



Expanded Edition

THE
h a i k u
ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Cor van den Heuvel

Over 800 of the best English language Haiku and related works

THE
HAIKU
ANTHOLOGY

Haiku and Senryu in English

Edited by Cor van den Heuvel



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Originally a Japanese form that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, haiku has seen a tremendous growth in popularity in the English language over the last two decades. It is a type of poetry that celebrates simplicity, emotion, and imagery, one in which only a few words convey worlds of mystery and meaning. All across North America, haiku magazines, presses, and societies continue to write and discuss this most evocative of poetic forms.

First published in 1974, *The Haiku Anthology* has proved a landmark work in modern haiku. The haiku's attraction lies in its ability to create in the mind of the reader an image so real one can almost touch it, and this book contains a wealth of such examples: a lone parachute at sunset, a weight lifter holding a tea cup, snowflakes against a car's headlights. This third edition, now com-

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pletely revised and updated, comprises 850 haiku and senryu (a related genre, usually humorous and concerned with human nature) written in English by 89 poets, including the top haiku writers of the American past and present. A new foreword details developments since the publication of the last edition.

Cor van den Heuvel, a haiku poet himself, is past president of the Haiku Society of America; he has headed the panel of judges for the Japan Airlines English-language haiku contest in Tokyo and served as the U.S. representative at the International Haiku Forum in Matsuyama. Van den Heuvel lives in New York City.

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To Harold G. Henderson and R. H. Blyth

I would like to thank the poets for their help in putting together this book, particularly Carl Patrick for his critical advice and L. A. Davidson for the use of her library of haiku books and magazines. I'd also like to express my appreciation to Gerald Howard, who was my first editor at Norton, for suggesting I do a third edition, and to Norton editor Patricia Chui for guiding it through the publishing process.

A special thanks to my wife, Leonia Leigh Larrecq van den Heuvel, for her love and support through three editions of *The Haiku Anthology*.

A NOTE ON THE
SELECTION AND LAYOUT
OF THE POEMS

*S*election: Some readers may wonder why I've chosen certain poems in this book which are, on the surface, similar to others. If a haiku is a good one, it doesn't matter if the subject has been used before. The writing of variations on certain subjects in haiku, sometimes using the same or similar phrases (or even changing a few words of a previous haiku), is one of the most interesting challenges the genre offers a poet and can result in refreshingly different ways of "seeing anew" for the reader. This is an aspect of traditional Japanese haiku which is hard for many Westerners, with their ideas of uniqueness and Romantic individualism, to accept. But some of the most original voices in haiku do not hesitate to dare seeming derivative if

they see a way of reworking an “old” image.

Layout: Due to the fact that the words of a haiku provide only the bare essentials of the image, with which the reader’s awareness works to create the haiku moment, it is important that the reader is not distracted from those essentials. The layout of the page, the amount of white space within which the words may work, and the choice of the other haiku on the spread all play a role in determining how the reader will direct his or her attention. Such considerations have been second only to the selection of the haiku themselves in the editing of this book.

FOREWORD TO THE
THIRD EDITION

Haiku. What is it about these small poems that makes people all over the world want to read and write them? Nick Virgilio, one of America's first major haiku poets, once said in an interview that he wrote haiku "to get in touch with the real." And the Haiku Society of America has called haiku a "poem in which Nature is linked to human nature." We all want to know what is real and to feel at one with the natural world. Haiku help us to experience the everyday things around us vividly and directly, so we see them as they really are, as bright and fresh as they were when we first saw them as children. Haiku is basically about living with intense awareness, about having an openness to the existence around us—a kind of open-

ness that involves seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

Not so long ago, in 1991, when the first Haiku North America conference was being held at Las Positas College outside of San Francisco, another major figure of American haiku, J. W. Hackett, and his wife, Pat, invited four of the attending poets including myself to their garden home on a hill in the Santa Cruz mountains. Christopher Herold, one of those poets, wrote a haiku, included in this anthology, about that experience:

returning quail
call to us from the moment
of which he speaks

The poets had all moved out to the garden, continuing their talk about nature, Zen, and haiku. Toasts were raised to Bashō, Japan's most famous haiku poet, and to R. H. Blyth, his most faithful translator. Shadows were lengthening and James Hackett was trying to make clear his feelings about haiku when the birds suddenly came to his assistance. Christopher Herold's haiku captures that "moment" of the afternoon, when Hackett, and the quail, summed up everything he had been saying, eloquently and passionately, about haiku and the way of life it represents: living in the present moment—now.

That conference the poets were attending is just one indication of the new popularity of haiku. The Haiku North America conferences bring together poets from many different haiku groups and societies throughout the United States and Canada. They are held every other year. The first two were at Las Positas, the third was in Toronto, and in 1997 the conference was held at Portland State University, in Portland, Oregon. The next one is scheduled for Chicago. There have recently been a number of international conferences as well. There was one in Matsuyama in 1990, with delegates from the United States, China, and several European countries meeting with some of the top haiku poets and critics of Japan. In Chicago in 1995 about twenty Japanese haiku poets came to join American and Canadian haiku poets in a series of events called Haiku Chicago, which included a haiku-writing walk through Chicago streets and parks.

