
ESSAYS

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

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Haiku has evolved beyond its early stages into something leaner, stronger, sharper. It requires a better poet to write good haiku today, and more often what a poet chooses to write is less likely to be normative. Or put another way, what was normative to the best poets of previous generations is no longer competitive for the best poets of the current generation. Journals and Web sites are gradually discovering this, and slowly accommodating the new practices. Increasingly we find more different kinds of haiku in these places, and readers are learning to parse them in new ways, just as poets are learning to exploit the new possibilities inherent in the new shapes. Not all will work—some will flare briefly and disappear forever. But by having a look at what's currently being tried, it may be possible to deduce what the new shape of haiku is likely to be.

To begin we'll consider a very brief history of haiku form. This will in no way be exhaustive, but suggestive as well as cumulative. We'll follow with a more detailed study of the form I feel is likeliest to be the shape of things to come.

Let's begin with the elephant in the room. It will be a long time, if ever, before the three-liner is displaced as the primary shape of haiku in English. There are many reasons for this: history, tradition, mimesis, not to mention the way the three-line haiku continues to

1. An earlier version of this paper, titled "Monophilia: The History and Practice of One-Line Haiku in English," was read at Haiku North America 2011, Seattle, Wash., on Aug. 4, 2011.

supply a useful combination of technical opportunities for the poet to exploit. Haiku work well in three lines in English, and that first inspiration to render Japanese haiku in this fashion was a gift. The first three-liners in a Western language may date back to the 1600s, in Dutch, but we have no records to prove this. We do know that three-line translations were being made as early as the 1870s, and we must regard this as somewhat serendipitous, because it was no sure thing: the Japanese originals were, of course, single vertical lines, and if that verticality was certain to be adumbrated by our own horizontal writing process, the choice to mimic the tripartite internal organization in three lines was not so obvious. And, despite some other early contenders, the three-line model proved to be the most generally accepted, and so is the great-grandfather of contemporary haiku practice in the West.

Since the three-line haiku has become normative practice, any other form must be considered aberrant. The onus is on the outlier to prove the efficacy of its novelty: of course any variant form will provide a different experience—the question is, is it a better one? If any poem can be shown to work just as well in the normative shape, then all the variant shape is doing is calling attention to itself, and to its author. Part of our consideration should always be, how does the shape chosen by the poet enhance the poem? And if it doesn't, we must consider this to be a decision error on the part of the poet. I urge you to experiment with all the poems that follow, to see if their success is dependent on the manner of presentation, or if they might have been just as well served to begin life as more normative poems.

We needn't reiterate the history of the three-line form here, since it is primarily the history you already know: from Aston to Blyth to Hass, from Lowell to Hackett to Herold, up to and including the current journals. So let's agree to simply use the three-line form as the backdrop against which we might consider other shapes that have arisen.

Just as reasonable a choice in those first days of translation was a two-line, symmetrical or asymmetrical arrangement such as that employed by Basil Hall Chamberlain as early as the 1880s:

Haply the summer grasses are
A relic of the warriors' dream. [Bashō]²

Another important Japanologist, editor and anthologist, Asatarō Miyamori, also favored the two-line rendering of Japanese originals in the 1930s:³

A fallen flower flew back to the branch!
Behold! it was a flitting butterfly. [Moritake]

Two later Western poets and anthologists, Kenneth Rexroth and Harold Stewart, also adopted the two-line format. Where the former achieves a very sharp lucubration, as in⁴

Summer grass
Where warriors dream. [Bashō]

the latter chose to make something more appetizing to middlebrow taste, rhyming the poems and pulling the teeth of their observations:⁵

ILLUSION

The fallen blossoms which I saw arise,
Returning toward the bough, were butterflies.
[Moritake]

In truth, the two-liner has never really caught on in the West, perhaps because it too much resembled the rhymed couplets of Augustan poetry without its familiar philosophical trappings. We do find the occasional exception, such as work by John Gould Fletcher in the 1930s:

2. Basil Hall Chamberlain. "Bashō and the Japanese Poetical Epigram," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, XXX (1902), 46.

3. Miyamori Asatarō, trans. and annotator, *An Anthology of Haiku, Ancient and Modern* (Tokyo: Chugai Printing Co., Ltd, 1932), 111.

4. Kenneth Rexroth, trans., *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* (New York: New Directions Books, 1955), 115.

