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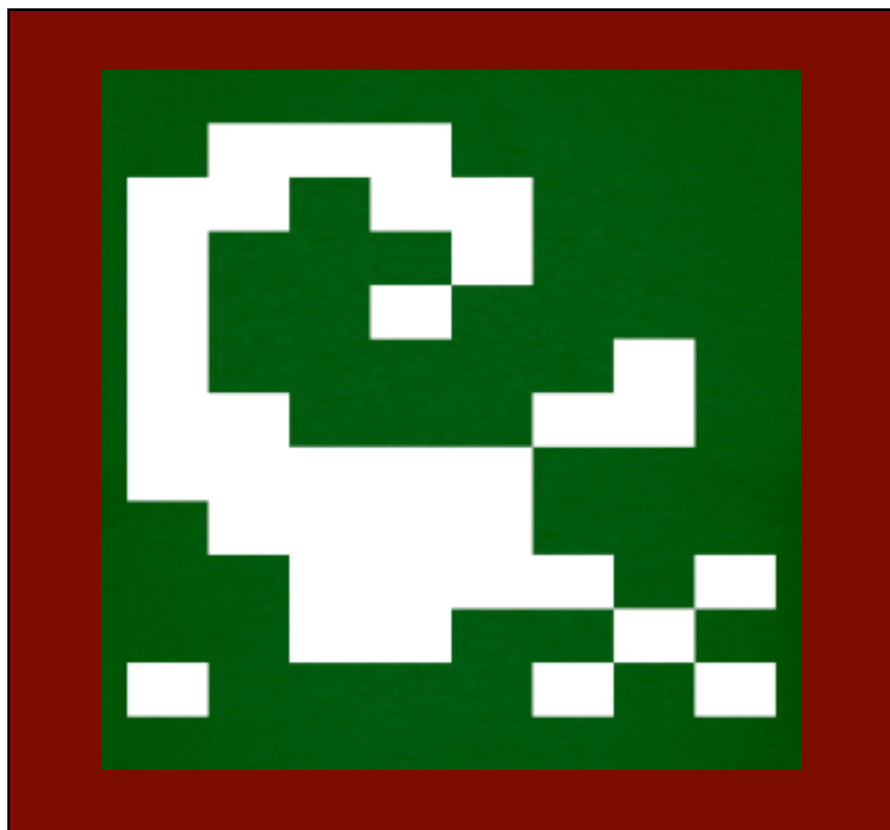
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Where the Visible and Invisible Met

Whenever I read haiku written by contemporary U.S. writers (and there are many haiku out there), I note two main problems that limit the work from being as intriguing as it might. Both have to do with misunderstandings about the history of haiku.

The first problem: the idea that the primary goal of a haiku, in its compact syllables, is to create beautiful images. It's true that haiku can be beautiful, yet more crucial than beauty to the haiku is that the image should tell us something significant, often even conflicted, about the human world, or the natural world, and frequently about their relation to each other. A haiku should reveal to us something about the world that we don't understand or never have said as compactly. Seventeen syllables can be enough to frame a profound insight or define a powerful conflict.

The second problem, connected to the first: that this beautiful image should exclusively portray nature or humans within a wholly natural setting. In the context of the contemporary U.S., this misunderstanding turns the resulting haiku into exercises in nostalgia, in how to picture human life as free of industrialization, commercialization, or the morass of politics and manipulative media language. Yet although the great writers of haiku usually know the haiku tradition well, the goal of the best haiku has never been simply to imitate the past. Instead, the great writers of haiku take the tradition and do something that's both unique and reflects its own moment of composition, not the past, in a way that acknowledges haiku tradition but extends it.

My concern with these problems helped me approach the impressively contemporary haiku in the most recent issue of *R'r*. I was looking for poems that explored an important issue, however briefly, yet I also was hoping to find poems that made clear that even though they were haiku, they were poems of the here and now.

I appreciated the many poems in the issue that took aesthetic chances with the haiku and were unafraid to alter the supposed sanctity of its formal constraints. From that perspective, I enjoyed all the one-line haiku. Yet I enjoyed even more the poems that radically altered the haiku's conventional form by use of open field spacing techniques ("a vault

smelling of” and “ruins of/a Cadillac” by Peter Yovu, and “In fields the purple” and “Missing existential as” from Rebecca Lilly) or by disrupting the supposedly natural flow of the haiku’s rhythm structure (the “girl brief” by Richard Gilbert; the poem beginning “how we’ve grown.” by Scott Metz, and the poem beginning “Dawdling, out” by Rebecca Lilly).

I appreciated as well the haiku that called conscious attention to more contemporary themes and problems. For instance I enjoyed, and frankly laughed along with (even when they weren’t funny), those postmodern lines which made the dynamics of language part of the haiku landscape, thus disrupting any tendency towards pious nostalgia (“let’s bite through each syllable’s plum” from Peter Yovu; “men seeing dying/in fictions” from Jack Galmitz; “Stroking its fur/the word/“wolf”” from Michael Andrelczyk; the mysterious leap into suggestive but undefinable implication of Helen Buckingham’s “a black way past bible”).

Finally though, when I went to choose the winning poem, I wanted one that told me, unquestionably, that its writer understood that the idea of landscape in haiku might incorporate any of the conditions of contemporary landscapes, no matter how unnatural or unattractive. I wanted a haiku that told me it was living in the now, not in some generalized universal. Some of the images that stood out to me in regards to this idea included Peter Yovu’s ruined Cadillac on the river; the painted door left on a lawn from Jack Galmitz; the wolf’s “medicinal scratch” from Mark Rutter; Dan Schwerin’s use of debts and David Boyer’s missing souvenirs; George Dorsty’s Vietnam-era-like moment of a father whose war experience includes keeping human teeth in a closet; and perhaps the single most original moment in the issue, Paul Pfleuger’s “online death notice ads”—an image which may not have appeared in any kind of poem before.

The winner for me, however, was the poem by George Swede:

shadow's head
on the other side of the chasm
a bank statement

This poem captures the postmodern recognition that contemporary landscapes include not just physical materials but also conceptual ones like money, and that the conceptual ones often have more control of people than physical materials do. Also, the image of the bank statement, and the metaphorical implications of the chasm which suggests a crossing from one condition to another (though neither can be seen clearly), capture both the real yet also abstract current crisis of the United States, and much of the world: the recent series of global financial collapses. The opening line, whose use of

shadow seems at first relatively conventional, has come by the end to take on a more sinister depth, as it's not a head in shadow (as say on a dollar bill) but the head of a shadow, of a danger, whose complete form we don't yet see. The poem understands that abstraction and image can no longer be considered clear opposites, and it defines, simply and memorably, a problem which has destroyed people's lives and from which the world may take a long time to recover.

Given my criteria, Swede's poem stood out the most for me, among a number of risky haiku that make an effective case for the continuing value of the form and its history.

Mark Wallace

Mark Wallace is the author of more than fifteen books and chapbooks of poetry, fiction, and essays. [*Temporary Worker Rides A Subway*](#) won the 2002 Gertrude Stein Poetry Award and was published by Green Integer Books. His critical articles and reviews have appeared in numerous publications, and he has co-edited two essay collections, [*Telling It Slant: Avant Garde Poetics of the 1990s*](#), and [*A Poetics of Criticism*](#). Most recently he has published a novel, [*The Quarry and The Lot*](#) (2011), and a book of poems, [*Felonies of Illusion*](#) (2008).





