

Synesthesia Literary Journal 1:1

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Marilyn Chin's *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*
by Breana Marshall



Award winning writer Marilyn Chin's 2009 novel, *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*, tackles some intense themes such as race, class, sexuality, and sibling relationships. Chin brings her readers into the lives of her characters through a series of anecdotes, parables, songs, and personal character accounts. The short sections that comprise the novel make it more engaging, easier to read in sections, entirely more entertaining, modern, and a book that demands publicity.

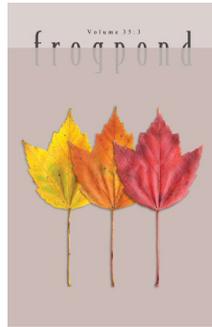
The novel's fragmentation provides an ease with which one can take breaks from reading the text. If a reader is forced to take a break from reading, he or she can easily pick up the book again later and open to a new section with a new narrator, but continuing the theme from where they left off. One section in particular recounts three dreams, all of which involve the protagonist's sister, Mei Ling, who always seems to appear in her sister Moonie's dreams to "interrupt [Moonie's] happiness." Each dream tells a different story and each story is connected through the idea of sibling rivalry. This way, somebody who stops reading after one section will be able to pick up where they left off with the same theme. Chin's creative style provides her readers the ability to become distracted without confusion, something not afforded by most novels of generic chapter-by-chapter form. Had she simply written a storyline that chronologically flowed throughout her novel, her readers would more than likely be caught in the monotonous routine of being interrupted and being forced to read the same chapter of a book over and over again.

Breaking the monotony further, Chin writes her book in seven sections, all of which are composed of smaller pieces. Even the second section that takes on the form of a smaller novel within a novel has chapters focusing on everything from "a hippy-dippy-looking dude" to a Kahlua Pig, each chapter making up a portion of a larger story about a food delivery. Thus, even when reading the novel-esque portion of Chin's text, breaks are allowed and the reader is not lost when picking up the book where he or she left off.

In terms of entertainment, Chin's novel is diverse in that it appeals to a great variety of people. With sections varying in length, tone, perspective, theme, and narrator, there is undoubtedly something for every reader. In other words, somebody who dislikes one genre will find multiple other genres within the same novel that may be more enticing.

Essentially, Chin's text is diverse and interesting in its fragmented nature. It is not dry, dense, or inconsistent, but entertaining and easy to follow. With central themes and diverse narrators, Chin provides cohesion and multiple perspectives. She creates a novel that can be read all at once or in segments, depending on the reader or situation that each reader finds him or herself in. With so much cohesion and diversity in one work, readers will most likely continue to enjoy Chin's novel. Contemporary enjoyers of parables, short stories, novels, or poetic language will all enjoy this book, which is not something that can be said of every text.





The beauty of simplicity and brevity found in haiku cannot be compared to any other poetic form. In this issue of the international journal, *frogpond*, the reader is enchanted by contemporary haiku at its best. You will enjoy a greater understanding of how a small poem can be rich with imagery and meaning. The following poems heightened awareness of nature and humanity expressed in a few words. In the following one-line haiku, notice how Mike Spikes has connected the world of nature with lingerie making this poem a haiku genre called, “senryu.”

insect in a spider’s web her lacy lingerie
~ Mike Spikes, Jonesboro, Arkansas

The next two poems by John Dunphy and Roberta Beary show subtle humor in their 3-line senryu. Beary has used a lowercase “i” to minimalize the speaker; a convention of the haiku writer’s humility.

carnival sideshow—
staring at me
the mind reader yawns
~ John J. Dunphy, Alton, Illinois

tour bus
i lie about
everything
~Roberta Beary, Bethesda Maryland

The delicacy of close observation is apparent in the next two poems:

the trill of a wren
a petal falls slowly
into my tea
~Sandi Pray, Robbinsville, North Carolina

origami
all the buildings
folded by the quake
~Brenda Roberts, Fort Worth, Texas

What seems to be an easy form is actually complex and challenging for the haiku writer and reader. If you want to understand more about haiku, you will find Charles Trumbull's essay to be a valuable gift. He is the scholarly editor of *Modern Haiku*, (the largest haiku anthology in America) and he presents an excellent view of what an editor looks for as seen in his essay, "Meaning in Haiku." His text is a comprehensive lesson worth second and third reads. He writes: "Trying to pin down 'meaning' in haiku is like trying to nail Jello to the wall." Then he proceeds to delve into the topic. On other pages you will find a haibun and other haiku poems by Trumbull.

