

AMERICAN HAIKU



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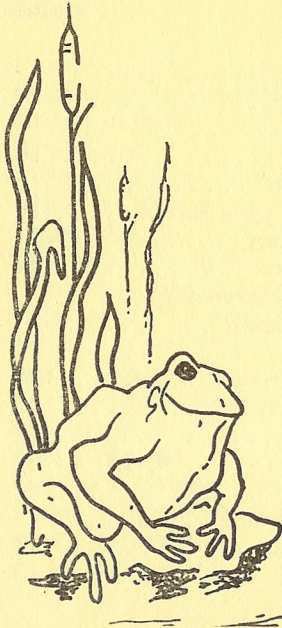
AMERICAN HAIKU

Vol. V No. 1

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INDEX

Author	Pages	Author	Pages
Hilda Aarons	9	Truth M. Fowler	17
Frank Ankenbrand, Jr.	9	Rosemary Gainer	17
Eloise Barksdale	10	Tom Galt	18
Madeline Beattie	10	Sandi Gerber	18
Mary D. Benner	10	Jaye Giammarino	19
Joanne W. Borgesen	10-11	Johanna Gravell (Jay Gee)	18
Sam Bryan	11	Lorraine Ellis Harr	19-21
Tiny L. Buffington (Lou Buff) ..	12	Gladys I. Harwick	21
James Bull and Gayle Bull ...	24-41	(Glad Harwick)	
Scott M. Bushnell	12	Beth LaPointe Heath	21
Helen S. Chenoweth	12-13	Lynn Hendrix	21
William Howard Cohen	13	Marion Chase Howell	22
Carrow De Vries	13-14	Evelyn Tooley Hunt	22
David Dickinson	14-15	Joseph E. Jeffs	22
Magdalene M. Douglas	15	Foster Jewell	4, 23, 41-42
Cornelia P. Draves	15-16	K. W. Johnsgard	42
Gene M. Edwards	16	Christina R. Kallman	42
Lee Eldredge	16	Leroy Kanterman	43
Virginia Moran Evans	17	Walter H. Kerr	4, 43

INDEX

Author	Pages	Author	Pages
Gustave Keyser	43	Frank E. Salmon	52
Elizabeth Searle Lamb	43-44	Charles Shaw	52
Anne Landauer	44	Joy Shieman	52
Carol Law	4, 44-45	Marjorie Bertram Smith	53
William E. Lee	45-46	E. Nel Snyder	53
Edith M. McKay	46	Robert Spiess	5-9, 58-61
Orion McLain	47	Jerri Spinelli	53
Kay Titus Mormino	47	Will D. Swearingen	54
Roger Mueller	47	Daisy Elmore Tennant	54
Willene H. Nusbaum	47	Dori Thiry	54
Catherine Neil Paton	48	Tickner	54
Jess Perlman	48	D. Tickner	55
Marjory Bates Pratt	4, 49	Saxon White Uberuaga	55
Spencer Rathus	50	Ann Vrooman	55
Willie Reader	50	Irma Wassall	55
Charles C. Rogers	50-51	Joyce W. Webb	56
Sydell Rosenberg	51	Mary lou Wells	56
Herta Rosenblatt	51	Paul O. Williams	57
Anne Rutherford	52	Virginia Brady Young	57

A w a r d s

The editors are pleased to present the following haiku, which have been judged to be the best subscriber-haiku submitted during the months listed. AMERICAN HAIKU cash awards were \$10.00 each. Our next issue (scheduled for Oct., 1967) will contain awards for March, 1967, through June 1967. Please note we are in the process of changing our publishing schedule to three issues a year. In 1968, AMERICAN HAIKU will be published in Jan., May, and Sept.

OCTOBER, 1966

The October, 1966 award-winning haiku cannot be published here, because it was printed as the AMERICAN HAIKU award winner by another publication, April, 1967. Our policy is to publish previously unpublished haiku only.

NOVEMBER, 1966

Those old rail fences,
and their way of zig-zagging
around violets.

—Foster Jewell

DECEMBER, 1966

To wake in the night
and hear no insect voices . . .
the first frost has come.

—Marjory Bates Pratt

JANUARY, 1967

The sound of the chain
across the pasture gate—
how cold the night!

—Carol Law

FEBRUARY, 1967

Last night's pale harvest
guarded by a scarecrow's ghost
and this old rail fence.

—Walter H. Kerr

SPECIFIC OBJECTS IN HAIKU

by Robert Spiess

In his haiku the poet names what he apprehends. And just as the names **lion** and **tiger**, **robin** and **starling** are more concrete than such abstract terms as **animal** or **bird**, the haiku poet should ordinarily find it truer to his requirements of excellence to name an object at a quite specific level rather than at a more general level. Thus, **tree** frequently is less effective than **oak** or **birch** or **maple**, and forgoing **butterfly** for **monarch** or **swallowtail** or **sulphur** often makes the haiku better because it sharpens the image. Perceptive haiku poets and readers figuratively find night and day difference between a birch and an oak or between a maple and a spruce, and between the color, size and flight char-

acteristics of a swallowtail and those of a sulphur.

Some writers deliberately use abstract and vague terms in an attempt to make a haiku seem to have a wide range of associations or to appear "mystical," but all that this results in is confusion, dullness or complete lack of aesthetic meaning or value. Other writers believe that they must try to cram as many objects or "things" as possible into a haiku in order to "tell a lot" and to force the haiku to seem full of meanings and overtones.

The haiku, however, achieves its unique effect in ways that are the opposite of these. It needs to be concrete, to be particular and exact. The words used in a haiku should be

simple ones, unaffected and lacking in "grandeur," without highly charged emotional content or presumptuous cosmic implications. They should be as individualized or particularized as possible. And it may be said at this point that simplicity and concreteness do not limit the associations or nuances that the haiku is capable of containing or suggesting; rather, both enhance or add to them and keep the haiku from becoming amorphous or jellyfish-like. Simplicity and concreteness give the haiku sinew and backbone.

The precise naming of objects in a haiku (without carrying precision to esoteric or recondite extremes), permits shadings, nuances and associations that broader terms cannot convey, because broader terms abstract a few general or common characteristics from several or many specific or indi-

vidualized objects. Broad terms cannot include important, differentiating attributes that characterize one individual or species from another. And distinct attributes are what help to make the haiku image artistically pleasing and aesthetically significant, precisely because they are closer to the object, nearer to its nature. Thus, particular attributes make the haiku more intuitive, because the beclouding intellect with its abstractions is remote.