5. Harold Stewart, *A Net of Fireflies: Japanese Haiku and Haiku Paintings* (Rutland, Vt., and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1960), 36.

Snowflakes rise and fall on the wind:
Even Winter has her white flocks of silent birds.⁶

Robert Grenier, in his experiments with short lines that are not necessarily haiku, offered this poem in the 1970s:⁷

PULSE

how big a gap can a line contain & go on

He seems to be asking what exactly are the believable parameters for *kire*—how far afield can a poem go on the other side of the break? This is an age-old question in haiku, and the answer is always exactly what the poem supplies—in this case, all the way from the range of possibilities of “pulse” to a disquisition on the nature of ... what? poetic practice? blood pressure? heredity? the universe? A most challenging poem.

Slightly less challenging but no less terse, and even tangier, is M. Kettner’s 1980s poem⁸

your hair drawn back
the sharp taste of radishes

Two lines seems exactly right for this: no three-line arrangement approaches its strident acerbity.

Karen Sohne penned this classic senryu in the 1990s:⁹

androgynous stranger
winks at me

and Michael Facherty’s terse¹⁰

in the wood pile
the broken ax handle

6. John Gould Fletcher, verse V, “From the Japanese,” *Visions of Evening* (London: MacDonald, 1913).

7. Robert Grenier, *Sentences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Whale Cloth Press, 1978).

8. *antantantantant* (2002).

9. Dee Evetts, ed., *Woodshavings* (New York: Spring Street Haiku Group, 1994).

10. *Black Bough* 8 (1996).

dates from the middle of that decade. And from this new decade we have John Carley's¹¹

sunlight spills along the canal
another breath of solvent

and this from Jörgen Johansson¹²

a ladybird
b5 to c4

The two-line poem derived from the essentially two-part (content-wise) Japanese haiku makes some sense, even if it hasn't enjoyed much popularity with poets in the West. The four-line version, however, doesn't have the same easy continuity, and we should perhaps view it as an idiosyncratic product of Western haiku practice. Not surprisingly, it also has not been much favored. A number of early American haikuists used four lines on occasion, notably Virginia Brady Young, whose first lines end in a colon and read like a title, L.A. Davidson, and Álvaro Cardona-Hine. Only one poet that I know of has made it his trademark form: Stephen Gill, who publishes under the name Tito:¹³

Further down the cobble beach
the face of another
sunwatcher
loses its copper glow

It is debatable what the four-line array accomplishes, beyond airing the poem out a bit. Tito's poems do tend towards a greater syllable count than the prevailing norms, and perhaps the fourth line helps make them feel less weighted, more free-flowing. In most instances, the four-line efforts we might find published are aberrations from usual practice by their authors, and the lineage employed seems directly aimed

11. *Frogpond* 25:1 (2002).

12. Jim Kacian and Dee Evetts, eds., *A New Resonance 6: Emerging Voices in English-language Haiku* (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2009).

13. *Blithe Spirit* 7:4 (November 1997).

at arriving at specific sorts of timings for the readings of the poems. Here, for instance, is an early example (1970s) by Larry Eigner:¹⁴

w i d e - r a n g i n g
 cloud over
 sunlit
 somewhere enough for a storm

Eigner didn't call his poem a haiku, though it is clearly related. Virginia Brady Young's, also from the 1970s, was clearly in the genre:¹⁵

at twilight
 hippo
 shedding
 the river

There is certainly something gained with each line break, not to mention a slight suggestion of the hippo's shape, in this poem, so we might decide the four-line solution here seems aptly chosen for the content. Shape also seems to be central to Robert Spiess's poem (early '80s):¹⁶

a square
 of water
 r e f l e c t s
 the moon

LeRoy Gorman's self-deprecating four-liner from the same time also seems to use the form to advantage:¹⁷

between
 Goethe & Graves
 summer
 shelfdust

14. Larry Eigner, *Windows/walls/yard/ways* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 163.

15. *Haiku West* 7:1 (July 1973).

16. *Cicada* 3:3 (1979).

In Dee Evetts's haiku (late '80s), the motivation wasn't so much a four-line result, but a more organically pleasing presentation:¹⁸

the river
 going over
 the afternoon
 going on

And perhaps Martin Lucas's poem (2000s) is something of an anti-haiku, so deviation from the norm feels appropriate:¹⁹

somewhere
 between
 Giggleswick and Wigglesworth
 I am uninspired

Perhaps the least practiced shapes haiku have taken are specific to individual poems, shapes we might term "organic." A simple example is L.A. Davidson's²⁰

beyond
 stars beyond
 star

from the early 1970s. Another famous stellar poem, by Raymond Roseliep a couple years later, approximates this same shape:²¹

he removes his glove
 to point out
 Orion

17. *Frogpond* 24:3 (2001).