of the red planet

Quietus

dark calling

on the road

a glimpse

of conjuring

follows

Rebecca
Lilly

what's left of the light the music absorbs

Philip
Rowland

stepping on something tender like territory

Eve
Luckring

about it on the beach by the trees two moments between that is

Richard
Gilbert

of the red
planet the shadow
and substance of my mood

Ernesto
P.
Santiago

a seed capsule bursts
& there is
a solar system

john
martone

at the edge of the universe a two-way mirror

George
Swede

a zodiac a slow train held up to answer

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

my broken clock sweat on the fact

Peter
Yovu

Old alchemy the glass

look out for fragments

the dark immaculate

Rebecca
Lilly

every nano remains

fog on a new canvas

Scott
Metz

phases you can't help thinking of offspring

Adrian
Bouter

fatherhood in utero Bach

Philip
Rowland

leverage & dosage a punch easy with vermillion

Cherie
Hunter
Day

recession tango and me that hate accordions

Johannes

S. H.

Berg

deep in the thrust where another day breaks

Eve
Luckring

proteins fold-up
so do your poems
& days

john
martone

arachnid



crossing out
all abstractions
flowers of basil

Patrick
Sweeney

something
left to fish
next heartbeat

Lucas
Stensland

Sprinkling salt a rain

glistens an ease of light

particles it is

Rebecca
Lilly

privacy in bud
in all
the windows

George
Swede

along the slice
of water and sky
never at night

Richard
Gilbert

everything and kitchen sinks between the flowers

Marlene
Mountain

the sun jangled by
hummingbirds let me be
news to myself

Peter
Yovu

propaganda bits down the center drought

Scott
Metz

unfenced field
I could end
in oil

seed

rape

Nicola
Moore

wind
at my final breath
pronounce me

Peter
Yovu

archangel

arachnid

alabama

Richard
Gilbert

lunar landing shipwreck of my slave name

**Tyrone
McDonald**

if only you could cry damaged masks

Adrian
Bouter

her only friend is a stranger just that noise in the attic

Barrow
Wheary

the mint leaves
have dried, the ghost
who wrote this

Mike
Andrelczyk

the room looking back the death prepositions

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

then I must go to the Mountain: (space reserved) for Marlene Mountain

by Jack Galmitz



Perhaps it is a truism to say that reading the works of Marlene Mountain is equivalent to reading the history of haiku in English, but some truisms bear repeating and this one certainly qualifies. There has not been a poet of her stature to emerge in the field since she first started writing haiku in the 1960s and her poetry began with a bang not a whimper or, keeping with T.S. Eliot, her “end is in her beginning.” So, I will begin by following the injunction of Eliot’s master craftsman, Ezra Pound, who recommended young poets to first read their contemporaries and then read backwards in literary time. I will begin with Marlene Mountain’s most recent work that appears in *Haiku 21* (Modern Haiku Press, 2011) working backwards, or slantwise, towards her beginnings. Time doesn’t seem so imperative when analyzing Ms. Mountain’s work, because from the beginning she was experimenting with the haiku form, never satisfied to fulfill the expectations or demands of the then paradigms set forth by the existing patriarchal order.

Let’s have a look at one of the poems in *Haiku 21*:

out of nowhere isn’t

We can possibly make “sense” of this poem by interpreting “out of nowhere” as a non-existent category, an “isn’t.” However, we can just as well, and this seems more plausible, consider the poem as an instance of what Richard Gilbert called “dis-completion,” that is: a poem that disallows completion, “disassembles attempts at reaching a significant coherent meaning-at the same time as meaning is being posed” ([R’r Blog, 1/2/12 comment](#)). Professor Gilbert considers such poems as codicils of expectation that are thwarted, so much so that the very definition of haiku as a genre is threatened, retreated from. This is Marlene Mountain at her best, but she achieves similar disassembling even in language games that are more familiar:

a loss of content shapes painted over left to their own design

Is this Ms. Mountain's Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Dover, 1977)? Content, matter, what matters, what we hold on to for dear life is lost, leaving shapes painted (colors and figures as meaning and structure, composition), and yet they still create a design, only their own, not ours. I can't think of another haiku in the English language that commands such respect for the accidental, the random, operating outside the boundaries of our rules. (Lest it be forgotten, Marlene Mountain is also an artist and has been painting for as long as she has been writing haiku). Here is another poem in a similar vein, where Ms. Mountain leaves things be, doesn't impose meaning where meaning is not (and does so ironically in the medium that most signifies, that by its nature is signifying, that is language):

left to itself a moon without subtitles

She is not afraid to deprive herself, her reader, with the preparation necessary to understand, to offer the rules, the schema, and this creates dislocation, disorientation:

along with wind and mud and whatever that means if anything

She demonstrates the post-modernist ability to keep an open text, to achieve what the semiotic philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco required of the poet: "I would define the poetic effect as the capacity that a text displays for continuing to generate different readings, without ever being consumed." (thinkexist.com/quotes/umberto_eco).

And, while she has said of herself that she was always serious, even as a child, she can be self-deprecating while simultaneously referencing her signature (Mountain as related to hills in the below poem), her trace of presence in absence:

toward old as the hills ungracefully

Let's go back to 1977 (all time is synchronous). Marlene Mountain at that time wrote a haiku that had no content other than the formal requirements of the genre: it was more than a meta-poem, it was a demonstration of the emptiness of the formal in-and-of-itself, an aside to those who were seeking a similitude to the Japanese haiku; Note its 5-7-5 formatting:

-- ---;

-----.

(Tweed 6:1 1977)

Here are a few more examples of her enticingly provocative style, her language play with the haiku form, the replacement of words for punctuation marks, the replacement of words for numerals, all in the service of disengaging the reader from the routine reading of haiku:

Frog semi colon
and more sounds now ellipsis
the night period

(Tweed 5:4 6 1977)

too purfick hikoo:

5; 5

7 7;

5 5

(Tweed 6:1 1977)

five-seven-five haik(u)!

five five five five five
 seven seven seven sev
 five five five five five

(*Tweed* 6:1 1977; poems cited in *RAW NerVZ*, 1995)

Besides experimenting with inherited form, technique, and semantics, Marlene Mountain was an early practitioner of cut-up in haiku (which William S. Burroughs used in the 1950s and 60s as alternatives to linear narrative), as well as multi-media haiku, where she used pictures along with words to convey meaning. She was also amongst the first to create concrete poems as haiku. Her experiments in the formalities of the haiku genre long preceded similar strains later engaged in by other practitioners of the form. Here is one of her cut-ups:



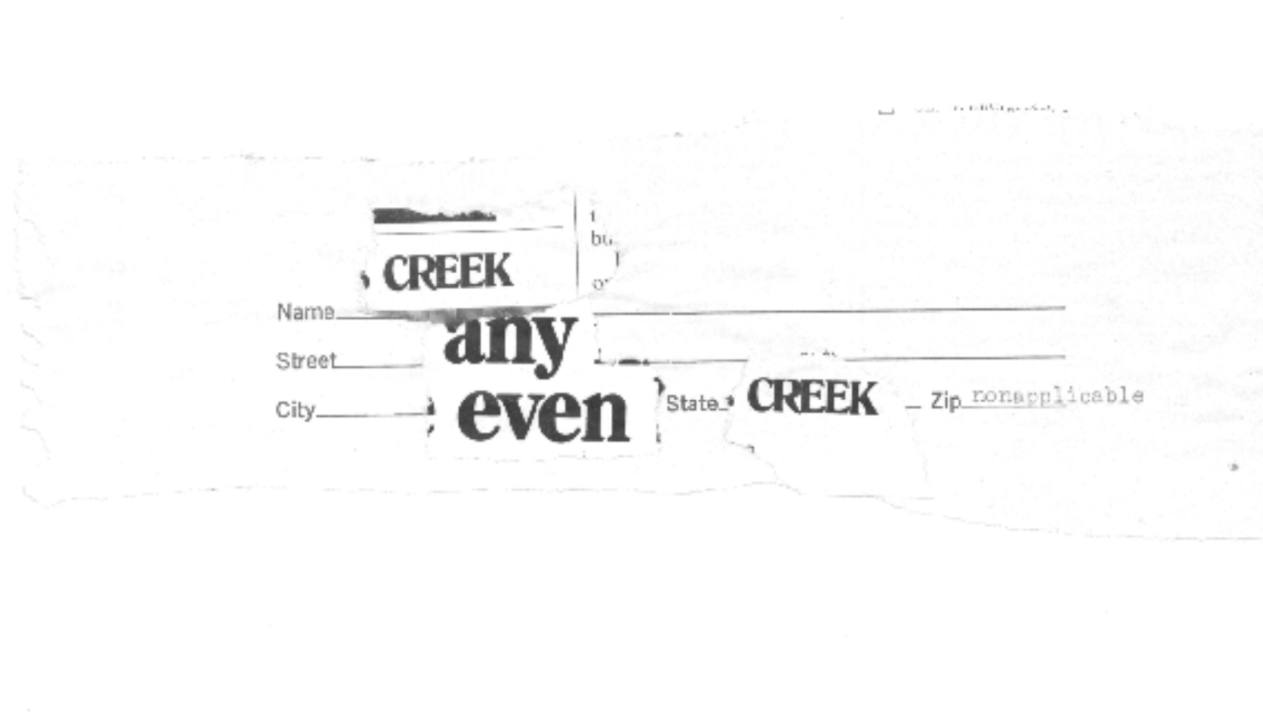
Here is an example of one of her concrete poems:

l l
a a a a
b b b b
i i i i
u u u u
m m

Here is another cut-up, though it doesn't disturb linearity, but uses mixed media as an intermediary in meaning:



She often used these pictograms to convey new contexts within which the reader could re-imagine the world they inhabited; here is a particularly ingenious use of this technique, returning “words” of nature into a piece of paper designed for completely different purposes (say an application of some kind).



