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# EDGE

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# summer 1990

## Theodore Enslin

### Appreciation

Perhaps it is  
 simply the  
 trim figure  
 of someone unknown  
 which delights me  
 in passing  
 that we do not  
 will never  
 make contact  
 of any kind  
 unknown that it might  
 be something  
 more if we could  
 or no matter  
 this walk  
 more than distance  
 we vanish  
 each of us  
 separate  
 reminding  
 of any the others  
 we knew.

*Theodore Enslin's work has encompassed more than 40 books since the first was published in 1958. He has spent much of his life in New England, USA, in particular Cape Cod and Maine. His latest book is Antiphony.*

## Boadiba

### Wanga

Poison on a thorn  
 In the knot of the rope  
 That ties your goat.

Poison  
 mixed with poison oak  
 So you scratch  
 and ruin your blood.

Poison airborne on feathers  
 from a dead chicken  
 You kick  
 Off your doorstep.

Second-rate magic  
 Nothing more  
 Than chemical war.

*Haitian poet Boadiba now lives in San Francisco.*

## Takashi Yamada

*translated by John Solt*

### Centipede

I want to put a shoe on each foot

### Snow

A small silver key comes fluttering down. Thinking it is from heaven, I try to catch it but it fades in the palm of my hand.

### Fish

sacrificed hands and legs to the gods

*Takashi Yamada, a relatively unknown Japanese poet who died in 1956, is still remembered by some for his short stature, small breakfasts, and brief poems.*

## Noemie Maxwell

### Euclidean Walks

*after a painting by Magritte*

Fallacy, a promenade,  
 and the crank of artifice, turning, integral,  
 utter out these two.  
 They confer, miniature, under crows conferring,  
 and in perfect equilibrium.  
 Where the data of roofs is so clear  
 they must meet here.  
 Where the drill of that tower, conical, spins,  
 this is a necessary blueness,  
 rising to the top of things.  
 Suture, frail system split, sewed,  
 strains out no bicycle but one line,  
 that window!

*Noemie Maxwell, poet and co-editor of Sub Rosa Press (306 E. Woodland, New Milford, N.J. 07646 USA), has published Ivan Arguelles, Christopher Munford, and the unofficial poet laureate of Brooklyn, Stanley Nelson. She reads from her work on the Sub Rosa Cassette, issue #21-22 and has work in the Well/Free Anthology.*

## Michael Carlson

### Human Interference

A few pigeons exit the car at Edgeware Road.  
 The platform seems to soften & melt as  
 We pull away. The walls of the tunnel lose  
 Their blur, become clear as we come to a stop.  
 We sit. After a while faces move into focus,  
 Take on expressions, search the car for room or air  
 Or something to read. Eventually someone talks.  
 A person has fallen in front of the train.  
 We will have to wait. London Transport regret  
 This delay, which they say is the result of  
 "Human interference". We get in the way.  
 Many of us are already late.  
 We are getting later all the time.

## Nico Vassilakis

### The "I" Resurrection Poem

there are strands of string  
 hanging off my body  
 the loose ends are attached  
 to everything I own

so undo?  
 the knots I have  
 tied?  
 to  
 the objects?  
 in this room?  
 and  
 watch me?  
 float away?  
 unburdened?

*Nico Vassilakis is a prolific poet whose most recent collection is Vowel (meemaw & pawpaw press, Seattle, 1989), and an editor dedicated to "that network of tiny and informal presses which keeps risk-taking poetry alive." He co-edits the Sub Rosa Press, recently guest-edited Ice River, and is unsettled back in the New York City area. His sister, Maritza, lives in Japan.*

### The Downs

Long walk up a small hill, the sight  
 of hills farther off, of chalk &  
 other changing elements of fact,

a landscape I could have brought  
 with me, in my mind, instead of  
 the landscape I find, still, surprised

I don't know why I should be  
 when I look, though not, in a sense  
 looking for it, & it's there.

*Michael Carlson was born in 1951 in New Haven, Connecticut, USA, and educated at Wesleyan and McGill. He has lived in England since 1977, and presently works for ABC Sports. His third collection, Homage to Gibbon, was recently published by Northern Lights.*

## George Evans Ryokan As An Old Man

Bones are pine  
their elbows crook  
and nothing straight  
but the trunk  
where it's rooted is stable.

Birds darting  
without concept  
of difference in earth or sky  
are pure motion.

The dawn bell  
counts men  
and leaves.

A wave,  
another,  
water rashed  
against stone—

behind my shoulder  
a wave

and then a dream.