The examples that follow are of haiku that have merit. Therefore, the comments about them are given in the spirit of suggestion—that further particularization could enhance the quality they now possess.

In the following haiku, it is possible for the reader to extrapolate a duck of whatever kind or species he wants, when he reads the words, **a wild duck:**

Trapped in thin ice,
a wild duck waits patiently
for the sun to rise.

—Anne Landauer
(AH, IV, 1: 36)

I believe that the poem lacks the instantaneous quality necessary for a fully effective haiku, because the reader must make a purely intellectual effort in order to form the necessary image. The immediate, intuitive aspect is lost as he ponders the size of the duck, whether it is dark or bright-plumaged or is gray to match the ice, etc. If the poet had particularized the duck—mallard, canvasback, coot—the somewhat abstract tone of this haiku probably could have been eliminated. Incidentally, the use of **patiently** in this haiku is not very apt. Psychologically, “patiently” is a word that applies mainly to people and probably should not be used in reference to wild creatures. A wild creature

is as it is; by nature it has this wonderful quality that we humans have to give a name to when we find it in ourselves. The word **waits**, coupled with **wild duck** (or a duck of some particular kind), would be sufficient; the perceptive reader will intuitively grasp the instinctive nature of the duck in this situation.

Intellectual intonation and lack of particularization combine in the third line of Marjorie Bertram Smith's

Autumn is golden
in garden and ripened field . . .
each seed a miser.
(AH, IV, 1: 51)

The third line is a rather bald intellectual statement; it is not a suggestion of the quality of “miserliness.” (Again, **miser** is too much a human term to apply to an aspect of creation that is intuitively closer to itself than

we humans seem to be to ourselves). Had the poet indicated one or two specific kinds of seed instead of using the very general term **seed**, the haiku might have been more successful. I also wonder if it is necessary to use three words—**autumn, golden, ripened**—to inform the reader of the setting of this haiku. The perceptive reader needs but one or two such words in a haiku in order to grasp the mood and automatically and immediately project the applicable aspects of the mood to the objects named in the haiku.

Had she named the particular kind of tree, Willene H. Nusbaum might have enhanced the effect of her fine haiku

The woodpecker taps
a black stripe path up the tree
hunting frozen worms.
(AH, IV, 1: 39)

She did not particularize, however, so the reader must bring his intellect into the image. Even in winter each species of tree is recognizable by its overall shape, characteristic angle and degree of fullness of its branches, etc. To me, in the context of this haiku, the word **tree** tends to limit the image to the trunk of a tree that has indistinct branches. I have to make a conscious effort to visualize the other aspects that I believe are necessary for a full image, and this intellectual effort—trying to formulate a tree, selecting from several tree images that rise up in my mind—is somewhat disconcerting.

At this point the reader may ask: "But isn't one of the major functions or aspects of haiku that of suggesting, of letting the reader use his imagination to 'fill in' as his experience or abilities warrant?" True—but at a level more profound than that of se-

lecting an appropriately colored and shaped jigsaw puzzle piece and fitting it into an outline to complete a "picture." The suggesting comes at the level where words are incapable of directly imparting "information," because the "information" is so deep in existence, in things, in ourselves, or is so subtle that words are too crude an instrument to be used directly. Once more I must fall back upon the word

intuitive to halfway express my meaning: the haiku must suggest—arouse, bring into aesthetic focus—the intuitive aspect of the objects in the haiku—that is, their relation to each other, to ourselves. Intuitive suggestion cannot be evoked by vagueness; it can only be triggered by particularity and individualization;—for it must be an immediate suggestion, requiring little or no abstractive intellection.

Open tips of hay
sunlit on the bending side—
dry sounds shake the ear.

—Hilda Aarons

What is the willow
writing in the water . . . that
the wind wipes away?

—Frank Ankenbrand, Jr.

Flagstones painted white—
our near-blind neighbor insists
they brighten his path.

—Eloise Barksdale

Sunset spilling fire
through the pepper tree branches
—church windows aflame.

—Madeline Beattie

New Year's Eve once more . . .
only ghosts of yesterdays
celebrate with me.

—Mary D. Benner

New home—old paintings
on the walls . . . the scents of fall
blow through the window.

—Joanne W. Borgesen

12, 13 by Joanne W. Borgesen

12—

Under the maple—
a child's sandpail turned over
in the fallen leaves.

13—

Full moon . . . a black lake:
like a lost child in the swamp—
wail of a limpkin.

14, 15 by Sam Bryan

14—

Desert wanderers
eating sweet oasis dates,
learning how to climb.

15—

In a sleeping bag
gazing into endless sky,
wandering with stars.

16, 17 by Lou Buff

16—

Quilted daffodils

lie embedded in the grass—
tacked against the hill.

17—

Bachelor buttons

mingle with frisky old maids
in the flower bed.

Bat-ridden gargoyles

high atop the church steeple
smile at the new sun.

—Scott M. Bushnell

Nest of small heartbeats

in that high crown of weeds—
a killdeer crying . . .

—Helen S. Chenoweth

21, 22 by William Howard Cohen

21—

In the stillness
a single bird treads
the fallen leaves.

That man in the moon
stares face to face with the boy's
water reflection.

—Helen S. Chenoweth

22—

Sign by the road
traces Confederate raids;
now only ice invades.

Cedar Waxwings drunk
on fermented crab apples
slam against the panes.

—Carrow De Vries

25 - 28 by David Dickinson

25—

Dry stone boundary wall:
snow covered, invisible,
no longer bounding.

Even midday sun
comes through the bare, dark
branches
in winter's blue tones.

—Carrow De Vries

26—

After the shower
I picked from an apple branch
a brief private rain.

27—

The hammering home
of a spike in a log
sounds a curious scale.

28—

Boulders loosed from frost
appear on our thawing road
like morning mushrooms.

30—

Spring chants her folk song—
a branch strums the barbed wire
fence,
fingered by sparrows.

29, 30 by Magdalene M. Douglas

29—

The queer headless bird
sleeps away the summer day . . .
stink of water weeds.

Two boys, a sandpile—
caught in the tunnel of play
a bleary-eyed frog.

—Cornelia P. Draves

The rag doll stares
from the bottom of the trunk—
attic wind whispers.

—Cornelia P. Draves

Tumbleweeds lurching
down the lane, pushed by the wind.
A mockingbird sings.