Besides her body of experimental haiku, Marlene Mountain challenged the conventional rule that haiku must contain two juxtaposed images and that no other format was acceptable. She took up the struggle alone to insist that one-image haiku was not only permissible, but was used by the ancient haiku poets. Remember, this argument was advanced in 1978, just as the women’s movement was beginning to gain momentum, at the cross-roads of cultural change, and Ms. Mountain seemingly took on the male-dominated haiku world alone. It took no small courage to confront the gatekeepers of haiku about what was and was not permitted in the writing of haiku. The essay, “one image haiku,” was not only an academic exercise, but marked the turning of an avant-garde poet into a radical, politicized, feminist poet.

It was not merely that Marlene Mountain re-introduced what had always existed in haiku (in Japan), that is, the one-image poem, but that she did so as the “rules” governing the writing of haiku were being consolidated and solidified by a community of writers who had formed a hegemony and dictated to practitioners what was appropriate. To this day, there are some writers of the genre who would insist that anything other than the conventional two-part haiku, one part

juxtaposed to the other, is the only viable form for haiku. But, art does not flourish within strictures. Though there is validity to the two image haiku, to require writers to replicate this form in each and every instance is to turn this poetry into the equivalent of following instructions on how to make a paper airplane, or, with some more sophistication, into origami. For those interested in her parsing of modern and ancient examples of the one-image haiku, [her essay is available on-line](#).

It was at this juncture in her career as a poet that the women's movement gained more recognition and pervasive influence in the West, and Marlene Mountain re-created herself as an activist, feminist poet. Much was at stake culturally surrounding the issue—five thousand years of male dominance of societies—and Marlene Mountain gave the strength and talent of her voice to challenge the patriarchal. While some of her poems from this period no doubt might seem polemical, there are more that are simply good poetry, poetry bearing a message. She was not didactic: she was enraged. There are many sources of instances of her feminist writings: one such is an essay entitled “shetrillogy.” It is a long narrative essay in which Ms. Mountain creates words to portray the patriarchal view of history up until the present moment and replace it with a new woman-language (1987). There are some marvelous poems included in the essay, poems that speak to the feminine as an equal and balancing valence to the male, as well as some that make of womanhood a “wholeness” unto itself or a shared experience with other women. Here are some samples from [“womocreativa”](#):

i am no beginning i am no end

i am chaoscswommos

from my womwomb all is

from my gynitals all flows

shesharing i will make myself into ourselves

sheyes again i will shegive a big birth

birth of wom harvest of wom

Before moving on to further examples of her feminist haiku, it seems important to have a look at a self-interview she conducted in 1982 that was published in *Wind Chimes* #6. The work was titled “two femmarks, inner:review,” and it explores her views on writing and feminism (and note that she had to divide herself within/without to find a sponsor of the dialogue; the lack of a credible male interviewer speaks volumes to the tone of that time). In fact, the imaginary interviewer questions the validity of Ms. Mountain’s haiku in just the way one would expect: that she makes up words, that she emphasizes ideas rather than images, that rather than seek “oneness,” so important to earlier practitioners of the art and still considerably important to those writing today, she poses un-oneness. For instance, the imaginary interviewer points out that her word “taliswoman,” is not a real word and is an intellectualization. Ms. Mountain answers in a most illuminating way:

My moment of awareness was that 'talisman' is a concept, a made-up word. Mankind is a made-up word. If you understand that 'man' is not a generic term, but a political idea (that was an overwhelming moment keenly perceived), then the feminization of a word can be a natural response. Or in my case, 'taliswoman' was a hit-on-the-head-with-a- stick. A leap. A breakthrough. Now I'm giving you the word, the leap.

I: Aren't you asking us to accept an intellectualization?

M: Not to accept is the intellectualization. In one second the word/moment can become a part of you. Mary Daly, in her discussion of therapist, gives us a word--hits us on the head: the/rapist.¹ That's very immediate to me.

I: She doesn't call that a haiku, does she?

M: I call mine haiku.

I: And your definition of haiku?

M: How 'bout, life?

I: Is that all?

M: That's a lot.

Regarding the un-oneness haiku, Marlene Mountain gives us a wrenching example of the common world-wide practice of female castration:

clitoris of the four year old removed

In order to appreciate Ms. Mountain's poems of politics, it is necessary to understand that in retrospect and prospect they were/are radical, that is, further examples of her expansive, experimental writings: they are not to be understood as vagaries of an established normative form. She gives the context within which her poems are to be interpreted in another self-interview: "[innerview](#)" (1981). Here she defines the changes her poetry underwent when she became aware that poetry was always political, that she had previous to her politically engaged poetry simply been naïve. As she said somewhere, "I will not have content taken from me." Here is a sample from "innerview":

Though progress has been slow, and repression still abounds, woman has begun to regain some of her rightful rights. The image of woman, however, remains clouded with many many misrepresentations. It is in this light, and for these reasons, that a piece such as Yarrow's--with either a covert or an overt reading--can be effective in establishing a spiritual bond with the past, and in restoring woman's original image.

I: You're throwing haiku into the political realm.

M: It's already there. In an age such as ours, omission is as much political as . . .

I: Haiku is not . . .

M: Haiku can be a lot more than pears and yellow windows.

I: Why do you insist upon stressing the political and the female?

M: I'm not stressing the political, rather, I am recognizing its existence, and within this recognition I am involved in reexamining the direction, potential, and truth of both my painting and haiku. At first, I felt that the potential of painting was wide open and that haiku had many built-in limitations. Now, I've come to see it was my own preconception of haiku that was the limitation. I no longer see haiku as a 'pure' art form, protected from the climate of the times.

Women's Art/Art As Activism. For me now that's all one word. Woman as Protest. Woman as Spiritual. Woman as Physical. Woman as Autonomous. Woman as Herself, by the very fact of living in a patriarchal world, is Political. And along with that, as She says this and does that, She is an Activist. (["art as activism,"](#) 1987)

Marlene Mountain wanted to create a new language game, one with new rules (with as little equivocation as possible), without aporia, that addressed "identity" in a new way. This is what raises her art above mere didacticism. She has a whole series of what she called "pissed off poems and crosswords," the crosswords being a pun on the everyday play of language game in newspapers and magazines, now cross=angry. She wrote a series of poems under the rubric "late night without mahler" (1985), Mahler being referenced perhaps because of his womanizing tendencies and dictatorial conducting manner. In the following poem, we see the objectification of the objectifier:

exhibition of women by male artists

And, in one poem she points to the fact that even language, which seems gender neutral, is not:

thousands of women gather and talk in spite of language

And in "rain a nature sequence," (1985), we can see just one example of why this is so:

ruins the flow of language to correct the sexism

change every he to da see how he da feels

In "i grow older," (1985) she shows us what it is she is challenging:

not against men in general just generals and

autumn nears a gun sale

And, in order to be true, she was daring enough to seem politically incorrect, whereas she was being politically correct:
 “coretta: [10/85]”

coretta: he never once mentioned women's oppression

coretta: he never once mentioned women's oppression

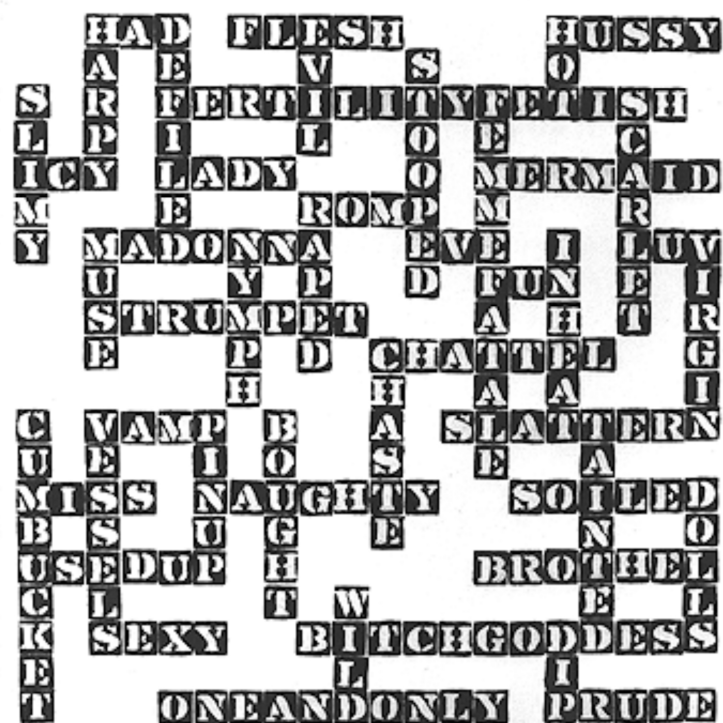
coretta: he never once mentioned women's oppression

coretta: he never once mentioned women's oppression

coretta: he never once mentioned women's oppression

(*Wind Chimes #18; Women and Language*)

