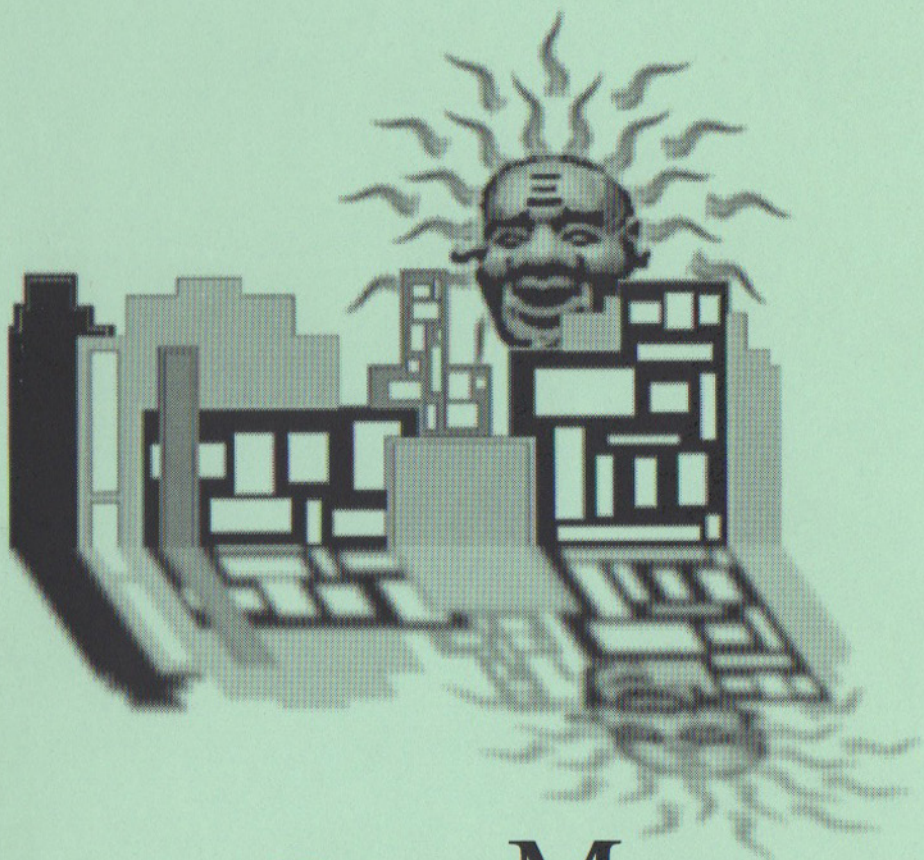


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Paul David Mena





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April 1997

Paul David Mena

t e n e m e n t l a n d s c a p e s

***A Small Garlic Press
Chicago • and internet***



A Small Garlic Press is a Nonprofit Organization
incorporated in Illinois under 501(c)(3) section of the IRC.
FEIN 36-4126633

3030 West Fourth No. 27 Kennewick, WA 99336, USA
5445 Sheridan 3003, Chicago, IL 60640, USA

ASGP e-mail

sanrensi@teleport.com
marek@enteract.com
ketzle@cyberspace.com
leeannh@netgate.net
renay@proaxis.com
grafik@enteract.com

Kim Hodges, operations
Marek Lugowski, editor
katrina grace craig, editing
LeeAnn Heringer, technology
Renay, public relations
Rene Rivera, finances

This is the third offering from A Small Garlic Press.

Our homepage URL: <http://www.enteract.com/~marek/asgp/>

We would also like to draw your attention to our on-line & print magazine of arts and letters, *Agnieszka's Dowry*, *AgD*, a writing and visual arts exhibit, continually updated, available at the same address.

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Book design & typesetting by Marek Lugowski.

Art by LeeAnn Heringer, Katrina Grace Craig & Marek Lugowski.

Technical production assistance by LeeAnn Heringer.

Preface by Dhugal Lindsay.

Second edition printing logistics Kim Hodges.

This book was created by people working together across the internet.
It was digitally mastered, then printed direct-digital on a Xerox Docutech.
It can be printed and bound using a remote networked digital press.

First Edition, first printing: 7 October 1995;
second printing: 28 February 1997.

ISBN 1-888431-02-4

Preface

"A storm in a teacup" — perhaps this is how one can describe the distillation of energy which is haiku. In Japanese the haiku form is of 17 syllables, usually arranged in a 5,7,5 pattern, and includes a season word. Many schools of haiku exist in Japan: some traditional, some modernistic, some spurn form while others adhere to it strictly, some even forsake the seasonal word.

Haiku Schools in Japan are divided roughly into two camps. The Schools of "Traditional" and "Modern" haiku. Many "Traditional" Schools believe that haiku should deal only with natural objects and that planes, trains and automobiles have no place in haiku. Love is also a taboo subject in these Schools. Many factions in this camp subscribe to the "shasei" or snapshot school where a totally objective viewpoint is stressed. The "Modern" Schools, three factions of which I am an active member of, believe that there is a haikuness to haiku separate and distinct from that laid out by a definition through the objects included and themes involved. My particular school, "Kanrai" or "Midwinter Thunder" believes that objectivity is illusory and that subjectivity is intrinsic to haiku. In short, even though the set form and seasonal word reference dictum is accepted by the majority of Schools, there is an abundance of different opinions as to the philosophical aspects of what a haiku should be.

