

## With Words Haiku Reading & Comprehension Course

### Lesson Four

#### Two Branches Called Haiku

(following on from Lesson 1, Journey from the Japanese)

In Lesson 1, we learned about haiku making a transition from a Japanese form, in the Japanese language, to its English language incarnation.

We saw how early translators (and even modern dictionaries) saw haiku as a seventeen syllable format, and that modern writers and translators were prepared to move on from strict adherence to seventeen syllables, in order to satisfy other criteria of haiku, especially brevity.

In reality what happened is that two branches formed.

1) In general, writers who have taken an especial and deep interest in the haiku form have abandoned strict seventeen syllable adherence. This applies also to journal editors, and the specialist haiku organisations, like the *British Haiku Society* and the *Haiku Society of America*.

2) Writers who have specialised less in haiku have taken the seventeen syllable rule at face value, and are often very successful and widely published writers to boot, putting great care and creativity into this work. These people will sometimes say that advocates of branch 1) above are "wrong".

Group 1) will often say that Group 2) are "wrong" and under-informed about what haiku really is.

Here at With Words, we see merit in both. When we teach the writing of haiku, we teach the complex, fascinating, layered, multi-aspect form that haiku is, but we don't feel we have a right to say other writers are "wrong". As a reader you are entitled to appreciate both!

#### EXERCISE ONE

Take a look at the poems listed below. Pick three or four that you like, and explain what you appreciate about them. There are no trick poems here! They are all published poems, but are by writers from different backgrounds.

1.

The dregs of my coffee  
Glisten  
In the morning light

2.

lazy afternoon  
I drift along with the breeze  
and dandelion seeds

3.

spring morning –  
a mouse  
in the pot-pourri

4.

Hamilton. Tweeds? Tux?  
Baloney? Abalone?  
Flux, Tom. Constant flux.

5.

at least we up front  
about this freakdom. at least  
we let it all hang out

6.

the moon is broken  
battersea power station  
from a train window

7.

Wessex saddlebacks.  
The unrestricted palette  
of white upon black.

8.

lullaby of rain  
another pinch of saffron  
in the pumpkin soup

9.

My face is a scarred  
Reminder of your easy  
Comings and goings

10.

midday heat  
a doll hung up to dry  
by its hair

## EXERCISE TWO

Go through each of the poems above again, and answer each of the questions below for each poem.

- a) How many syllables does this poem have?
- b) Does this poem have a season reference/kigo?
- c) Is this poem describing a single moment, or does its action span more time than the "here and now".
- d) How many adjectives does this poem have?
- e) How many verbs does this poem have?

This lesson is not really complete until you receive the written feedback from the tutor on this exercise, which will clarify the relevance of those questions, so if you're feeling a bit confused please don't worry yet! However, as an optional extra exercise, have a go at answering the following final question:

- f) Do you think this poem is written by a specialist haiku poet, or a poet from a general poetry background?

The next lessons in this course will deal with purely the haiku written with priorities other than seventeen syllable adherence, but we hope that studying the above will have put into context the disagreements that you will ultimately encounter about haiku!

Poems © individual writers. (To get the most out of this exercise, the authors have not yet been revealed but will be in the tutor's written response to your exercise).

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