She even created art in conjunction with her haiku that served to illustrate (as in a crossword puzzle) the language of patriarchy:





Marlene Mountain also had a vision of God as the alibi of patriarchy and parochialism: she produced some startling mixed media works to illustrate her views/feelings:



As inventive, as critical, as important as Marlene Mountain's haiku history has been, there have been her detractors: their denial of her work as haiku results from their definition of haiku: the Haiku Society of America (HSA) formed a committee to define the genre (as if consensus was the method to arrive at truth). For them, haiku is and will always remain "a 'Japanese poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived, in which Nature is linked to human nature.'"

Hiroaki Sato, in his essay "Divergences in Haiku" (a speech given in 1999 to the HSA) says in this view of haiku, the 'haiku moment,' however defined, is crucial. Sato also stated that, as Cor van den Heuvel says with uncharacteristic politeness in the foreword to the third edition of his *The Haiku Anthology* (W. W. Norton, 1999), what Marlene Mountain calls 'pissed off poems,' for example—pieces that 'express her outrage at what we have done and are doing to harm the environment and to limit the freedom of women'—are, 'however admirable, something other than haiku or senryu.'

Mr. Sato does not take a stand, at least directly, but offers a series of haiku by Ms. Mountain, calls them haiku, which in itself is illuminating, and then says many would not consider them as haiku. Here are the poems/series in question:

well, just who the hell do you think fucked it up, caterpillars

spring in america water unsafe food unsafe sex unsafe

i'm committed to your maleness even more to the moon's femaleness

scratched into the mountain shadows of the moon

a dirty business but someone has to be mother nature

Perhaps the appraisal of Marlene Mountain that is most important of all comes from Haruo Shirane, author of the influential book *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford University Press, 1998): [in 2001, he wrote to her:](#)

Dear Marlene,

I consider [William J.] Higginson to be a close friend and I admire his work greatly, but here I must offer a different opinion with regard to your work. Whether or not it fits some definition of haiku is of little relevance in the larger picture. The fact is that it is superior poetry, much superior to almost the entire body of what has been narrowly defined in North America as *haiku.* Basho, like his great rival, Saikaku, felt that it was not form that counted, it was the poetry, the quality of the words, how it could move the reader. In their younger years, they broke all kinds of rules. Saikaku was criticized severely, and was told he was just *blowing dust.* But it was in the process of breaking rules that these poet often made their greatest poetic achievements. Great poets don't stick to rules; they make their own. You belong in that company.

To put it another way, what was most important for Basho was what was called *haikai spirit,* to be constantly seeking new horizons, new forms, new words, new emotions. (See my book, *Traces of Dreams*.) In my view, you have that spirit.

Haruo Shirane (Columbia University)

A similar opinion of the work of Marlene Mountain is offered by Professor Richard Gilbert. In his essay titled "[A Very Warm Mountain](#)," (*Frogpond* 27:2, 2004) he introduces the essay with one of Ms. Mountain's poems:

autumn mist oak leaves left to rust

(*Frogpond* 26:1, 2003)

He says Ms. Mountain has "crafted an oeuvre which offers numerous haiku re-conceptualizations in the *gendai* spirit, an important term from the Japanese haiku tradition meaning 'modern, contemporary.' Mountain offers readers a range of possibilities for presenting contemporary social issues in haiku, and importantly, through her prevalent one-line form, has presented *gendai* re-conceptualizations of the natural in haiku."

He goes on to say of the poem noted supra:

"The above haiku is one of her more imagistically concrete poems: even the register shift of "rust" coming at the end of the line remains strongly visual. But "rust" creates imagistic irruption and so, naturalistic irruption. Does rust reinforce the sense of season? This is how irruption seems to create a tension, in terms of nature. The uneasiness; rust instead of russet; rust as

weathering metal, as *technos* not *geos*. Rust is sometimes sharp-edged, ragged, something that gets you cut (so, cutting), infected; the feeling of decay deforms any rising romanticism concerning beauty of the leaves of the autumn oak in mist. It also seems that the irruptive collocation “mist oak” really catalyzes this unease; this language seems to rebel against meaning, forcing us out of the poem, so we lose contact with the natural, with the naturalness of the read-image, read naturally. Then the power of rust (vivid, solid color, substance) throws us back in again, but as garbage, detritus: cast-off or broken. And yes it’s the leaves turning, dying, drying out. But we can’t quite accept this in a facile way.

And why is that important — not to believe? Yes, why should we lose our belief in how we habitually find nature? Just perhaps, nature tainted by the consciousness of language is more honest, in a surprising way. Why may this be? It is painful to look at the truth of our contemporary relationship with nature. The field of literary ecocriticism, shared by Le Guin and Mountain, offers us relevant contemplations which directly impend upon haiku. While there are a number of avenues to consider, one that strikes me in relation to Mountain’s haiku is that of Bill McKibben, whose 1991 book *The End of Nature* showed us that human civilization has lost, in our time, is the very *idea* of nature as something apart, indomitable, pure: the molecules our biosphere have now been altered by human civilization. From global warming and ocean temperature-rise to acid rain and ozone holes, no heretofore natural biome remains unaffected. In another text, *The Abstract Wild*, Jack Turner shows how the wilds have been converted to managed zones. How can haiku deal with these new truths, concerning relationships between nature and society? Does “pure” nature even exist, except as a romantic concept?

Contemplating such deformations of nature and the wild, it may be said that at this point in time, naturalistic haiku are highly artificial. And conversely, that there is a strange and rather mysterious naturalness that arises from deformation. James Hillman discusses this in terms of the need for the pathologic in soul-making — it’s become very difficult to recover nature through either romantic or naive modes. This is one reason why the realism-inspired *shasei* representation style of Shiki, which we have been following as a main haiku guideline, is limited. Not irrelevant by any means, but partial. [. . .]

Questions such as “where is the wild,” and “what is nature” must likely be relevant for poets these days, and they are crucial questions for haiku. Coupled with these questions are the polemics of haiku viz nature. It would be ironic indeed, witnessing increasing ecological chaos, to leaf through page-after-page of picaresque juxtapositional haiku scenes of serene contemplation — some future literature might well ask, “what were those people thinking?” These days, our zeitgeist demands fresh poetic responses to our global predicament. One dimension of Mountain's search has been to artfully seek the wild in haiku, with a rare and unflinching honesty, and in doing so provide approaches that challenge us to reflect honestly upon our time, and the poetic and political relevance of the modern haiku tradition.”

Then, we have from the website tempuslibres.org the following assessment of Ms. Mountain’s life and work:

Haiku as a protest.

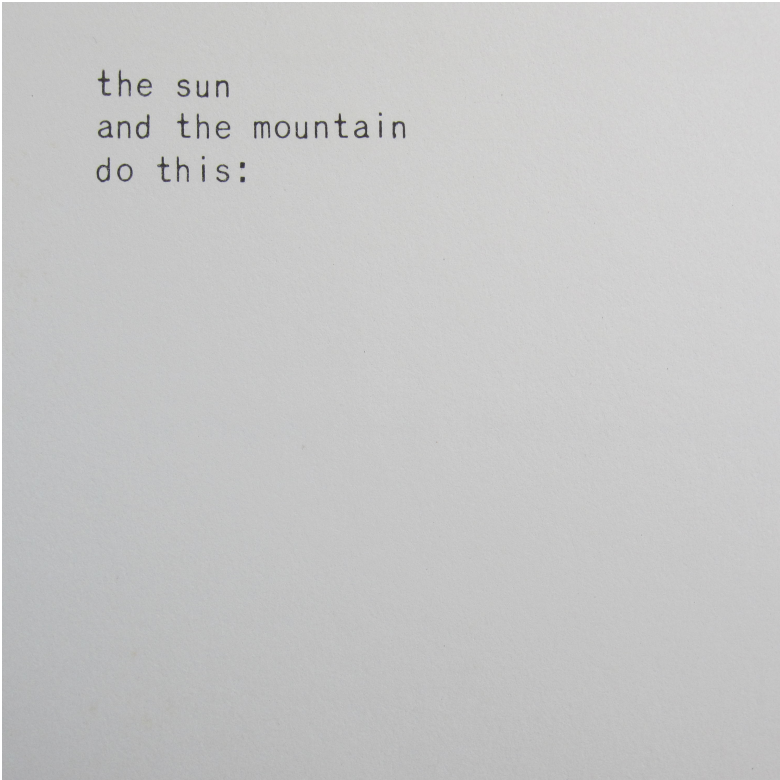
A strong speech, committed haiku, far from Zen, but also important essays about a new conception of haiku. A profession of faith to assert her female identity, to tell women sufferings ('a poll'), problems of the world.

