

## POETS' PROFILE

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by Ty Hadman

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This month I have deviated a bit from the established scheme of featuring just one poet and have chosen instead to feature several haiku that I feel deserve greater attention than they have received. My choices are of course subjective, but I do hope that most of the readers will appreciate many of the selections that I have made. Furthermore, I hope that most of the haiku will be new to those of you who have been interested in haiku for a number of years. And finally, it is my wish that these poems will further generate interest in the works of the haiku poets that wrote them, who like their works, have not sufficiently been praised or acknowledged.

**Beatrice Brissman** was born and raised in a one room log cabin on a homestead in the Montana wilderness. Her mother taught her only child to appreciate simple natural beauty. As a little girl Beatrice spent many an hour outdoors and became fascinated with snails' silver trails glistening on the sun baked ground, the sound of the wind whirring and rustling through the prairie grasses, darting dragonflies, buzzards making their rounds high overhead, clouds and shadows, and other similar movements and forms that captured her eye. She even did her English and arithmetic lessons, that her mother had assigned her, outdoors on a flat boulder during the warmer months of the year. Thus her upbringing in this austere natural environment became an important part of her being which later became the inner foundation she worked from for the rest of her life.

Beatrice became a painter and a poet, worked as a fashion consultant for 28 years, was a top-notch interior decorator, and was very fond of gardening. She mainly painted landscapes;

her favorite subjects being seascapes and snow scenes. She started writing poetry in 1937 and her first haiku (called hokku in those days) were published in 1941! But knowledge of haiku was practically non-existent in the U.S. and there was no market for publishing them, so her output dwindled to nothing (very similar to Paul Repts' experience in 1939 – see [Paul Repts](#) October's Poet Profile) until it was revived once again with the advent of haiku periodicals in the early 1960s. She wrote all kinds of poetry, receiving many awards for her sonnets, love lyrics, free verse, dramatic monologues, and most French forms of poetry. She also wrote cinquains (please read Jane Reichhold's [Those Women Writing Haiku Chapter Two](#) if you haven't done so yet).

Even though she did not leave behind a large number of memorable haiku and never had a haiku collection published, the fact that she was one of the very first women to write haiku over a sustained period is important in itself. Robert Spiess included one of her haiku for extensive comment in an article, "The Problem of Reading Haiku", published in *Modern Haiku* in 1977.

Beatrice will probably be remembered more for her haiku that focused on individuals (haiku editors at that time usually called them senryu) than for her haiku on nature themes. One of the persons that she immortalized in some of the haiku that were published in various haiku magazines was an elderly cleaning lady that worked at the same department store as Beatrice who had in earlier years been a concert pianist!

The old charwoman,  
caressing the pink silk sheets  
with sandpaper hands

\* \* \* \*

The old charwoman  
staring at the flowered hats,  
reties her torn scarf

\* \* \* \*

Yanking and twisting,  
the wind fights the old woman  
for the shabby shawl

\* \* \* \*

Leaving the wharf —  
the old sea captain follows  
his limping shadow

\* \* \* \*

The spinster's Schnauzer  
watching while she sprinkles snow  
on the yellow stains

\* \* \* \*

Little League ball game:  
the voice of his blind brother  
cheering him on

\* \* \* \*

Shopping bag woman  
asleep on the bus – the end  
of the line . . . again

\* \* \* \*

**Jane Andrew** wrote a haiku over 20 years ago that I have never forgotten. It is one of the haiku I know by heart and have never grown tired of. Jane visited Greece in the late 1970s where she wrote the haiku that I have included at the end of this paragraph. I have often wondered why others besides myself have not praised this particular haiku. One reason might be that the Greek names are too foreign for most readers to appreciate. If that is the case, then it is quite unfortunate because they are appropriate and add more than just sound value to the haiku. But the more probable reason is that it was buried amongst a couple hundred other haiku and escaped attention; the unfortunate destiny of many good haiku.

Almond blossoms  
on island Nissyros —  
snow on Mt. Atavyros

\* \* \* \*

One woman who has been writing haiku for a very long time and has become one of America's haiku masters is **Evelyn Tooley Hunt**. Here are four of her haiku which I consider American haiku classics:

five generations of plowing  
still they turn up  
these flint arrowheads

\* \* \* \*

The unstated, but definitely implied words, "roots" and "cultivation", both having double meanings, are a very important part of this wonderful haiku.

