

Haiku

Haiku:
The Gentle Art of Disappearing

By

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**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

Haiku: The Gentle Art of Disappearing, by Gabriel Rosenstock

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Was Nár dhéana an leabhar seo dochar d'aon duine
May this book harm no one

Haiku: One-breath poetry, traditionally 17 syllables (5-7-5), now increasingly practised outside Japan as a free-style form, usually in three lines. It owes its impact and inspiration to a meditative flash in which the experienter of the haiku moment merges suddenly with perceived phenomena.

Senryu: One-breath poetry, often without the flash, less nature-centred and frequently lighter than haiku, usually touching on human foibles.

—Author's definitions

Note: Where “GR” appears in the text, it indicates that Gabriel Rosenstock is the author or has provided a translation, or version, of the works of others.

Some of the author's own haiku have appeared in Irish and in English in *World Haiku Review*, *Lishanu*, *Simply Haiku*, *Modern Haiku*, *Lá*, *Feasta*, *Heron's Nest*, *Haiku Reality*, *Haiku Scotland*, on the websites of *Non-Duality Salon Highlights* and *Poetry Chaikhana*, *Sacred Poetry from Around the World* and in the volume *Géaga Trí Thine* (Comhar, 2006).

The bilingual haiku accompanying the photo-haiga are by the author - Gabriel Rosenstock.

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HAIKU DISAPPEARING

Would you like to disappear? Haiku can show you the way!

‘How painful it is to see people all wrapped up in themselves,’ commented **Ryokan**. Well, it’s unwrapping time, for all of us now, time to let go. How? Let’s *see*!

Haiku is an ardent, inspired and inspiring engagement with everyday life, an intercourse with nature-centred events, mainly, events that are happening around us all of the time but which we perceive more keenly on the haiku path. Read true haiku with reverence, write true haiku - do it right and you can disappear, happily, now - and over and over again in the course of your life.

There’s a professor in Chicago who has been studying happiness. What is happiness? It’s all about flow, maintains **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi** in *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*: ‘The metaphor of ‘flow’ is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives ...’

Catechism ... Sometimes it appears that the cat knows more than we do, learning from experience, fitting into the world, and disappearing from it, more gracefully than we can:

the cat

walks into the autumn wind -
extended whiskers

Murayama Kokyō

(Version: GR)

nothing
 she doesn't know –
 the cat on the stove
 Fusei
 (Version: GR)

from darkness
 and back into the dark
 the affairs of the cat!
 Issa
 (Version: GR)

from what unknowable universe
 beyond Hubble –
 the cat's green stare
 GR

frosty morning ...
 the dead cat's paw
 reaches to the sun
 GR

Warning ... Take a break! This book is best savoured in sips! Haiku carry a dosage warning. Large draughts lead to giddiness or numbness. As the Welsh say, too much pudding chokes the dog.

If your attention is flagging, it's time to reach for the bookmark. No bookmark? Make one! Occupy yourself nonverbally, pre-verbally. Flow back in here again later.

Disappearing in the haiku moment ... Think about moments of flow, ordinary or extraordinary events in your life in which you have experienced flow: it may have been entering another dimension while dancing, or when engaged in some aesthetic pursuit – music, pottery or painting; it may have been lovemaking, or the highlight of some athletic activity, or simply watching the dawn, or the stars, in some exotic location. You needn't shine as athlete, hill-walker or lover, no need to book a trip to Kerala or Kerry. You can flow now with haiku, like water, like a cloud.

Wandering monks were called *unsui* in Japan, literally 'cloud and water'. In Estonia, the perfection of life was personified in the singing wanderer: 'If you walk your path without singing then this is an insult to the land, to meadows and forests and trees, and they show their disapproval of such a wanderer by taking away from him the power of moving on...' ¹

¹ *Regilaul – music in our mother tongue* by **Mikk Sarv** (*Estonian Culture 1/2003* (1)), published by Estonian Institute



*eas Ghleann an Chairthe
ní spiorad go dtí é
faoin solas*

*Glencar waterfall
when touched by light
is pure spirit*

Bashō moved about quite a bit and caught the beauty of flow and stillness, the intermingling textures of life:

The squid seller's call
mingles with the voice
of the cuckoo

(*Matsuo Basho, Poems*, trans. **Robert Hass**, PoemHunter.com, 2004)

It is your static, self-conscious, unflowing self which makes you so stolidly visible, so permanently present to others and to yourself. Disappear for a while. True haikuists will show you the way because they have developed a magnetic capacity to attract the haiku moment. What is the haiku moment? Nothing more than an alchemic mingling and fusion of essences in which you disappear. Become the cloud! Become the water, the breeze that moves them! The voice of a bird. **D. H. Lawrence** once remarked that in the beginning was the Chirp!