—Gene M. Edwards

34, 35 by Lee Eldredge

34—

Down-shafts of sunlight:
—one last mulberry leaf joins
autumn's yellow snow.

35—

Drifting jellyfish
—parachute launched, rip cords
swaying
with the young moontide.

37, 38 by Truth M. Fowler

37—

The tufted titmouse
dips lightly to the feeder
and flies with his loot.

—Virginia Moran Evans

From their snug thicket
twin fawns watch star crystals fall:
taste their first snowflakes.

38—

Wrinkled summer pond:
turtle sailing old brown log
gulps pirate stone flies.

Sphinx-like, two cats crouch,
tension mounting to moment
of lightning combat!

—Rosemary Gainer

All naked I sit
watching the waves. They, too,
have
the warm wind on them.

—Tom Galt

Alone at night
each creak speaks of a thief
sneaking up the stairs.

—Jay Gee (Johanna Gravell)

42, 43 by Sandi Gerber

42—

Wet autumn evening—
we shattered all the street lights
walking in puddles.

43—

The sound, nothing more,
of a voice for the first time—
December snowfall.

44, 45 by Jaye Giammarino

44—

The wind blows all night
trying to induce a turn
in the weather vane.

45—

The sun melts the snow
uncovering green-tipped ground...
storks fly overhead.

46 - 52 by Lorraine Ellis Harr

46—

Newly stuffed scarecrow
getting his first summer shower
out in the corn patch.

47—

A morning-glory—
slim trumpet on climbing vine
making its blue sound.

48—

At the path's end—
resting on his snow shovel
watching new snow fall.

50—

Late summer evening;
giving repeat performance
the cricket fiddler.

49—

Watching driftwood fire
When did the foghorn begin
its deep throated cry?

51—

The old farm dog knows:
solitary places, fields,
made for lonely walks.

Dusk darkens to night—
voices from the playground
drift into silence.

Beaver ponds so still,
after the rain, so still . . .
I watch for ripples.

—Glad Harwick

In the black water
the moon sheds a slender light—
a lone shark lurking.

—Beth LaPointe Heath

A dry brown oak leaf
scratching wind-blown on the walk
echoes by a wall.

—Lynn Hendrix

57, 58 by Evelyn Tooley Hunt

57—

Archaic island,
guard well your ruined altars
and discarded dreams.

—Marion Chase Howell

Footsteps of dry leaves
running across the flat roof
—and rain, chasing them.

58—

Those two fishermen
standing knee-deep in the tide:
one man, one heron.

On midnight chimneys
mockingbirds, drunk with April,
tumble out their joy.

—Joseph E. Jeffs

60 - 63 by Foster Jewell

60—

Sharp shadows of clouds
gouging out chunks of sunlight,
reshaping the hills.

62—

Beyond and beyond,
same rhythm of the sand dunes . . .
on, and on, and on.

61—

Hail vanishes
from under the blooming plum,
leaving the ground snow-white.

63—

Sweet puddle-music
the leaky eaves are making
after the long drought.

SEASON REFERENCE IN JAPANESE AND AMERICAN HAIKU

By James Bull and Gayle Bull

Students, poets, critics and editors of English-language haiku have shown a great deal of interest in season in English-language haiku. Students know that the use of **kigo** or season words "is practically universal in classical haiku."¹ They know that in Japanese haiku there are some 15,000 season words, about 500 of which are

can be divided into those who are frequently used.² "American writers against their use, those who are for it, and those (apparently the vast majority) who know nothing whatever about it" (HE, p. 18). Yet, one haiku editor has flatly stated that "No poem will be considered a Haiku unless it fills the vital principle of referring to

This article was originally read as a paper before the First Symposium on English-Language Haiku, at Wisconsin State University—Platteville. It is based on an address by the same title, originally delivered before the Contemporary Literature Section of the Fourth Annual WCTE College and University Conference, at Wisconsin State University—Oshkosh.

¹ Harold G. Henderson, *HAIKU IN ENGLISH* (New York: Japan Society, Inc., 1965), p. 18. Hereafter referred to as HE.

² Sanki Ichikawa, ed., *HAIKAI AND HAIKU* (Tokyo: Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai [Japan Society for the Promotion of Science], 1958), p. 175. Hereafter referred to as HH.

a season of the year in some way, either directly or implied."³

If one turns to published statements on the subject of season in haiku, he finds that American poets have said almost nothing concerning the matter. Frank Ankenbrand, Jr., and J. W. Hackett have said that season can be introduced to haiku by season "subject" (HE, p. 31) or by season "name" (p. 35); Hackett has said that season adds "dimensions" to haiku (p. 35), and H. G. Henderson, the critic, has added dimension to that by maintaining that season adds a special "depth" to haiku (p. 19). Ankenbrand has referred to seasonal "feeling" (p. 31) as well as seasonal "odor"⁴, while Clement Hoyt and others have called for seasonal "tone" (HE, p. 20). The critics have offered little direct help. R. H. Blyth, who arranged his four-volume Haiku seasonally, has noted that in recent

times the Japanese themselves have abandoned the season word as conventional and artificial. According to Blyth, the Japanese no longer express or even imply season in haiku.⁵ Concerning the possible use of season words in English haiku, Henderson has said that they might be impractical as well as artificial (HE, p. 18): on the one hand, the Japanese use of long lists of conventional season words is artificial; on the other hand, the flora, fauna, seasons, customs of the English-speaking people are quite different from the Japanese, making it impossible for us to adopt the Japa-

³ Jean Calkins' editorial statement in HAIKU HIGHLIGHTS AND OTHER SHORT POEMS, II, May, 1966, p. 4. Hereafter referred to as SP.

⁴ SP, II, Feb., 1966, p. 4.

⁵ HAIKU, I (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1949), p. 333.

nese practice in toto (p. 19). Haiku editors have been no help whatsoever. AMERICAN HAIKU magazine and the magazine called SONNET, CINQUAIN, TANKA, AND HAIKU have said nothing. Jean Calkins has only confused the issue by insisting that poems in haiku form which do not utilize season are not haiku but senryu.⁶

Where can the student, the poet, the critic and the editor turn for definite guidance in the matter of season in haiku, in particular, season in English-language haiku? It seems reasonable that they turn first to Japanese practice and then to current American practice—American practice, because the only significant work in English-language haiku is being done in the United States. The first involves a synthesis of statements made by authorities on Japanese haiku. The second involves a study of selected haiku

from the first six issues of AMERICAN HAIKU magazine, the only magazine devoted exclusively to the development of English-language haiku.

