

communication. The haiku poet writes nothing of his inner feelings, only of the perceptual experience which provoked those inner feelings. Yet if the reader has had similar experiences, the haiku will be able to provoke similar feelings in him or her as well. By sketching out only the essential details of a scene, the poet deliberately leaves blank spaces to be filled in with the reader's own emotions and experiences. Haiku doesn't "exist" in the words themselves, but in the shared experiences of the poet and the reader. The poem itself is simply a link between two persons.

In this sense, then, haiku has become truly international, going beyond particular geographies and cultures. By narrowing in on a moment of individual human experience, haiku opens up the way to universal human experience. A haiku which can only be understood by people from the same culture is simply an unsuccessful haiku. It fails precisely because of its inability to communicate on a personal, human level — to touch our common humanity. Really good haiku build bridges across the oceans, channels between the ponds. *Something of the poet* will be communicated to the reader, even though the reader may not be able to grasp *everything* the poet intended (let alone all the meanings which go beyond what the poet intended). The ultimate reward is in how much one's life has been enriched for having made the effort. ■

1. Ezra Pound, *Collected Shorter Poems* (Faber Faber 1952)
2. From "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens, in *The Norton Anthology*, p. 249.
3. From Hitch Haiku by Gary Snyder, *The Back Country* (New Directions 1968).
4. Jack Kerouac, in *The Haiku Anthology*, ed. Cor Van Den Heuvel (Simon and Schuster, Inc. 1986), p. 112.
5. Randy Brooks, *Barbwire Holds Its Ground* (High/Coo Press, 1981), no page. [Haiku about Kansas].
6. Edward Tick, *On Sacred Mountain: Vietnam Remembered* (High/Coo Press, 1984).
7. One-word haiku by Cor Van Den Heuvel. In Van Den Heuvel, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
8. Opening hokku from the solo renga, "In Your Panties," by Hiroaki Sato, in Sato, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
9. Raymond Roseliep, in *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English* by Hiroaki Sato (Weatherhill, 1983) p. 213.
10. French haiku by Jocelyne Villeneuve [Canadian], *The Haiku Handbook* by William J. Higginson (McGraw-Hill, 1985) p. 82.
11. Yugoslavian haiku by Vladimir Devide. In Higginson, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
12. Arabic haiku by Abdelhadi Barchale [Morocco]. In Higginson, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

**FOR FURTHER READING:** William Higginson's *The Haiku Handbook* was an indispensable source of information for this article. *The Haiku Anthology*, edited by Cor Van Den Heuvel, contains some of the best haiku in English published to date. The title of Rod Willmot's compilation, *Erotic Haiku*, speaks for itself. Hiroaki Sato's *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English* surveys the various historical and cultural transformations haiku literature has undergone. For uninitiated readers of Japanese wishing to understand the subtleties of real haiku in English, there's Sato's new book *Haiku in English: A Poetic Form Expands*, written in Japanese, complete with Japanese translations of English haiku.

# THE NEW HAIKU

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARLENE MOUNTAIN

by Richard Evanoff

MARLENE MOUNTAIN, American haiku poet living in the mountains of eastern Tennessee, has been one of the most innovative and influential writers of haiku in English, having contributed to the expansion of both its form and content. Her work has appeared in numerous books and anthologies of haiku in English, as well as in *Newsweek* and various literary magazines. Her most recent book, *pissed off poems and crosswords*, takes haiku far beyond her achievements in the book which first brought her critical acclaim, *the old tin roof*, published in 1976.