Where its petals fell,  
now the plum leaves, too, drift down  
on the pool, the stone

\* \* \* \*

Drifting through the town:  
thin wisps of morning mist  
. . . and white thistledown

\* \* \* \*

Hugging huge bouquets  
children knee-deep in daisies  
and mid-summer haze

I don't know who or which people make up all the haiku rules; like no end of line rhyming, no use of poetic devices, no verbs in the past tense, don't put punctuation on every line, etc. — all a bunch of nonsense (unless one is just speaking personally about rules for oneself).

When I was living in Sacramento, I encouraged my friend and roommate, **Ana Takseena** who was writing poetry at the time, to try her hand at haiku. After a couple of years of study and practice she showed me the following memorable haiku one day which has never been

published until now:

In the moment of silence  
when they think of John  
I think of Yoko Ono

What a powerful last line! It is the one important thing I stressed in our discussions on haiku; that haiku poets live and die by the success or failure of their last lines (or words); that is where most of the art of haiku lies.

The "flint arrowheads" haiku by **Evelyn Tooley Hunt** previously quoted alludes to America's historical roots both before and after European emigration to America while Ana's haiku suggests another type of European invasion, a modern one, one that became part of a generation's heritage, not just in England and America, but in many other parts of the world as well. I'm obviously just scratching the surface at the periphery while comparing two seemingly dissimilar haiku. Numerous other comments that are more pertinent can be made on both haiku because of their depth and breadth. Really good haiku operate on various levels simultaneously. One of the best tests in considering haiku quality is to examine the length, level, and quality of discussion and commentary that a haiku evokes emotionally and aesthetically and how the haiku connects with the essence of life itself. The unstated, but implied, are the waves, ripples, and reverberations that continue long and far after the haiku reader has been dropped by the haiku poet at the end of the haiku.

Many haiku poets are forgetting to include historical and cultural references and events in their works. Ever since reading Ana's haiku, there has not been a year that has passed by on the Remembrance Day of the death of John Lennon that I have failed to recall her fine haiku. History is simply false and lost without literature and vice-versa. The best haiku never fail to come to mind at certain times, on certain dates, in certain places, or in certain situations and circumstances, like the personal example I gave of [Helen Chenoweth's](#) Pacific Ocean haiku in the September's Poet Profile..

If you haven't started building a storehouse of favorite American haiku, haiku to be recalled periodically, now is a good time to do so. Haiku are excellent conversation fillers. Like short quotes, sayings, proverbs, lyrics from songs, and other short phrases, haiku can be very appropriately added at certain key moments during the course of a discussion on almost any topic. It's one very good way of introducing and promoting the art of haiku into the society at large.

**Roberta Stewart** is another woman, who like Evelyn Tooley Hunt, has been writing haiku for a long time, is well known throughout the haiku community, but has not received nearly enough praise. Here is an all time favorite of mine, an American haiku classic in my opinion:

On the pinto's back  
her calico skirt ballooning

across alkaline flats

Here's a popular, but debatable generalization: haiku in English should usually be between 10 and 14 syllables. Roberta's haiku contains 19 syllables. Too long you say? Don't touch it! It's a flawless haiku. The lower limits of haiku have been reached, no words or just one or two or three words, but we do not yet know what the "acceptable" upper limit is and there has been obvious discrimination against so-called long haiku. No season word you say? Not really a haiku, a senryu you say? Ridiculous! Do you like the poem or not? Is it powerful or not? Who cares about rules and definitions? Impact and effect are what's important. Is there a heightened moment? Does the haiku poem sing? Is there a unique blending of woman / animal / earth / air? Yes! Yes! Yes! And Yes! to a dozen other similar questions.

Now one by **Steve Thompson**: I've never seen a better yin-yang haiku than this one!

white coal, black snow

**Magnus Mack Homestead**, like Steve Thompson, has been writing haiku for many years. His best haiku have received very little attention. Consider this American haiku classic:

frosty autumn air:  
splitting wood in dead center  
a one-handed man

\* \* \* \*

The next haiku below was included in a book I discovered in the rare book section of a university library that I visited one time when I was hitchhiking across country through the South. The book of haiku on birds was said to be one of the tiniest and shortest illustrated hardbound books ever printed in the United States. I don't recall the publisher's name or date of publication, but I do remember the haiku that I liked best which I have never forgotten and I do seem to remember vaguely that the author was a male. The author's last name is Bohne. He wrote traditional American haiku. I still remember this haiku from the book:

among the ripe berries  
in the pyracantha bush —  
six cedar waxwings

\* \* \* \*

I don't know how many of you are familiar with the work of **Viola Provenzano**, but if you haven't heard of her or aren't familiar with her haiku, I strongly suggest that you do yourself a big favor and buy some back issues of *Modern Haiku* where her work has been frequently published. Her haiku images are usually very strong. Color often predominates. I cannot imagine that she doesn't paint. She has an amazingly sharp eye and deep sense of beauty and aesthetics. Here are three American haiku classics by this master that are among my favorites:

between tapplings  
the woodpecker's powdered gold  
drifts down through the sunlight

