursuit of what the West considers “literature.” Thus, when we repeat their admonitions against “literary pretension,” we have to take it in context—as a rejection of the extreme classism, conservatism and literary cronyism of previous generations, and a bit of Japanese self deprecation and humility, or else perhaps viewing haiku as an embodied personal philosophy rather than an external art of mere wordplay; for some, haiku is also a way of living and seeing in addition to being literature. And indeed, viewing the fine arts as a numinous thing separated from daily life was a Western importation to Japanese poetry that is foreign

to pre-modern haiku, and not all contemporary haiku poets see haiku as conforming to Western conceptions of art-literature.

While “pig and i” will remain a beloved and quintessential English language haiku, we must accept that some haiku in English theorists have quite oversold the idea of simplicity in Japanese haiku, taking Shiki's theory of objective life sketching to extremes that far exceed even the simplicity of the most straightforward of traditional Japanese haiku.

In fact, in order to find any Japanese haiku that exhibit the kind of extreme economy in language used in “pig and i,” we have to look to avant-garde free verse haiku poets of the early 20th century, like Ogiwara Seisensui, who took haiku in similar directions over half a century earlier:

石のまろさ雪になろ
ishi no marosa yuki ni naru

*Ogiwara Seisensui*¹⁸

a stone's roundness becomes snow

trans. Clayton Beach

With a count of 11 morae split 3-3-5 or perhaps merely 6-5 in Japanese, and translating to around 7 syllables in English, this ku comes very close to the brevity of “pig and I,” but ironically, this is a haiku that many conservatives in Japan would not consider legitimate haiku. In terms of meaning, it is slightly more surreal and paradoxical than “pig and i,” or at least more oblique in signification, exceeding the simplicity of thought found in Mountain's ku with a sense of the impossibly true. In order to justify the extent of brevity promoted in English haiku through the lens of Japanese tradition, we have to embrace the avant-garde and admit modernism into haiku, something that early haiku in English theorists like R. H. Blyth and Harold Henderson detested and did their best to stymie by echoing Kyoshi's conservative dictums on natural beauty and proclaiming non-conforming poetry as “not haiku” while expounding upon their ideal of the “traditional” haiku in English and refusing to engage with or translate gendai haiku.

Seisensui, in arguing for free verse and non-seasonal haiku, made many of the same arguments against the 5-7-5 format that informed the drift away from haiku formalism in the West and which lie at the heart of the “no 5-7-5” movement. Criticizing padded haiku, Seisensui felt that the form of each particular haiku should be decided by the content of the poem, not a pre-set number of morae, and he also felt that some famous poems were weakened by adding extraneous imagery in order to satisfy the formal requirements. Unlike later gendai poets, many of whom would retain kigo and the 5-7-5 while innovating in tone, topic and content, Seisensui argued for a retention of the spirit, tone and naturalism of Bashō's haiku while expanding the shasei aesthetic beyond Shiki's earliest teachings, imbuing his haiku with the same kind of minimalism, naturalism and reverence for Bashō that the Haiku Society of America codified as “traditional” haiku in the 1970s through the establishment of formal definitions of haiku, senryu and related words, forming the mainstream conceptions of the form that linger to this day. Seisensui's daring innovation opened the Japanese language haiku to new rhythms, but many did not see how these poems were haiku, seeing them instead simply as “shi,” free verse poetry.¹⁹

The same problems of reception occurs with the translation and importation of haiku in English into Japanese, where it is called haiku, but spelled with the conditional approval of the katakana script used for foreign loanwords. That is to say, it is seen as decidedly separate from the “true,” Japanese haiku. And indeed, the strictest neoclassical practitioners of haiku remain tied to pre-modern cultural norms and are distrustful of western-rooted modernism as inauthentic to the pure Japanese spirit of haiku.

古池や蛙飛び込む水の音
furu ike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto

Matsuo Bashō

old pond. a frog jumps in the sound of water

trans. Clayton Beach

Perhaps the most famous and quintessential of all haiku, Seisensui daringly critiqued this verse. In perhaps the best example of the poetic implications of his argument for allowing the content to establish form, Seisensui took Bashō's famous "old pond" haiku, and suggested that the superposed image was entirely unnecessary. It should be noted, that the last two lines were written first, based on actual experience, while the image of the "old pond" was chosen for more literary reasons, after much discussion with his disciples over what image would offset the base in a harmonious way, and after rejecting the more conventional suggestion of "mountain rose," Bashō chose the old pond for its forlorn, "sabi" aesthetic and resonance with the following lines. For Seisensui, this added literary dressing given for the sake of conformity to tradition was extraneous, went outside of the scope of "shasei" objectivity, and the poem should have simply read:

蛙飛び込む水の音

kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto

ed. Ogiwara Seisensui

a frog jumps in—the sound of water

trans. Clayton Beach

"Old pond," in his view, did not add anything to the core essence of the experience of this haiku, and being an artificial fiction added to fill in the missing 5 morae of the first "line," was completely superfluous. Seisensui took a completely unprecedented stance, arguing that the base was in itself a complete haiku, and did not need any further elucidation, that only slavishness to the 5-7-5 rhythm made anyone feel that more was required of the poem beyond the initial moment of inspiration.²⁰

Of course, this was a radical suggestion that ripped apart the fundamentals of haiku in a way that sent shock-waves throughout the haiku world, galvanizing both supporters and critics of this new approach, and it remains a radical suggestion even today, in terms of Japanese haiku poetics. But it fits perfectly naturally with the prevailing wisdom and tendencies of haiku in English regarding naturalism, brevity and simplicity, and bolsters the defense of haiku in English as valid haiku, insofar as one accepts Seisensui's work as a valid part of the canon.

The further irony is that if we accept Mountain and Seisensui's briefest works as reflecting a legitimate form of haiku, then we have to contend with the fact that Seisensui also pushed the limit of length in haiku to its maximum, writing some extremely long haiku when the subject matter called for it:

牡丹一弁一弁の動きつつ開つつ姿ととのう

botan ichiben ichiben no ugoki tsutsu hiraki tsutsu sugata totonou²¹

Ogiwara Seisensui

peony: petal by petal

as it moves, as it opens,

slowly takes its shape

trans. Clayton Beach

With 29 mora in Japanese, and 20 syllables in my English translation, this poem challenges the assumption that haiku cannot relish in excess language—the original is full of repetition/parallelism, alliteration, and assonance. And this is not the first haiku of such length; both Bashō and Buson have several ku that far exceed the normal allotment of syllables. In fact, most of the time, when a pre-modern hokku deviated from the 5-7-5, it was generally to exceed the length—a poet found the strictures preventing them from expressing certain ideas, or it was a stylistic manner of saying "I'm so

ecstatic (or distraught) that I don't have time to count syllables!"

molasses dance of moonflowers the story folds itself into a crane²²

David Boyer

This ku by David Boyer has 18 syllables, only a single syllable beyond 17, but it inhabits the opposite end of the spectrum of haiku in English from Mountain's early work, in that it is maximalist in its effect. And yet, its length is not from a formalist desire to cling to a 5-7-5 structure, but from allowing the material to shape itself. Instead of merely having a simple image as the superposed section, it has a somewhat elaborate and abstract one that is almost a base section itself; "molasses dance of moonflowers" plays on the contrast between dark syrup and white flowers while connecting through the sweetness of both, while also perhaps playing on the suggestion that the movement of the flowers are "as slow as molasses." These layers of contrast are almost sufficient for a stand alone haiku. The actual base section is also compound and complex; "the story folds itself into a crane" could in and of itself be a successful stand-alone haiku in the minimalist vein, like van den Heuvel's "the shadow in the folded napkin,"²³ or Seisensui's shorter works, but when modified by the antecedent phrase, it grows even more mysterious and resonant, with the white flowers transforming into the paper crane while "the story" is left to the reader's imagination. This haiku is complex and has many layers of contrast and affinity between the images, but it does not revel in superfluous words and padding or attempt the 5-7-5; every word is chosen carefully and used with precision toward meaningful effect, and when put together, the base and superposed sections resonate and create more than the sum of their parts.