This issue includes an interview with Dr. Akito Arima, the renowned haiku master, Japanese brush-painter, and physicist. Michele Root-Bernstein chatted with him at Asilomar's sand dunes on a bench overlooking the Pacific Ocean. She writes, "At the Fifth Haiku Pacific Rim Conference held September 5 – 9 in Pacific Grove, California, participants had the privilege of attending a reading by the well-known Japanese poet, Akito Arima. Author of thirteen books of haiku and haiku master of Ten'i, one of the most prominent haiku groups in Japan, Dr. Arima has served as president of the Haiku International Association and played a leading roll in reaching across the borders of haiku practice. *Einstein's Century*(2001), a collection of his poetry in English translation, has been praised for "a certain traditional elegance and...delicate, confident cosmopolitanism. A new selection of his haiku appears in English translation in *Bending Reeds*, the Yuki Teikei Haiuj Society Members Anthology for 2012." Michele has cited examples of his poetry from *Einstein's Century*.

Here is a traditional sensei haiku:

buying hydrangeas—
the river the color
of dusk

As opposed to an instance of contemporary or gendai haiku:

tulip petals dropping...
one of them the ear
of Vincent Van Gogh

Toward the end of the interview Root-Bernstein asked Dr. Arima a question about physics:

Root-Bernstein: "My question, what new age is dawning?"

Dr. Arima: "New age? In physics? You ask me the most difficult questions? (Laughter) Last month a very important discovery was made; the origin of mass was finally solved. But still in the universe there are many steps of development we don't understand yet. Particularly important in the life sciences, why is there life, why do living things have memories? Another important, if minor, question concerns the asymmetry of life. Do any of you have your heart on your right? One among 100,000 people has the heart on the right side of the body. If physical law were strictly obeyed in life then we would have to have the same number of people with hearts on the right as on the left fifty/fifty. But living things seem to break the symmetry very severely. Why is this so? Nobody knows. By the end of this century, however, those questions will be solved."

Root-Bernstein: "And in the meantime, we may use haiku to contemplate the beauties of asymmetry in living things?"

Dr. Arima: “Yes.”

Were you to meet Dr. Arima you would be pleased to find that he is a humble man who loves to laugh. Here is the signature haiku from Dr. Amira’s book Einstein’s Century:

the Dog Star:
Einstein’s century
comes to an end

Turn a few more journal pages to discover other forms of haiku such as Haiku Sequences, Haibun, Renku, Tan Renga, Yotsumono.

What’s missing? To a reader who is new to haiku it would be helpful to have a glossary of terms and a Table of Contents, although there is an Index of Authors in the back. Otherwise, this journal is well-crafted, and presents a high quality of writing. The offerings are vast including 17 brief book reviews, a “Readers” page, an “Editors” page, event reviews, a calendar of upcoming events, and announcements of contest winners. There’s even a whimsical comic strip. If you’d like to enjoy and understand haiku in a not-so-small nutshell, this journal is for you.

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Barton Smock's *hiatus newsletters*:
Marrying the Precious and the Profane
by Christopher Gorrie



Barton Smock's recent collection, *hiatus newsletters*, is an assemblage of poems from three previous collections (*the paper dolls have been cutting your hair*, *Grief of Arm*, and *Angel Scene*) as well as a presentation of a number of newer poems. At times Smock's style can be allusive and difficult to characterize or pigeonhole, but each line keeps your attention rapt and leads your imagination to something new and unexpected. Smock is playful, sincere, and always enchantingly perceptive.

hiatus newsletters begins with a "statement" that runs the gamut of linguistic and euphonic expression, while foreshadowing the intensity that follows with phrases such as "Talent is a mime on a mountaintop" and "Careful with my dreams." It serves as both an address to the reader and an authorial reflection. The poet is essentially saying "Here's my mind, deal with it."