If one analyzes the various statements on season made by Blyth⁷, Henderson⁸, Sanki Ichikawa⁹ and Kenneth Yasuda¹⁰, he discovers that all four authors' statements can be divided into three categories which

⁶ SP, II, May, 1966, p. 4.

⁷ HAIKU, I, particularly p. 382.

⁸ AN INTRODUCTION TO HAIKU (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), particularly p. 5.

⁹ HH, particularly pp. 173-175.

¹⁰ THE JAPANESE HAIKU: ITS ESSENTIAL NATURE, HISTORY, AND POSSIBILITIES IN ENGLISH, WITH SELECTED EXAMPLES (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1956), in particular pp. 42-46; 48; 151; 176.

rest upon three bases, each explained by certain key expressions. Analysis leads to the following synthesis: in haiku, the components of season are three;—theme, connotation, and mood. Theme is based on natural phenomena. It is announced by an object, an activity or a statement of season. Connotation is based on human experience. It turns on the associations, suggestions or intuitions surrounding natural phenomena and human activities. Mood is based on aesthetic response. It turns on man's feeling in his relation to theme and connotation. Its hallmark is unity—oneness of natural phenomena, human experience thereof and poet's emotional reaction thereto. It reinforces the air, sometimes even produces the atmosphere, of season.¹¹

In ascertaining whether the Japanese principles do apply to English-language haiku and if so **how** they can

be applied, in February, 1966, we contacted selected AMERICAN HAIKU subscribers in six geographic areas of the United States—in the region east of the Mississippi River, New York-New Jersey; Wisconsin; Arkansas-Louisiana: in the region west of the Mississippi River, Texas; Northern California; Southern California.¹² To each individual we sent 118 haiku

¹¹ It is noteworthy that the statements concerning season made by American haiku writers (quoted earlier) fall into the same categories: theme (natural phenomena)—season "subject" or season "name"; connotation (experience)—"dimensions" or "depth"; mood (aesthetic response)—seasonal "feeling", seasonal "odor", seasonal "tone." It is also noteworthy that not one of the poets makes statements which include all of the categories and their bases.

¹² Of the sixty-one individuals contacted, thirty-six (59%) responded. Of that number,

which had been published in the first six issues of AMERICAN HAIKU magazine. Each haiku was coded by number, rather than author's name. On a graph, each respondent divided the information pertinent to this study into three categories: applicable this area; not applicable this area but could be understood; and unintelligible this area. His judgments were to be based on close scrutiny of the natural phenomena within the individual haiku. They were, then, to be based upon experience proper to the individual respondent's immediate geographic area. Thus, two of the bases for season components were called for: natural phenomena (for theme); and experience (for connotation). We hoped to get at aesthetic response (mood) in an indirect manner, by having each respondent arrange those haiku which were seasonal in his area according to chronology within season

—early, middle, late, or question mark for indcision concerning time within season. After entering those haiku which were unintelligible in his area, as well as those which were not applicable but could be understood, and after arranging within seasons those applicable his area, the respondent entered the remainder as applica-

nine (25%) were men, twenty-seven (75%) women. Of the respondents, twelve (33%) listed their immediate geographic area as rural (under 20,000), and twenty-four (67%) as city. Although five of the respondents failed to note the number of years they had lived in their immediate geographic area, the average number of years residence for each of the thirty-six respondents was twenty-two. Twenty-seven (75%) of all respondents had had haiku published in AMERICAN HAIKU and at the time of response, each respondent had been a subscriber to AMERICAN HAIKU for an average of two and one half years.

ble his area but non-seasonal in nature. In ascertaining the status of a given haiku, simple majority ruled in each geographic area.

Of the 118 haiku, seventy-four (63%) received a simple majority of votes in one or more areas. The most obvious conclusions one might draw from this fact are that we did not contact enough areas, or that many non-seasonal haiku were included in the group. But far more interesting conclusions might be drawn from those seventy-four haiku which were given seasonal vote. Only nine haiku (12%) were given season in all six geographic areas. Twelve additional haiku (16%) received seasonal vote in the three-area region east of the Mississippi River, but not in the three-area region west of the River. And an additional eleven (15%) received seasonal vote in one geographic area each. These facts lead one to conclude

that a writer who composes true haiku which have their basis in Nature and man's reaction thereto, a writer who carefully chooses his phenomena or statements so as to indicate season of the year, stands a chance not of being misunderstood, but of not being fully understood outside (and even inside) his own geographic area. For example, among the seventy-four seasonal haiku were forty-seven (64%) written by various poets living in the immediate geographic areas polled. The percentages of seasonal haiku written by those authors and understood as seasonal by the respondents in their specific areas are as follows: Wisconsin, 100%; New York-New Jersey, 77%; Arkansas-Louisiana, 100%; Texas, 67%; Northern California, 60%; Southern California 0%. Viewed from another angle, a Wisconsin writer of seasonal haiku stands a 100% chance of being understood

east of the Mississippi River, but only a 50% chance west. An Arkansas-Louisiana poet stands a 100% chance in his own area, a 33% chance in Wisconsin and Texas, and no chance whatsoever in the other three areas polled. The New York-New Jersey area reader stands a 40% chance of fully understanding a seasonal haiku written by a poet from Northern California, and a Northern California reader stands a 35% chance of fully understanding a seasonal haiku written by a poet from the New York-New Jersey area. One could continue to cite possibilities or lack of possibilities. However, the possibilities cited above are enough to justify a tentative conclusion: as any kind of art must evoke emotion, and as emotion cannot be evoked but in terms of a work's substance, and as haiku substance is not a little dependent upon natural phenomena and experience

thereof, from a seasonal point of view the full emotional dimension of a given haiku is likely to be lost on a vast segment of the population.

Such would not be the case with Japanese haiku, for several things conspire in that country to make season reference understandable on a nation-wide basis: geography, climate and convention—the latter being of particular interest here.

In R. H. Blyth's HAIKU, the autumn collection of haiku comprises 498 poems.¹³ Of that number, 102 (20%) contain some form of autumn (*aki*), either as a direct statement of season or as a part of a season word.¹⁴

In "The Season" category under

¹³ III (1950), pp. 326-361; IV (1952), pp. 2-161.