In the end, however, Boyer's approach to haiku ultimately falls in the same tradition of Mountain's "pig and i," in that the origins of one line haiku in English inescapably lead back to her pioneering work in introducing and extensively developing the possibilities of haiku in English in a single line. If Mountain's minimalism is justified by the first poem by Seisensui, Boyer's maximalism is equally validated by Seisensui's longer ku, even though it certainly pushes the boundary of what still feels cohesive as a single haiku. To be sure, even though it is long by haiku standards, Boyer's ku still has an economy of language and concision that is characteristic of haiku—it simply is longer than is generally promoted by the stewards of brevity. In this sense, the argument is not that haiku isn't simple, or brief, but a question of what degree of simplicity and brevity is acceptable in the course of a haiku.

Just as Japanese haiku average about 17 morae and seem to top out around 30 morae, 12-15 syllables seems to be a comfortable average for haiku in English, with 20 syllables being near the maximum a haiku in English can withstand before it starts to fall apart from instability. Or, at least, 20 syllables seems to be about the most anybody regularly attempts with any amount of success.

Even Mountain's later work occasionally revels in more linguistic play, multiple cuts and longer, more complex structure, as seen in her "just a touch of deer," and in the following ku:

before the dew unsettles a cardinal dries off the sun

*Marlene Mountain*²⁴

Just shy of 17, at 15 syllables (7-6-2), this poem has a certain kind of simplicity at its heart and is not excessively long, but it is also complex, more literary and certainly uses words like "the" and "a" to provide structure. Any sense of cutting or disjunction is achieved through paradoxical, playful syntax that provides multiple readings in a way that increases depth and resonance, rather than stubborn minimalism for the sake of brevity. The derangement of syntax here is the opposite of random telegraphing in that it demonstrates skillful cutting and pivoting toward artistic, poetic effect: the verb "unsettles" can be taken as an intransitive action of the dew in-and-of-itself, or paradoxically, as a transitive verb, where the dew "unsettles" the cardinal. Later, if the poem is read without a caesura after "off," the cardinal impossibly "dries off the sun." A period or line break would make the final cut clearer, but it would also remove that element of wordplay and ambiguity. Mountain still shows the

same simple heart and purity of spirit found in “pig and i,” but she also shows more craft and complexity in her approach to haiku as literature and linguistic play. And yet, in many ways, this later poem is more in line with the traditional Japanese haiku in terms of use of language and aesthetic than her early minimalism.

While haiku are always short poems, the exact extent to which “brevity is the soul of haiku” differs from poet to poet—even from poem to poem by a single author—and minimalism has always been a style that falls in and out of favor from generation to generation. There is always a school that promotes spartan simplicity and raw feeling on one hand, and a more literary minded, intellectual school on the other. Many prominent haiku have even drifted from one pole to the other over a long career. While Mountain's “pig and i” was groundbreaking and perfect for its time, such simplicity is no longer entirely necessary for our poetry (though neither is it entirely obsolete), and even the poet herself took to more complexity as her mature style developed and changed with the times.

Banality is merely the antipode of obscurantism, and neither extreme is desirable in any literature that aims to move hearts and communicate effectively. Poems like van den Heuvel's “tundra” and Boyers' “molasses dance” inhabit the outer range limits on the spectrum of brevity and simplicity in haiku that show how, while haiku certainly has vague boundaries as a genre, it also has a great deal of variety and space to play.

Homogeneity in verse is not something to aspire to as a community, and the hive mind sometimes tries to police aesthetics that are arbitrary and dull when faced with challenging work. In his book, *The Poetics of Japanese Verse*, Kōji Kawamoto offers some critique on shasei realism, objectivity and simplicity in haiku:

“The problem lies in Shiki's readiness to equate the ability of a verbal description of a concrete object to move men's hearts with the ability of the real object to do the same... Shiki was not necessarily a rigid adherent of biased realism even when it comes to realism vs. idealism and the question of objectivity, nonetheless, his remarks on shasei led to considerable misunderstanding of the function of poetic language and literature in general... Shiki errs in assuming that these objects can be incorporated into a poem merely through the simple process of identifying them by name...”²⁵

Thus, we don't actually get a full vision of a pig, or spring rain, merely by mentioning them. There must be a few salient details, a bit of specificity for any true sense of realism to emerge—there is such a thing as “too simple” in haiku. Kawamoto drives the point home even further.

“Perhaps it can be postulated in a very general way, that the literary success of any haiku poet or school or period largely depends upon the awareness of the fact that a tendency toward stylistic simplicity can lead to sheer banality despite insistence and measures to the contrary”²⁶

Here, Kawamoto warns us against the trap of simplicity for its own sake. The periods when simple aesthetics like shasei and karumi were in vogue created a large volume of inoffensive but mediocre haiku that few people cherish today. Some of the harshest critiques of the poet Chiyojo were centered on the simplistic interpretation of Bashō's “karumi” aesthetic that was the hallmark of her teacher Shikō (a disciple of Bashō) and which was quite in vogue at the time she was writing. Her supposed one-dimensionality is not a unintentional fault, but was actually the style of her time.²⁷

Shiki's ku are not without their critics either; Kyoshi felt Shiki's original shasei approach was shallow and needed a deeper profundity. Shiki was openly influenced by the West, whereas Kyoshi looked to protect traditional Japanese culture from the corruption of Western modernism. Thus, ironically, though shasei in haiku in English is often promoted as Kyoshi amended it—looking for

deep profundity in the every day—Shiki was a playful poet accused of immaturity by his own disciples, insofar as they felt his style was superficial and not allowed to mature due to his untimely death, and his haiku was modern, outward (Westward) looking rather than chauvinistically Japanese. Shiki reveled in the use of language as play—haiku as poetry and wordplay rather than deep philosophy—even creating multiple personas from which he wrote, and he engaged the world with a painter's eye rather than a philosopher's heart.²⁸

Kawamoto is also critical of Blyth's original focus on the Zen in haiku, a major and almost fundamental premise in the Anglophone interpretation of the soul and spirit of the genre, attributing it to exoticism rather than an accurate portrayal of the Japanese haiku:

“Most of the post-war beat generation and subsequent haiku poets [in English] first came to haiku and developed their interest in this literary genre mainly by way of Zen. In actuality, this manner of assimilating the haiku is no more than a manifestation of a form of fascination with something foreign and exotic and may be seen as having corrupted a more accurate picture of haiku.”²⁹

Insofar as haiku in English minimalism is based on an outlook that views haiku as expressions of Zen metaphysics along the line of them being 'one breath koans,' it simply isn't a culturally sensitive or accurate interpretation of Japanese haiku. Blyth's descriptions of haiku are ecstatic and seductive, but ultimately hyperbolic and distorted by his enthusiasm for Buddhist interpretation, with him often evaluating the success of haiku by the “quality of their Zen.”