Do not resist ... Among the definitions of 'flow' in *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, we find: 'To run, as water: to move or change form like a fluid ... to melt ...' All the sages, ancient and contemporary, are unanimous in praise of flowingness:

Do not resist
The journey's flow
And you will find yourself at One
With the mysterious unity of the Universe ...

Chuang Tzu

Disappearing in the flame ... Mystics will show you what true haikuists already know:

‘I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon and stars ... I awaken everything to life.’

It was **Hildegard von Bingen** who uttered those magnificent words. What a haikuist she would have made, had she known of the technique, given her life-long engagement with the secret life of plants and stones. Another German mystic, **Angelus Silesius**, was a master of minimalist verse; though his strange couplets are generally too abstract to resemble haiku, he presents us with a fine, if cryptic, reason for disappearing:

God, whose love and joy are present everywhere,
Can't come to visit you unless you aren't there!
(Version: GR)

Are you all wrapped up?

Only to the extent that a person
exposes his or her self
over and over again
to annihilation
can that which is
indestructible
arise
within themselves ...

Karlfried Graf Von Durkheim
(*The Way of Transformation*)

So, we hear this message from all sides, in many cultures, East and West, down through the ages. We cannot ignore it. The true haikuist cannot ignore it. It is his life's breath.

Disappearing in the ordinary ... Haiku poems focus on ordinary, seasonal goings on around us. Some form of brain synchronization happens in the haiku moment and the ordinary becomes extraordinary. We do not need a magic wand, or magic mushrooms, to disappear. A turnip can take us there, a tree, a crow, a shadow on a lake, the hissing of geese.

Meher Baba reminds us: ‘The best way to cleanse the heart and prepare for the stilling of the mind is to lead a normal, worldly life .’

i m’aonar anocht
leis na torbáin
leis an gcrúinne

alone tonight
with the tadpoles
with the universe
GR

in the silver dewdrops
vanishing...
my house
Issa

(Trans. **David G. Lanoue**)

The haikuist can disappear first thing in the morning, last thing at night, each haiku moment being a cleansing of the heart, a stilling of the mind, a vanishing. Where is the sane man or woman who, deep down, desires an unclean heart, an unstilled mind?



*trá an airgid ...
cá stopann an sáile, cá dtosnaíonn an talamh?
feadóg ag glaoch*

*silver strand ...
where does water end and land begin?
a whistling plover*



*tabhair leathsheans dóibh
agus pléascfaidh na carraigeacha
ina maidhm sholais*

*rocks explode
in light
given half a chance*

Disappearing in light ... The haikuist's focus is such that the interconnectedness of all things becomes radiantly apparent. The Mexican poet **José Juan Tablada**, who visited Japan, was one of the first Westerners to cultivate haiku:

tierno saúce
 casi oro, casi ámbar,
 casi luz

slight willow
 almost gold, almost amber,
 almost light

(Version: GR)

The effortless action of becoming, which is manifested a thousand times over in the daily world around us, was intuited in **Tablada's** timeless haiku moment. And where is he? He has disappeared into the willow. Its lambent willowness.

Rumi says:

Open the window of your bosom
 Let the spirits fly in and out ...

True haiku is an opening to an experience of freedom, fluency, spontaneity, a sharing of light.

Angelus Silesius, in another of his immortal couplets, says:

*Freund, so du etwas bist, so bleib doch ja nicht stehn:
Man muss aus einem Licht fort in das andre gehn*

Friend, whatever you are, you must not stand still:
One must from one light into the other spill
(Trans. GR)

Zen-Haiku Master, **James W. Hackett**, in his *A Traveler's Haiku*
(Hokuseido, 2004) offers us this:

clinging to a twig
now full of nothing but light –
the end of summer

Everything disappears ... One could say that everything disappears, or
will one day:

day after day
bits of the chained bicycle
disappear

Annie Bachini
(*Presence* #9)



*Bá Aisléime —
carraigeacha á gcreimeadh
sularbh ann don am*

*Ashleem Bay —
rocks eroding
before time began*

From self-infatuation to selflessness ...One is grossly visible in the world – to the world and to oneself – when one suffers from self-infatuation, self-engrossment, self-importance. Haiku is a streaming into the light in which self-infatuation cannot exist. The pure and purifying action of the haiku moment causes us to dissolve into another dimension. And who or what are we then? Creatures of light. Nothing more. Nothing less. And though we may return to the chiaroscuro of life, we are changed. We have, briefly, known our brilliant nature. The self has been sloughed and only Self remains.

