



Clouds Empty Themselves

Island Haiku

by

WINONA BAKER



CLLOUDS EMPTY THEMSELVES : Island haiku

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Baker, Winona.

Clouds empty themselves

ISBN 0-9693047-4-9

1. Title.

PS8553.A5C4 1987

C811'.54

C87-091410-3

PR9199.3.B25C4 1987

For Helen

Thanks to Margaret Bailey who edited the poems

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the editors of the following publications in which many of these haiku appeared:

Alchemist, Amelia, Bird Verse Portfolio, Discovery, Frogpond, Hai, Haiku Canada Broadside, Haiku Canada Newsletter, Haiku Zasshi Zo, Living Message, Mainichi Daily News, New Cicada, Stump, Sunrust, Swag, Whetstone, and Haiku Canada's 10th Anniversary Holograph Anthology.

Some were read on CBC's *Morningside* program. The haiku *summer's cold* was awarded a shikishi at the International Haiku Symposium in 1986, and *skinny young men*, special recognition in NCHS Contest in 1987.

IF THE CLOUDS BE

*If the clouds be full of rain,
they empty themselves upon the
earth:*

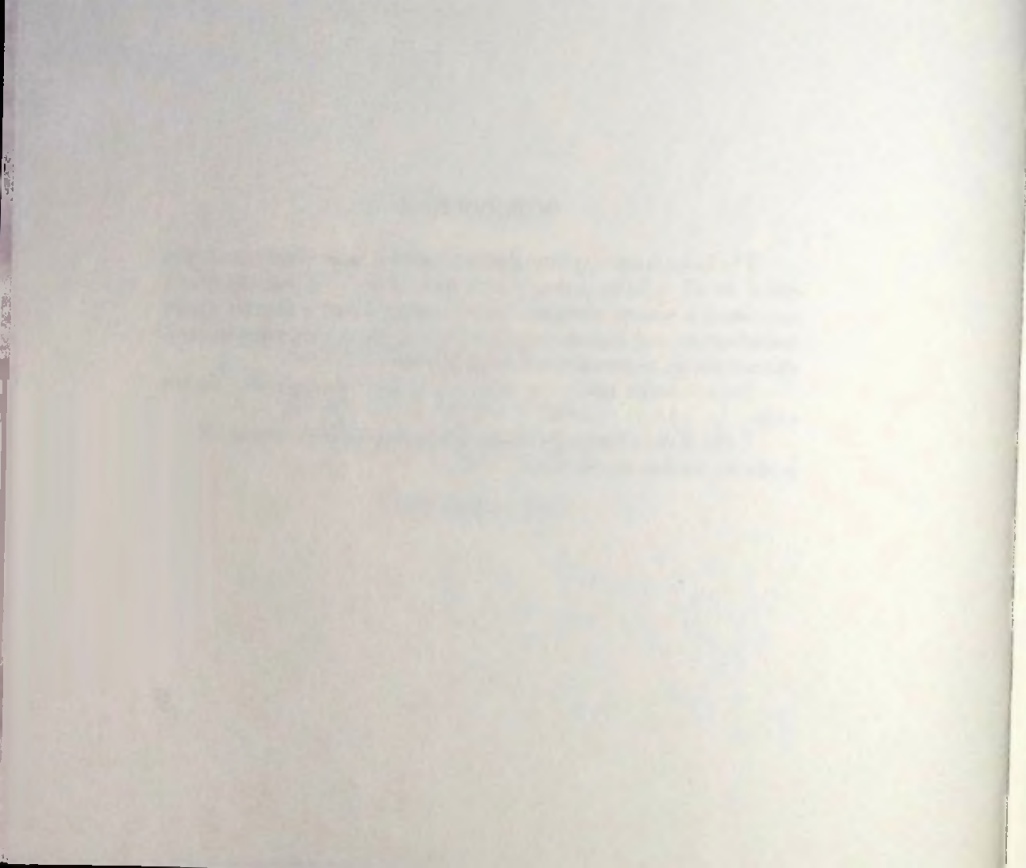
Ecclesiastes 11:3

INTRODUCTION

The haiku is a poetry form that originated in Japan. Traditional rules called for 17 syllables arranged in 3 lines of 5 - 7 - 5 syllables that : mentioned a season; sketched, in the present tense, a singular event; united nature with human nature; objectively conveyed a sense of awe / transcendence; eschewed usual poetic devices.