“Haiku require our purest and most profound spiritual appreciation, for they represent a whole-world, the Eastern world, of religious and poetic experience... Haiku are to be understood from the Zen point of view... the mood in which they are written and in which they are to be read, is the same as that of Rōshi [Zen master], the same as that of the *Diamond Sutra* and the verses of *Hekiganroku* [*Blue Cliff Record*, a collection of Zen koans]... Haiku is the final flower of all Eastern culture; it is also a way of living... Haiku is not only poetry...it is a way of life, a mode of living all day long; it is religion... haiku is a kind of satori or enlightenment...”³⁰

Blyth's writings are sprinkled with these kind of proclamations, but his saying that haiku are to be meditated upon like a koan from the *Blue Cliff Record* and that every nuance equates to some aspect of Zen scripture is equivalent to if someone else said that English sonnets are not just love poems, but expressions of Christ's perfect love and the Christian faith, that they are not just poetry, but ecstatic visions of Christian gnosis and the eternal love of Christ. Yes, Shakespeare was ostensibly Christian, writing in a Christian nation, but this coincidence of fate and cultural background does not necessarily imbue every syllable of his poetry with theological implications and overt Christian allegory, even if an extremely enthusiastic foreign critic who had recently converted to Christianity decided to say so (and managed to convince his countrymen that it were true). Certain Japanese haiku poets have indeed put more Buddhism into their poetry than others, just as certain western poets have done with Christianity, but that doesn't make it an essential feature of the haiku in particular, for it is an underlying feature of all poetry and art of medieval Japan as a cultural substrate. Furthermore, the prominence of Buddhism in haiku has faded into the background with the rise of modernity, with periods of Shinto revivalism and modern Agnosticism flavoring the haiku of their eras.

Kawamoto is not the only Japanese haiku critic bemoaning the excessive focus on Zen in the Beats and in haiku in English in general. Blyth had the fever of the convert, and as such his passion for Zen was all consuming, evangelical and helped spread an infectious passion for haiku, Zen and Asian culture. So he was invaluable to the spread and reception of haiku in the West. The problem is not that Basho wasn't interested in Zen, but that Zen was the heart of medieval aesthetics—everything from tea

ceremony to calligraphy, waka, renga and haikai all had equal parts of Zen—whereas Blyth, and many early haiku practitioners, saw Zen as an crucial identifying feature of haiku that must be at the very forefront of its poetics, rather than a coincidental part of the source culture in the background that was shared with nearly every other aspect of Japanese culture at the time, a feature that faded from all the arts as the aesthetics of the nation were changed in the face of modernity.

Saying that Basho's haiku is Zen is about as meaningful for our adaption as saying it is Japanese. Surely, to understand haiku one must understand Japanese culture, and Zen is part of that. The Zen component and ideal of the hermit-poet is certainly something that has been a thread of Asian poetry way back into Classical China, and all the way up to the free-verse of Santōka, but it's not an indispensable feature, nor the primary focus of haiku. Especially if one considers haiku a living, breathing and contemporary force that is not forever yoked to a single aesthetic and period of time, or an ethnocentric vision of haiku as unilaterally Japanese.

To understand aesthetics such as *sabi*, *wabi*, and *yugen*, one must explore some Zen and know the philosophical underpinnings. But that's a big difference from reading haiku as if they were Zen scripture, and looking for hidden Zen allegory in every detail to the point of missing obvious literary references or normative Japanese interpretations in favor of fanciful Zen interpretation.

Japanese haiku was first and foremost a kind of poetry for much of its history, and thus has long been subject to literary aesthetics, and many of the references found in haikai were literary in nature. The Buddhism of its practitioners has shaped it to a certain degree through normative cultural assumptions, but Zen is by no means the main factor in the vast majority of haiku. Haiku as a lifestyle and discipline has indeed been promoted by poets like Ishida Hakyō; “haiku is not intellect... Rather it is flesh. It is life... haiku is not literature... haiku is raw life,”³¹ and it has had its periods of status as non-literature or non-art, but those are far from the only positions, nor are they exactly the dominant ones, and living the life of a *haijin* isn't so much a religious matter, as a matter of imbuing one's poetry with what Tohta would call *shisō*: “existentially embodied thinking,” which he saw as “an ideology, but not an 'ism'...” rather “a living conceptual framework integrated with and absorbed into daily life—both a form of consciousness and personal philosophy.”³⁰

Thus, haiku is an intense engagement with the act of living and being, a heightened state of conscious awareness to which every haiku poet brings their own personal philosophy, be they Buddhist, Atheist or Christian, and these outlooks on life might very well change the poetry as it leaps from poet to poet and culture to culture. In this sense, *mindfulness* is a necessity, but the particular creed of the poet is not.

Harold Henderson was a friend of Blyth's and a founding member of the Haiku Society of America. As a member of the committee to define haiku for the society, he was integral in forming what I call the “orthodox haiku in English.” This is the dominant set of views and “common knowledge” explanations for haiku that one finds in American haiku and which has spread to the broader English language haiku traditions in other countries. One might also call this “haiku *sensu* Blyth,” for his four volume set of haiku translations is the cornerstone of this understanding of haiku. One often finds Blyth and Henderson's ideas repeated on blogs, in magazines, books etc. as incontrovertible facts about haiku, and seldom do people examine where these ideas came from, or question their accuracy. When the ideas are reflected in Japanese criticism, the source can often be traced back to the most conservative, traditionalist circles and theorists like Kyōshi, with his strict neoclassical model, but often the ideas are simply inaccurate and unique to the world of haiku in English. In recent years, their work and ideas have come under closer scrutiny by Western haiku scholars, but the rank and file of poets writing haiku in English still have a great deal of investment in their vision of the form.

Blyth and Henderson's interpretations of Japanese tradition are largely the basis of the strong fixation on Zen in the early days of haiku in English. Perhaps one of the reasons haiku became popular was because of the counterculture's fascination with Zen and eastern thought. Regardless, it is incredibly telling to read early interpretations of Bashō's haiku written from Blyth and Henderson's

perspective and compare them to the more culturally informed and literary nuance of Japanese scholars such as Kawamoto.

蛸壺や はかなき夢を 夏の月

takotsubo ya hakanaki yume o natsu no tsuki

Matsuo Bashō

octopus pots—these fleeting dreams, the summer moon

trans. Clayton Beach

“Here the religious implications are obvious, even if we do not go into the Buddhist symbolism of the boat and the moon. It is, however, worthy of note that whenever Bashō uses the word “dream,” he seems also to be thinking of human life...”³³

Henderson takes the fleeting dreams as a Buddhist allegory for life, he conjures a boat from his imagination to reference the *Parable of the Ferryboat*, and takes the moon as a Buddhist symbol of enlightenment. If interpreted as a koan, this haiku is a serious meditation on the transiency of life, the illusions of our hubris and the redemption offered by the Buddhist symbol of a luminous moon. But is this what Bashō was thinking? What does this haiku say from the context of poetic tradition, looking at the traditional associations of the words and how they've been treated in Japanese poetry? How does a Japanese haiku scholar read this poem?

“Here a most peculiar mood is created by the assortment of “fleeting dreams,” an elegant cliché at the core of the courtly waka tradition—and the obviously vulgar yet comical image of the pots used as octopus traps... the word hakanaki (“fleeting” or “ephemeral”) was an essential epithet for the word yume (“dream”)... When we read Bashō's haiku, we are amused by the image of an octopus... dreaming a fleeting dream with little thought for the fisherman in the morning. The traditional treatment of *hakanaki yume* further impels us to associate this dream with those of melancholy love. In this way, the eccentric image of an octopus sadly dreaming of love... blends together a heightened sense of absurdity and pathos.”³⁴

So on one hand, one of the founders of the haiku in English tradition takes this poem as an austere and serious Buddhist parable, while by Japanese poetic standards it is a comical juxtaposition of romantic cliché and vulgar image, resulting in utter bathos! Could the two interpretations differ any more?