There have been others: in Europe, California, and one just last year in Tokyo, which was hosted by the Haiku International Association and attended by a large delegation from the Haiku Society of America and Haiku Canada. These larger activities are the result of smaller groups of haiku poets getting together in their own individual countries to write haiku, to publish magazines and books on the subject, and to discuss haiku theory and practice. This phenomenon is nowhere more prevalent than in the

United States, which probably has more poets writing haiku than any other country except Japan. Groups of poets have joined together in Boston, New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Portland, Oregon, San Francisco, and many other cities and towns across America to write and discuss haiku. The Haiku Society of America has helped to coordinate and organize special events, such as the conferences mentioned above, to bring these groups together for an interchange of ideas and mutual encouragement. Many of the groups were started within the society's regional division program, which allows each region to elect its own regional director, have regional meetings, and have its own newsletter or magazine. Many of the poets in this anthology have been active in such groups.

Despite such serious attempts to develop a haiku literature, and to educate the public about it, there is still a lot of misunderstanding about this kind of poetry. The idea that haiku is anything in three lines of 5-7-5 syllables dies hard. People write little epigrams in this form, or jokes about Spam, or cute descriptions of birds and flowers, and think they are writing haiku.

In 1987, I wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*:

A haiku is *not* just a pretty picture in three lines of 5-7-5 syllables each. In fact, most haiku in English are not written in 5-7-5 syllables at all—many are

not even written in three lines. What distinguishes a haiku is concision, perception and awareness—not a set number of syllables. A haiku is a short poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived in which Nature is linked to human nature. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, this record neither describes nor defines, but “diminishes to the point of pure and sole designation.” The poem is refined into a touchstone of suggestiveness. In the mind of an aware reader it opens again into an image that is immediate and palpable, and pulsing with that delight of the senses that carries a conviction of one’s unity with all of existence. A haiku can be anywhere from a few to 17 syllables, rarely more. It is now known that about 12—not 17—syllables in English are equivalent in length to the 17 *onji* (sound-symbols) of the Japanese haiku. A number of poets are writing them shorter than that. The results almost literally fit Alan Watts’s description of haiku as “wordless” poems. Such poems may seem flat and empty to the uninitiated. But despite their simplicity, haiku can be very demanding of both writer and reader, being at the same time one of the most accessible and inaccessible kinds of poetry. R. H. Blyth, the great translator of Japanese haiku, wrote that a haiku is “an open door which looks shut.” To see what is suggested by a haiku, the reader must share in the creative process, being willing to associate and pick up on the echoes

implicit in the words. A wrong focus, or lack of awareness, and he will see only a closed door.

At the time I wrote that article the activities of the Haiku Society of America were pretty much confined to New York City, though it had members throughout the country, and most of the small groups mentioned above were yet to be formed. Soon after this the HSA began to hold its annual meeting in a different city each year, and the regional system was created. All the special conferences mentioned above have taken place in the decade of the nineties. The world of English-language haiku has radically changed since the last edition of this book in 1986.

At the same time as these developments were taking place, haiku's sister genre, senryu, was also increasing in popularity and in quality. Senryu is the same as haiku except, instead of dealing with Nature, it is specifically about human nature and human relationships and is often humorous. Many poets writing haiku in English also write senryu. For many Americans writing them, senryu is haiku—though a very special kind. But as many others consider them totally different genres, without disputing that they have the same roots and retain many similarities. They both embody an awareness of the world around us.

Besides the wider developments discussed above, yet partly due to them, the more important goals of

creating excellent haiku and producing individual writers of talent continue to be realized. New, young poets have come to the fore. Established poets have broadened and deepened their work. New haiku magazines and presses have appeared. And new books of haiku and about haiku have significantly altered the way we think about the genre. (See the Book List following this foreword, where magazines and organizations are also listed.)

In this book there are about 850 haiku and senryu by eighty-nine poets. Around half of the poems are new to this edition. Forty-four of the poets appear in the anthology for the first time. I will get to a brief discussion of some of these new writers shortly. But poets have been writing haiku in North America since at least the 1950s, and I would like to first say something about the early figures of English-language haiku, for their work is included here as well.

Two major poets from this group have died since the last edition of this book appeared. The loss to haiku by the deaths of Nicholas Virgilio and John Wills is immeasurable. Both were respected in the American haiku world from their earliest appearances in the little magazines. By the time of their deaths they were considered among the top writers of the genre. Since their passing their stature has become even more assured. Their works stand as monuments on the landscape of American haiku's first half century. That

period, beginning in the fifties and early sixties with the first experiments of Jack Kerouac, J. W. Hackett, Nick Virgilio, and others, and which is now being crowned with the mature works of a number of outstanding haiku poets, may someday be looked upon as the Golden Age of North American Haiku.

Nick Virgilio died at age sixty in January of 1989. He was stricken by a heart attack while taping an interview for *The Charlie Rose Show*, a nationally televised program then airing on CBS. Nick had been a popular figure as a guest on television and radio in the Philadelphia area, interesting thousands of people in haiku. During the year or so before his death, he appeared a number of times on National Public Radio. When he died, he was on the verge of becoming American haiku's first celebrity. Virgilio's work is far-ranging, from simple nature poems to gritty urban haiku. His haiku about his brother, who died in Vietnam, comprise one of the finest elegies ever written. They demonstrate the power of love to preserve the memory of those close to us.

Through the Nick Virgilio Haiku Association, headquartered in his hometown of Camden, New Jersey, Nick still spreads the word about haiku. He is buried there only a few steps from Walt Whitman's tomb. Whitman was one of his favorite poets, and Nick often quoted him. A large granite stone in the shape of a lectern has been erected over Nick's grave