A woman on her feet, who talks straight, about Life.

Marlène Mountain, feminist. Impossible to forget.

Such compelling praise of her work easily over-rides the negative views offered of her life's work. It has been a remarkably diverse, innovative, experimental work from its beginnings to the present.

But now, let's go back to the beginning, as this essay opened with Eliot's "her end is in her beginning." The first book Ms. Mountain published was titled *the old tin roof* (1976). There are some haiku in the volume that already play with language; for instance, the following poem leaves off on a colon thus pointing to nothing, or the unfathomable, as if only an empty space suffices to explain what precedes it:



the sun
and the mountain
do this:

Or, again, there is a poem with extra spaces between words, emphasizing the nowhere that the buzzard, the scavenger, the bird of ill-omen and carrion, occupies:

buzzard nowhere into nowhere

Then, she writes a poem that moves backwards:

backroad summer

in a mountain

follow

She includes a poem with a word missing letters, a visualization of the one word of the poem:

sn wfl k s

Here is her interesting take on what was then haiku's emphasis on the present moment, but without the pseudo-epiphany; she arranges it as an equation with a understated calculation and remainder:

tonight
less tomorrow
will do

Finally, she includes a portion of language as meaning as a poem: the suffix, meaning action or process, the result of an action or process, something used in an action or process, something related to:



ing

There is another poem that merits our attention, inasmuch as it repeats a single phrase three times in order to present, concretely, the action of the phrase:

newly plowed field
 newly plowed field
 newly plowed field

The book also contains some one word poems, such as the following:

furrow

crow

krĭk'ĭt

In 1986, Marlene Mountain, in the essay [“will I ever get myself explained? \(a partial autobiography\)”](#) speaks to her relationship to haiku as one of attachment, but not a cozy, comfortable attachment. There came a time when she felt haiku was too detached from the real world and human condition. Yet, she felt haiku could accommodate that real world. In her words,

Have I gone beyond what haiku is—its particular, perhaps peculiar, view of the world? Its quietness in the middle of a battlefield, its reverence of nature in the middle of irreverence, its simplicity in the middle of chaos? I don't think so. I've merely brought that 'other side' of life into haiku. (Perhaps, I've pushed.) The battlefield, the irreverence, the chaos are a part of us and, therefore (as I've come to see it), are haiku.

Suffice it to say, Marlene Mountain has been and continues to be one of the most restive, experimental, contentious, controversial, and important figures in the world of haiku. She has not slowed down, even in age, as her poems in *Haiku 21* demonstrate. Her accomplishments: one of the first to experiment in the use of one-line haiku, one of the first to concentrate on concrete/visual haiku, one of the first to use mixed media/collage as an expression of surprising meaning in haiku, one of the first to incorporate the political/gender identity in haiku, the first to question the necessity of a two-image structure in haiku, the first to use empty diagrams or words in place of substantives or numerals to express the mere formalism of haiku, and one of the first to use spacing of words and letters in unusual ways to elicit further meaning than is usually found in haiku. She is, in short, a giant in the field of haiku poetry. Let's end with a somewhat enigmatical poem she wrote, one that exemplifies her sensitivity, her constant human need for association and closeness to others, her ability to invoke aporia to expand rather than to retract meaning:

close to someone in the stars white seeps inward





in on Other

window closed reflection of an unknown breeze

**Marlene
Mountain**

birdsong
her whole world
through that peephole

Robert
Epstein

as a body born of words
as a body bones of words:
preoccupations she writes

Richard
Gilbert

chapter from a masturbation walked in on Other

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

holding onto what animal vertigo on the way to grace

Michelle
Tennison

of lies beneath
a wet leaf
rust the drift

Scott
Metz

conjugating the sea seizes seeing

Peter
Yovu

a dewdrop Orpheus claims a wave in the other ocean

Sabine
Miller

the penis bone of a whale who sang before god

Barrow
Wheary

kaddish
rust peels off
my tongue

Roberta
Beary

tree shadows
a lifetime
in pencil lines

Donna
Fleischer

old hay baled
too many winters
the falling out

Dan
Schwerin

deep inside the couch
the remote listening
to church bells

Peter
Newton

window scratching the sheen of a failed wing

Cherie
Hunter
Day

A life incomplete some
people bending smilingly
senselessly it bleeds

Rebecca
Lilly

a long hard lie swells into perjury. spit or swallow?

Eve
Luckring



a skinned plant

so far so good ahead of patriarchy 'nature nature'

Marlene
Mountain

Grievance breathe a

skinned plaint scar spot-

mark, the sophistry

Rebecca
Lilly

glass wind bears
across thinning war
faces

Scott
Metz

world's end bunker loaded guns water kids

**Marlene
Mountain**

robots pace the march hardest left

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

that the thine that becomes the subject of one stroke no as if

Richard
Gilbert

the *mu* bacteriophage
an old dog
collapses

john
martone

evaporating spirits
among the tan loaves
of river stones

Patrick
Sweeney

clouds upon clouds everything but the baby

Sabine
Miller

'women's month' and the year of some dragon

Marlene
Mountain

time fuck shit piss blue mine love mend leaf kiss must call

Richard
Gilbert

A forced turn slipping

glimpses dying orbit the head

rests a blow torch

Rebecca
Lilly

giving blood freely the rest is a pawn shop

Johannes
S. H.
Berg

the red house of fun fenced in rain

Nicola
Moore

bling holla milking the hour glass object

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

Descant: Dimitar Ananiev's Rustic

By Jack Galmitz



In 2008, the online journal *Haiku Reality* published an item that struck me as too important as to be forgotten or ignored: an essay entitled [“Haiku and Capitalism”](#) by Dimitar Anakiev, co-founder of the World Haiku Association, internationally renowned film-maker, poet, and erstwhile medical doctor. The essay (subsequently re-published in *where the wind turns: The Red Moon Anthology 2009*, Red Moon Press, 2009) was directed at what can only be called the new specter haunting Western Europe and the Anglo-American world: that is, the specter of global capitalism and its entrenchment into the deepest and most private spheres of existence (even in so seemingly innocuous a poetic form as haiku).

Dr. Anakiev expressed ambivalent feelings about this state of affairs since, by its nature, haiku was an art form that should of necessity fulfill the human need for inter-relationship with nature and not serve the domination of western materialism.

Here is a portion of Dr. Anakiev’s essay:

The “capitalistic haiku” has spread and taken root in its numerous mutations often expressing the spirit which has broken its vitality and uses it as a form without any ontological substance. Such, “capitalistic haiku” cannot be made by any further formal regulations into a “real” haiku, simply because it is not real, or is not real enough, and perhaps is even “unreal.” Having criticized the “naiveté” of the New Age rebellion against its own culture and having succeeded to adapt haiku from the subculture to the demands of the mainstream, we have to confront with the result and the result is the “capitalistic haiku.”

If we ask ourselves what the characteristics of the “capitalistic haiku” are, then we shall notice the maximal reduction of its human content, so that when reading poems of current “capitalistic haikuists” we cannot learn almost anything about their authors as human beings – the whole spectrum of human topics has disappeared and, in the “capitalistic haiku,” are dominated by dehumanized topics of nature. Thus, for them, nature is a mere object as if an aim in itself whereas man is most often present as an affirmative witness, and haiku is a record in “index affirmatorum.” The need to express something is not noticed; it is replaced by the need for recording. A deeper association is absent, that which is essential to haiku. I guess the so-called “ecological haiku” viewed in this way can be a subtype of the “capitalistic haiku” because a real, essential, connection with nature is replaced by critical conscience. It is doubtful whether “capitalistic haiku” can be considered to be poetry, and it is also doubtful whether it is haiku at all. If it is, it is of the most trivial sort.