Kawamoto's book was written in Japanese for a Japanese audience and later translated into English. It is a rare glimpse into in-depth literary criticism on haiku from the traditional Japanese perspective, and it puts forth haiku as a sophisticated literary genre that is a playful mix of the elevated and the vulgar, but most definitely a literature that plays upon previous Japanese poetic tradition while at the same time innovating and moving forward. What is striking when reading Kawamoto's criticism is just how incorrectly Blyth and Henderson have interpreted much of Bashō's work, and in general the nature of traditional haikai. The picture of haiku they painted using the poetry of Bashō shows a simplicity of thought and freedom from literary artifice that wasn't necessarily there, simply because they didn't catch the cultural references or subtle implications, blinded as they were by a Western perspective of the haiku as “exotic,” and their search for Zen allegory. When Blyth or Henderson rated haiku by the quality of the Zen, it was utterly tone deaf to the reality of haiku criticism in Japan, which often looks at skilled use of traditional language and fresh insight into the essential implication of the subject. While Bashō's final *karumi* aesthetic was more shallow, imagistic and rather similar to Shiki's conception of *shasei*, the poems of the *sabi* period, which are his most popular and frequently discussed, are steeped in the Japanese literary tradition even when colored by an undercurrent of Zen detachment.

One of the most famous quotes from Bashō about haiku mind, often put forward as a koan-like proclamation to empty one's mind and destroy one's attachment to self, is, "Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself."³⁵ Of course, according to the orthodoxy of haiku in English, this is a profound call to sit out in the forest listening to the sound of nothing reverberating through the bamboo and trees until you are struck with enlightenment and can finally write an authentic haiku full of Zen.

Kawamoto, on the other hand, reads this as an admonition against subjective and personal interpretation of natural images, as an urge to heed saijiki and Japanese tradition. Rather than saying it is about achieving a Zen state of "no-mind" and merging with the plants in satori, he states that Bashō is urging poets to respect literary tradition and conform to the "essential implications" (hon-i) of these elements, acknowledging the traditional implications even when playing around with them ironically; "In Bashō's haiku, the temporary rejection of the traditional was always followed... by a return to the time honored notions of hon'i."³⁶ Thus, "going to the bamboo" is not a Zen matter, but a literary one. It is not destroying the ego, but keeping it in check and respecting the encoded meanings and normative associations of imagery established in the imperial anthologies of waka, thus recognizing the inherently romantic implications of a summer dream, even if it is being dreamed by a doomed cephalopod. The matrix of meaning and signification evoked by a kigo is the opposite of "no-mind," it is an orientation to a conversation running across generations and requires a great deal of learning and specific knowledge. This was a turn away from the previous Danrin school of haikai, which had often been wildly satirical of and contrary to the essence of courtly language.

Of course, Kawamoto's is a fairly conservative and traditional interpretation of Bashō. Seisensui on the other hand, took more to the idea of haiku as listening to nature, dwelling on quotes from Bashō like "Follow nature and return to nature," or "When you are composing a verse, let there be not a hair's breadth separating your mind from what you write." He urged an immersive experience where the poet was so in tune with their surroundings that the line between nature and human nature was extinguished, not unlike a Zen state of "no mind."³⁷ It is ironic how much this resonates with Blyth and Henderson's conceptions of haiku, when they so conspicuously avoided engagement with the modern Japanese haiku, instead promoting their view as adherence to pre-modern tradition.

This also has ramifications regarding kigo, or seasonal references, in Japanese haiku, kigo have essential implications that are coded and add deeper meaning to the poem, but if used incorrectly, the subtext suddenly gets very confusing as the reader gets mixed messages. Thus, Japanese haikai spend a lot of time learning their proper use. There are many kigo that, if translated directly, would be completely unrecognizable as a seasonal implication, as they have a stylistic association with a season on a culturally specific basis due to poetic tradition. So, objective portrayal of nature does not concern kigo—it's highly affected and stylized—and it relies on shared consensus of the "essential implication" of a word. Kigo falls between the subjective and objective, occupying the realm of the intersubjective.

Seisensui distrusted the gap between essential implication and lived experience, and saw strict kigo as an impediment to the further refinement of Shiki's shasei aesthetic, a barrier to the highest potential of haiku. In that sense, he makes the same argument against kigo that many in the world of haiku in English have done, citing its limitations in clinging to outdated, culturally specific associations and lack of portability beyond the limited climate of Honshu.³⁸

In English language haiku, there is a tradition of more personal interpretation vs. normative connotation, so kigo in the strictest sense doesn't actually exist. We see this reflected in the haiku in English focus on haiku centered on "nature vs. human nature,"³⁹ abandoning the strictly *seasonal* aspect of traditional haiku to focus on a looser concept of *nature*. However, this focus pulls the "human-nature" out of haiku in a way that Kyoshi might have approved of, but was completely out of line both with haiku from Bashō to Shiki, and much of modern, gendai haiku.

In Japanese, there are kigo that are entirely cultural, for instance, "temari," a stitched ball that is

given to children on New Year's Day.

鳴く猫に赤ん目をして手まり哉
naku neko ni akamme wo shite temari kana

Issa

playing ball
the little girl makes a face
at the mewling kitten

trans. Robert Aitken⁴⁰

This haiku is an idyllic picture of a New Year's Day, but there's no "nature" there beyond a domesticated animal, and the focus is on human nature; the little girl teases the cat that wants the new ball for itself, giving it the "red eye" (equivalent to sticking one's tongue out). So season can have nothing to do with the pastoral, and can be urban and anthropocentric. This is without even delving into the ironic and deconstructive use of *kigo* in some *gendai*, where authors twist *kigo* in a way that remains in the tradition of haiku in that it respects the implications, but only by utilizing contrast and irony for effect in the way Bashō contrasted courtly language with vulgar imagery.

In English, if there's no set emotion or essential implication for, say, "spring rain," then it can't be used ironically, or traditionally, or to give you a clue as to what the rest of the poem might mean, it's just naturalistic description—and that's very different than a true "*kigo*," even though you could call it a "seasonal reference." In that sense, haiku in English resembles *senryū*, which may use seasonal words, but does not use them as *kigo*: It does not orient itself in the traditional semantic framework.

Ultimately, this is the biggest barrier to anything written in English truly being part of the Japanese haiku tradition; the coded language and cultural topoi established first in the Imperial collections of *waka* and then later through haiku *saijiki* (seasonal almanacs) do not translate in the same way features like cutting, disjunction, simplicity, or the love of nature can. Insofar as haiku is steeped in the more untranslatable linguistic, literary and cultural heritage, with their corresponding assumptions in Japanese, the English-language haiku fails to connect to Japanese tradition in a meaningful way.

Thus, while haiku in English is an interesting body of poetry that is inspired by the Japanese haiku and does retain several key elements, there remain severe barriers to importation and adaption of the pure "traditional form" in English, and translating haiku in English into Japanese often results in something that barely resembles haiku at all.

