

## Haiku: Women Connected through Inner Life

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translated in English by Dorothy Howard

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Just my luck, I get to give my presentation right after a meal, our bellies full. I'll do my best to deliver and hope you'll do yours reception-wise

Let's begin with an observation: whatever our age, origin or period, it seems we've always watched our weight:

Jessica Tremblay: *diet / this month / only twenty-eight days*<sup>1</sup>  
*sa diète / ce mois-ci / seulement vingt-huit jours*<sup>1</sup>

Diane Descôteaux: *I've put on weight / this spring, says the river / in a fierce voice*<sup>2</sup>  
*j'ai pris bien du poids / ce printemps, dit la rivière / d'une grosse voix*<sup>2</sup>

Nobuko Katsura: *On the scale / my bathed and steaming body / this night of snow*<sup>3</sup>

I'm with you this evening to talk about connections, kinship or links that bring together women haiku poets.

Looking through several anthologies with that in mind, I came across this haiku by Alice Frampton, the coordinator of this annual conference – a haiku right on target for this haiku weekend:

*rock throwing / our circles / about to meet*<sup>4</sup>  
*jets de pierres / nos cercles / sur le point de se rencontrer*<sup>5</sup>

The one idea I would like to get across in our time together would be: as women, whatever our nationality, our political or sexual allegiance, we are soul mates. In my opinion, there is very little difference between haiku by women poets whether they be from Japan or the West.

Western feminist theorists have identified, from the late 1970s, our writing's characteristics. Recognizable through recurrent themes, it makes use of first person narrative, the mother-daughter relationship, and our own body (sometimes seen with humour).

I'll not get into any of these themes as they can be found in *Regards de femmes – haïkus francophones* – the last compilation under my direction. Most of the haiku I'll be reading (also in

English translation) are it's true, from *Regards de femmes*, but this evening, I want to deal with the theme of inner life as perceived, experienced or desired by living contemporary poets; several of the English haiku, I will be reading, come from the Canadian anthology *Carpe Diem*. I'll also be reading haiku by Japanese women of the seventeenth, eighteenth and twentieth centuries, who have dealt with various aspects of their inner garden. Haiku, therefore, over time and space.

On the one hand, haiku is a snapshot of the present moment; on the other, women find nourishment in dreams, desires and aspirations on a daily basis: the synergy between the world of the 17 or so syllables and women's universe is solid.

**Sutejo DEN** (1633-1698); seventeenth century. She lived in the same period as Bashô.

*is there / a short cut through the clouds, / summer moon?*<sup>3</sup>

Juliette Schweisguth (Clochelune):

*sounds of snow and ink / rustles of souls and wings / two butterflies in love*  
*bruits de neige et d'encre / frôlement d'âmes et d'ails / deux papillons s'aiment*<sup>1</sup>

elehna de sousa: *frogs still croaking / as the yellow moon / slips between two firs*<sup>4</sup>

**Chigetsu KAWAI** (1634?-1718); seventeenth century. Contemporary of Bashô and one of the very few women admitted to the master's circle.

As women we spend endless hours in the kitchen; there, we can often hear, see and smell Nature.

*a bush warbler – my hands in the kitchen sink / rest for a while*<sup>3</sup>

Micheline Beaudry: *August moon / she leans by the window / a melon on the table*<sup>1</sup>  
*lune d'août / elle se penche à la fenêtre / un melon sur la table*<sup>1</sup>

Angela Leuck: *in my kitchen / a jar of pickled lemons – / winter sunlight*<sup>4</sup>

**Sonome SHIBA** (1664-1726); seventeenth century. A contemporary, Bashô found very beautiful. Widowed at thirty-nine, she never remarried

Aging often calls for humour, self-mockery even, at times.

*when you grow old / even mice avoid you – / how cold it is!*<sup>3</sup>

Line Michaud: *covered moon / clouds too speak of rain / my aged bones too*

*la lune s'est voilée / les nuages annoncent la pluie / mes vieux os aussi*<sup>1</sup>

Philomene Kocher: *using the mirror / my mother gave me / the other side magnified*<sup>4</sup>

Patricia Benedict: *birthday gift / 'Fountain of Youth' / needs two batteries*<sup>7</sup>

**CHIYO ni** (1703-1775); eighteenth century. She is, unless I'm mistaken, the only woman poet of Ancient Japan, that has enjoyed continuous reknown, almost equal to Bashô's. Three books translated into Western languages, are dedicated to her and her haiku: one in English and two in French. Widowed at twenty, she became a Buddhist nun in her early fifties. She befriended several poets and was mentor to young women poets and nuns.