Today's haiku tend to be shorter, and don't always follow the old rules.

I like Kazuo Sato's definition. He says it is the suchness of the moment; the Zen experience of "Ah!"



Spring

*spring child and I walk
think of Shelley's skylark
ducklings in the park*

*rainstorm over
cherry-petal-filled puddles
by the tennis court*

*spring vandals
have toppled friend stone angel
from her pedestal*

*stone angel gone
from the old graveyard
where is she buried?*

*forsythia bush
or spatter-painted sunshine
on the shed's grey wall*

*sun warm shingles
gold crocus bloom beneath
ignore obscene flies*

*sun
broke through clouds
just as the queen arrived*

*air like puffs
from babies' mouths, soft as girls' hair
falls on the town*

*disturbing wind
Nanaimo in April
have I stayed too long?*

*young children play
pretending to be adults
oh look out — April!*

*capricious place
shirt sleeves in February
hailstones in May*

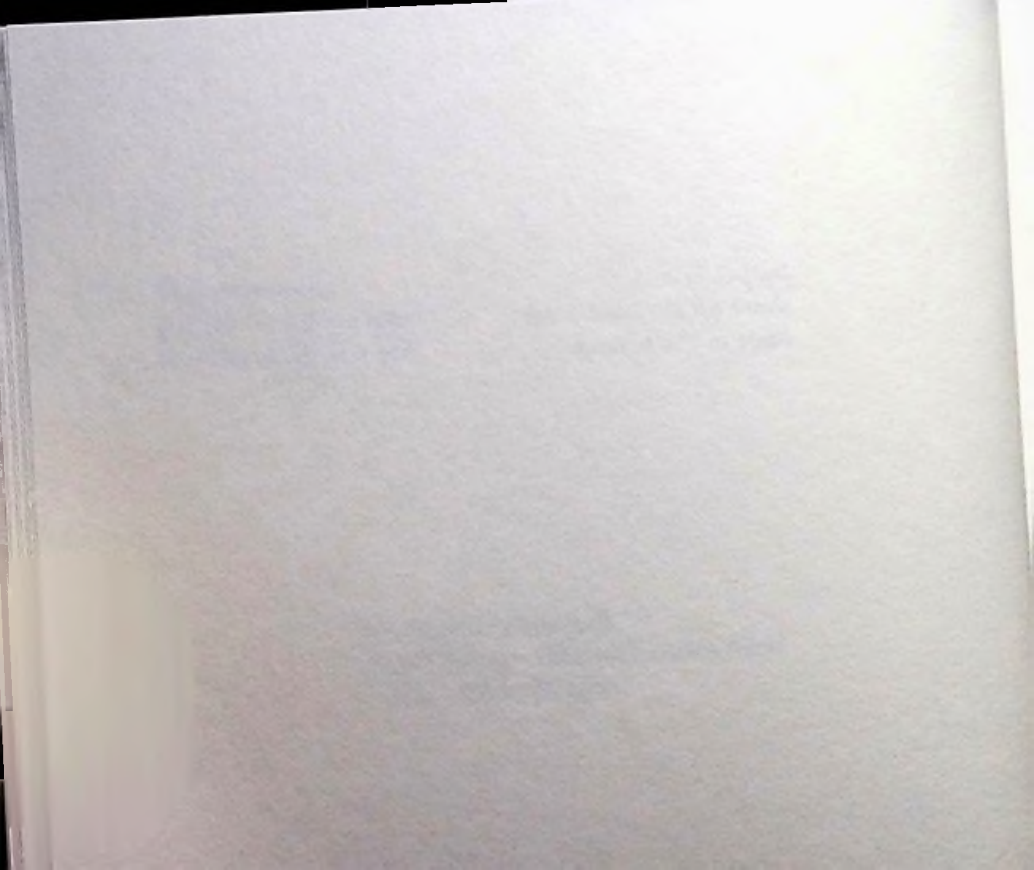
*in clipped branches
fruit trees hold last night's snow
did we prune too soon?*