Historically, the orthodox haiku in English aesthetic has inconsistently paralleled two extreme views of haiku, Kyōshi's nativism and pursuit of nature to the exclusion of modern humanism, and Seisensui's modernist pursuit of *shasei* naturalism to its logical conclusion, abandoning the 5-7-5 and *kigo* while retaining objective naturalism. While both theorists accepted the idea of haiku as a nature poem, the crucial difference between Kyōshi and Seisensui was that their conceptions of nature were from two completely different worlds—the traditional and the modern—and the connection to nature was mediated through two fundamentally different functions: *kigo* and *shasei*. Seisensui's view thus accepted much of the modern world, humanity, technology and the biosphere as all being part of "nature," while Kyōshi looked toward the idyllic past, literary tradition and the stylized natural clichés of the poetic past.

Knowing that our lack of *kigo* and *hon-i* makes our haiku inauthentic from a strict Japanese traditionalist stance is both good news and bad; the strictures put on English-language haiku in the name of Japanese haiku tradition in the past are largely hypocritical and sometimes completely inaccurate, for there are no truly "traditional" haiku in English, at least regarding pre-modern *Japanese* tradition, and the original expositions of the form in English were riddled with inaccuracies that distorted our ideas of that tradition. This knowledge liberates us to experiment with what haiku might mean in English, since we'll have to build much of our own tradition from the ground up, but it also leaves the question of why we persist in calling our work haiku in the first place, and continue to claim

inspiration from and fidelity to the Japanese form.

The positive side is that Japanese haiku in the 20th century and beyond has proven to be flexible, and in the more liberal side of the modern tradition, there is increasing commonality and connection between the traditions in Japanese and English, starting with Shiki, then Hekigotō and Seisenui in the 1910's and continuing on to our current day. So long as we recognize the differences between the traditions, and don't represent our way of approaching haiku as reflecting traditional Japanese practice, or being the one true way—so long as we don't misrepresent Japanese practice through repetition of misinformation—we can be inspired by the Japanese haiku and learn a great deal from it while developing our own interpretations of the form and still feel we are part of the haiku genre. That is to say, we are part of the haiku tradition in the broadest sense, but we *cannot* write “traditional haiku” in English. Only by the most liberal, modern Japanese conceptions of haiku are the two genres connected.

Perhaps the most important points raised by Kawamoto (regarding the English language haiku community's urge toward brevity) involve his exposition of the function of meter in Japanese prosody. It is a lengthy essay that discusses the entire origins of the theory of metrics in Japanese poetry across several generations, so I will try to reduce his voluminous study to a few crucial and relevant revelations:*

1. The basic unit of Japanese metrics is a “bimoraic foot,” a two mora unit accented on the first mora, somewhat like a trochaic foot in English.
2. The underlying meter of haiku is three bars of 4/4 time, corresponding roughly to three lines of trochaic tetrameter, with 12 possible accented beats and 24 “eighth notes” that reflect possible positions in the meter where the morae may fall.
3. Each of the 5-7-5 mora “lines” are overlaid on this metric framework, one line per bar of 4/4 time, with some feet having single a mora with its duration stretched out or a pause after it, making the syllable counts odd numbered and leaving a fair amount of blank space as silence or a caesura at the end of each 5 mora line and a briefer caesura in the 7 count line.
4. “Extra syllables” are added to the form without changing the meter simply by filling out the empty spaces generally left blank at the end of the lines, most “hypermetric” lines still nest into 4/4 time, with extreme modern deviations incorporating occasional tri-moraic “triplets” that would change a single trochaic foot to a dactyl.
5. Meter in Japanese poetry does not come from natural linguistic features, but is an artificial, performative element of poetic tradition, separating poetry from natural speech. This is because the Japanese language lacks the pitch, duration or accentual stress patterns necessary for building the more traditional poetic meters found in Chinese, Greek or English poetry.⁴¹

This information has a number of important ramifications for adapting haiku into English. The most interesting facet is that haiku's bi-moraic foot, 4/4 meter and overlaying 5-7-5 pattern all are a result of the language lacking the traditional stress patterns needed for long-form metrical poetry. In other words, haiku sounds like poetry not because of its inherent phonological or semantic structure, but because of a tradition that has developed around performing it as poetry; the structure is a learned experience of metrics, rather than a natural rhythm of speech. This explains why after a brief period of free verse, both conservative and avant-garde Japanese haikai alike returned to the 5-7-5. Without it, Japanese poetry simply doesn't sound much like haiku at all. The occasional deviation, if it fits the

* Kawamoto's book is fairly expensive and rare at the moment. For a more accessible but still detailed treatment of Japanese metrics, see Richard Gilbert and Judy Yoneoka's article at <http://research.gendaihaiku.com/metrics/total2.html>

meter, can still sound like verse, but otherwise, it falls apart and becomes mere prose. Bashō recognized this implicitly in his oft quoted advice, “If you have three or four, even five or seven extra syllables but the poem sounds good, don’t worry about it. But if one syllable stops the tongue, look at it hard.”⁴² It also explains why the literary language, that developed to accentuate the meter and fit inside it, persists in modern poetry. Many feel that Modern Japanese lacks the rhythmic punch of the literary language.

Looking at haiku in English, however, we have a wealth of meters available, and all of them sound like poetry. Even our free verse can be variable and still not lose a sense of accentual rhythms the way Japanese verse does without a set pattern. So, whether our verse falls into regular iambs, trochees or slightly more varied free verse, it still largely sounds like poetry, or it least it ought to if we strive for authenticity. Japanese haiku, it turns out, has a heavy beat and a meter that is exaggerated in comparison to the rhythms of regular speech, something accentuated by literary language that developed to fit the rhythm, so that any interpretation of the genre that says our haiku should avoid meter or sounding too “poetic” in order to attain authenticity is off the mark: Japanese haiku uses elevated, literary diction and has a strong, regular pulse that separates it from prose and clearly demarcates its status as verse, thus haiku in English, no matter what style it chooses, should be recognizable as verse rather than mere prose, if it aims to emulate the actual Japanese tradition of haiku as best it can.

It also follows that any argument against the authenticity of the 3 line format in haiku in English is completely wrong. The 5-7-5 pattern, when placed over the 4/4 meter of haiku in Japanese, has caesuras that generally fall after each sub-group of morae, which makes them function very much like a line in English verse. In fact, most of the Japanese contests and journals that accept haiku in English *insist* on a three line format. So while the one line haiku has a rich canon in the English language and the format has some very strong merits in terms of literary aesthetics and novel techniques that have grown from it organically over time, it is not a particularly accurate reflection of Japanese practice and can be seen more as an evolution within haiku in English than a traditionalist interpretation. The one-line format can obscure the meter, and, barring careful punctuation and obvious cutting that creates a tripartite rhythm, will lead away from the Japanese haiku rather than towards it. This is not to say anything negative against the practice of one-line haiku, for many of the finest haiku in English being written today follow this format, but we must recognize that any argument for this practice being more “traditional” than the 3 line format has little basis in fact.

(/ x) (/ x) (— —) (/ x)
 pig and i < > spring rain < > < >

Now, we can return to Mountain's pig and examine it metrically by the standards of Japanese 4/4 meter. If we give a weak stress for the rest after the single, strongly stressed syllable in the middle foot, as happens in Japanese meter, we have two trochees and a spondee, giving three feet of roughly trochaic meter, then an empty foot. This is closely analogous to the bi-moraic meter of the first line of a Japanese haiku as described by Kawamoto. So, metrically, this emulates what's going on in Japanese haiku fairly accurately, it simply concentrates the entire poem into the space of a single first line. Whether this similarity was intentional or coincidental, I find that Mountain's intuitive grasp of haiku spirit and form was often quite impressive. She consistently cut through the nonsense of the day and grasped the essence of the form insofar as it can be expressed in English, even when she bucked the American orthodoxy and made a new path for herself.