We recognize in this description the many haiku that are sketches from life (*sasbei*), where a scene from nature, devoid of human presence, is given to evoke a mood, an emotion by the mere panoply of words on the page. Whether the haiku represents nature as adornment or wholly other, such haiku do sever human and nature as binary opposites.

Karsten Fischer, of Humboldt University, Berlin, in the essay [“In the Beginning Was the Murder”](#) (*Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 6 no. 2, 2005) invokes Frankfurt School Philosopher Theodore Adorno to suggest that

The domination of man’s natural environment made possible by controlling man’s inner nature leads to a limitation of the human horizon to self-preservation and power. In addition, the justifying idea of a divine commandment to subdue the earth and to have dominion over all creatures reduces the sensitivity of civilized humans for the conditions of their violent domination of nature organized in and by society. Finally, the internalized violent domination of nature also facilitates the use of force in social life. Adorno’s hypothesis with regard to a psychology of civilization means that man’s brute force against nature encourages him to use violence against other human beings as well.

Of course, following the history of neo-Marxism (which did not separate man from nature, but rather saw nature as the inorganic body of man), we arrive at Jean Baudrillard’s hyper-reality, where all members of a society desire possession of the signs, the codes, of social hierarchy, so that there is no substance ontology any longer. The label, the name, the brand is all-important and this hunger so saturates the drives of the modern human psyche that human beings can no longer distinguish what is real from what is reified. The very fiber of the psyche is subjugated to appropriation of signs of belonging. As an example of this unconsciousness, the loss of a sense of belonging to nature, and the positioning of the modern “subject,” Dr. Anakiev’s poem that follows expresses it perfectly:

mall people!
do you know how soon
we will die?

(this poem is not included in *Rustic* [Red Moon Press, 2010])

As Karsten Fischer noted (Ibid, supra):

The running wild of self-preservation as a regression of civilization into its former state and antithesis rather results from its ideological justification. This justification demonizes nature and therefore enables its unrestrained, exterminating domination.

Adorno does not criticize the domination of nature as such but rather its boundlessness, which leads to its dialectical set-back. This set-back is a dialectical one because, according to Adorno, the absolute domination of nature provokes destructive socio-cultural phenomena, since the domination of fellow humans and the domination of nature are closely related through history in a disastrous way. They cannot be separated from each other.

Hence, we have Dr. Anakiev's poem that stamps on our psyche the savagery that in dominating nature and man in the central act of civilization results in the savagery directed towards other human beings:

Neanderthal man
is bombing Afghanistan back
to the Stone Age

Here are Dr. Anakiev's remarks on the poem:

The idea for this poem came after the first massive bombings of Afghanistan in 2001. It was published on the Italian poetry site *Casa della Poesia* as a part of their "anti-war" poetic action. Apart from this poetic event it has less in common with any particular criticism than with speaking about the very nature of mankind: humanity is continually enacting a modern Stone Age, without any ability for moral progress.

And democracy is no guarantee against the ferocity of man's destruction of man. Just after the declaration of an independent Slovenian Republic in 1992, which was a parliamentary democracy, hundreds of thousands of people were "erased," that is, denied identity, their own history, passports, civil rights, subject to defamation, inequity, and humiliation. Dr. Anakiev was at this time a practicing medical doctor until he was added to the list of the "erased." Here, in the following poem, we have mention of Cerberus, the hell-hound of Hades, who keeps those who have passed through the River Styx (where memory is lost in the land of the dead), from passing into life again. Ironically, Dr. Anakiev equates the pseudo-democracy of Serbia with hell.

Cerberus at the door
of the Slovenian gulag
is a democrat

Again, the author offers these remarks regarding the poem:

This poem expresses a very interesting idea related to democracy: just as in the case of The Trail of Tears, the contemporary case of the Slovenian Erased people is the result of illegal action by a legal democratic government. The legal government is breaking its own law in the name of democracy.

In the following poem, written before the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia, which had previously been a multi-cultural society, we see the suspicion of man towards man (and in this poem Dr. Anakiev uses a *kigo* of winter to good affect):

the start of the war —
Through bare branches I spy on
my neighbors' houses

Here is the author's commentary: The last two lines of the poem were written in Tolmin, Slovenia, in the winter of 1990 just before the Yugoslav war started. I was aware of the nationalistic excitation of my neighbors, but not being an ethnic Slovenian it had not made an impression on me.

To convey the unspeakable horror that resulted from the war in Yugoslavia, Dr. Anakiev transfers a human experience to nature, since the unspeakable is also the irrational. The short poem is based on Bashō's famous poem

The summer grasses—
Of brave soldiers' dreams
The aftermath.

(tr. Donald Keene)

Here is Dr. Anakiev's version

Young grasses . . .
A mountain bleeds from a helmet
full of dreams

One is reminded of the difficulty inherent in writing poetry after the Holocaust. As Theodore Adorno said “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” For Adorno, no language, no poetry, could possibly begin to articulate the horror that had been unleashed upon the world. The inhumane cruelties of Auschwitz, Dachau, death marches, and crematoriums could never be contained in sonnet, villanelle, sprung rhythm, free verse. (Anaya M. Baker, cited in *Poetry of the Holocaust: Writing After Auschwitz*). Additionally, the poem also refers to the WWI battles of the Isonzo which were fought around the Tolmin area where Dimitar lived.

To think that the horrors of the Balkan wars were only in the past is to delude oneself. The Balkans, as Dr. Anakiev has pointed out, is primarily rural, and in these rural areas, the far-right still thrives. There exists a primitivism in the rural lands, based highly on traditions, and shared languages. The emphasis on tradition is aligned with anti-modernism. For the rustics, anti-intellectualism predominates, as reflection is seen as a form of emasculation. Disagreement is discouraged. There exists the fear of difference. Economic frustration proliferates. Xenophobia also predominates, as does envy of the wealthy.

These examples are but a few of what Umberto Eco outlined in his analysis of what he called Ur-Fascism (New York Review of Books, 1995).

One can visibly see these complexes in the rustic population throughout the Balkans through the eyes of Dr. Anakiev.

In the Balkans
at the calling out of “rustic”
swastikas sprout

The author notes:

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was founded on the basis of fighting fascism during WW2. The democratic governments of national states in the Balkans were founded on the basis of a “goat’s milk” philosophy. Many collaborators of the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini are politically rehabilitated only because they are “ours.”

Visibly impressed by this poem, Kuniharu Shimizu drew [a haiga](#) and Ban’ya Natsuishi translated the poem into Japanese:

Na Balkanu in the Balkans
 u ime rustike calling the name of rustic
 cvetaju swastike swastikas grow

バルカン諸国で田舎者の名を呼ぶと鉤十字育つ translation by Ban'ya Natsuishi



Dimitar Anakiev (Slovenia)

artwork: Kuniharu Shimizu

And, as a marginal note, Ban'ya Natsuishi shares Dr. Anakiev's distrust and anomie towards Western European and Anglo-American global domination. It is found in his poem:

Put a period deeply
 into the desert
 at the center of the New World!

(Turquoise Milk: selected haiku of Ban'ya Natsuishi, Red Moon Press, 2012)

As can be expected, Dr. Anakiev, savors his praise for those who promote a cross-culturalism, a non-nationalistic approach to poetry/haiku. Being marginalized himself for so many years, Dr. Anakiev relishes freedom and the banishment of rules that are imbalanced, that favor one of the forms in a binary opposition to the detriment of the other. Here are a few of his glowing words for Richard Gilbert's *Poems of Consciousness* (Red Moon Press, 2008):

Richard Gilbert's *Poems of Consciousness* represents the first voice in Anglo-American haiku criticism to bring to an international readership democracy instead of authority. This anti-dogmatic book tears down the prejudices which have been built up and culminated over decades of English-language haiku theory. In this work the genre is rescued from overly complex ideologies and refreshed by concepts inspired by simple and common poetic truths . . .

Let me also stress here: International haiku is not a name for a new concept in haiku but the result of democratic practice, which began its official life as a form of organization in the Tolmin Haiku Conference 2000, and has now found its theoretical footing in Gilbert's work, and its real home in the democratic haiku practice of the Kumamoto poetic circle. It is my great hope that the democratic practice of International haiku will become more influential, at both the national and international level. (Anakiev, "A Gift Of Freedom: Interpenetration in Haiku," 2008).