¹⁴ A study of Ichikawa reveals the same picture. Eighty-nine haiku in HH contain autumn season words. Of those, eighteen (20%)

autumn, Blyth lists fifty-nine haiku.¹⁵ Of that group, fifteen (25%) utilize the expression **aki no kure** (an autumn evening.) Furthermore, that expression appears as the **last** line of the three-line haiku fourteen times (24%). It might be a convention in Japanese, but in English, it would be a stereotyped cliché. This is not an isolated example. In the "Sky and Elements" category Blyth lists 140 haiku.¹⁶ Of that group, fifteen (11%) utilize some form which means "the autumn wind": either **akikaze** (five) or **aki no kaze** (ten). Further, of the ten uses of **aki no kaze**, nine are at the **end** of the haiku—cliché third line. In the same category, there are also nine haiku (8%) which end in **nowaki** (autumn storm) plus the **kireji** (cut-word) **kana** (equivalent to "Ahh!" in English) **Nowaki kana**—cliché. We can conclude, then, that in Japanese autumn haiku season is frequently in-

dicated by season name, either directly stated or as part of a season word, and that the uses of **aki** are often so conventional that they are clichés.

Of course, 396 (80%) of the haiku in Blyth's autumn group do not indicate season through the use of some form of **aki**. They do it through the use of season object. Here, too, the Japanese conventional use of season words indicates the danger of cliché. For example, in Blyth's "Sky and Elements" category under autumn, fourteen (10%) **begin** with "**Meigetsu**" (autumn moon). In the "Human

contain some form of **aki**. Further, of the fifty season words listed under autumn in Ichikawa's "List of Season Words" (pp. 177-178), some twelve (24%) use **aki** either as a **direct** statement of the season or as a **part** of a season word.

¹⁵ III, pp. 326-361.

¹⁶ III, pp. 364-440.

Affairs" category, Blyth lists seventy-seven haiku.¹⁷ Of that number, forty-three (56%) are **kakashi** (scarecrow) haiku, one of the most popular autumn themes in Japan. Of those forty-three scarecrow haiku, some twenty-seven (63%) end with **kakashi kana**—definitely cliché usage. Yet, the possibilities available to the haiku writer who deals with natural phenomena are almost limitless. He can indicate season without cliché. In Blyth's autumn category, "Trees and Flowers"¹⁸, the haiku are not laced with cliché season expressions, probably because the poems deal with many **specific** plants and trees which are associated with autumn: roses of sharon, falling willow leaves, bush-clover, Indian millet, morning-glories, pampas grass, rose-mallows, weeds, gourds, grapes, persimmons, buckwheat, vines, mushrooms, chestnuts, berries, pears, apples, chrysanthemums, etc. One

might think that the chrysanthemum (**kiku**), another favorite Japanese autumn theme, would provide ample opportunity for boring cliché, in that there are twenty haiku devoted to it out of a total of 132 haiku in the Blyth category (15%). Yet the chrysanthemum haiku are not boring, and the secret seems to lie in that the haiku employ different forms of **kiku**, as well as varying position within the haiku.¹⁹ The conclusion one might

¹⁷ IV, pp. 18-57.

¹⁸ IV, pp. 94-161.

¹⁹ The breakdown shows the flexibility the Japanese have attained in utilizing the word. **Kiku**: twelve uses (60% of the chrysanthemum haiku)—three in line one; six in line two; three in line three. **Shiragiku** (white chrysanthemum): six uses (30%)—four in line one; one in line two; one in line three. **Kigiku** (yellow chrysanthemum); one use (5%)—in line three. **Makegiku** (a special use,

draw from the above information is that although there is a danger of cliché convention when using season objects in haiku, the more specific the season object, the less the possibility of cliché.

In analyzing the seven English-language haiku which received a definite autumn vote (either by nation, or by region, or by one area only), we find that four (57%) utilize direct statement of season—autumn or fall. This is to be expected, in view of the fact that English-speaking poets are not familiar with thinking in terms of season reference.

All six areas gave autumn vote to the following haiku:²⁰

1:122—

On the weathered shelf
a self-cleaned cat in autumn
curls around itself.

—Thomas Rountree

4:11V—

The fall rain whispers
—and a grasshopper hinges
slowly down a thistle.

—Don Eulert

Yet the mere mention of autumn or fall is not enough to make a given haiku seasonal across the nation, for

5:62—

Fall's last rays of gold:
an old woman bending low,
picking bitter-sweet.

—Phyllis Holub

was given fall in the three-area region east of the Mississippi, but not in the three-area region west. This indicates

referring to a chrysanthemum contest, meaning "losing chrysanthemums"): one use (5%)—in line one.

²⁰ The number above each haiku in the text is the code which identifies each haiku sent to the respondents who co-operated in this study.

that mere mention of season is not enough to trigger full seasonal dimension, for in terms of the experience of natural phenomena, the Northern California respondents maintained that the haiku is unintelligible and the Southern California and Texas areas could not muster enough votes in any category, thus allowing the haiku to fall into an uncertain category. It appears that without a knowledge of vivid orange bitter-sweet berries which line (or used to line) country roads in autumn, without a knowledge of gathering bitter-sweet for floral and weed arrangements and decorations, the direct reference to "Fall" is little help. A vast segment of the nation might understand the autumn **theme**, but be unable to respond to the **connotations** surrounding the human activity, thus unable to respond emotionally to the **mood** of the poem. The significance of this inability becomes

clear when we consider that a direct season statement might be applicable to only one area of the nation, as in the following haiku:

2:71—

By an old sea fort . . .
grey autumn surf recalling
cannons roaring then.

—Warren F. O'Rourke

Texas gave this haiku an autumn vote. Southern California gave it uncertain category and the remaining four areas said that it was not applicable their area but could be understood. Understood, perhaps, but the full aesthetic overtones of autumn, decay, all things passing away, are probably lost on anyone who has not experienced the objects therein.

Among the haiku given autumn vote on the basis of season object, the most obvious is probably

2:98—

A Hallowe'en mask,
floating face up in the ditch,
slowly shakes its head.

—Clement Hoyt

“Hallowe'en mask” is undoubtedly the clue here, whether or no the respondents have ever seen one floating in a ditch. All areas gave it autumn, as they gave the same vote for the following poem:

1:62V—

Swinging in the night wind
against these coppery leaves:
pendulums of rain.

—Morgan Gibson

Here “coppery leaves” is the seasonal clue, reinforced, perhaps, by the blustery rain. No such clue seems to exist in the following haiku, for those respondents west of the Mississippi River:

2:20—

The birds are leaving.
Even ducks have found the night
has frosty edges.