faint sunlight
 injecting the veins
 of a falling leaf
 GR

he will not desert her!
 a bat

 circling the moon
 Gyōtai
 (Version: GR)

The melting of rigidity ... The haiku path is one of playful light, of love, of joy. As **Sharon Salzberg** teaches us in *Loving-Kindness – The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*: ‘Without the rigidity of concepts, the world becomes transparent and illuminated, as though lit from within. With this understanding, the interconnectedness of all that lives becomes very clear. We see that nothing is stagnant and nothing is fully separate ...’ The haiku path breaks down ‘rigidity of concepts’ and the world becomes illumined.

Indeed, were it not for this transparency, this inner luminescence, this interconnectedness, the haiku moment could not exist for us mortals at all and, so, it would be impossible for us to disappear in its clarity.

In many good haiku we spy a 'miniature animated cosmos', to borrow an apt phrase from **Octavio Paz**:

out come the creepy crawlies
all over the earth
see? they have shadows

Kuge

(Version: GR)

Disappearing in the garden ...Even maggots and beetles are part of the eternal flow. There is very little out there which does not possess *mononoke*, nature energy.

Some haikuists may need to learn how to disappear, initially, in a wood, on an unruffled lake, on top of a mountain, out on the rolling sea, or simply by visiting a splendid garden. **Ken Wilbur** has noticed how a great garden can 'pull the sensitive viewer out of him- or herself and into the garden, so completely that the separate self-sense disappears entirely and at least for a brief moment one is ushered into a nondual and timeless awareness.' This is a good way for the apprentice haikuist to get an inkling of the quality of the haiku moments awaiting him/her.

Once you experience the disappearance of 'the separate self-sense' you will know how haiku can authenticate this experience for you, over and over again.

Find a garden, then, and bring the haiku masters with you, the Sufi poets, or the timeless couplets of **Silesius**:

Die Seel, ein ewger Geist, ist über alle Zeit:

Sie lebt auch in der Welt schon in der Ewigkeit

The soul, an eternal spirit, is beyond time's hold:

Even in this world it is in eternity's fold

(Trans. GR)

Silesius also said *Die Zeit ist Ewigkeit, Ewigkeit ist Zeit*/Time is Eternity, Eternity is Time. **Wu-men** (1183 –1260) stated the same thing:

One instant is eternity
Eternity is the now ...

If we miss out on this insight we cannot experience the tremendous explosion necessary to disappear.

Disappearing in sound ... As the haikuist's art deepens, magnificent gardens, mountains and gorges will become totally unnecessary. The haikuist will disappear anywhere, in a shallow brook, a sewer, in a steaming dunghill! Alchemists call this a distillation.

Even in great cities, New York or Baghdad, we can disappear: 'feel the delight/ of walking in the noisy streets/ and being the noise' (**Rumi**). We can see a similarity here with disappearing into music. The Fuke sect in Japan used the bamboo flute (shakuhachi) to enter into a state of absolute sound known as *tettei on*. They had a saying: 'Become a Buddha in one sound.' What kind of a sound is that? It is the sound heard in mountain streams, waterfalls, rapids and cascades by the great, wandering haikuist **Santōka** and even, one suspects, a sound heard as he urinated on weeds.

In haiku – one-breath poetry – we can disappear into a buddhfield. What is to hold us back? The city? The woods? The forests? The flowers? The clouds? The rain? The mountains?

amidst the deep mountains
on my hat
only the sound of falling leaves
Kikusha-ni

(*Japanese Women Artists* by **Patricia Fister**, Spencer Art Museum, 1988)

a summer storm
 each and every raindrop
 bearing its own sound
Robert Bebek

their hungry cry
 carried away by clouds
 to where there are no gulls
GR

And silence ...

more silent than the hour
 before stars awake
 silence of the cats
GR

Laurence Sterne says, ‘Eloquence does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty.’ This simplicity and majesty is often found among the so-called unlettered members of society and in the oral literatures of the world.

Listen to the Elders...As you perfect the art of reading and writing haiku, the wisdom of the elders will become manifestly clear. The Ojibway taught us this: ‘My son! A lone wolf is rarely found in the wild. Wolves are social creatures like you and me. Just as you watch over your sister, so does a wolf watch over his brother. Just as you listen to your father, so does the wolf listen to his mother. Just as our family eats together, so too does the wolf. My son! Our people and the wolves are the same.’

becoming a cow
 would be fine – morning naps
 and the evening cool
 Shikō
 (*A Haiku Menagerie*)

Longing to disappear ... There seems to be a deep longing in the human spirit to disappear – that is to say, to know its own nature.. The great Portuguese poet **Fernando Pessoa** says, ‘Fly, bird, fly away, teach me how to disappear!’