18. Dee Evetts, *The Mill House* (Haiku Canada Sheet 1987–88).

19. George Swede and Randy Brooks, eds., *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide* (Northumberland, Eng./Oakville, Ont.–Niagara Falls, N.Y.: Iron Press/Mosaic Press, 2000).

20. *Haiku Magazine* 5:3 (1972).

21. Raymond Roseliep, *Sailing Bones: Haiku* (Ruffsedale, Pa.: Rook Press, 1978), 24.

The felicity with which this shape causes the reader to re-enact the content of the poem is uncanny, and stands as a model for those seeking similar effects.

There are still occasional attempts at rather free-form haiku, as anyone who has had a look at the HaikuNow! Innovative category results from the past couple years will note. But not many of them have been compelling in their execution. An interesting recent effort is Eve Luckring's²⁴

c u m u l o
 n i m b u s
 d r i f t the
 d a y
 o f f
 s c h e d u l e

Another branch we might consider is concrete haiku. After a flurry of activity in the late 1970s to early 1980s, especially in Canada, concrete haiku have not been much practiced in English. The first such effort perhaps was Paul Reps's 1930s poem²⁵

!
 rain

Two decades later the most famous concrete haiku was penned by Cor van den Heuvel:²⁶

tundra

There have been other one-word efforts, though none perhaps quite as successful, and certainly none so iconic.

The greatest early exponent of concrete haiku was Larry Gates. His series "Test Patterns" in the 1960s included such work as²⁷

24. *Modern Haiku* 41:2 (summer 2010).

25. Paul Reps, *Square Sun Square Moon: A Collection of Sweet Sour Essays* (North Clarendon, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1967).

26. Cor van den Heuvel, *The Window-Washer's Pail* (New York: Chant Press, 1963).

27. *Haiku Magazine*, 1971.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
 It was snowing
 And it was going to snow.
 The blackbird sat
 In the cedar-limbs.

Elsewhere I have made the case that we might consider this poem the first sequence in English-language haiku.

Once journals and organizations had come to the West, and a normative practice began to be established, experimentation took more the shape of a response to the norm. Larry Gates, for instance, took the standard haiku model and rotated it ninety degrees, attempting to combine the three-line norm of the West with some feeling of the verticality of Japanese poems, as in this one from the 1960s:³⁰

As	a	flashes
the	little	white
falls	water-thrush	
darken		

In this case, Gates actually had a follower, as the poet Evelyn Tooley Hunt, who often published under the name Tao-Li, employed this shape in many of her poems. More idiosyncratically, Martin Shea used spaces and lines to create quite different layouts—and consequent emotional responses—to what usually were three-line haiku, as in this one from the mid-70s:³¹

bolted	space
the lights on the corners	
click and change	

30. *Modern Haiku* 2.4 (autumn 1971).

31. *New World Haiku* 1:3 (1974).

At about the same time Alan Pizzarelli was working with a flexible lineation that followed the flow of the idiom, resulting in a seemingly artless, colloquial effect:³²

a spark
falls to the ground
darkens

that's it

At the opposite end of the theoretical, anne mckay was seeking anything but a casual effect on the reader, organizing her material for artistic impact, as in this poem from the late 1980s:³³

a clarity
 astonishing
 the night
 rising
 slow
 and
 sweet
 suddenly
 her voice
 ... singing

Another Canadian with a penchant for formal experimentation is Michael Dudley. This poem from the 1990s is one of his most unusual:³⁴

a purple sky

 dim on the
 figures drive-in
 appear screen

32. Alan Pizzarelli, from the sequence "Tea Party," *Haiku Magazine* (1974?).

33. *Frogpond* 12:2 (May 1989).

34. Dorothy Howard and André Duhaime, eds., *Haïku: anthologie canadienne / Canadian Anthology* (Hull, Ont. / Aylmer, Que.: Éditions Asticou, 1985).