—Pauline Fehn

Southern California voted not applicable this area but could be understood, Northern California and Texas were unable to muster enough votes for any one category. All three areas east of the Mississippi gave the haiku autumn, and twelve of the nineteen respondents in that area gave a definite **late autumn** vote, presumably because one associates the ducks' leaving with nights which are truly frosty. Of the seventeen respondents west of the Mississippi, only three gave definite late autumn.

Of course, it would be possible to render haiku seasonal across the nation by adopting certain conventions or cliché's. For example, among the seven autumn haiku cited above, there

are certain expressions which are already conventional expressions of season: direct season statements such as "The fall rain whispers" and "Fall's last rays of gold"; season activities such as "The birds are leaving"; season objects such as nights with "frosty edges." Although the expressions seem appropriate to the haiku in which they appear, it is quite possible that they could achieve wide enough usage to become stereotyped cliché's of season, just as *meigetsu* is in Japanese or "autumn moon" and "harvest moon" are in English.

It is possible that specific season object is the chief means of avoiding cliché' season reference in English haiku, just as it is in Japanese. Of the nine haiku which received season vote across the nation, eight (89%) have an obvious seasonal clue: seven mention season or month or day of year; one mentions a specific seasonal

festival. But of the twelve haiku which received season vote by region (east of the Mississippi River, but not west), only two (17%) mention a specific season. Of the remaining ten, eight use a season object for winter (ice, snow, skater's pond, blizzard), one uses a summer season object and one an autumn object. Of the eleven haiku which received a season vote in but one of the six areas, only one (9%) contains a specific statement of season (2:71). The remaining ten haiku rely upon objects. A list of the key objects, seasons and areas follows:

1:137—black cloud . . . spills its burden (summer—Wis.)

2:21 V—spinning maple seeds (spring—Wis.)

2:100—lightning flash . . . night rain (summer—Wis.)

4:10—blue-tailed lizard . . . mint bed (summer—Ark.-La.)

4:49V—garbage dump . . . gulls
. . . cattails (spring—N. Y.-N. J.)

5:20—shower . . . green velvet . . .
rocks (spring—Ark.-La.)

5:123—desert dust storm . . . yellow
butterflies (summer—Texas)

6:20—blue lizard . . . moss encrust-
ed stone (summer—Ark.-La.)

6:96—empty house . . . broken
windows rattling . . . door slams (win-
ter—Ark.-La.)

6:98—wind-mad newspaper . . . in-
sane sound (spring—N. Y.-N. J.)

It is apparent that 89% of the haiku seasonal by nation contain a specific reference to season, whereas 91% of the haiku seasonal by area do not. The latter percentage and the list of specific objects above indicate that specific objects will lead away from cliché season reference. The specific objects in the area list also indicate that at least in the United States English-language haiku will eventually prove

to be seasonal not so much by nation or by region, but by geographic area. For example, anyone who has spent a number of years in the Wisconsin area knows that the following haiku is summer:

1:137—

Black cloud overhead
grows beyond the farthest blue,
then spills its burden.

—Eve Smith

It is summer not only because of its objects, but also because of the connotations surrounding the experience of those objects. Wisconsin skies tend to cloud in late afternoons with clouds moving from west to east, toward the Great Lakes. This phenomenon becomes especially apparent during a summer period of prolonged, hot, blue-sky days. Day after day one watches the clouds form—huge white clouds—waiting for rain that will break the heat. Finally the threat of

storm—a humid day, hot and oppressive, and a huge black cloud in the west. Gradually it covers the sky from horizon to horizon; then, rain, not where the viewer is, but a horizon away. A Wisconsinite's emotional reaction could only be summer mood, based on the objects and the connotations surrounding the experience thereof. And Wisconsin respondents placed the haiku at mid-summer.

Mood brings us to another interesting seasonal problem. In the list above, items (6:96) and (6:98) depend not so much on natural phenomena as on man-made objects. The first, from

In that empty house,
with broken windows rattling,
a door slams and slams.

received a winter vote in the Arkansas-Louisiana area, but a vote of definite

non-season in all other areas. The second, from

Wind-mad newspaper,
beating bars of fence pickets,
makes an insane sound.

received a spring vote in the New York-New Jersey area, a non-seasonal vote in Wisconsin, Northern and Southern California, and an uncertain category for Arkansas-Louisiana and Texas. There is certainly no direct statement of season, winter or spring, in either of the haiku. Neither relies on phenomena specifically related to a particular season. Yet each was given definite season. The explanation might lie in that we asked our respondents to arrange the haiku related to a given season in their area according to chronology—time within season. Although the Arkansas-Louisiana majority gave a question mark vote for

winter to "In that empty house", indicating that they could not pinpoint its actual time in season, the New York-New Jersey respondents gave a majority vote of early spring to "Wind-mad newspaper." This indicates that there must be something about the mood of the two haiku which gives them a seasonal value in certain areas. The importance of mood in the seasonal evaluation of these haiku becomes apparent when one considers them in their original context as part of a five-haiku sequence entitled "To a Vacant House in Autumn" written by Clement Hoyt of Texas.

To a Vacant House in Autumn

6:5—

Hair, in my comb's teeth,
the color of autumn wind—
this whole day is gray.

6:96—

In that empty house,
with broken windows rattling,
a door slams and slams.

6:97—

Leaves moil in the yard,
reveal an eyeless doll's head . . .
slowly conceal it.

6:98—

Wind-mad newspaper,
beating bars of fence pickets,
makes an insane sound.

6:99—

You can see through it:
that shape of a cicada,
haunting the bare tree.

It is significant that the last haiku in the series was assessed as mid-autumn in Wisconsin and in New York-New Jersey, while it fell into the mid-win-

ter category in Southern California, and into the uncertain category for Arkansas-Louisiana, North California and Texas.

"To a Vacant House in Autumn" was not published with title, as a sequence. Neither were the individual haiku published as a group. Thus, the respondents had no way of knowing their collective nature. Therefore, the variety of seasons assessed to the various haiku in the series indicates that it is, at present, almost impossible to be **certain** of the season of a given haiku in English. "In that empty house" and "Wind-mad newspaper" are not winter and spring, respectively; neither is "You can see through it" autumn in one area and winter in another: all are autumn. Furthermore, the arrangement of the haiku in "To a Vacant House in Autumn" indicates that a given haiku can take on a seasonal mood, even though in itself it

lacks definite season statement, activity or object, providing the author supplies a proper matrix of seasonal haiku. It also seems evident that a haiku can take on a season mood, given a title.