*George Evans is the author of four poetry collections—the latest, Sudden Dreams: New & Selected Poems is forthcoming from Coffee House Press. He lived in Japan for two years, was twice featured in Origin in the early 80's, and has work in recent issues of Conjunctions, Sulfur, Ironwood, Scripsi, and Stand.*

## Robert Brady

### Solanum Tuberosum, from a Dream

O homely spud  
muddied orphan  
lumpish ragamuffin  
from the far side of the furrows  
poor relation to noble Eggplant  
Cardinal Tomato  
Magical Mandrake  
and elegant Belladonna,  
though often mistaken  
for a clod of dirt  
you have a soul as pure  
as any Irish saint's;  
you send up for blossoms  
white stars from the ground.

O subterranean emissary  
earth-ivory  
friend to the poor  
when helped from your homespun jacket

## John Solt Five Poems

the city burns any plans  
we have of discovering it

lying naked  
in another town

i ran up a large tab  
at the dry cleaner's

how much of our lives  
we cared nothing  
for the world  
outside  
our joined skin

arms of trees wave incandescent  
the silver moon reflected in  
autumn soup

electricity spilling down the shoulder  
of a sea horse  
(again)

last thought  
of a dying man

chasing a hat  
in the wind

*John Solt is a poet, translator, scholar, editor, and archivist of avant-garde poetry and art. John edited the magazine One Mind in Tokyo in the 70's. The poems here are from his mss. Merkin Tufts in the Red-Light District.*

you are welcomed as well  
by the well-to-do  
who love your symphonies of starch  
your crisp gold coins  
and invite you to their tables  
as formal white companion  
to the tawny mignon.

O egalitarian tuber  
like us you are a child of earth  
that yet contains the stuff of heaven;  
and, mashed into clouds  
with a bit of cream,  
the peaks you achieve  
from such lowly beginnings  
nourish and inspire us all.

*Robert Brady, poet, writer, father, is fiction editor of the Kyoto Journal. His book Further on This Floating Bridge of Dreams was reviewed in the Winter '88 EDGE.*

## Chie Yamanaka

### The Ruins

*Chie Yamanaka, originally from Kochi, is now living in Aichi Prefecture. She has been teaching English at senior high schools for some 20 years. She writes poetry both in English and Japanese.*

When did the circular motions stop  
And why?

A "should have been";  
And if it really had been so  
Another "should have been".

It is possible  
These two were drawing circles  
Somewhere crossing  
Each other's orbit.

The circles  
Found in the ruins of a city  
Where a house of possibilities used to stand.

## Adam Schonbrun

### A Jewish Valediction Forbidding Mourning

When my father died I turned to Judaism.

In the Midrash the Rabbis ask:  
Why was Judah given the blessing  
of kingship?

They answer:  
When all the other brothers  
saw their father Jacob  
weeping, ash and sackcloth,  
they fell to the earth  
& began to repent.

Judah, however, went out with his cane  
& got himself into the bed of Tamar.  
This, we learn later on, as Jacob blessed  
his sons, was the sign of kingship—

And this is also why I took that redhead  
to the duckpond in my parents' old '73 Bonneville  
and untangled myself from my tzitzit and held her  
warm girl's body till it felt great to be alive  
and the 8th day of mourning was my happiest also  
because somewhere out there on that moon-lit pond  
full of Canadian geese beneath these willows  
I heard my father laugh saying, that a-way son,  
you're the ace, doin' fine, ease your mind:  
And our car rocked for 18 years old I was,  
18 is life, and we tenderly made love for all  
we were worth.

## The Delicious One

When I bite into this plum  
I'm transported  
to an orchard  
in Northern Galilee.

The next bite I for once  
Thank God & The Earth  
for something this great  
& sweet & though it's  
no good for my colon  
I go & eat another.

As she sleeps  
beside me  
now, in the dark,  
my love, will she  
learn the blessing  
over the plum?  
Its sweetness touches  
her lips. "My sweet honeysucker lips." My son,  
let him know  
if all else fails  
eat this & then see if he can bless.



*Adam Schonbrun's first book was awarded the Ron Adler Memorial Fund prize for a young poet at the University of Haifa. He was the recipient of the 1988-89 Katy Lehman Fellowship for Poets at Penn State University, where he is now teaching. He recently came close to Japan by renting the film Tampopo and drinking a lot of saké.*

## Hyperfiction: The Computer and the Imagination

by Michael O'Rourke

"Hypertext fiction is an attempt to produce 'nonsequential' . . . stories, much like the kind of thing Cortazar has in mind with *Hopscotch*, or Milorad Pavic in Dictionary of Khazars." —Stuart Moulthrop

A hypertext novel is to a conventional novel as exploring a city on your own is to a guided tour. It is no longer linear because one certain progression through the text is no longer dictated. Every door suddenly opens onto any other door as you move through this (brave) new world.