It is in the field of cultural struggles (and this is related to cultivation, as in husbandry) that the future holds political possibilities of a renewed Balkans. As Dr. Anakiev wrote:

A big field of
cultural struggle: hens
are laying eggs again.

The author notes:

Culture is the field of cultural struggle. Perhaps the only field still open for rebellion. Bertolt Brecht said: "A book is an armament, take it in your hands" and I think it still works.

And, it must be borne in mind that in the cultural struggle, Dr. Anakiev never wields a sword, but always wields a pen/pencil: He is the witness to the death and ongoing rebirth of the world:

The capital
of my heart: just one
sharpened pencil

He is fully aware that this carries a burden, because the author must put all else aside in focusing on the cultural struggle; he may sometimes have to depict cruelty, horrors, without intervening.

The idea for the poem came as a result of becoming conscious of the cruelty of the poet's job. To be a good writer or a good poet means making poetry and literature the most important thing in one's life. No compromise, merciless. A gladiator's job.

Noting the war crimes committed by many involved in the breakdown of Yugoslavia, Dr. Anakiev gives us a sarcastic reminder of the pseudo-innocence of these war criminals.

With souls full of goat's milk
rustic heroes
fill the jails

Recall that "rustics" has an encoded meaning and then consider the significance of "goat's milk" as a cultural reference to the rustics' sense of tribal identity.

Our author comments on this poem:

The Balkans is primarily rural. Even the people living in cities are the first urban generation.. many of today's urban Balkans suffer a nostalgia for their villages, like a paradise they have left, goat's milk is a metaphor for expressing rustic nostalgia, especially for Montenegrins but for others as well. One often hears the phrase "I miss the goat's milk from my village." Our statesmen fabricate a "Goats milk story," and create a "Goat's milk nationalism." These people, even after completing their education, relate goat's milk to the center of their world. Often they don't understand problems of the modern world because they hate the modern world. One can imagine those accused of war crimes in the former Yugoslavia before the judges at the International Criminal Tribunal: "You bloody bastards, you never tasted goat's milk from my village, you have no right to judge my war activities . . ." Tasting the goat's milk from a mountain village signifies an initiation into Holy Nationalism in the Balkans. You do not need to actually try the milk, it's enough to say: "Yes, I know what you mean . . ." because the rustic Balkan

soul suffers from not being understood in the centers of power. The “culture of goat’s milk” is dying in the prisons of The Hague.

What we see in Dr. Anakiev’s pencil is radical in the world of haiku. Dr. Anakiev challenges readers/writers of the form to engage in politics (since they are, wittingly or no, already situated so). Politics in haiku has long remained something of a taboo, at least if it is too direct, which has virtually eliminated conscious politics from entering its content. However, even when poets are seemingly “apolitical,” writing is a social practice and hence a political process. To compose poems devoid of human nature is to void human nature; to present pictures of a “pristine” nature is to indulge in the delusion of a golden age (and remember America has a long history of being regarded, particularly by writers of the 19th Century, as the new Eden, freed from history).

Dr. Anakiev works in the tradition of the exponents of exposing the subterfuges of the hegemonic culture in his poetry. As Adrienne Rich wrote:

Poetry is neither an end in itself, nor a means to some external end. It's a human activity enmeshed with human existence; as James Scully names it, a social practice. Written where, when, how, by, for and to whomever, poetry dwells in a web of other social practices historically weighted with enormous imbalances of social power. To say this is not—as these essays vividly demonstrate—to deny the necessity for poetry as an art whose tangible medium is language.

It's a commonplace to say that in a society fraught with official lying, hyperbolic urgings to consume, contrived obsolescence of words (along and the people who produce them) poets must "recover" or "subvert" or "re-invent" language. Poetic language may thus get implicitly defined as autonomous terrain apart from the ripped-off or colonized languages of daily life.

It's an even older commonplace to claim "the imagination" as a kind of sacred turf. The appeal to a free-floating imagination permeates discussions of poetry and is traced to many honored sources from Coleridge to André Breton to Wallace Stevens to Barbara Guest. It can assume a degraded public world to which is opposed the poet's art as an activity-in-itself, distinct from other kinds of activity, work, production, save perhaps as metaphor. (*Line Break: Poetry as Social Practice*).

It may be tempting to describe the poetry of Dr. Anakiev as polemical, but it would be more apropos to describe it as paralyzing, as psychologically distressing, as a way of finding catharsis by gracing memory with a voice. The air is frozen around the entryway to Dr. Anakiev’s psyche and only humanization can give it the warmth needed to dilute it.

“When we were soldiers . . .”
 The refrain hangs in the frozen air
 of my entryway

The refrain, the repetition, is something like the symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder; the song is the song of the stuck in a repeated, painful time, however convivial it is portrayed in the above poem. To enter the world of Dr. Anakiev is to pass through the entryway of war and its gory grotesqueries.

Even in his descriptions of commonplaces, there are signs of the unnatural, a way of emphasizing the omnipresence of whatever is vilest in the history of the Balkans. In winter, we expect that flies will be gone, but for Dr. Anakiev the dead keep returning, even out of season, even out of time sequence. Even dead flies have an ominous connotation to them in his world, as if they are signs that nothing has normalized in his world. Even on New Year’s Eve, the turning point in nature when evening and darkness begin to withdraw and cultures often celebrate the new strengthening of nature with fireworks and celebrations, Dr. Anakiev can only find more “gathering,” not as a social ceremony of joy, but as a gathering of mass graves, upturned dead flies (so like humans in their death postures).

New Year's Eve—
 the window still gathers
 dead flies

Dimitar says of this poem:

In 1993 I left the army but my family and I were on different sides of the front. My wife and daughter were able to reach me traveling circuitously around Europe. We went to my father's mountain house on the Serbian-Bulgarian border to spend a few days together. The house had long been empty but the window sills were full of dead flies.

In *Rustic*, history and domination and death reach back further in time than the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Dr. Anakiev retreats backward in time when Germany dominated the entire region of Eastern and Western Europe in the following poem:

Mittleuropa:
 in the grey cloud
 a shadow of death

Dimitar says: *The political concept of Mittleuropa was offered by Slovenian separatists in late '80s and the beginning of the '90s as an alternative to the political concept of Yugoslavia. The poetry festival "Vilenica" was founded to promote ideas of Mittleuropa in contrast to the "pro-Yugoslav" concept of the world famous Macedonian poetry festival "Struga". One of the first laureates of the Valencia poetry festival was the Austria writer Peter Handke. He was asked in a press conference about Mittleuropa, and he answered: "I have no idea about Mittleuropa, for me Mittleuropa is a place with a grey sky all the time . . ." I was traveling to Prague to receive the "Medal of Franz Kafka" and finding myself following grey clouds in the sky the whole time, I recalled the words of Peter Handke.*

Mittleuropa is also the German term equal to Central Europe. The word has political, geographic and cultural meaning. While it describes a geographical location, it also is the word denoting a political concept of a German-dominated and exploited Central European union that was put into motion during the First World War. The historian Jörg Brechtefeld describes 'Mittleuropa' as the following:

The term 'Mittleuropa' never has been merely a geographical term; it is also a political one, much as Europe, East and West, are terms that political scientists employ as synonyms for political ideas or concepts. Traditionally, Mittleuropa has been that part of Europa between East and West. As profane as this may sound, this is probably the most precise definition of Mittleuropa available. (J. Brechtefeld, *Mittleuropa and German politics. 1848 to the present* (London 1996).

The Mittleuropa plan was to achieve an economic and cultural hegemony over Central Europe by the German Empire and subsequent economic & financial exploitation of this region combined with direct annexations, settlement of German colonists, expulsion of non-Germans from annexed areas, and eventual Germanization of puppet states created as a buffer between Germany and Russia.

Dr. Anakiev is so acutely aware of the violent history of his cultural heritage and region that even in "grey clouds" he can see the signs of impending death and destruction. History, as Marx said, repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce. But, we find nothing farcical here.

Even where we expect signs of culture and the springs of life in the digging of a well and in reaching a drop of water (that everlasting symbol of life), the digging also unearths the stratum, the archeology of death and murder.

Drop of well water—
 gravediggers dig up
 my ancestral bone

Dr. Anakiev places this poem in the following context:

Drop of well water represents ancestry.

The village funeral of my father was at a mountain cemetery, without a priest, following an ancient ceremony led by the oldest villager. I have heard that this poem has something in common with the Celtic mythology. (Dimitar, as an Erased, couldn't travel and had lost contact with his parents and couldn't attend his father's funeral).