Smock's poems tend to be of two distinct types: imagist sequences and prose poems. Many deal with faith and family issues, yet others stray from these themes and instead work to evoke the mystery of perception and things left unsaid. The strongest sections of the book are the poems chosen from *Grief of Arm* and *Angel Scene*.

§ § §

from *Grief of Arm*

This section begins with a prose poem titled "lukas has as samuel lapp" that explores femininity from a detached perspective, almost like that of a camera:

I wondered at that point had I heard, ever, a man
speak. a song came to me but it was tucked as in a church.
...mr. ford bends the boy's finger in the police
station but not backward, instead forward, instead very maternal.

This excerpt shows a poet who is wondering if he has ever been around a "real man". Smock moves on to confront the difficulty of finding true solitude in "man sitting":

went he
to be alone
with his thoughts
but never
arrived.

This is, in effect, Smock asking the reader to ask themselves if they have ever truly been alone. The poet speaks of our perception of time and separation in “ballpark”:

once you are absent, your absence
is long.

Remember the age-old phrase “out of sight, out of mind”? Well, Smock just pushed it a step further. The single finest line – a tightly-knit dramatic punch – in *Grief of Arm* appears in the poem “fiction”:

I prefer god’s early work.

Grief of Arm presents a poet who has an ability to address intense themes with simultaneous conviction and whimsy. At times, Smock seems to give voice to things we never know how to put into words, and he does so with impressive brevity.

§ § §

from *Angel Scene*

The next section of hiatus newsletters markedly refines the skill shown in *Grief of Arm*. These poems are tighter, clearer, and more complex. The first poem, “from the prayer book of uncommon disorder”, may be the best in the section. It complicates the universal fear of death with ease and leaves the reader with their own disturbing thoughts, as the poem ends mid-line:

satan, if you’re there –

“dear god”, a prayer of sorts, is another notable poem. In it, the poet expresses his discontent with the intangible love of a deity and sides with the power of tangible love in a one of his most emotionally complex lines:

I will fight you for my son.

The title poem of this section, “angel scene”, evokes an interesting idea and feeling in the reader – that even the smallest, unseen animal shares our deepest, subtlest longing: our constant desire for escape from the mundane into another world hidden from our senses:

when on the path
some small
unnamed
creature
senses
the oblivious
coming
of a man
and wishes
in its own

animal way
to be called
into ash
or bush

Angel Scene is the most matured section of the book in terms of style and composition. These poems show a certain grace, making them feel effortless-yet-intentional. They could be read again and again and offer something new each time.

§ § §

from *the paper dolls have been cutting your hair*

This section, which is the first in the book, is understandably the weak link. These poems come from Smock's debut collection and are less-developed than the later poems of *Grief of Arm* and *Angel Scene*. Some of the poems just fizzle out without much of an effect at all. For example, "beware the tyger":

whose stripes
mimic
prison bars
behind which
a man is on fire

The poem falls flat because its whole effect is based on cleverness. This is one of the major problems with this part of the collection.

Despite the prevalence of this issue, *the paper dolls have been cutting your hair* does have a few incredible poems in it. One of the poet's most evocative poems, "the infidelity of strangers", is here:

the pull of her stockings
to the book in her lap –
the English teacher
your wife
could've been.

One of his greatest full sentences is in this section as well, at the end of the prose poem "revenant":

we spool the dark from outside, wring
it over a glass.

Another mentionable gem is the prose poem, "the winners of midwestern gameshows", which is composed entirely of unfinished sentences. A chilling line sits at the poem's climax:

had we cut the palm, not the throat, of death.