*You lived in Matsuyama in 1970 and had some contact with Japanese haiku at that time. Are there any rules for writing haiku in Japanese which you feel should be maintained in writing haiku in English?*

I don't know the origin of the phrase "moments keenly perceived," but I find it meaningful and something to hang onto as my haiku "change". However, I wonder if either Japanese or Western haiku poets truly write (or have ever written) to the fullest of that idea. The haiku I see being

written are about *some* "moments keenly perceived," i.e., the pleasant ones. Also *some* of "the here and now," *some* "things as they are," and so on. As far as Japanese haiku are concerned, readers in the West are limited, of course, by what the translators have chosen to translate for us — but most of what I've seen has been about the "nice side of life". I have a lot of trouble with just that view. Since there's not been a particularly interesting definition of haiku that I've seen or heard, or at least one which seems to encompass all that we experience in our heads and hearts and through our senses, I just write what moves me — and call it haiku.

*You've been credited as being one of the first writers in English — or in any language (Japanese included) for that matter — to treat such themes as feminism, politics, and eroticism in haiku. How good a vehicle do you feel haiku is for exploring these areas?*

In August 1977 I experienced a spiritual/mental/emotional explosion — more a rebirthing — in which whatever concerns I had about "form" simply disappeared, and at the same time I began questioning my

attitudes and limitations regarding "content". It was really a rebirthing of "life" — one that led to a reevaluation of the myths and lies I'd been led to believe about practically everything, and especially about what had been left out of the record, or distorted, about women. I was permanently and deeply affected, and this in turn has affected what I write. Up until then I'd mainly been influenced by those who stressed such Zen-like attitudes as "oneness," "nothing special," the "wordless poem," and so-called "egolessness" in haiku. Although I had responded to nature, I did so from these intellectual and aesthetic concepts, unaware of the larger reality of nature being poisoned and ravaged. Also, I realized that I'd spent thirty-seven years on earth man-watching and promoting male ideas (male art, etc.), and had hardly paid a bit of attention to what women had said or done. It was a traumatic experience to perceive all of this in myself, and led to my not wanting to help hold up the male sky any more. What's happening in my own writing is a result of a very personal quest — in part, I'm trying to sort through how and why I'd gotten so one-sided before, i.e., so male-

oriented. Not that I don't already know — we're all imbued with and consumed by patriarchy.

Over the years, to use a catch-all term, "social concerns," including the environment and peace/weapons, have appeared in my writing. To be swamped by "concerns" when one has been writing "nothing special" for many years is a pretty strange, rather awful, predicament. It was a huge conflict for me at first and for years following, and apparently for some fellow poets who don't like or understand my shift — not that I myself fully understood it at the time. As my visual consciousness and "political" awareness change, so do my haiku. What I try to do is to keep up with myself. I think haiku ought to be able to encompass all that is human. It will just take a bit of getting used to by some, as it has for me.

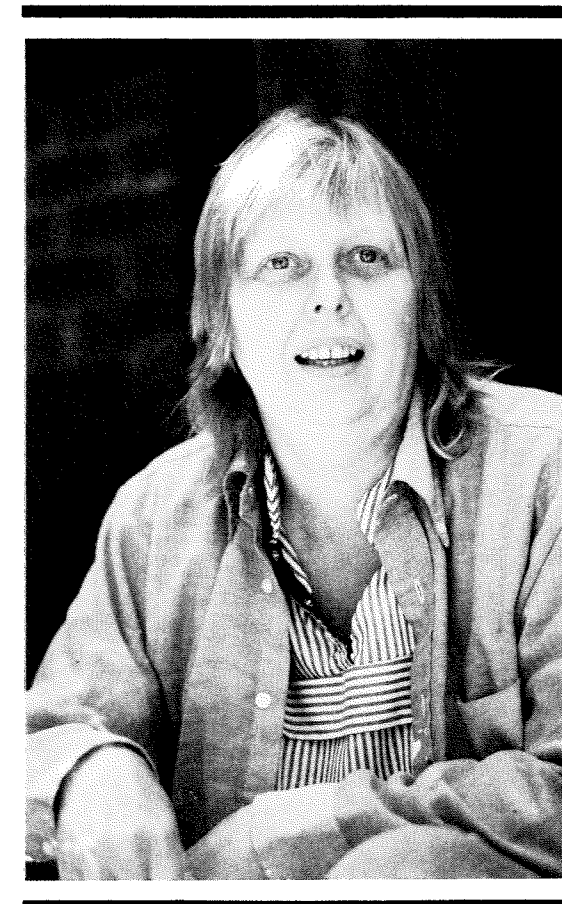
*Weren't you the first to write erotic haiku?*