The school of "American Haiku" has developed over the past few decades into a tangible entity. Basically it is defined as the midway ground between several popular American haiku poets and is characterized as being free-form and not overly concerned with

the inclusion of a concrete seasonal reference. Although this approach is different to that of the majority of Japanese Schools, it is still a valid approach to the art of haiku and many good poems have been written under its auspices.

Several haiku appearing in this collection by Paul David Mena will undoubtedly be counted as among these pearls of American haiku. Only once have I had the pleasure of visiting New York but while reading this collection I once again felt that I was there, at sunrise in Soho, with the man and the pigeons in Tompkins Square, on a fire escape deciding on my dinner and watching the moon from some dark street. Paul has a penchant for visual haiku but has also captured some of the sounds and smells of the city that is New York. When read as a collection these haiku allow us to once again see New York through fresh eyes and from a myriad of angles, to feel the pulse of the city and its loneliness as well.

— *Dhugal J. Lindsay*

Tokyo

October 1995



Soho sunrise:
pigeons reign
over unswept streets

East New York morning:
sunshine and salsa
flood my apartment

manhole cover
offering incense
to the skyscraper sky

the inclusion of a concrete seasonal reference. Although this approach is different to that of the majority of Japanese Schools, it is still a valid approach to the art of haiku and many good poems have been written under its auspices.

Several haiku appearing in *in the taxicab* Paul David Mena will undoubtedly be counted among the best work of American haiku. Only once have I had the chance to visit New York but while reading this collection I once again felt that I was there, at sunrise in Soho, with the man and the pigeons in Tompkins Square, on a fine escape deciding on my dinner and watching the snow from some dark street. Paul has a penchant for visual haiku but has also captured some of the sounds and smells of the city that is New York. When read as a collection these haiku allow us to once again see New York through fresh eyes and from a myriad of angles, to feel the pulse of the city again.

two lovers kiss
on the brownstone steps
the blinking streetlight

—Cheryl J. Lindberg

Tokyo

October 1995

lingering
among rusty swing sets
bubblegum perfume

Rockaway Beach:
liquid rainbows
washing broken glass

Washington's statue
can no longer withstand
the pigeons' attack

FDR Drive:
graffiti rainbows
on abandoned cars

the taxi driver
turns off
my favorite song

Tompkins Square:
an old man teaches Tai-Chi
to a crowd of pigeons

ambulance
paralyzed
in gridlock

the billboard reads
"cheerful English
spoken here"

unable to escape
the subway station
of my dreams

on the fire escape
the breeze shifts direction
from pizza to chow mein

Battery Park:
Statue of Liberty
in your eyes

College Point:
lawn chair audience
judging traffic

stripper
yawning
rhythmically

a sudden gust —
yesterday's headline
crosses the street

initials faded
graffiti heart
on a cracked wall

Williamsburg, Brooklyn:
the cinders
of my childhood home

after the fireworks
the thunder and lightning
of the IRT local

I fell in love
for the second time this week
on the downtown train

at South Ferry station
well-fed rats
also wait for the train

in the shadow
of Trump Plaza
a cardboard house

more refreshing
than the art auction
subway graffiti

gentle sidewalk breeze
every time
the light turns green

outside Penn Station
a blind beggar
checks his watch

homeless man
wipes dew from the bench
before sitting down

an old cop
who would rather not
wake up the drunk

even the cicadas
stop
for the fire truck

listening to the News
I feel guilty
for being alive

adult book store
a refuge
from church bells

Penn Station after midnight:
even the shadows have echoes

reading
under the flashing neon light
one line at a time

having missed
the last train
fear keeps me company

punching a hole
through the Soho night —
amber moon

distant subway train,
rescue me
from these shadows!

the World Trade Center at dusk —
a pair of sunsets

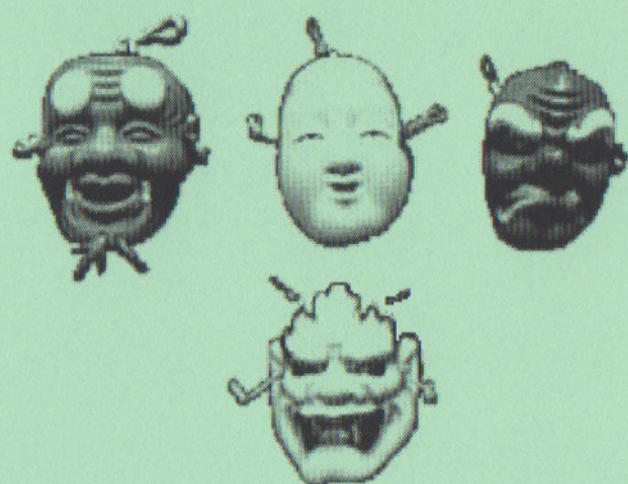


Paul David Mena was born in Rockville Centre, New York, on the day that "Mack the Knife" topped the charts. He grew up in a Long Island suburb that deserves to remain anonymous.

Although Paul began writing poetry in high school, his more sustained efforts began only four years ago, on purchasing *The Haiku Anthology* by Cor Van Den Heuvel. The brevity and austerity of the haiku form seemed ideally suited to Paul, a man who otherwise still would be trying to finish his first poem. Instead, he has managed to finish — and publish — many haiku over the past three years, all in small journals and magazines.

Tenement Landscapes is his first book.

Paul lives in Stillwater, Minnesota, where, in addition to working as a programmer and playing as a poet, he busies himself gathering material for an unauthorized autobiography to be written posthumously.



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