

THE WASP'S SMALL SHADOW: 101 Haiku Moments

by Frank Dullaghan

SAMPLE:

INTRODUCTION

Haiku is often defined simply as a three-line poem with a strict syllable count of 5:7:5 and many mainstream poets believe that this is enough and publish witty three-liners and aphorisms under the title haiku. But if you are a lover of haiku, you already know that this is not enough. A haiku is a lot more than this. However, I don't believe we in the West can write haiku. The best we can do is an approximation. This is because haiku is a Japanese poetic form, it is written in Japanese with all of the particular cultural and aesthetic associations that go with Japanese poetry and way of life. It does not even have a syllable count but something more akin to bits of sound. It should be possible to say a Japanese haiku in one breath.

The best we can do, therefore, is write short poems in English which try to mirror the same aesthetic. There is no strict set of rules but the following are generally observed:

- The poem should have no more than 17 syllables. It may have less.
- There should be no overt metaphor, alliteration, rhyme or other poetic device. The poem should be plain.
- The poem should be about the thing itself. It should be presented as it is. It should speak from the moment.
- Usually, the poem will provide an insight that will reveal itself with the help of careful reading. It is usually a soft, subtle, insight. Many haiku can seem 'so what' until this happens.
- The reading of the poem requires reflection, contemplation. It will generally be rewarded (so long as the poet is good — start with the translations of the Japanese masters — Basho, Issa, Buson).

- There should be a small break, a pause, which gives a little twist or moment of insight that allows the poem to reveal itself.

Of course, as with all writing, some haiku break the rules and are still good. But one must first understand the aesthetic and break rules with care.

There is also a variation of the haiku called a senryu which has a more humorous inclination. It often deals with moments of human foibles and is usually self-deprecating. As you would expect, they are not great moments of hilarity but rather try to bring a smile to the face. They are of gentle wit, the insight usually one of human nature. Many of the poems in this collection are senryu. Others skirt the borders between haiku and senryu. You can decide which is which for yourself.

For me, the most important thing is to try to make the haiku happen in the moment. If it is successful, it will freeze time, perhaps for just a millisecond, while it stops in your brain, the words slowing just that little bit while you contemplate the message. So these are 101 haiku moments hoping to freeze time. Not all of them will be successful. Different ones will be successful for different people or for the same person at different times.

Enjoy.

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