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SHASHIN - KAKU HAIKU

In developing a Canadian haiku style of poetry, I had to come up with a name. During my investigations into the history of haiku⁽¹⁾ I came across two Japanese words that I have chosen to describe this new style; Shashin, meaning photograph and Kaku, meaning picture (to sketch or draw).

The first line is made up of up to two words of no more than three syllables or two feet⁽²⁾, a foot is one breath-stress producing either one or two syllables. The rhythm of Japanese poetry is based on the beat of stress rather than on the number of syllables⁽³⁾. The only restrictions placed on the first line are that it must let the reader know exactly what it is you want to talk about and it must be connected to the second line in continuity of thought.

The structure of the second line is made up of up to six syllables or three feet and acts as an ending thought to the first line and must show no contrast. The object of the first and second lines is to 'paint a picture' that will leave a very strong impression on the mind of the reader. A 'photograph' that says everything. Subjective, maudlin ideas and rhyme are not accepted.

Use of non- traditional haiku themes is encouraged, however, traditional seasonal themes with provocative content are acceptable. The overall feelings and ideas embodied in the first two, 2-3 beat, lines must be clear and concise with no hidden images.

The third line, as in the haiku, is the contrast line with less syllables than in the second line, two to three feet (five syllables). Shashin-kaku must make a clear statement about life and the world around us.

The best method of dealing with the writing of Shashin-kaku haiku is to compare it with the traditional and modern haiku of Japan as well as with the modern haiku style. Traditionally, the Japanese haiku style in English consists of a 5-7-5 syllable or 3-4-3 beat⁽⁴⁾ poem with a seasonal word or theme. The haiku form in any language is a triplet verse of 3-4-3 beats. Fundamentally, haiku is not syllabic poetry⁽⁵⁾. It is the haiku in the Japanese language that the syllables are counted and not necessarily the English translations. Haiku as a verse form is more than four hundred years old with its origin in the haiku, a light hearted linked verse consisting of 36, 50 or 100 verses composed by a team of poets. The opening verse, called the hokku, was in three lines of 5-7-5 syllables with the second verse a 7-7 syllable couplet.

The hokku was the most important as it set the tone for the rest of the poem and through the works of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), in his travels, wrote hokku (linked verse) alone without the verses that followed and cleared the path for the birth of haiku - completely independent hokku.⁽⁶⁾

Basho:

furikeya/kawazutabikommu/mizu no oto

The old pond
a frog jumps in
sound of water

On the way to the outhouse
the white of the moonflower
by torchlight

I don't know
which tree it comes from,
that fragrance ^(6a)

Modern Japanese haiku dates from the time of Shiki, circa 1896, when he and his followers broke with traditional haiku thought and strove to appeal directly to emotion and abhor wordiness, leaning towards a diffuse style, as well as detaching themselves from any lineage of classical haiku masters, creating a new haiku. They respected the poem more than the poet. ⁽⁷⁾

Kyoshi:

tenjutsu-no/utsuritekarashi/koto no mizu

the sun in the sky
is mirrored darkly on the water
where tadpoles live

Kijo:

hara-sumaya/butsukariuruku/mekura-inu

cold day in spring
bumping into this and that
a blind dog walking ⁽⁸⁾

Adrienne Kerr says: I have a new Japanese friend -Makido- and she has explained to me that for the Japanese, perhaps the most representative poetic genre -the one that expresses their innermost feelings, their "soul" -is the haiku, the shortest of poetic forms. Through only 17 syllables, it seeks to convey vividly the feeling and the image of the now-the moment; it most tellingly brings into play the special characteristics of the Japanese language -the broad range of meaning and the vivid imagery of each word and phrase -wow, what an undertaking!

The origin of haiku itself can be traced back to the "renga" (linked verse) that first appeared during the Kamakur period (1192-1333 A.D.) and reached the height of its popularity during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). "Renga" emphasized satire and wit; two or more

persons gathered to participate in its composition, with one composing the "choku," or "Kaminoku" (long, or upper, hemistich of three lines of five, seven and five syllables) and the other wittingly countering with the "tanku", or "shimonoku" (short, or lower hemistich of two lines of seven syllables each).

Towards the close of the Muromachic period, a more broad-humoured and jocular form of renga developed, and this strain of renga came to be known as "haiku-renga" (witty or humorous linked verse). The haiku-renga ranked considerably below the traditional renga, but rose in standing during the Edo period (1603-1867) and came to deal more with refined wit and humour. And the kaminoku gradually became independent of the shimonku to become today's haiku (although it was called haikai until the dawn of the Meiji Era in 1868. But it was Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) perhaps one of the foremost poets in the country's literary history, who established the fame and status of the haiku. Basho was an itinerant poet who travelled the length and breadth of the country and with keen perception caught the refined and sublime in the common, everyday scene; he tried to catch the voice from the innermost recess of the people's soul.

Here is one of Basho's better known works with an approximate translation.