The most recent attempt at fashioning a compelling new shape while keeping a traditional haiku feel and content has been made by Lee Gurga. The possibility his cruciform shapes contain is only beginning to be explored, but one of the more successful of his early efforts is the following, from 2010:³⁵

not
the
whole
story
but probably enough
fresh
snow

A final anomalous shape I'd like to mention is the overlap haiku, what Nick Virgilio named the "weird":³⁶

fossilence

This technique has not been used very often to my knowledge: perhaps a couple dozen poets have published them in the past twenty years. A related style overlaps words to create compression. One of the best is this one by John Stevenson:³⁷

jampackedelevatoreverybuttonpushed

The newest shape to make a bid for permanence in haiku practice is the vertical array. It's not exactly a new idea: besides being the usual shape for Japanese haiku, we can find it in English as early as the 1950s, being the regular shape employed by Michael McClure, as in this example:³⁸

35. *Frogpond* 33:2 (spring/summer 2010).

36. George Swede and Randy Brooks, eds., *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide* (Northumberland, Eng./Oakville, Ont.–Niagara Falls, N.Y.: Iron Press / Mosaic Press, 2000).

37. *Frogpond* 25:2 (2002).

38. John Brandi and Denis Maloney, eds., *Unswept Path: Contemporary American Haiku* (Buffalo, N.Y.: White Pine Press, 2005), 156.

NOTH
 ING
 NESS
 of
 intelligence;
 silver
 sunlight
 through
 closed
 eyelids

And the verticality of Japanese haiku certainly inspired this poem by John Tagliabue from the early '70s:³⁹

ANCESTRAL PORTRAITS

the
 mark
 of
 leaves
 in
 the
 flying
 air

Alan Pizzarelli in 1970 offered a chunkier version of this idea:⁴⁰

rain
 floating down the gutter
 a crimson leaf
 a popcicle stick
 a ...

39. John Tagliabue, *The Doorless Door (Japan Poems)* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1970).

40. Alan Pizzarelli, *Karma Poems: Haiku/Senryu 1970–1973* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Print Center, 1974).

and Marlene Mountain in 1976 provided this version:⁴¹

beneath
leaf mold
stone
cool
stone

But it wasn't until Robert Spiess, in *The Cottage of Wild Plum* (1991) that the vertical form was explored in depth.⁴²

crescent
moon
a
bat
loops
and
twists
among
wild
plum

One poet who picked up on the possibilities that might be found in what Spiess was exploring was Vincent Tripi, as in this poem from *the path of the bird* (1996):⁴³

Looking
up
at
the
giant
sequoia
woodpecker
fledgling

41. Marlene Morelock Wills, *The Old Tin Roof* (1976).

42. Robert Spiess, "A Cycle of Five Haiku from 'The Cottage of Wild Plum'" *Modern Haiku* 22:2 (summer 1991), 98.

43. Vincent Tripi, *The Path of the Bird* (1996).

With the regular publication of the poems of John Martone, beginning in the mid-'90s, the full range of possibilities of the vertical array began to come clear. This poem, from his chapbook *Heart Wood* (1998), is typical:⁴⁴

here-
 there-

 si-
 lence

 ap-
 pro-

 xi-
 mate-

 ly-
 fern

Another poet quick to realize the potentials of this shape was Scott Metz. This recent one is among his most successful:⁴⁵

a
 not
 her
 drop

 &

 it's
 raining

All this by way of prelude: if something is to upend the hegemony of the three-line haiku, the clear favorite is the one-liner, which, if the pitch I'm about to make for it is true, is due for a term of its own. I would like to suggest: the *monoku*. What recommends it is its clarity: it says what it is. I also like its brevity, and the hybridity of its origins: a Greek prefix wedded to a Japanese suffix to create a new English term.

44. John Martone, *Heart Wood* (Jamaica, Vt.: Bull Thistle Press, 1998).

45. *Modern Haiku* 38.3 (autumn 2007).

Haiku is not the sole province of one-liners in English poetry, but it is nearly so. Almost all examples of monostich are imported from other languages—the Russian of Bryusov, the French of Apollinaire. The practice of rendering links of renga in single lines (for space considerations, perhaps) may well have influenced poets writing haiku in English, especially those offering sequences, which have often had their individual elements arranged in single lines.*

Like all these alternative shapes, monoku must be considered against the success of the normative three-line haiku. While some of these alternative shapes have specific applications, others seem simply idiosyncratic. Monoku, however, have not arisen out of a need simply to be different: they actually offer a range of technical and stylistic opportunities that are not available to the three-line haiku, nor even, so far as I am able to ascertain, to the Japanese single vertical line form. It offers resources that one just can't find elsewhere in haiku, and where there is new territory, poets will colonize. I will detail some of these advantages as we proceed, but first I'd like to offer a brief history of the monoku.