I wrote a few in 1969 and 1970, but I think of Michael McClintock in later years as one who truly wrote powerful haiku about love and sex (as well as war). Perhaps I was the first, though, to write about personal aspects of sexuality on a continuing basis. And of more intimacy. Perhaps, too, the first woman. I consider the haiku I've written over the years — whether women's, "unaloud," other visual, 5-7-5, "dadaku," sexual, social/political/protest, anger, minimal — as just plain "moments". There are both advantages and disadvantages with using these other labels, but the main point, I think, is to stay open. Each of us has to find her own haiku, which to me means finding her own self.

*Where did you get the ideas for some of these innovations, such as "unaloud" [unalloved] haiku and "dadaku"?*

The "unaloud" haiku began about 1974 and over the next four or so years I wrote more than 70 of them, as well as other kinds of visual poems based on phrases rather than on single words. One of the first "unaloud" haiku, "raindrop,"\* is rather obvious; others are more complex. The majority, again, were instant "moments keenly perceived," even though many took considerable time at the typewriter. Another early one was "violet."\*\* I suddenly saw the word itself within the flower — forming it. Sometimes the reverse would happen. As I was reading a word in a nature book or dictionary, I would see the shape of an animal or plant, or some aspect of it.

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RICHARD H. CONNORS

The "dadaku" also began around this time. I loosely defined them as spoofing some of the "rules" of haiku, in particular as related to Westerners blindly adopting the 5-7-5 syllable "form". "Dada" (French for "hobby horse") is, of course, the "anti-art" movement as exemplified by Marcel Duchamp and others, and *ku* in Japanese means "phrase." Later on, I also spoofed some haiku of "the Masters," and more recently *kigo*, or season words.

Also around this time I began working with what I call "tear outs" (nature words and shapes from magazines pasted on paper). All of these approaches helped me get away from the typed three lines and back into the random placement of words — and, moreover, back to an interest in one-line haiku. Some of the "tearouts" have collage shapes with a typed one-line haiku. All of this led to my first book of haiku, *the old tin roof*.

*What's the advantage of writing in one line in English haiku? Japanese haiku is, of course, traditionally written in one line — albeit with the familiar 5-7-5 syllable/sound breaks — but your "at dusk hot water from the hose" is frequently anthologized as an example of one of the first (and finest) "one-liners" in English.*

I don't like the term "one-liners." If I didn't think that haiku as a genre needed some of the content I've added to it, I might just say

that I write "one-liners" and simplify a lot of things. But, I prefer to call them haiku. Over the years thinking in one-line has become natural and automatic. Once in a while I feel something in three lines, but I usually don't bother to write it; I figure it will come out as one-line eventually. I also like writing in one line because there's no fussing around with how a haiku looks — it's just there. At various times I've used extra spacing between words or phrases, but not for many years; and I also try to avoid punctuation and capital letters. After writing a lot of minimal haiku, many of the "new content" haiku got longer — though I try to keep the letters/spaces to sixty or less. Yes, I sometimes count those — but not syllables! — because most haiku magazines can't handle long lines, so a word or two is dropped to the next line, which looks odd. It seems ridiculous to have to base a poem on the size of a magazine page. At the same time the limitation does keep one aware of using the fewest words possible.

*How about your haiku sequences? They also seem to go beyond a minimalist approach and yet are actually quite different from traditional renga [linked verse]*

My first haiku sequence was published in *Modern Haiku* in 1971 [which won a prize].