§ § §

All in all, hiatus newsletters is a book unique both in its presentation and its sincerity. Smock shows that rare ability to explore oneself and express what is found through a language one can truly call their own. There is no identifiable filler in the book, and it keeps your mind moving in every direction at once. With hiatus newsletters, Smock has proved himself as a unique and serious force to be reckoned with in contemporary poetry.



An Interview with Barton Smock
by Christopher Gorrie

Hailing from Columbus, Ohio, Barton Smock is a poet, a husband, and a father. His work spans six full-length collections, as well as a selected poems book. His poetry is unique, perceptive, and at times startling. You can find his work on his website at <http://www.bartonsmock.com>. He also runs a blog, <http://kingsoftrain.wordpress.com>, and an amateur poetry journal, <http://pornsad.wordpress.com>.

Gorrie: What first brought poetry to your attention?

Smock: My father singing gospel songs while driving and my mother explaining to me what she thought the line ‘miles to go before I sleep’ meant. These two memories were with me when I first picked up Mark Strand’s dual publication of *Reasons for Moving / Darker* which gave ghost frame to some things I’d been hanging onto.

Gorrie: Did your interest in practicing poetry as an art form grow gradually or suddenly?

Smock: It was something I always left unfinished until 2005/2006 when on some social media outlets I found certain communities of writers who were actually finishing works and titling them. After that, it was a daily thing. An urgent thing.

Gorrie: How does inspiration come to you? Does it come from reflection/meditation, or through life experiences?

Smock: I’d say both, and I’d say others as well. It never feels like an arrival.

Gorrie: What does your writing process look like?

Smock: I have a static word document with lines, and themes, and explanations of those lines and themes. I make it a point to read and reread them. When actually writing to finish, I scroll the document down and either try to write from memory or actively try to avoid writing about my subject. The poems of others that have stayed with me have in them a great avoidance, a sudden thing, or both. In both process and end result, I try to remain.

Gorrie: How do you know a poem is finished?

Smock: When I find it difficult to remove anything else from it.

Gorrie: What is the hardest thing you encounter when writing a poem?

Smock: The moment, early or late, when I’m not sure who’s speaking.

Gorrie: What poem of yours is your favorite and why?

Smock: My most recently written. Because it is usually the one I’ve written for my children.

Gorrie: Do you have any favorite authors/poets? What are your favorite poems/books of all time?

Smock: I don't know if I'm woefully under-read or just too whimsically over-read, but: James Tate, Charles Simic, Andrew Hudgins, Sherwood Anderson, Judy Jordan, Julia Leigh, Cormac McCarthy. Simic's *A Wedding In Hell* and *The World Doesn't End*; *After The Lost War* by Hudgins; Leigh's *Disquiet*; McCarthy's *Child of God*.

Gorrie: Which of your books do you believe is your most successful and why?

Smock: *Mating rituals of the responsibly poor* seems to have gotten the best response so far in terms of feedback and people actually purchasing it. However, the collection before it, *Angel Scene*, is the one I believe more successfully marries my sense of the precious and the profane.

Nine Young Poets and How You Can Help
by Seretta Martin

The Border Voices Poetry Project is celebrating 20 years of Poetry fairs and Anthologies: Poem by students & featured renown poets!

What is so remarkable about this program?

Border Voices sends poet-teachers into school throughout San Diego county and Nevada. An added bonus is the ITV poetry programs that are viewable on your home television and streamed into classrooms via Community Access TV. These shows feature young poets elementary through high school level on TV reading their poems and discussing poetry with celebrity poets and the founding director, Jack Webb who is also a poet and journalist.

Why is this program important?