Poems written for a very dear deceased woman friend:

Chiyo ni: *farewell / flower of the floating world / poppy flower*<sup>5</sup> (in Moundarren)

Suzette Lecomte: *night sky / my friend's favourite blue / looking at it for her as well*  
*ciel de nuit / le bleu préféré de mon amie / le regarder pour deux*<sup>1</sup>

Other poems are written on her own evanescence:

Chiyo ni: *trout going downstream / day by day the water / frightens me more*<sup>3</sup>

Other poets also write on the theme of death:

Ava Kar: *the funeral home – / a birdbath / with no water*<sup>4</sup>

Maxianne Berger: *my obituary ? / one candle and / a little wind*<sup>4</sup>

If it's true that old-age leads us to our final sleep, we can also ignore death and affirm life, like the French poet, Monique Coudert

*chestnut in palm / hiding my life line / I will live forever*  
*marron dans ma main / cachant ma ligne de vie / je suis éternelle*<sup>1</sup>

A variation on the same theme, a metaphysical question is asked by Hélène Boissé:

*mosquito – is its life really worth less / than mine*  
*le maringouin – sa vie vaut-elle vraiment moins / que la mienne*<sup>1</sup>

**Seifu ENOMOTO** (1732-1815); eighteenth century. A contemporary of Buson. Very famous in her time. Widowed at 28, her output was prodigious.

*rumbles from the rocks – cherry blossoms in the moonlight / far from the world of men*<sup>3</sup>

Occasionally, Nature becomes a close friend in our moments of solitude.

Seifu Enomoto: *at daybreak / speaking to the blossoms / a woman all alone*<sup>3</sup>

Dominique Champollion: *from the end of the street / rushing to meet me / dead leaves*<sup>9</sup>  
*du bout de la rue / accourant à ma rencontre / les feuilles mortes*<sup>9</sup>

Claudia Coutu Radmore: *abandoned farm / the wild pear / in bloom*<sup>4</sup>

**Kikusha TAGAMI** (1753-1826); eighteenth century. An accomplished artist: poet, painter, calligrapher, musician. Widowed at 24, she made a courageous decision for her time: she shaved off her hair and started to travel across her country.

The night star, feminine symbol *par excellence*.

*the moon and I / left alone – / cool on the bridge*<sup>3</sup>

Hélène Leclerc: *four a.m. / in a corner of the tent / the moon*  
*quatre heures du matin / dans un coin de la tente / la lune*<sup>1</sup>

Ann Goldring: *the moon / coming along with us / from puddle to puddle*<sup>4</sup>

At times, we look for the moon without finding it.

Terry Ann Carter: *underground parking / no space / for the moon*<sup>4</sup>

**Hisajo SUGITA** (1890-1946); twentieth century. All her life, she was tortured by the idea of combining her roles as spouse and mother with her calling as a poet. Like many women, she combined many tasks. She sometimes considered divorce. She died in a sanatorium.

*she mends socks / not quite a Nora / this teacher's wife*<sup>3</sup>

In this poem, of course, Hisajo is alluding to the heroin of Ibsen's novel, *A Doll's House*.

Louise Vachon: *polyandry / far too many socks / to pick up*

*la polyandrie / beaucoup trop de chaussettes / à ramasser*<sup>1</sup>

Hisajo: *haiku poet, / caring mother – / this summer I'm a wreck*<sup>3</sup>

Monique Parent: *on the furniture / a film of dust / the page still white*<sup>1</sup>  
*sur les meubles / une pellicule de poussière / ma page toujours blanche*<sup>1</sup>

Winona Baker: *breast self examination / a moth batters / the screened window*<sup>4</sup>

Hisajo: *my illness ebbs – propped by a wrecked boat / I bathe in the sun*<sup>3</sup>

**Masajo SUZUKI** (1906-2003); twentieth century. Masajo did something that just wasn't done in the nineteen thirties: she left her husband to join her lover. The relationship lasted forty years... until her lover died. She wrote numerous haiku celebrating the love of her life.

*on the seaside dunes / other people in love... / lingering daylight*<sup>10</sup>

Joanne Morcom: *rain on the roof / the rhythm of our lovemaking / slower paced*<sup>11</sup>

Janick Belleau: *seashore / a hundred-year-old couple / seated in eternity*<sup>13</sup>  
*bord de mer / couple centenaire assis / dans l'éternité*<sup>13</sup>

**Nobuko KATSURA** (1913-2004); twentieth century. She was in Osaka when it was bombarded in 1945. She published nine collections and won several prizes. An advisor to the Modern Haiku Association celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

*women's hearts / touch one another – hanging / plumes of wisteria*<sup>3</sup>

Carole Melançon: *talking under stars / in the convertible / living room open to the sky*  
*discuter sous les étoiles / dans le cabriolet / salon à ciel ouvert*<sup>1</sup>

**Niji FUYUNO** (1943-2002); twentieth century. Haiku poet and illustrator, appreciated for her great sensitivity. Deceased too soon in 2002.