Na -tsuku-saya	The grasses of summer
Tsu-wamo-no do-moga	of the warriors
Yu-me no a -to	These remain but dreams.

Natsukusa, or "grasses of summer," is the key phrase; orthodox haiku deals with a specific season of the year. ^(8a) Haiku in present day Japan still has a seasonal theme as with the modern form yet distinguishes itself from traditional form. North America has no haiku tradition. Most 'modern' writings are based on what has already been written and translated. Haiku in Canada today, has a much more free style form where content and structure are concerned. The seasonal theme can be found in most of the Canadian haiku but there is no set beat, or 5-7-5 syllabic structure.

Jones, in his book *The Brave Never Write Poetry* (Coach House Press, Toronto 1985), found himself in 1982 in a direction out of my current sense of emptiness [in] zen Buddhism & the composition of haiku. "*While my experiments with zen philosophy and meditation proved futile, my interest in haiku was enriched by a wide reading of traditional and on temporary Japanese haiku in translation . . . That autumn I found my self in the role of secretary of the Haiku Society of Canada and organizing a massive reading at Harbourfront . . . Rather than encouraging me, this brought about my complete disillusionment with haiku. What I discovered was a mass of hobbyists imitating translations of centuries-old Japanese haiku . . . Everywhere the subject matter was foreign to that of contemporary North American existence . . . The few haikuists who were doing anything original were completely bogged down in lifeless exploitations of form and linguistics. I lashed out at the audience: Do you really want to hear this crap?*" ^(9a)

Jones:

Eating candy floss . . .
Until we come to the crushed
cat in the road

Cold, evening wind:
I give a wino
my last cigarette

spring morning
into the empty tavern
struts a pigeon

an old shoe
against the wall of an alley
worn again by leaves ⁽⁹⁾

Hryciuk:

just changed,
he lay on my belly
the warm swell of pee ⁽¹¹⁾

Faiers:

the morning taste
of herb tea
in a styrofoam cup

LSD
these clouds reveal
too much moon ⁽¹⁰⁾

The following samples of poems will introduce you to all the other, left over, haikuish, short poems which do not fit into the standard haiku form. These Shashin-kaku follow the structure set down in the beginning of this essay. Some have been published in *Going Down Goose Lane Toward Broken Jaw* (Harmonia Press 2005). I have included samples of haiku by various poets that I feel fit into this style.

abortion
is not for any man
missing my son

Sipping Green Tea
after love settles the air
aroma

three girls
under an umbrella
acid rain

Consuming
shape of sterile love
Toronto track

*Konya no/ shefu no chiri no
dekibae/noranekowakamawazu*

*Suterippaa/gudengudenniyoidore/
fiutatsu no kuchigamotomuyorokobi*

cooks chili
is bad tonight
stray cat is blind

stripper
beer sloshing in her brain
both mouths smile

A sip of wine
and a poets words
thoughts of home

Outside Tobique
Nation Drumming Circle
Japanese tourist

Serving Chai
in the once empty room
the warmth of you

Wayne Ray

*Yu me no naka/Karerawahitotsuni/ga to
naru*

gangs march
children thrusting guns
genocide

(For Jones)
In a dream
they become one
moth and flame

Miki Mesiab (unpublished)

sipping on Green Tea
across from Old Loyalist Cemetery
long before Vimy

*Ryaouchawoajiwav/chigiri no ato no/kaori
no naka de*

among headstones
in the cemetery
a condom

weeping
under her phoney crown
beauty queen

Herb Barrett ⁽¹²⁾

radio shouts
wars murders accidents
cat curled in sleep

in the mall
people munching food
in different languages

J.B. Reynolds ⁽¹²⁾

The following longer poems are composed of a main prose poem of twelve lines which begins and ends with a Shashin-kaku Haiku of the same theme. I call this style Joge uta (upper and lower poem).

The Juke Box

music blares
and in the restaurant
a blind boy

dark sounds
penetrate dark spaces
inside smile

Wayne Ray

I see you now
do you see my sounds
my vibration's
my music
quarter in the slot
play me
music plays me
plays you
my music box mouth
has no eyes
I feel your smile
feel mine

Bone Cancer

his wife sits
weeping softly as he speaks
they both hurt

morphine drips
thin anaesthesia
through veins
fragile
as my friend's
brittle bones
aching
he tells his life
drifting in and out
on tides of pain
there is
no more time

eyes close
pain will end too soon
eternal sleep

Miki Mesiab

Collateral Beauty

After the cloudy rain,
on the tree lined summer grass,
a single daisy.

On a Morey Tuesday
overcast day rain recedes,
grief and loss movie has
gripped our sixth sense,
does not heal our wounds , or
like time, wounds our heals.
Inside the Chapel theater
quiet introspection, solitude,
each man's personal interpretation
of his own grief and loss.
A single daisy blooms on the lawn,
the collateral beauty of tears.

In the Chapel,
this little light of mine,
an orange glow.

Ray Scott

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