The Border Voices Poetry Program has promoted literacy and helped hundreds of children to find their voice and creativity through poetic expression. When I first heard about it and attended a fair I was hooked. I said to myself, "Here is a mission that I can support. I want to be part of it and help children in this way." Since then it has become my mission too! I have been teaching with Border Voices and its close counterpart, California Poets in the School for almost a decade and also serve as the Assistant Director and Fair Manager. In recent years the program has had cuts in funding due to the recession and fewer grants. If people realized how much good this does for our young people in terms of self esteem and scholastic growth I think that they would be happy to support the program. This is why I have put together a mini-anthology to show you some of their imaginative poems. At the end of the anthology you will find information on how you can support the project.

The annual BORDER VOICES POETRY FAIR will be held Saturday, June 1st at the San Diego Office of Education Campus, Building 2 by the flag pole, 6401 Linda Vista Road, San Diego, 92111 from 10 a.m. – 12 noon. It is free to all! Be sure to check the website later this Spring for details at bordervoices.com.

Where can you read some of the student poems before attending the fair?

Right here! Sit back and enjoy reading this selection of Ekphrastic poetry (inspired by visual art) by students in Border Voices Poetry Workshops at Spreckels Elementary School, San Diego, California.

NINE YOUNG POETS
A mini-anthology compiled by Seretta Martin

"The Dark Salon"
after the painting *Proserpine* by Christopher Young

In the painting a lady is eating a poison peach.
It is juicy and gushes down her chin
onto her blue velvet gown.

Brown hair falls in curls against her white forehead,
her nose is sharp like the peak of a mountain,
and her lips are pouty and full.
Above her a black and silver moth hovers,
behind her a chalkboard glows and
a lovely grape vine is growing in the spotlight.
I am the moth that has come to save her
from the poison peach with a sprinkling
of vermilion sea salt from a far-away land.

Jessica Gibson, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Marisela Sparks

* * * * *

“The Woman Who Lives on Wall Street”
after *Freefall*, a sidewalk drawing

People walk over her every day.
She wears lots of clothing all at once
and has a barcode skirt.
The woman of Wall Street is frozen
in the same position.
She smells like the pleasant aroma of hot dogs
from the vendor cart down the endless street.
Her left leg is bright orange and her right leg
is still being drawn by the chalk artist.
The woman waits for the earth to quake
and pop her out of the sidewalk.
I am the two-dimensional woman
who lies on the sidewalk, aching to be —
three-dimensional.

Dylan Love, Grade 4, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Elizabeth Stewart

* * * * *

“The Staring Child with a Bloody Nose”
after a surrealist painting

I was born in the wild and left here
with a violet dress and
a black balloon.
I was born, but not raised by anyone.
Like a dead person,
I stare and don't move.
What will happen to me?
I fear that no one will find me
in this field of tall grass.
It's just me,
standing alone, holding
my black balloon.
Parachute-men are landing
all around me. I stare and don't move
in this field of tall grass.

Jagger Lee, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Sarah Bobier

* * * * *

“Colors, Colors Everywhere”
after the painting *The Couple* by Jennifer Main

I see lots of blue and orange faces,
green feet, and almost every
color of eyes.
The faces are close enough to see
the whites of their eyes —
eyes that stare at me as if they
don't trust me —
as if they want revenge.
They smell of foreign fruit
and strange candy.
I hear the colors whispering
like they are alive.

Ryan Matson, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Marisela Sparks

* * * * *

“The Horrible Queen of Hearts”
after a painting on a greeting card

I am a shaggy white dog
on top of the queens head
nesting in her red licorice hair.
The queen’s round, fat face
looks like a clown.
She wears a dress of black
with silver lace everywhere
except down the middle
which is tainted red.
The horrible Queen of Hearts
has hearts locked up on a chain.
She drags them with her.
The licorice tastes so good —
I can’t stop eating.
When the licorice is no more
the Queen will fall down dead.
Then I will be the Dog of Hearts,
until I am no more.