This longing becomes manifest early on, in the games of childhood, in hide and seek. Do we miss those games as adults? Did we ever truly understand their significance? ‘Nature loves to hide,’ said **Heraclitus**.

A red crab
 hiding in the sand –
 pure waters

Fukuda Kodojin
(Old Taoist: the Life, Art and Poetry of Fukuda Kodojin
(1865 –1944) Stephen Addiss with Jonathan Chaves,
Columbia University Press, 1999)

a winter squall
 hid in the bamboos
 and lost itself
 Bashō
 (Version: Noel Griffin)

Playful innocence ...The haiku moment is a disappearance into the playful, innocent world of childhood. One may ask, was it ever that innocent? Did it not always suggest the possibility of pain and fear, reinforced by fairy tales that bristled with ogres and wolves? Is the innocence we associate with childhood some form of intense longing in mankind for an Eden, a Utopia that may or may not have existed?

One way or the other, the innocence of childhood has always been threatened, by slave labour, by sexual and other forms of abuse, by hunger and disease and even, in certain parts of the world today, by children's armies. And yet, it is possible to restore lost innocence, by disappearing into the haiku moment, the spirit which is endless, unborn, eternal.

only a half-squawk
 from the crow –
 but what a chorus it sets off
GR

A second before, or a second afterwards, and this haiku moment would not have existed. But such haiku moments can happen frequently, several times a day. And as we dip into their purity – their singularity or the concatenation of events which they can fire – are we not momentarily released from the burdens of responsibility and rationality, from sins real or imagined, and plunged, fearlessly, into the cleansing flow of things?

We never really lost our ability to be delighted and surprised by the colour, taste, sound, odour and texture of things. We may think we did, we may feel we did, but the haiku moment brings it all back. We begin to see again, as we once saw:

around the eyes
 of the old fisherman
 permanent ripples

George Swede

(*Almost Unseen*, Brooks Books 2000)

You Are A Star!

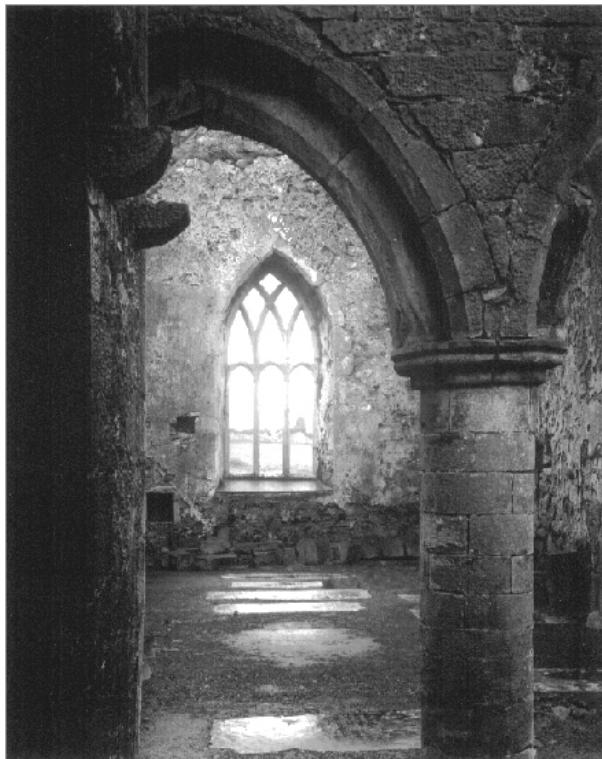
Man is not body. The heart, the spirit, is man.
 and this spirit is an entire star out of which he is built.
 If therefore a man is perfect in his heart,
 nothing in the whole light of Nature
 is hidden from him.

Paracelsus

For many people, the desire to disappear is mere escapism. Take, for instance, the largest group of foreigners in Japan, Koreans known as Zainichi. They are under constant pressure to conform. Their cultural and linguistic identity becomes brittle. (See *Japanese Society* by **Yoshio Sugimoto**, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

One of these Koreans, **Kidong Kang**, uses haiku to express his desire to flee the very home of haiku itself:

swallow left behind
 makes me want to fly
 Zainichi me
 (quoted in *Modern Haiku*, Winter-Spring 2004)



*creimthe ag urnaithe
fallaí sceiteacha
Mhainistir Bhuiríos Uíll*

*worn out from prayers
the crumbling walls
of Burrishoole Abbey*