However, just because Japanese meter is trochaic doesn't mean we can't use a more natural iambic meter in English haiku, though I do find it interesting that Mountain's ku demonstrates in English an affinity to the natural meter of Japanese haiku. Moving forward, for those interested in exploring meter in haiku in English, keeping this flexible framework in mind and experimenting with slight deviations

within the concept of a 4/4 time framework overlaying the text would be profitable, much more than restricting poems to arbitrary numbers of syllables with no set beat or meter and the resulting anarchy.

Now that we have seen that the extreme brevity of Mountain's ku is not actually all that in-line with traditional Japanese practice in terms of poem length and number of images or details, and that poems like “tundra” and “fossilence” are absolutely *extreme* takes on the concept of brevity in haiku in English that stretch the genre to its limit, there is a final interesting way in which Japanese poetics can be used to re-frame our views of an element of our own approach to the adaption of the haiku. That is, the popular feature of our briefest expressions of haiku—the “poem-word,”—can be seen as a valid analogue to a feature of the Japanese haiku tradition, the kaketoba (pivot word), and thus it can be expanded upon and used as part of a fuller form that opens new horizons for the haiku in English.

人に生死蒔田鳥の争うよ
hito ni seishikarita tori arasou yo

Shin'ichi Takeda

Life and death for man;
a battle fought by chickens
on the paddy stubble

trans. David Burleigh⁴³

Here the phrase “life and death” seishikari, functions as a pivot word, sharing the symbol 蒔 (kari) with the first word in 刈り田 (karita), or “paddy stubble/harvested rice field.” However, like fossil and silence in fossilence, seishikari and karita have been blended together as seishikarita. The fact that the kanji used for the 2 shared syllables, kari, is the one contained in the word for the concept “life and death,” 蒔, rather than the 刈り that would normally be used in the word for the kigo of harvested rice field, or “paddy stubble,” means that the entire phrase also functions as the neologism seishikarita, “rice field of life and death.” The kigo is embedded in this neologism and must be teased out by recognizing it in the blended word with an alternate spelling. This dual meaning deepens the metaphorical resonance of the ku in a more nuanced and complex manner than is communicable in English translation, where the pun/pivot disappears and the grapheme play is lost. This usage ties in to the long Japanese poetic tradition of kakekotoba, which was a crucial part of the poetics of courtly waka.

Discussion of features like this rarely factor into English-language treatments of haiku, much to the detriment of our understanding, for this kind of wordplay is extremely common and important in Japanese haiku.

Because the fusion of words into novel portmanteaus has been a prevalent feature of Japanese poetry for over 1000 years, the concept of blended words is nothing new to Japanese tradition and fits perfectly well in the context of haiku. However, in terms of practice, in Japanese haiku the blending is used to save space in the 5-7-5 form while showing linguistic playfulness, generally tying the superposed and base sections together and emphasizing the blending of multiple images, becoming the bridge between what are in some cases two very different worlds. I know of no Japanese haiku that consist of a single blended word. In the English-language haiku “poem-word,” the blended word becomes the entire locus of the poem, and the brevity puts an immense amount of focus on the neologism, with the word becoming almost a mantra upon which to meditate, reflecting perhaps the Zen obsessed idea of haiku as wordless koan.

It would be interesting to see more poets working in English expanding beyond the singular pwoermd and using these blended words the way they are used in Japanese haiku—as pivots between sections in a normal haiku—rather than giving them the entirety of the focus; using them to open up a more complex way of blending phrases and imagery. Individual (not blended) pivot words that create double entendre or multiple ways to read a line have been used extensively in one-line haiku in English

for some time now, but the portmanteau is generally seen as a poem in and of itself, and has yet to make regular headway into the body of longer haiku, where it has the most promise in terms of moving the genre in novel directions in English while re-engaging with Japanese tradition.

In conclusion, English-language haiku has stressed the concept of brevity and embraced its practice to a further extent than the Japanese haiku, and long ago found the limits of this trajectory, pushing minimalism as far as humanly possible short of saying nothing, aiming at the Zen-inspired idea of the haiku as a “wordless poem.” However, the way in which early translators and theorists approached the form often failed to acknowledge many literary and linguistic features of Japanese haiku, ignoring haiku as poetry and instead reading them in terms of Zen inspired simplicity and focusing on the psychological aspect of capturing heightened, “haiku moments” in a diaristic fashion, or else interpreting images through free association even when the original poems were highly stylized and followed poetic clichés with precise meaning and complex use of language (rather than directly painting subjective experience in the simplest terms available). By missing the normative cultural implications of many haiku and instead making personal readings the basis, haiku in English became seen as a collaborative process between poet and reader, with each poem being open to interpretation, rather than referring to an established matrix of coded words that invoked a highly allusive literary tradition. In losing the Japanese implications and focusing on an individualist, psychological/spiritual approach, English-language haiku both divorced itself from strict Japanese tradition and developed a genuinely new tradition with its own unique canon, built around minimalism and thus exploring haiku as extreme micro-poetry to a greater extent than has generally been seen in Japanese practice.

While this indicates a significant level of divergence and differentiation between the two genres, exemplified by the pig and boar of Mountain and Tohta, ultimately the diversity in practice illustrated through the in depth contrast between the two enriches and broadens our vision of the possibilities available to the haiku genre as a whole.

However, often times this gradual divergence on the part of haiku in English has been couched as if it were adherence to Japanese tradition, with many believing Blyth's misinterpretations of the genre as fact, and truly believing they were writing “traditional haiku,” often criticizing what they felt were inauthentic attempts. If we are truly to engage with the Japanese haiku as literature and learn from it as an antecedent for our own poetry, it should be seen that many of our early impressions were, if not completely false, certainly warped, and certain restrictions on length, content and outlook that have been imposed upon the English language haiku in the past can be loosened without fear of losing authenticity to the spirit and tradition of Japanese haiku, insofar as we have ever had it.

There have been some haiku in English “traditionalists” resistant to the modern Japanese haiku (gendai), and other haiku in English poets who model their poetry after this liberal tradition. While the brevity of haiku in English goes far beyond that of Bashō, we can allow for the extreme brevity practiced in haiku in English in the context of haiku only insofar as we admit that modern Japanese haiku is indeed a valid part of the haiku tradition, and we *should* admit the modern Japanese haiku as valid, for if experimental Japanese poets like Seisensui cannot use the word “haiku” to describe their work, surely what we do in English has even less veracity as authentic haiku. The ramifications of this acceptance of modernity in haiku is that extreme minimalism is not the only acceptable interpretation of the genre, and that expanding the complexity of both the base and superposed sections—working in longer lines that have a sense of metricality, using more complicated literary language or even working in or close to the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern, and leaving the realm of strict objective realism all are valid choices that can be made within the broader tradition of haiku, with precedent going back to Bashō, and which carries all the way to the present day.

Often, when someone in the Anglophone haiku community makes a pronouncement about the true nature of haiku, they use Japanese tradition to justify it. But when one then uses more accurate information about Japanese tradition to challenge that view of haiku, its proponent suddenly becomes completely uninterested in Japanese tradition, and begins to speak of their own view of poetry, or else

their adherence to a unique Anglophone tradition. However, even anglophone haiku has never been truly unified in aesthetic and outlook, as evidenced in our “haiku wars” and ongoing debates. Thus any move to strictly define the genre is going to result in the disenfranchising of non-conforming poets and promoting internecine conflict. Better to keep definitions fluid and observe the many ways the *idea of haiku* has been interpreted in the past and continues to be developed.