A man, as Dr. Anakiev knows, has yearnings for belonging to nature, to his society, to his family, to his culture, language, to all the usually unspoken needs of fulfilled citizens. But for Dr. Anakiev all of this was denied. In the following poignant poem, we see this unsated appeal in the following one line verse:

from the balcony unreachable mountains

Anakiev brings up for the first time in this poem the period when the Republic of Serbia, a democratic parliamentary state, “erased” members of its population.

Here is the context provided by the poet:

The balcony of my apartment in Tolmin was a symbol of my life for more than 10 years after I returned to independent Slovenia. To break with the Yugoslav policy of “brotherhood and unity,” and to foster enemies, the Slovenian government erased from the official records more than 25,000 people. All of the Erased, among them 6,000 children, instantly found themselves without any human rights: people of no-official-existence. Among them, me. Living without documents is not easy. Most of the time I spent on my balcony watching mountains.

Under the fallen sky
 the freaks of chaos become
 a hospitable sea

Here the unbearable is depicted as the impossible: a fallen sky. Naturally, the unnaturalness of this state of affairs is a “freak,” and “chaos,” the Greek word for lack of cosmos and order in the universe and society. Yet for some unknown reason, Dr. Anakiev compares this state of affairs to a “hospitable sea,” something welcome if inhuman.

Dr. Anakiev discusses this as a mythological poem, one which reaches back through the turbulent history of the Balkans to the time of Alexander the Great and up through and to the present modern wars. He reminds us that “the hospitable sea” was a Greek euphemism for the Black Sea.

As Kirsten Fischer noted in her essay mentioned above (“In the Beginning Was the Murder” [Ibid]):

Adorno’s view of the civilization process is not, like Freud’s, a tabooing of violence due to its first use against fellow man and following ritual enclosure. He rather suggests a removal of violence-taboos as the result of the use of violence against creatures. This violence became boundless by its ideological justification.

According to Adorno’s reconstruction of the history of philosophy as natural history, aggression against nature is inevitably an artificial result of civilization’s emergence from its origins. With this thesis Adorno refers to the psychic mechanism of projection discovered by Freud. In the course of the rationalization process aiming at the domination of nature, all uncivilized creatures are perceived as evil because of their incompatibility with sociocultural rationality . . .

Nature must contrast sharply with civilization and is perceived as evil as such; it must be exterminated to preserve civilization, and soon the self-preservation running wild has its dialectic set-back. Initially self-preservation by the domination of nature was an anthropological development which was both necessary and positive. Adorno agrees with Nietzsche’s reminder to be grateful for the end of “continual fear of wild animals, of barbarians, of gods and of our own dreams” made possible by the rationalization process. The running wild of self-preservation as a regression of civilization into its former state and antithesis rather results from its ideological justification. This justification demonizes nature and therefore enables its unrestrained, exterminating domination. Adorno does not criticize the domination of nature as such but rather its boundlessness, which leads to its dialectical set-back. This set-back is a dialectical one because, according to Adorno, the absolute domination of nature provokes destructive socio-cultural phenomena, since the domination of fellow humans and the domination of nature are closely related through history in a disastrous way. They cannot be separated from each other.

We can easily see this unrestrained reflex striving for survival and indifference to the slaughter of creatures in one of Dr. Anakiev's most well-known haiku:

Spring evening.
The wheel of a troop carrier
crushes a lizard.

Animal Day—
lop-ears of a rabbit
full of jumping light

The author has this to say about "Animal Day":

There is no "Animal Day," but I invented this holiday for our pet rabbit living in his prison on our inner balcony.

One cannot help but see the irony and ambivalence in this poem and commentary. While an animal ordinarily slaughtered and eaten is kept by the poet as a pet, he is caged, and this is equated to keeping him in a "prison."

And, we can see how "alien" people are easily dominated by the hegemonic culture because of the association of them with nature and with pre-cultural existents: Dr. Anakiev gives us this poem, one that relates to the United States of America:

A tomahawk made
to forget its native tongue
keeps the democracy

One does well here to recall Dr. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart* (1960), where Dr. Bettelheim records his experiences as an inmate of a concentration camp during WWII and how he discovered that by maintaining his humane emotions as well as intellectual distinctions, he as well as those inmates who shared these values remained alive and

morally intact, whereas those who strove to struggle to survive at any cost either died or lost what was most essential to their humanity: the human heart.

Bettelheim's view was that the individual's inner control of hostility was the key to interethnic harmony, while projecting hostility onto other social groups created the prejudicial attitude upon which the concentration camps were formed.

After all the suffering Dr. Anakiev underwent in the Republic of Serbia, from being a practicing medical doctor to suddenly become one of the "erased," I asked him how he bore it. He informed me that it was part of his maturation as a person and, indirectly, it forced him to learn a new language, that of film, and to become a successful and internationally known documentary and artistic director. It also formed his character to such an extent that he has spent the years of his life since the wars in Yugoslavia writing haiku, forming haiku societies, documenting the lives and history of the various people who comprise the population of the Balkans. Some of his films are available online (all you need do is search under Anakiev films); some are with English subtitles and some are not. He has a unique way of juxtaposing and overlapping different historical periods, with old engravings, poems overlaying them, and always the faces and voices of people. People stand out in his works, poetic and filmic. This is his heritage and his inheritance, what he will leave to the world. The people in the films are not actors, but ordinary people, sometimes the very last living member of a long line of family genealogy.

In his poems, as is readily evident, there is a strong voice, a strong human presence, a man who takes a stand without following the "rules" and "taboos" laid down by Anglo-American and Western European haiku poets. If you recall his essay ("Haiku and Capitalism"), you will agree that there is a "capitalist haiku," one which in a sense dehumanizes mankind by removing him/her completely from the tabloid of words. These poems are not neutral, not innocuous, for they implicitly project a view of the insignificance of humanity.

I will close with words from Bruno Bettelheim, if only because Dr. Bettelheim went through as horrific and catastrophic an experience as did Dr. Anakiev.

Dr. Bettelheim (*The Informed Heart*) wrote in the preface:

With so much at hand that generations have striven for, how bewildering that the meaning of life should evade us. Freedoms we have, broader than ever before. But more than ever before most of us yearn for a self-realization that eludes us, while we abide restless in the midst of plenty. As we achieve freedom, we are frightened by social forces that seem to suffocate us, and that seem to move in on us from all parts of an ever contracting world.

As Karen Zelan wrote in her obituary essay [“Bruno Bettelheim \(1903 to 1990\)”](#) (*Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education*; [Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education], vol. XXIII, no. 1/2, 1993, p. 85-100, ©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000):

To combat the unpredictable outcomes of our fast changing world, Bettelheim wrote that we can no longer afford to bifurcate the reasons of the heart from the reasons of the mind. ‘The daring heart must invade reason with its own living warmth, even if the symmetry of reason must give way to admit love and the pulsation of life.’ Bettelheim never lost sight of the importance of feeling. Exquisitely educated in the history of reason, his life’s work consisted of advising us to inform pure reason with the emotions, which is the very substance of a humanistic psychology.

These same words could easily be applied to the life and work of Dr. Dimitar Anakiev. He has left a living legacy of humanistic art for future generations to learn from and for that we owe him a great debt. His strong, personal voice is not just his own: it is the voice of man as a species-being, just as Marx described man, not as an isolated monad living only for self-fulfillment. Life is too dear for that.



The background is an abstract composition of teal and red brushstrokes. The teal is the dominant color, with various shades and textures. Red strokes are layered over the teal, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is that of a textured, hand-painted surface.

bacteriophages

with you i the world
i feel there is more f
it

Richard
Gilbert

lettuce seeds too mostly lost

john
martone

plum curculio
teased in the valley
of cool bronze

Patrick
Sweeney

wherein the foghorn a threshold

Eve
Luckring

the bit part
the wind plays
in the dragon's tail

Patrick
Sweeney

awaiting azure
suspended

in the sky pelvic
bone

Scott
Metz

Existential drift a wave

crests downwind one

cloud it's in earnest

Rebecca
Lilly

whom one falls for on the skylight hard rain

Philip
Rowland

ghostly the sand
storm half
husband

Scott
Metz

lov
er
spread
across
dead
lin
es

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.

leaving the town of her arms
once known as brontosaurus

David
Boyer

he sketches bacteriophages no sense of perspective

john
martone

Errant master his mood

staking out his absence

some axis stretches now

Rebecca
Lilly

end all pronoun out on earth's fire escape

Paul
Pfleuger,
Jr.



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