Cameron Blevins, Grade 4, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Elizabeth Stewart

* * * * *

“Free-Range Jalapenos”
after a surrealist painting

The white chickens have dark red Mohawks
and matching red goatees that quiver.
They are trying to steel smooth white eggs
from the omelet table.
I am trying to stop them,
but I’m at the bottom of a bowl.
I am a green jalapeno. They are the cool ones!
I struggle to get out of the bowl, and out
of this dirty chicken-coop kitchen.
The chickens must be trying to get the eggs
because we stole from them.
Wait! I forget that I can squirt—
SPICY JUICE.
Let’s do it! I squirt it everywhere!
All the other jalapenos jump

and bail out of the bowl with me, free!
Free-Range Jalapenos!

Griffin Bonner, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Michael French

* * * * *

“The Growing Red House”
after a contemporary Italian painting

In the country there is a bright red house
on a green, healthy grass field
that grows on and on for miles.
It’s a peaceful, playful house
with yellow trim.
Outside is the sound of delicate birds
singing their best songs and the air
smells like ripe strawberries.
The sun is rising.
I am the house and yes,
I certainly do grow.
My roots are deep,
but I’m not the only thing
growing around here —
an argument is growing!
I’m confused and sad to hear my people
at war with each other. They scream
at the top of their lungs.
I feel my door slam —
Ouch!
They seem to forget that I have seven windows,
I can see everything.

Pia Ashworth, Grade 4, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Elizabeth Stewart

* * * * *

“In a far-away forest in the world of Adonna Khare...”
after a drawing by Adonna Khare

...there are beasts with backpacks and curious creatures.
Do you see the lion with a ring in his nose?
He has human arms and hands. His eyes are purple.
In one hand, he holds a miniature moose with sharp horns,
and with his other, he has me on a leather leash.
Okay, if you must know, I am a spiteful alligator
with black eyes. Do you see me?
And do you see the green parakeet on a swing
made of hair from the lion’s thick mane?
And over there—
there’s that little guy with skinny legs who looks like a bat.
He has tied a rope around my mouth so that I can’t eat him.
Is the pelican that is curling our master’s mane with his beak
my only hope for escape from this hideous lion’s horde?

Corbin Baly, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Michael French

* * * * *

“Peace on Mars”
after a painting by Susan Detwiler

In the forest of Mars the sky
looks like a blue dragon in flight.
The world is spinning blue and green.
A panda is eating crisp bamboo,
and its baby is laughing
at the flying parrot cackling above.
A lion is yawning at a giraffe.
The jaguar is singing to an armadillo.
I pet the crock swimming in the river.
I am the baboon swinging from tree to tree
eating spring leaves that grow around me.
I feel the peacock tickle me with its tail feathers.
Leaping onto the elephant’s back, I ride.
In the moon’s glow —
Peace comes to the Mars forest.

Ian Hicke, Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary
Teacher: Millie Weil

* * * * *

Often there are school children who are shy and unsure of themselves. Perhaps they don't excel in their studies and have difficulty with writing and reading. Much to my delight, I've found that I can reach some of these children with poetry and suddenly they find themselves able to overcome the barriers that were holding them back.

For example, one of my third grade students was frustrated and cried when he thought he couldn't write a poem. That was my chance to help him succeed and feel good about himself. I sat with him during recess and helped him craft a poem. I told him what a wonderful imagination he had and praised him. The next day when he got up in front of the class he puffed up his chest and read his poem with amazing authority. I was joyful along with him. Later his classroom teacher said, "He has severe emotional problems, is on medications and that was the first time he has ever read in front of the class."

See how magical poetry can be in the lives of children!

If you would like to make a donation to this program so we can send teachers into the classroom to teach poetry, please contact the Border Voices Hotline: 619-293-2546 or visit the home page of Border Voices: bordervoices.com Under "Make a Donation", click on the "secured online form."

Toni Morrison at the Moxie Theatre
by Breana Marshall



The Bluest Eye – Toni Morrison at Moxie Theatre February 23, 2013

I entered the crowded Moxie Theatre on February 23, 2013 with lines from Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* swirling in my mind. Admittedly, apprehension overtook me at first. How could director Delicia Turner Sonnenberg adapt Morrison’s intertwining plots into a two-hour production on stage? Certainly, I thought, something important will be missing. Fortunately, I was mistaken in my preconception. Not only did Sonnenberg cast her production of *The Bluest Eye* with the perfect female leads from Mo’Olelo Performing Arts Company, but the characters of the novel that playwright Lydia Diamond intentionally left out were not missed in the slightest.