*hail storm today
this month cold as winter
April warmed us more*

*skinny young men
grouped around the car's raised hood
spring*

*purple lupins
shore up the road bank
lilies in the swamp*

*Buttertubs' geese
hiss discovering me
empty-handed*



Summer

*dead robin
flew twice
into my window*

*brave dandelions
golden one day the next
ghosts blown by wind*

*a plague of starlings
drops on the tree, devouring
desperate cherries*

*summer's cold
the fireplace brightly burns
next winter's woodpile*

sun-drenched children

L

E

A

P

into Harewood Dam

*this weather
does not belong to summer
not rain — a deluge*

*gone the summer rain
water-coloured rainbow
remnants in the sky*

*here summer stinks
not a thousand outhouses
the city dump*

*raucous stench
black crows and white gulls battle
at the garbage dump*

*Venus of the dump
a sculpted nude female
wears a red hard hat*

summer afternoon
I think the sky has fallen
no — wild chicory

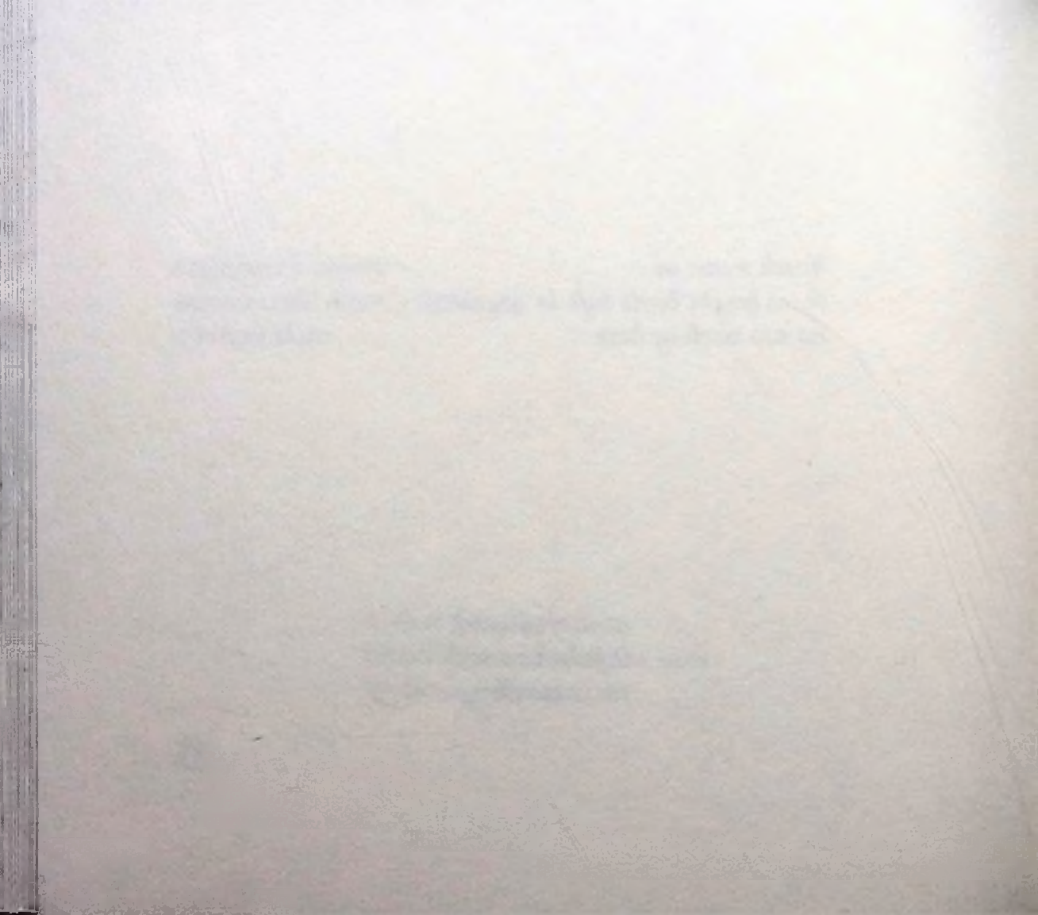
in spiked grass
busy dung beetle
rolls up a world