\* \* \* \*

winter storm:  
an otter's whistles  
through the sea thunder

\* \* \* \*

spring ice —  
a seal pup slips  
from a warm womb

\* \* \*

Like Viola Provenzano, the haiku of **Mentor Addicks** contain strong and often colorful images. Their haiku contain many of the traditional haiku qualities with a distinct American flavor.

above the wet horse  
after the morning thunderstorm  
a mountain bluebird

The above haiku is a good example of a haiku without a stated verb. Part of the beauty of this haiku, other than the scene communicated in the words, is in the subtle verbs left unsaid, but definitely there, to be discovered by the reader. Part of the enjoyment of reading this haiku is in finding the hidden verbs. Is the bluebird singing? Are the raindrops still slowly dripping down off the leaves of the trees? Does the horse give a slight shudder because it is wet? How many more can you find?

the horse tethered  
to the lodgepole pine  
shakes dew on itself

\* \* \* \*

orchard oriole  
picking pulp  
from split oranges

\* \* \* \*

overnight  
the migrating warblers  
gone

\* \* \* \*

**Harvey Hess**, from Hawaii, is another haiku poet that should be appreciated by more readers. Here are two of my favorites:

blackened with mildew  
mangrove branches overhanging  
the brackish lagoon

\* \* \* \*

over the falls  
after the drought  
gold guavas

\* \* \*

I really don't see the necessity in being required to include season words, but I have nothing against their use either. I do prefer, when used however, creative and unique seasonal references. This area has not been sufficiently explored. The possibilities are nearly infinite. Standard seasonal references such as "early spring", "late autumn", "winter sunrise", etc. are often overused and are not the absolute best choice of words in most cases. The key phrase



"hat buying time" in the following haiku by **Mary Truth Fowler** is a good example of what I mean by a unique seasonal reference.

It's hat buying time . . .  
but since I have no money  
a red rose in my hair

Compare the above haiku with one by **Alan Pizzarelli** published in *The Haiku Anthology* edited by Cor van den Heuval:

with no money  
I go  
snow viewing

Here's a haiku by **Ana Barton** that won an award in 1979 but seems to have been ignored or has simply become forgotten over time.

Autumn horizon:  
hill beyond hill beyond hill  
each in deeper mist

\* \* \* \*

**Margaret G. Robinson** wrote many fine haiku that are not well known other than to those who used to subscribe to *Dragonfly*, the haiku magazine where she submitted the majority of her work. Here's one example that was published in 1977:

Autumn dusk;  
sparrows edge closer together  
on the elm bough

Compare the above haiku with one that was published in a haiku collection titled *Sheep Clouds* the following year written by the famous poet and translator W. S. Merwin. I once had a brief stormy discussion with the poet at one of his poetry readings and he insisted quite strongly that he does NOT write haiku. His publishers call his poems three-line stanzas. Then why the kigo, Merwin? Why three and not two or four line stanzas? Why the use of haiku techniques? The readers can draw their own conclusions.

Late in summer:  
the birds draw  
closer together

Finally, here's a memorable haiku by a woman who has been a consistent contributor to

haiku publications for over 20 years, **Mary Dragonetti:**

Rainy autumn evening;  
faces in the lighted windows  
of a passing train

Thus life passes by, like strangers in the light (excuse me, Frank and Mary!), in the blink of an eye, in a decaying world, in a cold world, a bit sad, mysterious passengers absorbed in thought or conversing with one another or staring blankly out the train window, each one on a personal journey as I wait for the train to pass, followed by the sound of the train fading quickly into silence, then I too, continue onward, towards my own destination, in darkness, alone.

I wish to remind the readers of this column that I am asking for your contributions. I would appreciate any interesting biographical anecdotes or other material on some of the lesser known haiku poets who have been writing or who wrote haiku for at least fifteen years and any recommended haiku that you consider American haiku classics with your explanation why or your commentary. I am also open to working together with other haiku poets in writing this column. I have received some very positive feedback and it is encouraging. Thank you very much.