Of course the first character who comes to mind at the mention of *The Bluest Eye* is the “aggressively ugly” Pecola Breedlove. While the actress who played Pecola in the production, Cashae Monya, is not ugly in the slightest, her acting abilities led the audience to feel Pecola’s emotions and pain in a way that I didn’t think possible. Reading Morrison’s novel of incestuous rape, racism, and family dysfunction left me in a state of sad reflection, but Monya was able to bring comedy to Sonnenberg’s stage through Pecola’s naivety.

Monya was not the only female lead who grasped her audience’s attention through the power of laughter. The MacTeer sisters, played by Lorene Chesley and Marshel Adams, take Pecola in during her time of need and keep their viewers entertained during the entire production. Teaching heartrending truths, like “love is never any better than the lover,” the MacTeer sisters entirely balance comedy and tragedy through their quirky personalities.

What Monya, Chesley, and Adams brought to the stage made up for the lack of certain characters that Morrison wrote, but that Diamond eliminated. Sammy Breedlove, Pecola’s brother, did not appear in the Moxie Theatre’s adaptation of *The Bluest Eye*. In consideration to the overall plot of Morrison’s novel, Sammy is almost completely irrelevant. For this reason, his presence was not missed by the Mo’Olelo Performing Arts Company’s audience. One might even judge Sammy’s absence as an improvement to Morrison’s story as he appears in the novel as a secondary and underdeveloped character.

Sammy’s nonexistence is paralleled by that of Mr. Henry, the MacTeer’s tenant. Mr. Henry’s presence in Morrison’s text is necessary only as means of a comparison between one instance of molestation and another. Because Sonnenberg so artfully directed Pecola’s rape by her father, Mr. Henry’s rape of one of the MacTeer sisters is unnecessary. The act against Pecola is heinous enough in itself that no contrast is required to strengthen its atrocity.

Two hours after I had entered the Moxie Theatre to watch Morrison's novel transformed into a play, I exited the same theatre with a new perspective of the tragic literary classic. Chuckles were heard consistently throughout the theatre as Pecola and the MacTeers comically commanded the stage. With so much emphasis on the female leads, the secondary male characters seemed irrelevant and were not missed. At the end of the performance, each viewer had laughed, cried, and smiled along with the actresses adorning the stage.

Contemporary Haiku: “It’s not 5-7-5”

by *Seretta Martin*

For a better understanding of contemporary American haiku, here is a portion of the program presented Billie Dee, a San Diego based haiku poet and retired physician.

Exploring the One-Breath Poem:
Discovering Your Haiku Mind

A haiku is a short poem that uses imagistic language to convey the essence of an experience of nature or the season intuitively linked to the human condition.

–Haiku Society of America, 2004

What is the “Haiku Mind”? A cultivated mode of observation and appreciation, focusing on the everyday, often-overlooked details of daily living. We learn to set the ego aside in order to better see, to experience life ecstatically, to discover those “aha moments” in common settings and activities. Basically, the active haiku mind encourages us to “stop and smell the roses,” to live in the present moment. Many writers who take up haiku claim that it has changed their lives.

A Few Basic Haiku Principles

Forget what you learned in school: that little 17-syllable aphorism divided arbitrarily into three lines of 5-7-5. We are writing in English, not trying to emulate Japanese syntax or style. Recognizing the differences in language, we will explore the haiku form using common native speech to express our wonder and awe of the natural environment, our engagement with life, using the concrete sensory images that surround us daily.