In conclusion, it appears that from a seasonal standpoint, Japanese and English-language haiku are alike, in that both utilize the three components of season: theme, connotation and mood. Both state theme by object or activity or direct statement. Both rely upon connotations which surround human experience of objects and activities. Both trigger mood by evoking emotional response to theme and connotation.

They are, however, dissimilar, in that the Japanese haiku has the benefit of geography and climate, flora and fauna to render haiku seasonal by nation, while in America these things are so varied that adherence to natural

phenomena tends to render haiku something other than seasonal by nation. Whereas Japanese convention has led to cliché' season statement, and American convention indicates a possible trend in that direction, just as the Japanese haiku can avoid cliché' season statement by dealing with specific seasonal objects, so too, can the American. However, while Japanese specific objects are understood nationally, many American season objects are not and will not become so understood, unless we conventionalize artificially—a practice which would

lead to a kind of cliché' season usage, just as is the case with certain Japanese season expressions. On the other hand, if we do not conventionalize but continue to deal with specific phenomena, we seem bound to produce an American haiku not seasonal by nation but seasonal by geographic region or even area. Thus, from a literary point of view, it is possible that the American haiku will be a form of "regional" literature. In the long run, this may prove one of the chief distinctions between Japanese and American haiku.

64 - 66 by Foster Jewell

64—

In lulls of surf thunder,
backwash, in an undertone,
whispering, sh-h-h.

65—

Wind and desert sand
whispering behind my back
where my footprints dim.

66—

Mirage or smoke trees?
where the desert seems to drift
and the distance weaves.

In this old village
by a house of weathered wood
stands a rocking horse.

—K. W. Johnsgard

68, 69 by Christina R. Kallman

68—

In the still forest,
only the trembling snowflakes
greet the howl of the wolf.

69—

Out of the wet sand
comes a spurt of tiny bubbles
from a restless clam.

Beyond the breakers,
mist rides on morning wind
and fishermen stare . . .

—Leroy Kanterman

Retreating before
the rising sun, frost still lays
siege to my closed door.

—Walter H. Kerr

Waiting for the bus
in cold rain, even these friends
have no words to say.

—Gustave Keyser

That rain left puddles.
Now small boys are using them
to sail their stick boats.

—Elizabeth Searle Lamb

The city pavements
have a strange wet steaming
smell . . .
thunder grows fainter.

—Elizabeth Searle Lamb

Standing alone,
an elm: its dead arms in sleeves
of scarlet ivy.

—Anne Landauer

76 - 80 by Carol Law

76—

The bobbing fishboats
are black against the lifting fog
and the sound of the sea.

77—

The first day of spring—
and the old pond is covered
with red dragonflies.

78—

The chattering jay
is visiting his old haunts . . .
and these sunken graves.

79—

Along the marsh bank
brown cattails explode against
the noonday silence.

80—

In the winter silence
the fallen snow begins to drift
across the prairie.

Old campfire died down—
black shapes looming up here, there
against our stars.

—William E. Lee

82 - 83 by William E. Lee

82—

In the washed moonlight
our burro's back, arched for days—
straightened out nicely.
84, 85 by Edith M. McKay

83—

From an old warehouse
smells leak into the wet night . . .
coffee . . . copra . . . cane . . .

84—

A strutting rooster
sounds his self-winding alarm,
awakening dawn.

85—

Out of the grafting
of sunshine to nimbus clouds,
a rainbow blossoms.

Weeks of teasing warmth—
still, the wary old rosebush
refuses to green.

—Orion McLain

Rainbows flick their fins
just enough to cast shadows
as still as gray stones.

—Kay Titus Mormino

From the Mojave,
dirty clouds masking the sky:
my neighbor's leaves—mine!

—Roger Mueller

Small town at midnight:
clock breaking the cold silence
into twelve pieces.

—Willene H. Nusbaum

90, 91 by Catherine Neil Paton

90—

To an empty moor
the curlew calls plaintively
—faintly an answer.

91—

Green-blue the rough sea;
a flock of gulls, storm-driven,
rests on the ploughed field.

92, 93 by Jess Perlman

92—

Winter winds resting,
the road lies hidden under
snow and pigeon tracks.

93—

The mad winter winds,
discovering city dust,
dance a dervish dance.

94 - 97 by Marjory Bates Pratt

94—

Listening in silence
to the rain's tiny fingers
drumming on the roof.

96—

A flash of scarlet!
Cardinal and sunflower seed
have met on the snow.

95—

The old man's red nose—
a drop of dew hangs from it
this chilly morning.

97—

A woodland clearing.
Two pheasants parade their young
in the bright sunlight.

The apple tree's leaves
jerk in the soft spring drizzle:
birds call through the mist.

—Spencer Rathus

Down moon-haunted slopes
the owls like echoes glide—
hollow and searching.

—Willie Reader

100 - 102 by Charles C. Rogers

100—

You careful children,
bottle your fireflies in haste
before the night comes.

101—

Their jack-o'-lantern
eyes the dark of the night.
He grows dim, and squints.

102—

An apparition
seen in half-light on the hunt,
withered stumps in snow.

In between the thorns
young blue-tits perch on a branch
near the nest hollow.

—Sydell Rosenberg

104, 105 by Herta Rosenblatt

104—

Trees shriek in the storm—
in the still house the last rose
has dropped its petals.

105—

At last the morning—
how loud the song of the wren
near this silent house.

Eucalyptus trees
guarding the property lines
—shaggy old watch dogs.

—Anne Rutherford

The frozen raindrop
glides into my open palm—
white gypsy snowflake.

—Frank E. Salmon

Across the harbor
Eastern Point's revolving light
winks at a full moon.

—Charles Shaw

Three long years have passed:
now burned August hills become
these golden mountains.

—Joy Shieman

110, 111 by Marjorie Bertram Smith

110—

Edgings of snowflakes
ruffle grass and lace the trees
with fresh white jabots.

Whippet wind races
through skeleton trees; full moon
watches autumn pale.

—E. Nel Snyder

111—

The redwing black bird
“screes” from the cattail marsh.
In the bogs—the frogs.

Garments children wore.
These memories still linger
in the homemade rug.

—Jerri Spinelli

The old farm road
winding into midnight,
moonlight on its stones.

—Will D. Swearingen

Out the kitchen door,
over the ridge—stark silence
trails the bawling herd.