Monoku have been offered as an alternative normative version of haiku from the beginning. One of the first translators of classical Japanese haiku, Lafcadio Hearn, working in the 1890s, proffered one-line versions such as:⁴⁶

The voice having been all consumed by crying, there remains
only the shell of the *sémi* [Bashō]

As we have observed, competing models were also offered, and of these, the three-line form gained the most traction early on, and this has affected practice ever since. But not everyone was entirely convinced. In his seminal volume *The Country of Eight Islands* (1968), Hiroaki Sato, in collaboration with Burton Watson, supplied single-line translations of haiku and tanka, arguing that such versions provided a closer experience to the Japanese originals. Though Sato is less prolix than Hearn, we can feel a certain kinship in poems such as this:

46. Lafcadio Hearn, *Shadowings* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1900).

The sea darkens, and the voices of ducks faintly white [Bashō]⁴⁷

However, poets writing haiku in English were not quick to follow these examples: normative practice for haiku in English for the first half of the twentieth century was decidedly three lines. Kerouac, as was so often his wont, was the first to experiment with a single-line format in the 1950s. His comrade-in-arms Allen Ginsberg, seeking to incorporate a Western attitude into an Eastern genre, created what he called “American sentences,” seventeen syllables punctuated as usual. This was as much an outgrowth of his own work with long, flexible English poetic lines as any theoretical statement of what lay inherent in haiku itself. Here’s a typical example:⁴⁸

A dandelion seed floats above the marsh grass with the mosquitos.

This model was largely ignored by other poets inside and out of the haiku community, which began organizing itself shortly thereafter. The first monoku that received widespread acceptance was Michael Segers’s⁴⁹

in the eggshell after the chick has hatched

in 1971. What it chiefly is noticing, seemingly, is an absence, though one might argue for shadow or whiteness or some other characteristic. But the curiously truncated manner in which it presents itself, in medias res, is not to be found again until Robert Grenier’s “Sentences” (1970s) such as⁵⁰

except the swing bumped by the dog in passing

Once the idea of a single line containing the whole of a haiku came into consciousness in the haiku community, it spread quickly. George

47. Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson, eds. and trans., *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981).

48. Allen Ginsberg, *White Shroud: Poems 1980–1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

49. *Haiku Magazine* 5:2 (summer 1971).

50. Robert Grenier, *Sentences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Whale Cloth Press, 1978).

Swede took up the gauntlet, producing several monoku such as this, from 1978:⁵¹

at the edge of the precipice I become logical

An atypical poem by Lorraine Ellis Harr from around the same time:⁵²

an owl hoots darkness down from the hollow oak

R. Clarence Matsuo-Allard was one of the first to go on record publicly espousing the single-line format, with poems such as this one, from 1979:⁵³

an icicle the moon drifting through it

The same year saw Marlene Mountain's paean to concision:⁵⁴

pig and i spring rain

More efforts found their way into print in 1980, such as this one by John Wills:⁵⁵

dusk from rock to rock a waterthrush

and this from Robert Boldman:⁵⁶

leaves blowing into a sentence

Nearly all the leading haiku poets of the day found the single-line form worth exploring. At about the same time one by Peggy Willis Lyles:⁵⁷

Before we knew its name the indigo bunting

51. George Swede, *A Snowman, Headless* (Frederickton, N.B.: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1979).

52. *Cicada* 2:3 (1978).

53. *Cicada* 3:2 (1979).

54. *HSA Frogpond* 2:3–4 (November 1979).

55. *Amoskeag* 1 (1980).

56. *Cicada* 4:4 (1980).

57. *Brussels Sprout* 2:2 (1981).