The reader explores and wanders at will. Gone is the author with his ill-fitting tour agency suit and little yellow flag held aloft ("This way please, quickly, we still have an art museum and a plot twist before lunch"). Gone are the plastic name-tags on our lapels, with our names written in below the tour company logo, identifying us as Readers, cute, passive and helpless, viewing this world ("is this Paris or Dublin, anyway, Honey?") through the tinted windows of our air-conditioned bus.

### Chaos and Infinity

I digress, but digression is what hyperfiction is all about: the science of chaos is busy working to unite all the disciplines—biology, physics, chemistry, meteorology, and on and on. The scientists have discovered basic questions, previously insoluble, common to them all.

Through these previously-unrecognized properties, they are extracting new order from chaos. An important concept here is that of fractals, of endless branching. Take a snowflake, before it melts, and look at it under a microscope. Its perimeter will have a certain configuration. Enlarge it, and it will look the same. It will look the same at any level of magnification—one branch of the crystal, when examined more closely, has little branches along its edge, which, when examined more closely, have still more little branches.

The same with a coastline—when you measure an island's perimeter, do you measure every little inlet and bay, and if so, do you measure every little nook in the inlet, and every rock, and every crack in each rock? Like a snowflake, or a city, an island is infinite.

Hyperfiction aims at this same infinity. Theoretically.

### The Minoan Conundrum

"The novel, it now seems to me, is a child of print, and will disappear as print disappears." —Robert Swigart

The goal of hyperfiction, defection from the linear guided tour of the novel, is nothing new. The hypertext novel has a long and distinguished pedigree; it varies, of course, depending on which hypertext novelist you ask, but the books you will hear named are generally not hard to guess—anything digressive, puzzling or opaque. Nothing by, for instance, Robert Ludlum.

Take three authors: Sterne, (James) Joyce, and Cortazar. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne challenges linearity through digression. In Joyce, this is taken further. In *Hopscotch*, Julio Cortazar approaches the problem from a different direction, allowing at least two different readings of his novel: the first is conventional, ending with chapter 56. The second hops around, in the following order: 73-1-2-116-3-84-4-71-5-81-74-6-7-8-93, and so on. Cortazar is playing with relationships between the chapters, or elements, of his novel.

This is the seed of the idea behind most hyperfiction, in which any chapter, or NIT ("narrative unit"), can be linked with any other. It is also the seed of one of the concepts behind *Oulipo* (*Ouvroir literature potential*), a French literary movement and the main competition for hyperfiction's claim to deconstructionist vanguardism. In "Life, A User's Manual," a stunning *Oulipo* novel by Georges Perec, linearity is, if not eliminated, at least forgotten in a maze of plots, characters, puzzles and mysteries, all referenced in an index and approachable from the a multitude of directions. It, and its like—Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars*, and anything by Borges—are evidence that the novel in book form is not exactly dead, yet.

But I digress.

### Dostoyevsky and Super Mario Brothers

". . . A primary ancestor is the computer adventure game. . . Go left and die, go right, then go south and die . . . and so on. . . Very little plot, not much character, lots of troll bashing and treasure theft." —Robert Swigart

Infinite branching is not what hyperfiction is all about, although it has its roots there, in the

video arcade. It shares the goal of becoming "interactive." Michael Joyce, author of the hypertext novel *afternoon* and co-developer (with Jay David Bolter) of Storyspace, the program it was written in, maintains ironically that the only truly interactive systems at present are implanted pacemakers and defibrillators, with user and system responding to each other equally often.

Stuart Moulthrop, Professor at Yale and author of the hypertext novel *Chaos*, traces the electronic pedigree of the hypertext novel as follows: "Electronic text . . . opens itself to more sophisticated forms of interactive reading, pushing beyond the game model of the early computer fictions (from *Adventure* to *Zork*) toward what James Carse calls the 'infinite game,' the game whose object is to continue the play, which is something narrative has from time to time attempted."

### How It Is Done

"When I first began using a word processor as I wrote fiction, I imagined it would be possible to write a novel which changed every time the reader read it. It was never difficult to conceive of such a thing, only to think how to circumvent the constraints of linearity and entertain multiplicities that print-bound creation models taught us to suppress or finesse." —Michael Joyce

A hypertext novel is constructed of narrative units, or NITS. In absolutely non-linear writing each NIT would be logically connected to every other NIT, enabling an infinite number of possible combinations. In practice, this is an impossibly complicated task (foreseen by Borges in his short story "The Library of Babel"), and the actual network is not quite so extensive. A hypertext novel is read by moving from NIT to NIT. Each reading will vary depending on the order in which successive NITS are picked.