*neighbour's aviary
parrots scold dawn's light
a jungle there*

*a short free flight
netted where he clung to wire
by his caged mate*

*hawk move on
these bright birds safe in cages
no use circling here*

*uneasy August
it hasn't rained
for a month*



Autumn

*eat a Gravenstein
bare feet on the deck
sunlight on the sea*

*pick blackberries
from the tangle a buck leaps
here in the city*

*yin and yan always
this year tent caterpillars
and orange butterflies*

*she boards the ferry
turtled with backpack
lugging books for UBC*

*a fine September
even yellow jackets drunk
on late blackberries*

*ninety-one years old
Stan still tends his garden
a one-toothed smile*

*handsome blue heron
on one leg in the small pool
but the goldfish . . .*

*old cemetery
all the sprinklers going
in the pouring rain*

*sad tombstones
weathered old short stories
young men killed in mines*

*husband and son killed
in the same explosion
left to mourn . . .*

*could I walk
between these two islands
on moon's track of light*

*release a hook
from the undersized fish
may die anyway*

three such bright moons
sky water
mirror

one by one
small boats to moorage
birds to nests

*jack o' lantern
wears horn-rimmed glasses
and Mona's smile*

*November apples
cling to the tree
starlings arrive*

*softly indented stars
butter yellow moon
round as water*

*unexpected snow
has chastened fine November
cold chrysanthemums*

Winter

*autumn illness
has harried me to winter
husband aging too*

*home-canned apricots
for lunch this winter day
small summer suns*

*deciduous trees
upturned egg whips
stored for spring*

*Bowen Complex
the Senior's choir singing
"Springtime in the Rockies."*

*Indian wood woman
I know what drove you mad
this endless rain*

*on the shelter bench
waiting for the next bus
an empty pop can*

*winter gulls rise
into opposing wind
find their best turn soar*

*snow-silenced town
then the stillness broken
whistle of the train*

*grumble always
about the rain
old barnacle*

*two cats sit
back to back like bookends
inside the frost-trimmed window*

*pensioner
in the toy department
cuddles dolls*

*sun polished snow
the black crow circles
a shadow moves*

*winter laundry
a critique of crows
weighs down the line*

*driving at night
headlights part the darkness
not the falling snow*

*the clouds pass and the rain does its
work, and all individuals flow into their
forms*

from the I Ching

Why not write ***your*** haiku here? If you find the form : 17 syllables, arranged in 3 lines of 5 - 7 - 5 syllables too confining try a liberated haiku.

Have an *ah* moment,

Winona

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By the same author,
Not So Scarlet A Woman
Moss-Hung Trees

Clouds Empty Themselves set in Bodoni Book Italic
a red cedar press mini-book
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ISBN 0-9693047-4-9
Printed in Canada by Phantom Press & Publishers Inc.



The landscape, history and weather of Vancouver Island inspired this series of haiku.

The book has been recommended for adult literacy classes. Winona Baker received a shikishi at the 1986 International Haiku Symposium held in Vancouver, and a book award from JAL in their Expo haiku contest.



Photo Doug Baker

WINONA BAKER

CLOUDS EMPTY THEMSELVES

Two streams : an examination of the urban, 'natural' landscape and a very open revelation of events in Baker's own life . . .

—Brian Burch, *Canada Haiku Newsletter*, Fall 1990

A nicely produced chapbook, much enjoyed . . .

—Joe Nutt, artist and haijin (haiku writer)

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