This from James Kirkup also in 1981:⁵⁸

the blood of my shadow poured up the steps

Elizabeth Searle Lamb tried her hand:⁵⁹

cry of the peacock widens the crack in the adobe wall

and Ruby Spriggs as well:⁶⁰

my head in the clouds in the lake

And, a bit later, one from Hal Roth:⁶¹

dove song shortens the lane where she waits

All this occurred within the confines of the haiku community. At the same time, however, a very surprising thing happened: one of the major contemporary American poets, John Ashbery, inspired by Hiroaki Sato's one-line translations from the Japanese, published thirty-seven haiku in the journal *Sulfur* in 1981 and a year later in his 1982 collection *The Wave*. These poems were quite different from the majority of poems being published in haiku journals and indeed set a challenge to haiku poets to engage in a larger discourse with so-called mainstream poetry. Here's one example:⁶²

A blue anchor grains of grit in a tall sky sewing

No one immediately took up this challenge, perhaps because it was so daunting, but more likely because haiku poets were not even aware of it. In the following decade a handful of poets published monoku, most of them only occasionally. Since the beginning of the new century, however, all that has changed. Most major haiku poets since 2000 have tried their hand at monoku, and while some have decided it doesn't suit them, most

58. Kirkup, *Dengonban Messages* (1981).

59. Harold G. Henderson Haiku Awards (Haiku Society of America), 1981, 2nd place.

60. *Frogpond* 6:2 (1983).

61. Hal Roth, *Her Daughter's Eyes* (Glen Burnie, Md.: Wind Chimes Press, 1990).

62. John Ashbery, "37 Haiku," *Sulfur* 5 (1981).

have included at least a few in their collections as well as in journals. In rough chronological order, the past decade has seen work by

Chris Gordon:⁶³

a love letter to the butterfly gods with strategic misspellings

Dietmar Tauchner:⁶⁴

deep inside you no more war

vincent tripi (1996):⁶⁵

Ah water-strider never to have left a track!

Stuart Quine:⁶⁶

bolted and chained the way to the mountains

Allan Burns:⁶⁷

Kind of Blue the smell of rain

Jeff Stillman:⁶⁸

hazy moon hung over the new year

Lorin Ford:⁶⁹

their wings like cellophane remember cellophane

Karma Tenzing Wangchuk:⁷⁰

stone before stone buddha

63. Chris Gordon, *An Apparent Definition of Wavering* (No place: no publisher, spring 2004).

64. *Roadrunner* [Web] VI:4 (November 2006).

65. Vincent Tripi, *Paperweight for Nothing* (Greenfield, Mass.: Tribe Press, 2006).

66. *Presence* 31 (2007).

67. *Acorn* 20 (spring 2008).

68. *Blithe Spirit* 18:1 (March 2008).

69. *Roadrunner* [Web] IX:2 (May 2009).

70. Karma Tenzing Wangchuk, *Stone Buddha* (Charleston, Ill.: tel-let, 2009).

Charles Trumbull:⁷¹

such innocent questions — sunflowers

Scott Metz:⁷²

only american deaths count the stars

Martin Lucas:⁷³

the thyme-scented morning lizard's tongue flicking out

Giselle Maya:⁷⁴

the cuckoo's voice has opened a white iris

John Barlow:⁷⁵

the wind being farmed the wind that isn't

Eve Luckring:⁷⁶

cocktail party that one closed door

William Ramsey:⁷⁷

fate: a leaf falls but with improvisation

and Christopher Patchel:⁷⁸

we turn turn our clocks ahead

71. *Roadrunner* [Web] IX:1 (February 2009).

72. *Modern Haiku* 40.1 (winter–spring 2009).

73. *Presence* 39 (September 2009).

74. *Modern Haiku* 41.3 (autumn 2010).

75. *Presence* 41 (May 2010).

76. Jim Kacian and Dee Evetts, eds., *A New Resonance 6: Emerging Voices in English-language Haiku* (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2009).

77. William M. Ramsey, *More Wine* (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2010).

78. 2nd HaikuNow! Contest (The Haiku Foundation), 2011.

And of course I myself have found many resources in the monoku, publishing my first at the end of the century⁷⁹

the place i can't reach itches your absence

and scores more since. Last year, at the request of the Dutch publisher 't Schrijverke, I wrote a monograph on the topic, entitled *where i leave off*, which seeks to identify several strategies that monoku employ, and provides examples from my work.

I would like to focus on three of the more interesting techniques readily available in monoku but only rarely, if at all, in normative haiku, or even in other formal schemes. Of course there are many more than three such techniques, and the use of one does not preclude the use of others in any given poem. Many of the poems above are indeed not so simply parsed that a single technique can be said to account for the whole of its affect.