### Noh Theater and the Concept of Branching

Japanese Noh theater is, surprisingly, a good example of structure based on fractal branching. A day of performance consists of five parts: an auspicious/god play, a revenge/warrior play, a passionate love/woman play, a deranged/mad person play, finishing with a demon dance or another auspicious play.

In turn, each play is further divided into the same five parts: auspicious, revenge, passionate love (always at the center), deranged, and demon dance or auspicious again.

This subdivision into five parts continues on down, through scenes, sub-scenes and, in theory, to lines, sentences and words.

This is the principle of fractal branching: similarity of structure at all scales.

Construction is topographical, not linear.

Various writers have found various solutions for this problem of an infinite "proliferation of NITS." Deciding that infinite branching wasn't enough, hyperfiction pioneer Rob Swigart says, "*Portal* [his hypertext novel] chose to limit the NITS, make them conform to a linear sequence with the illusion of non-linearity."

In *afternoon*, a hypertext novel by writer Michael Joyce (who, with Jay David Bolter, developed the hyperfiction software, Storyspace), these connections are made slightly differently, through "words that yield." We read a scene:

*I try to recall winter. <As if it were yesterday> she says, but I do not signify one way or another.*

*By five the sun sets and the afternoon melt freezes again across the blacktop into crystal octopi and palms of ice—rivers and continents beset by fear, and we walk out to the car, the snow moaning beneath our boots and the oaks exploding in series along the fence line on the horizon, the shrapnel settling like relics, the echoing thundering off far ice. This was the essence of wood, these fragments say. And this darkness is air. <Poetry> she says, without emotion, one way or another.*

*Do you want to hear about it?*

We proceed by selecting a word. If the word we select is a yielding word, we cue the NIT it is connected to. If we select a non-yielding word, or no word, we will move along on a default course.

The result is a novel that has a different construction each time it is read. Michael Joyce has conducted public "readings" of his hypertext novel *afternoon*, following paths determined by members of the audience, and says he is surprised each time by the form the story takes.

### The Future

"I see a human evolution rather than a literary one: a cognitive and imaginative capability in an entire civilization. . . This capability consists, first, of the simultaneous perception of multiple dimensions; and second, of the freedom of the individual, which becomes the coexistence of multiple motivations. . . Print is one-dimensional (linear), and subjugates the individual to the will of God (the writer). Hypertext is multidimensional and recognizes the authenticity of each individual's chosen path." —Rod Willmot

You could go out today and buy a Macintosh personal computer, along with Hypercard software, and get to work on your hypertext right now. Arguments against doing this are incompatibility and obsolescence of hard- and software. In the year



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or more it takes you to complete your hypernovel, things have advanced to the point where your software is, at best, no longer state of the art.

An example of incompatibility is the problem the owner of an IBM PC has trying to read hyperfiction written for an Apple, and vice-versa. (It's impossible.)

At the moment this is a clear advantage of a book. You just pick it up and read. You don't have to be computer-literate, just literate. You can read it on the train, you can read it in bed, and you don't have to turn it off when you're finished.

But to any objection based on the actual, physical technology of it, there is generally a response. The invention of the computer was the main step, and that has already been taken. Anything else will be refinement, and will happen soon enough. Standardization will come about. The obsolescence problem will be tackled or adapted to. Computers are shrinking and getting faster at the same time. Calculator-sized memo books are already here, with interchangeable data cards—some day books will be read in the same fashion. A conventional book will be read by scrolling through the text, a hypernovel will be read by hopping across the topography of NITs.

The weightier objections to hyperfiction lie elsewhere, questions about the effects and implications of hyperreality.

—Because there are two directions hyperfiction will go: the first, as I've just mentioned, is back to the book. The second is the creation of hyperreal environments, multi-sensual interactive theaters.

Anything else falls somewhere between the two. Take Michael Joyce's vision of the evolving, infinite book: changing based on previous decisions made by the reader, on time of year, or anything else you choose. Incorporating text input by the reader, after which it disappears, only to resurface months later in a changed form. Hooked up to a network from which it will periodically download new text.