## A ONE-LINE HAIKU SEQUENCE

by Marlene Mountain

### i grow older

1  
i grow older radioactive wastes live 250 centuries  
old pond a frog rises belly up  
year ends another 96 billion lbs of hazardous waste  
universe love it or leave it

2  
after 'the day after' these are our leading minds?  
build down my intelligence offended  
balance of terror not how a kid spells peace  
marine recruiter won't phone again

3  
not against men in general just generals and  
autumn nears a gun sale  
full moon oh to hex the world back from them  
we should have stayed seaweeds

4  
farther & farther from the world still i hear the cries  
homeland for women  
if i were to paint goddess now her angry look  
unable to change the world autumn begins

from *pissed off poems and crosswords*, ©1986/9986 by  
Marlene Mountain, available in Japan from New Leaf  
Publishing, 14-10-407 Sakuragaoka-machi, Shibuya-  
ku, Tokyo 150.

It was in ten three-line groupings and called "Fishing". I later wrote other sequences, including "Cabin Sequences" and a group of "tear outs" called "Japan Series." In January 1978 I believe I instigated the first one-line renga, which had as its opening link: "snow falling old woman's banjo slightly out of tune". The one-line sequences I wrote later — the first of nine so-called erotic sequences was in 1979 — came about, in part, because I couldn't say all that I wanted to say in one line (a "minimal" line at that). The lines would flow out in the form of a sequence, or I'd collect single haiku and try to fit them together, or I'd just stick in a line here and there whether it fit or not. I didn't particularly understand what I was doing, but it seemed to be the only way I could manage to get in

all the new content I was concerned about — at that time the expression of woman as physical (sexual, mental, etc.) and spiritual (Goddess, Earth), and eventually as protest. Really, though, there's no separation of these "concepts"; it's been an organic process in which the sequences have allowed for a fuller expression of "moments".

*In pissed off poems and crosswords you wrote "art of course has no rules to break." In the absence of formal restrictions on the writing of haiku, what then distinguishes haiku from other types of poetry?*

I don't feel that art itself has rules. There are always "rules" or "attitudes" surrounding

an art — in the air or chiseled in stone — usually put forth by academics (my spelling: hackademics) or by those who have found something comfortable and don't want to see change. In the long-run, however, we *impose* rules, on ourselves and on art. It's been my own unconscious "buying" of myths/concepts/rules that I've struggled to get out from under — so I don't feel I'm breaking any rules of art, but only my own self-confining ones. At various times, it seems as if I've boxed my own haiku in; but as I as a person have opened up to other interests, so has my haiku. One has to do what one does, regardless of what others do. Art is fluid — at least it should be — otherwise it couldn't possibly exist. But then I don't try to make art or write haiku. In fact, I try not to — but it seems to happen anyway. I'm not trying to come to art, but to back away from it.

*Where do you think contemporary haiku in English now stands in relation to traditional Japanese haiku?*

It seems Westerners at first were trapped by three-lines or, more precisely, by three-line *translations* of Japanese haiku. Some poets/critics seem to think that the West's tradition has become three lines, but I don't think Western haiku has been around long enough to have an honest tradition, either of form or of content. We've spent a lot of time getting beyond "things Japanese," but it now appears we're finding our voice — our varied voices. Even better than opening up the way a haiku can look, has been the searching for our own "spirit" within haiku. I'm not completely satisfied with the developments, and although I very definitely appreciate what I've learned from the Japanese haiku, at the same time I have conflicts about it. It is, however, my point of reference. Personally, I have no tradition and don't want one. My worst writing has come about when I've *tried* to write haiku, or was overly conscious of the attitudes supposedly inherent to Japanese haiku. The more I let go, the closer I come to writing haiku, i.e., those "moments," whether from personal experience or from my perceptions of the world as it (unfortunately) is. In the long run, art is a documentation of one's sense of time and place, of one's relationship to the world. I like to think of haiku not as an escape through selective reality but as a record of one's involvement in life — the overall reality. ■

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## BICYCLES OF KYOTO

by John Einarsen