—Daisy Elmore Tennant

Rainy afternoon . . .
multicolored umbrellas
brighten this gray day.

—Dori Thiry

Stretched from branch to trunk
and dusty with green pine pollen,
this quivering web.

—Tickner

The first color of dawn—
a row of ants are running
up the morning-glory.

—D. Tickner

The crow's raucous calls
won't change a straw on his head—
stoical man of scraps.

—Saxon White Uberuaga

Pecking at their beads
nuns cross the morning-wet grass
and blackbirds whisper.

—Ann Vrooman

Standing in deep snow
someone painted a snow face
on a dark tree trunk.

—Irma Wassall

122, 123 by Joyce W. Webb

122—

The morning sun throws
the shadows of blowing leaves
against the curtain.

123—

Playful surf fingers
toss a wig of brown seaweed
at the rock's bald head.

124, 125 by Mary lou Wells

124—

Where once stood a house
now just a lone chimney stands.
Jonquils wave and nod.

125—

Cracker box in hand
she clops in her cowgirl boots
chasing butterflies.

126, 127 by Paul O. Williams

126—

Pine needles in twos
scatter across the flagstones—
the wind plays jackstraws.

127—

See where the river
under the sudden cold wind
shivers in patches.

On a slope . . . covered
with snow . . . vines of wild sweet
peas
caught in each other.

—Virginia Brady Young



VERBLESS HAIKU

by Robert Spiess

In determining for himself the degree to which the various unique qualities of Japanese haiku can become, and should become, part of his own creations, the English-Language haiku poet inevitably must consider whether effective verbless haiku can be written in English—haiku that having no verbs may nonetheless best express the shading, nuance, or quality of certain of his event-experiences.

In HAIKU IN ENGLISH, Harold G. Henderson, referring to Japanese haiku, says: "Many haiku contain no verb at all, and sentences are usually left unfinished" (p. 6). In A NET OF FIREFLIES, Harold Stewart, writing on the Japanese haiku, states: ". . . the haiku masters cultivate a deliberate

nakedness and poverty of diction, allowing only a sparse indulgence in adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and even verbs, and so making of this a poetry of nouns, postpositions (the Japanese equivalent of our prepositions), and interjections . . ." (p. 159). In THE JAPANESE HAIKU, Kenneth Yasuda similarly writes: "Again for the sake of directness, relatively few adjectives and adverbs are used in haiku. Indeed . . . there are a number of Japanese haiku without a single verb, adjective, or adverb. Truly, haiku could be called the poetry of the noun . . ." (p. 53). In AN ANTHOLOGY OF HAIKU ANCIENT AND MODERN, Asataro Miyamori comments: "Generally speaking, in the haiku an ob-

jective description is given, often omitting the verb, and the poet's subjective sentiment is left to the reader's imagination" (p. 7).

On the other side of the coin, the English-language haiku poet discovers that in "Strong Verbs in Haiku" (AH, IV, 1) Gustave Keyser presents the view that verbs are of essential importance in English-language haiku;—that even in haiku which present quiescent events the verbs used must particularly and accurately denote the kind of action that is taking place. He states: "One of the prime keys to optimum effect in haiku is strong verbs. This means selecting the precise verb forms to depict the nature and degree of action;—the inevitable verbs, the only right verbs" (p. 6). And again, at the conclusion of his article he says: "In summary, the effectiveness of haiku depends primarily upon the

strength, the rightness, of the verbs" (p. 9).

Ted-Larry Pebworth also represents this view in his "Weak Verbs in Haiku" (AH, III, 2) when he writes: "Many haiku are rendered ineffective by weak verbs . . . verbs that do not do any work or pull any weight." He finds that the verb "to be" in its various forms is particularly dangerous for the haiku poet as it implies only existence and does not act. He states: "Mere being is rarely interesting and seldom informative in haiku" (p. 23).

Out of necessity for reasonable brevity to this article, ineffective verbless haiku will not be considered; the purpose is to demonstrate that highly effective, verbless English-language haiku can be written, and are being written.

Gustave Keyser, the author of

"Strong Verbs in Haiku," has written an excellent verbless haiku:

Above gilded domes
of the orthodox temple . . .
the moon's veiled face.
(AH, IV, 1: 34)

True, the words "veiled" and "gilded" are past participles of "to veil", "to gild"; but in the adjectival usage they have in the haiku their verbal aspect is of extremely little significance. In fact, the nouns "veil" and "gold" or "gilt" come to mind more strongly than do the verbs. The mood or aura of this haiku envelops the reader with a feeling or sense of the foreign, the ancient and historical, the unknown and mysteriously strange, of the rituals and customs of another culture—and does it without a verb! In fact, a verb could easily destroy the entire effect of this

haiku, because it would make the haiku too active, even too violent, for the mood that the writer wants to create.

John S. Haney's haiku

The two poplar trees,
slender and tall on the hill—
a gate for the moon.
(AH, IV, 2: 5)

is far from being a static picture. The noun "gate" and the preposition "for" (which supplements or enhances "gate"), act as the verbal element—that is, the element in the haiku that suggests rather than tells that the moon (or its light) is entering through the two trees. A verb such as "comes" or "enters" would be too strong, even too crude, for this haiku. Haney's is a haiku of subtle suggestion, aesthetically well created.

In the following haiku by Foster

Jewell there is definite action involved as well as a strong feeling of taut suspense:

Step after slow step
over breath-holding silence
of fresh-crustured snow.
(AH, IV, 2: 5)

Many words, none of which are verbs, combine in this haiku to give the desired degree of action: the repeated noun "step", the prepositions "after" and "over", and even the adjective "slow." I believe that a verb would destroy this haiku. If the noun "step" had been changed to the verb "step" and the poet had said something like "We step slowly . . .", he probably would not have been able to achieve the appropriate atmosphere of suspense that now is present.

The final verbless haiku to be considered is Marjory Bates Pratt's

Through the early mist
no sound from the fisherman
on the other bank.
(AH, IV, 2: 40)

In this haiku the prepositions "Through" and "from" supply the subtle, necessary verbal element. Again, this is not a static picture; in a manner of speaking it could be called "quiescence happening."

Although there certainly is the danger that verbless haiku can easily be nothing more than mere pictures or seeming excerpts from a longer poem, and although I have quoted only four effective verbless haiku, I believe that significant verbless haiku can be written in English. Furthermore, for proper artistic conversion and aesthetic transmission, I believe that certain event-experiences demand verbless treatment in the creation of English-language haiku.

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