In many ways the modernist and post-modernist schools in Japanese and English language haiku have more in common philosophically with each other than they do with the “traditionalist” schools in their respective languages; the conservatives are rule bound and tend to call anything that doesn't confirm to their vision “not haiku,” while the liberal schools look to expand the form and make it more inclusive.

While there are significant cultural differences in English haiku and Japanese, I don't think it's helpful to strongly segregate Japanese haiku from the other haiku traditions (English, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Arabic etc.) in that all ultimately come from the single germ of the traditional Japanese haiku. They have differentiated immensely, with some bearing only vestigial traces of the original, but like every leaf on the tree of life, each brings its own unique expression to the form—just as different poets and schools have added new visions and interpretations to the tradition over the years—and all trace back to the same roots.

This view is shared by the Haiku International Association, which writes

“Haiku is a very short poem written in many foreign languages now, following the form and style of the Japanese haiku. Haiku International Association supports the international cultural exchange through haiku and is committed to exploring the richness and diversity of haiku writing.”⁴⁴

Rather than pretending every branch is equivalent and interchangeable, that our differences are minimal, and thus erasing important cultural distinctions, or saying that our traditions are too different to even be considered part of the same tradition and thus suggesting we abandon the word haiku or denying non-Japanese haiku authenticity, driving an artificial wedge between cultures and separating poets who share a common interest, I urge a cosmopolitan approach to haiku as a broad, multicultural tradition with its roots in Japanese poetics, and I urge poets to seek out the other traditions, interact with poets from other linguistic and cultural traditions and find out what they bring to the form. Haiku is in a unique position to be a poetic genre that embraces many languages, styles and cultures under one canopy, but only if rigid, dogmatic thinking is set aside.

It must, however, be stressed that strictly “traditional” haiku does not exist outside of the Japanese language haiku and its matrix of word associations and master-disciple lineages, so while I say that we English language haiku is authentic haiku, it does not mean that haiku in English is in any way “traditional haiku,” or that there are no borders between the genres. Everything we write in English is modernist or postmodern haiku, and it remains significantly different from the Japanese haiku in crucial aspects, and must always respect the importance of the Japanese haiku to Japanese cultural heritage and identity, as well as haiku history.

As the internet brings us closer and closer together, inclusivity and respect for differences in aesthetic will only become more important. Hard-fast rules in haiku have often had two functions, to give power and prestige to those wielding them as a cudgel, and to give direction to those who are lost without them. Bashō knew the rules of haikai and regularly flouted them. Shiki cast the entire apparatus of haikai and its literati out the window and created a new name for the genre. The pendulum swings back and forth between innovation and nostalgia, but the history of significant haiku poets is the history of writers who have engaged with tradition while adding something new, who have given us a unique and fresh perspective on the haiku and cut another facet on this tiny jewel of world literature.

Recent moves have been made to enshrine the haiku as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage,

which are described as “traditional, contemporary and living at the same time,” “inclusive,” “representative,” and “community-based.” All of these qualities point toward a conception of haiku that allows and encourages international involvement in the creation of haiku as a global literature and generous definitions that celebrate the value in each interpretation of the form. UNESCO writes,

“Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large”⁴⁵

This movement toward increasing cohesion, cooperation, inclusivity and international celebration of the many styles of haiku, while at the same time trying to preserve its history and tradition, is an incredibly hopeful vision of a path forward for haiku, both in its original, native Japanese form, and the many strands of international haiku that continue to grow and develop from that fountainhead.

While simplicity and brevity are fine goals in any poetic tradition, these will mean different things to different poets, and one certainly cannot judge the quality of a ku by its syllable count or the bare simplicity of its diction. I challenge haiku poets writing haiku in English to open their minds to the expansive and literary side of haiku in addition to the minimalist and atomized, and I hope that poets across the globe will explore the many different schools of haiku in Japan, as well as other language traditions, drawing inspiration from what they find.

There is nothing wrong with the unique tradition formed by Blyth and Henderson's idiosyncratic visions of haiku, it has in fact created a vibrant form of poetry, but we do both the Japanese and English-language haiku traditions injustice when we make broad generalizations that fail to recognize the fundamental differences in approach between the two, just as we make an unnecessary schism between two branches of the same tree when we fail to recognize the many similarities and affinities they continue to share. We do even more damage when we close our minds and refuse to consider that other approaches to the form within our own communities are equally valid to our own, and that haiku has a very colorful, complicated and rich history that only grows stronger with increased diversity and wider participation.

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Richard Gilbert

Pig & Boar, in the Haiku Wild: An Appreciation

An impressive amount of research and thought has gone into the article, “The Pig and the Boar, or: The Limits to Brevity and Simplicity in Haiku,” by Clayton Beach. Having read some of his earlier essays, and participating in online dialogue with Clayton on several haiku forums on social media, it has been an engaging experience to see where his contemplations of the state of English-haiku method, community, and issues of bias has taken him.

In responding to his article, I find myself largely in agreement, though in the interest of examining some matters, would like to add a few comments. One topic that surprised me was the news that in workshopping haiku the advice often offered would be: best is an aim likened to extreme concision, or even the “wordless poem”—an oxymoron if ever there was one—or the single-word poem as a “pwoermd.” As Clayton writes:

While I'm not opposed to brevity and simplicity in haiku, pursuit of them as an end rather than a means—at the cost of creative liberty and poetic value—is, in my view, ultimately short-sighted, restrictive and antithetical to both Japanese tradition and good poetics in general.

This seems a reasonable injunction. Though the devil is in the details. For the poet, a useful reminder; for the pundit, a caution to beware of sophistry; yet for the critic and reader, the cost of extreme brevity remains in the eye of the beholder. I am intrigued by “atomistic” haiku, yet quite as much with the median-length haiku, as with the longest-possible haiku. That is, the full range of haiku, to the fringe of what might be admitted regarding formal verity. To explain the value of extreme brevity I coined the term “atomistic haiku” in *Poetry as Consciousness [PaC]* (Keibunsha, 2018; pp. 148-49), writing

When applied to minimal haiku, “concision” may be inadequate: perhaps *atomistic* is the better term. Here are several atomistic haiku, drawn from *Disjunctive Dragonfly* (Gilbert, Red Moon Press, 2013):

silence
like it

isms with our clothes on

anchor
i
tic

(Jack Galmitz, *Y* (ImPress, 2013); Paul Pfleuger, Jr., *A Zodiac* (Red Moon Press, 2013); Philip Rowland, *Haiku in English*, Norton, 2013).