We, as women, are often drawn by water – another one of our characteristic symbols.

*Spring Day – / from the bottom of the water / grasses call me*<sup>5</sup>  
*Fête de printemps – / du fond de l'eau / les herbes m'appellent*<sup>14</sup>

Louve Mathieu: *my fingers in the water / time passes / and the river*  
*mes doigts dans l'eau / le temps passe / et la rivière*<sup>1</sup>

**Madoka MAYUZUMI** (1965- ); twentieth century. Her idol was none other than Hisajo SUGITA. She successfully founded and edited a haiku magazine for ten years. Its name was *Monthly Hepburn...* an homage to the fiercely independent actress, Katherine Hepburn. At the present time, she hosts a Tokyo TV program on haiku. Her influence on the young is vastly appreciated by poets of previous generations.

She is interested in the modern but in the mother-daughter relationship as well.

*Mother's Day – / I end up making / my mother cry*<sup>3</sup>

Dorothy Howard: *endless scales / on the neighbour's flute / my mother ironing*<sup>4</sup>  
*gammes interminables / de la clarinette du voisin / ma mère repasse*

Inner life goes much further than I was able to say or read this evening. I hope nonetheless that my presentation has given an inkling of the secret world of women poets be they from Japan or from English or French Canada.

Before leaving, please allow me to quote a poem by Hélène Bouchard that addresses us all, soul-sisters, whether clad in kimono, jeans or a Chanel suit.

*scarf or burka / outside in the glacial cold / we are all one*  
*cagoule ou burqa / dehors sous un froid glacial / toutes les mêmes*<sup>1</sup>

I'll conclude by mentioning that, this weekend, we have the opportunity to weave tighter links between us, even more so as Jessica, Micheline, Diane and I will be here knotting exchanges.

I thank you for your attention. I would like to respond to your comment.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Regards de femmes – haïkus francophones*, Janick Belleau (86 auteures et 283 de leurs poèmes inédits); Association francophone de haïku (Lyon) et Adage (Montréal), 2008
- <sup>2</sup> *L'Heure du thé*, Diane Descôteaux ; éd. Karedas, Paris, 2008
- <sup>3</sup> *Far Beyond the Field – Haiku by Japanese Women*, Makoto Ueda; Columbia University Press, New York, 2003
- <sup>4</sup> *Carpe diem*, sous la direction de Francine Chicoine, Terry-Ann Carter & Marco Fraticelli; éd. David & Borealis, 2007
- <sup>5</sup> Mon adaptation.
- <sup>6</sup> dont Hélène Cixous, Annie Leclerc, Louky Bersianik. Rendons aussi hommage à Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Madeleine Gagnon, France Théoret.
- <sup>7</sup> *Haiku Canada Review*, 3:1
- <sup>8</sup> *Chiyo-ni, Woman Haiku Master*, Patricia Donegan & Yoshie Ishibashi; Charles E. Tuttle Co, September 1998; *Une poétesse japonaise au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : Kaga No Tchiyo-jo*, Gilberte Hladorge; éditions Maisonneuve, Paris, 1936; *Chiyo ni, bonzesse au jardin nu*, Cheng Win Fun & Hervé Collet; éditions Moundarren, Millemont, 2005.
- <sup>9</sup> *GONG 19 – revue de l'Association française de haïku*
- <sup>10</sup> *Love Haiku – Masajo Suzuki's Lifetime of Love*; traduit par Lee Gurga & Emiko Miyashita; Brooks Books, Illinois, 2000
- <sup>11</sup> *Erotic Haiku*, compiled and edited by Hiroaki Sato, English/Japanese, Japan, 2004
- <sup>12</sup> *L'Érotique poème court / haïku*, Micheline Beaudry & Janick Belleau; Biliki, Bruxelles, 2006
- <sup>13</sup> revue *ellipse mag no 77* ; responsable / guest editor : Janick Belleau; *haïku et poèmes courts au féminin / haïku & short poems by women* ; New-Brunswick, 2006
- <sup>14</sup> *Haiku Anthologie du poème court japonais* ; présentation, choix et traduction de Corinne Atlan et Zéno Bianu ; Gallimard, Paris, 2002