It's my contention that early monoku, up until at least the Segers poem, and many after as well, employed no technique that is unique to haiku presented as a single line. The one-line translations seek to render a more just experience of the Japanese original, not to expand the range of technical advantage the monoku might offer in English; while poets writing in English seemingly didn't discover these technical advantages until the form was much more established. If we consider the examples above by Hearn, Sato, and Ginsberg, we would probably agree that all might have been presented in three lines with little loss to the poem had the translator or poet chosen that form. And we might say the same of the original poems of Matsuo-Allard and Bostok.

But in the Segers poem, and many of those that follow, something else is happening: re-presenting in three lines becomes more problematical, and the results lose something of the effect of the original poem. Segers truncates the poem in such a way that we actually omit the fragment part of the usual fragment/phrase layout: the poem might

79. Jim Kacian, *Where I Leave Off: One-Line Haiku and Haibun/Waar ik ophoud: eenregelige haiku en haibun* ('s-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands: 't Schrijverke, March 2010).

have been more traditionally written with a first line of, say, “in the henhouse,” if aiming for one kind of effect, or perhaps “darkness” if aiming for another. But by dispensing with it altogether the poet forces the reader to do more work, more imagining, and this serves to open the poem to all sorts of interesting results. Rather than a piling up of images upon the imagination, what Pound called “phanopoeia,” a single image is extended or elaborated into a second context, often implied. This omission of fragment comes to be one of the most commonly utilized techniques in the toolbox of the emerging monoku. Other examples of it from our list include the poems by Boldman, Spriggs, Gordon, Lucas, and Ford.

The second technique we find commonly in monoku that differs from normative haiku form is sheer speed. The rushing of words past the imagination’s editor results in a breathless taking in of the whole, only after which the unexpected “sense” contained within the imagery asserts itself. The pivot of a poem might occur in the first word, but having met it so early in the reading the reader can hardly be blamed for not recognizing it as such. And another might work in exactly the opposite way, postponing its pivot for the last word, and then asking the reader to decide how to read it.

The first such poem on our list is Marlene Mountain’s “pig and i.” In five words she limns the entire scene, and the reader or listener really has no alternative but to take it whole. Only afterwards is it possible to unpack it, by which point the entire sensation of the poem is embedded within us. Boldman’s poem operates in a similar fashion, as do the poems by Lyles, Spriggs, Tauchner, Burns, Metz, and, in a slightly different way, Patchel.

There is no parallel for this effect that I can find in normative haiku. The line breaks ensure that the reader slows down, and momentum is lost, which for most poems is not a loss, but for these special kinds of poems, removes much of their impact.

A third technique endemic to monoku is the use of multiple *kire*, “cutting.” Some critics, such as Hasegawa Kai, feel that *kire* is the most critical poetic technique employed by haiku. The advantage this kind of monoku has is that the break can occur in one of several places,

and each possible break point yields a different reading. Most often the sense of the poem remains similar, but different emphases create subtle shifts in meaning. We might think of such haiku as cut gems: each slight turn catches the light a bit differently; each facet contains its own inherent gleams and prismatic effects. Multiple possible caesuras yield subtle, often ambiguous texts which generate alternative readings, and subsequently richer poetic experiences. Each poem can be several poems, and the more the different readings cohere and reinforce each other, the larger the field occupied by the poem, the greater its weight in the mind. My poem is one such example, with others being the Metz, Wangchuk, and Stillman.

In addition to these three techniques let me briefly add the monoku's ability to enact its content, a kind of shape poem, as in the Wills; a more direct imposition of images in Lamb's; the creation of a kind of unexpected animism all the more direct for its form, as in the Roth; a vehicle for apothegm and epigram, in the tripi and Ramsey; and the irreducible, through-composed poem which a three-line treatment would render cumbersome, as exemplified by Lucas. There are special effects as well, such as Patchel's word repetition which deepens the significance of the observation, and the management of disjunctive elements that might feel too loosely constrained in a less lapidary form, such as the Ashbery and Boldman.

And so on.

This is not advocacy for one-line technique for all English-language haiku. The needs of each poem must be determined individually, and those needs met. Nor is it any indication of all that's possible within a one-line treatment—I believe we've only begun to explore how the monoku might expand the range of English-language haiku. But it is an argument that one-line form is no longer a variant form—the monoku is, and has been for some time, a fully-fledged form of the genre, and with an exciting exploratory period just ahead. I look forward to participating in that exploration, and expect many of you will be involved as well. It will not be the very distant future when we will define haiku as a brief poem, most often in one or three lines. Only then will our explanation have caught up with the reality.