In the modern-Japanese tradition, one can look to the lineage of Ogiwara Seisensui and his noted students, Ozaka Hosai and Taneda Santoka—esteemed for their often extremely brief works. Encompassing both a depth of humanity and a sense of haiku cosmos, this haiku of extreme brevity by Hosai is a signature achievement:

咳をしても一人
seki wo shite mo hitori (9-on)

coughing, even alone

In this minimal translation (done by our translation group) the atomistic brevity of the original is maintained—one often sees the English-translation containing (foolishly) text such as: “I too am alone.” There is no “I” or “am” in the original. One can argue about what is inferred, but the crux of this poem, its raw poetic power, concerns the fusion of extreme concision with vast, yet cuttingly direct inference. This lineage of practice (excepting the committed traditionalist or classicist type of haiku-reader) is as valid as any other, and has remained influential since its origin in the 1920s—that is, for nearly a century. I would like to quote from a bilingual page, offering some context to Hosai and the haiku, above:

From *Taikū*, 1926. Together with Taneda Santōka, Hōsai was one of the leading poets of the colloquial free-form haiku which Ogiwara Seisensui pioneered. The fact that both Santōka and Hōsai were mendicant priests who had rejected the world may have been closely connected to their abandonment of the traditional 5-7-5 haiku form: When one is “alone,” there is no longer any need for the poem to keep a fixed form. And yet, as in the poem above, which is 3-3-3 in the original, the free-form haiku was not completely formless. It was a poetic shape created for someone [who] could endure a life in which “In coughing/too,” h[e] was “alone.” [kotobakan.jp/makoto/makoto-6161]

There are hundreds of haiku composed at near to this level of brevity that might be quoted and translated; this could make a good study. Yet, I can’t think of a haiku in Japan that is composed of one single word—this may be due to my lack of reading, as there have been many avant-garde experiments—the literature would have to be combed through. In *PaC*, I began with extreme brevity and simplicity as one of 36 “qualities” among seven “properties” of haiku, presenting some 125 examples, of all styles. Here are two, selected at random, from page 187 (listed under “Idiosyncrasy”):

this morning
it takes the iris to open
forever

The sweet smell
from an unknown tree
repulses the metropolis

(Michele Root-Bernstein, (*Acorn* 31, 2013); Kai Falkman, (*Ginyu* 21, 2004.)

Counting syllables, there are 14 & 16: both exceed the median range. One of my favorite haiku, long-ago memorized, is by Richard Wright:

Just enough of rain
To bring the smell of silk
From umbrellas

(*Haiku in English*, Norton, 2013; composed c. 1960.)

The above haiku is written in 5-6-4, fulsome by the median standard of 12+ syllables across the English-language haiku genre. The capitals beginning each line add a formal note, as they elide with normative lines of contemporary poetry being written at the time. The range-limit of the haiku genre is a fungible or fuzzy-logic matter; one must take each poem on a case-by-case basis. Like Clayton, I find an over-emphasis on rules promulgated at the expense of poetic savor, and invention, anathema to the art. I personally have no preference for short or long, and no animus towards the 5-7-5 poem—if it happens to be good.

Possibly the longest haiku I published over the last two decades was 18 syllables:

moon cradled you recall the voice of another I might be the distance
(*Roadrunner Haiku Journal* 11:2, 2012)

And the shortest is probably 8 (though I have composed one-word poems I do not consider them haiku):

be mine –
alive for one
more war (*is/let haiku*, 30 Dec 2014.)

Dividing these two, an average of 12-syllables is found—my published work falls within the typical distribution of syllables. So, I suppose I'm not one of those "ELH theorists [that] have quite oversold the idea of simplicity in Japanese haiku." That said, simplicity is a tricky business, in principle, as Hosai, Marlene Mountain, and others (some quoted above) demonstrate. I prefer not to shun the range-limit, short or long, when it concerns word- or syllable-count. And if a theorist requires critical justification from within the Japanese haiku tradition of the last 120 years of modernity, it can likely be found.

Concerning translation matters, for those interested, I refer readers to a paper dealing with Japanese haiku form and its emulation in English. Of special interest are the sections written by Professor Judy Yoneoka, an applied linguist fluent in English and Japanese. The paper is: "From 5-7-5 to 8-8-8 Haiku Metrics and Issues of Emulation—New Paradigms for Japanese and English Haiku Form" [PDF. research.gendaihaiku.com/metrics/HaikuMetrics.pdf] [Online. research.gendaihaiku.com/metrics/haikumet.html].

In the Conclusion, the section, “A Metrical Approach to English Haiku Based on the Japanese Template: A Musical Analogy” demonstrates how various linguistic meters can be scanned, by applying regular and syncopated accents, fermata, etc., in English. The examples given provide evidence that although there is a lack of linguistic relationship between Japanese and English *at the level of the syllable*, there is serendipitously *a metrical relationship* at a higher level: whether at the level of the foot, the metron, or the segment.

In his analysis, Clayton sensibly states:

Banality is merely the antipode of obscurantism, and neither extreme is desirable in any literature that aims to move hearts and communicate effectively. Poems like van den Heuval’s “tundra” and Boyers’ “molasses dance” inhabit the outer range limits on the spectrum of brevity and simplicity in haiku that show how, while haiku certainly has boundaries as a genre, it also has a great deal of variety and space to play.

Homogeneity in verse is not something to aspire to as a community . . .

Also of value is the reminder that haiku in English-translation arrived with baggage—Zen baggage, in particular:

Insofar as ELH minimalism is based on an outlook that views haiku as expressions of Zen metaphysics along the line of them being ‘one breath koans,’ it simply isn’t a culturally sensitive or accurate interpretation of Japanese haiku. Blyth’s descriptions of haiku are ecstatic and seductive, but ultimately hyperbolic and distorted by his enthusiasm for Buddhist interpretation, with him often evaluating the success of haiku by the “quality of their Zen.”

Looking back, the combination of Zen ethos, when combined with concepts like ‘purity of mind,’ and ‘progress of enlightenment’ (as in Aiken’s, *A Zen Wave: Basho’s Haiku & Zen*, 1979), and in much of Blyth, seem unfortunate as they reveal an ignorance of the literary culture, complex framings and concerns the hokku and haikai tradition have sprung from. Ironically, the perspectives offered may illuminate—while at the same time being a western usurpation, cultural reduction, appropriation. Clayton outlines this tendency with care, and takes a stand: “When Blyth or Henderson rates haiku by the quality of the Zen, this is utterly tone deaf to the reality of haiku criticism in Japan, which looks at skilled use of traditional language and fresh insight into the essence of the subject.”

Clayton also offers a cogent explication of probably insurmountable divergences between Japanese haiku and haiku in English. This includes a discussion of the history and use of *kigo* in Japan: “. . . the coded language and cultural *topoi* established first in the Imperial collections of waka and then later through haiku *saijiki* (seasonal almanacs) do not translate . . .”. These and other matters of culture and language-diversity bring up difficult, even tempestuous matters: what is the relationship between haiku in English and the originating form (and culture), and what *will be* the relationship, down the line? The simple answer is, we don’t know.

Nonetheless, critical inquiry that combines a scholarly study of both literatures, as Clayton has done, provides for further intercultural understanding and dialogue. A complete separation of haiku cultures seems counter-productive. In looking to haiku in English,

It would be interesting to see more poets working in English expanding beyond the singular pwoermd and using these blended words the way they are used in Japanese haiku—as pivots between sections in a normal haiku—rather than giving them the entirety of the focus; using them to open up a more complex way of blending phrases and imagery.

This suggestion represents one form of rapprochement. With sensitivity and knowledge, the rich trove of Japanese haiku (in decent translation) and its accompanying critical tradition can be of great benefit in illuminating haiku in English. Happily, there are many aspects of crossover and interchange available. In his conclusion, Clayton offers a challenge “[for] poets to explore the many different schools of haiku in Japan as well as other language traditions, drawing inspiration from what they find.”

In the main, haiku in English needs to *breathe*, to find novel, expansive modes of expression, offering depth and enrichment—no matter what the syllable-count. Haiku remains our shortest genre of poetry, and concision matters.

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