- o Form: the length of a haiku poem is equal to one breath.
- o 5-7-5 (17 syllables in three lines) is generally too long for English Language Haiku (ELH); remember our natural spoken meter is iambic pentameter, i.e., 10 syllables per breath. Most contemporary haiku are about 10-12 syllables, though they can be much shorter. Minimalism is currently in vogue.
- o Avoid padding to meet some predetermined syllable count.
- o Japanese sound units are very short, not equivalent to English syllables.
- o English is filled with diphthongs and inflection. Japanese isn’t. We use punctuation where Japanese haiku poets use uninflected cutting words (kireji).
- o Season words/phrases (kigo): Reference to a season is essential in haiku but not in senryu.
- o Caesura/kireji and juxtaposition: We generally use a pause (caesura), often indicated by punctuation or line break, to balance the poem and allow the reader room to ponder; the visual equivalent of whitespace. There is no English equivalent for Japanese cutting words (kireji), though this is a key element to JLH construction. Indeed, kireji are not used in everyday Japanese speech, but are used only as poetry devices. Juxtaposition: usually two images are employed in a fragment and phrase format; the poem resonates in the caesura between them.
- o Diction and Voice: Employ straightforward, everyday language; big words and technical terms tend to introduce unintended humor.
- o POV (narrative mode): traditionally, haiku have used an omniscient narrative voice, though many contemporary haiku use first person (singular or plural); more personalization is a recent trend.

- o Haiku are usually written in present tense, representing a focused moment in time rather than a lengthy time span.
- o Avoid clipped, abbreviated, text-message-like diction. Use articles and conjunctions in a natural manner, especially in the phrase segment of haiku. Some mid 20th Century poets tried to imitate Japanese text, which employs no articles, plurals, or conjunctions (sounds like reading a telegram, sometimes pejoratively called “Tontoism.”)
- o Direct Sensory Imagism: Generally, avoid abstract words or phrases, e.g. “beauty,” “wisdom,” and “evil,” etc.
- o Show, don’t tell; try to avoid the direct expression of emotion; rather, learn to elicit those emotions in the reader through imagery.
- o Objectivity: “Just the facts, Ma’am;” avoid judgmental words or phrases; trust the reader to draw their own conclusions.
- o Lineation: Traditionally, ELH are written in three lines, though there are other variations we will explore in future workshops. Line one is short, line two long, line three short (usually).
- o Punctuation: Let parsimony be your guide. Line breaks and indentation are often employed to indicate caesuras. Most common punctuations are the em-dash and ellipsis.
- o Capitalization: Proper nouns are commonly capitalized, though first words usually are not.
- o Haiku: Mother Nature verses human nature.
- o Senryu: Casual tone and humor, or ribald subject matter is more characteristic of senryu.
- o As noted earlier, kigo are often omitted from senryu, though not always, as we see in the following haiku by Billie Dee where “first cherry buds” is a Spring kigo:

first cherry buds
 our newborn
 opens her fists

~Published in Scent of Rain, 2011

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Do you want to write haiku?

Join us at our monthly meeting and workshop:

Haiku San Diego meets 2nd Sunday

Open Door Bookstore 12:30 – 2:30 p.m.

(Corner of Cass and Missouri, Pacific Beach, CA)

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Regional Organizations:

Haiku San Diego: <http://haikusandiego.com>

HSD Yahoo Group (send your email to Naia to join: naia01@yahoo.com):

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/haikusandiego>

Southern California Haiku Study Group: <http://socalhaiku.org>

SCHSG Yahoo Group (sign up to join): <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/socalhaiku/>

Yuki Teikei Haiku Society: <http://youngeaves.org>

National & International Organizations

Haiku Society of America: <http://www.hsa-haiku.org/>

The Haiku Foundation: <http://www.thehaikufoundation.org/>

Haiku North America: <http://www.haikunorthamerica.com/>

World Haiku Association: <http://www.worldhaiku.net/>

World Kigo Database (Dr. Gabi Greve's massive project): <http://worldkigodatabase.blogspot.com/>

Online Forum/Workshop Sites

Haiku Hut (sign up to participate): <http://haikuhut.net>