Hyperfiction is a response to a need, the need to address the intricacy and chaos which has always surrounded us, and which has always been one of the goals of art. It is also a response to a more recent condition, one in which the manner in which information is processed and related has become as important as the information itself. It is art for the computer age, with all the shortfalls, dangers and potential revolutions of that technology. It is both an exploration of a new mode of thought (non-linear), and an application of the results of that exploration.

As with any new technology, it could be liberating (empowering the imagination through its interactive quality) or deadening (replacement of the imagination through artificial imagination); and as with any other new technology, we will no doubt continue to find elements of both.

## "The Willing Intervention of the Reader"

an interview with hyperfiction author Michael Joyce

*Hyperfiction is such a new form that nearly anyone now involved qualifies as a pioneer. Still, Michael Joyce (afternoon), along with Rob Swigart (Portal), Stuart Mouthrop (Chaos), and John McDaid (Uncle Buddy's Phantom Funhouse) is at the center of the "inner circle" of authors working in interactive, computer literature—hyperfiction. Rod Willmot has written "Evergreen," a hyperpoem.*

**Edge:** Are computer fiction and hyperfiction the same thing?

**Joyce:** Yes and no. Some computer fictions are networked or distributed readings, asynchronous serials, or whatever. I prefer the term multiple fictions to hyperfictions, though Multiple Fiction has an unfortunate acronym and people anyway are seeming to settle on IF or Interactive Fiction, which I think misleading because it brings to mind adventure games and, as Jay Bolter says in his new book *Writing Space* [Erlbaum, forthcoming], "We are just emerging from the nickelodeon era of interactive fiction, and the computer's equivalent of the nickelodeon era of interactive fiction is the adventure game—which costs rather more than a nickel."

At any rate, where the two terms merge is in the realization that fiction upon the screen is what Bolter calls topographic, i.e., "signs and structures on a computer screen that have no easy equivalent in speech." The text, even of a networked serial novel, is as much a manipulable thing—meaningful light—as it is conceptual abstraction. To the extent that all electronic text can be lifted, transmitted, processed, and grafted the two terms are the same.

**Edge:** Is hyperfiction the revolution some think?

**Joyce:** Yes, as soon as they think it. Seriously though, of course it is revolutionary. It's the first instance of what we will come to conceive as the natural form of multimodal, multi-sensual writing: a genuinely electronic text, not an electronic analogue of a printed text like a hypertext encyclopedia. Fictions like *afternoon* or Mouthrop's *Chaos* or John McDaid's *Uncle Buddy's Phantom Funhouse* can neither be conceived nor experienced in any other way. There is no print equivalent to *afternoon* and not even a mathematical possibility of printing its variations. I have "performed" my own text of *afternoon* any number of times in public readings where an audience member guides and/or responds to the choices other audience members make, and I am constantly surprised by the text which evolves as I read aloud what they form. This is in no way to

suggest that *afternoon* is random on the one hand or artificial intelligence on the other. Merely that it is formational.

We are, as some one of us has said, in the Late Print Age and these fictions point to the revolution long underway.

**Edge:** How do you see the genealogy of hyperfiction? Borges, Calvino, Cortezar . . . , Pavic . . . , Perec . . . , maybe Eco . . . ?

**Joyce:** Yes, all these and more. James Joyce, of course and before him Sterne. John Hawkes and before him Djuna Barnes and Ford Maddox Ford. Gertrude Stein, Pound, Charles Olson, John Cage, Martha Graham, Glenn Gould. Cornell boxes. A century of self-similar texts in a number of media.

Marc Saporta's *Composition No. 1* was published in France in 1962, and the English translation, a work consisting of about 150 unnumbered pages, appeared in the following year. *Hopscotch*, as you noted, was a hypertext.

To the contemporaries you must add Rushdie and of course Pynchon and Lessing. To the progenitors, you must add Willie Crowther and Don Woods whose *Adventure*, the original computer game/novel of the sixties was a multi-valent poem of space, much less a game than its successors are, much more an exploration of conceptual spaces and their relationship to language and action within the lives of real readers.

The layering of meaning and the simultaneity of multiple visions are comfortable notions to us. We are the children of the aleatory convergence. Just as the last two centuries have progressively disclosed themselves to us in the emergence of works of art and cultural coherences beginning in the previous *fin de siècle*, so too this 21st century we are already within, will disclose itself as having begun, hypertextually to be sure, in threads through the last two centuries. The longing for multiplicity and simultaneity seems upon reflection an ancient one, the sole center of the whirlwind, the one silence.

**Edge:** Is there any fundamental difference between novels such as these, which encourage multiple readings, and a hypernovel?

**Joyce:** Absolutely. The hypernovel or multiple novel requires rather than encourages multiple readings. It not only enacts them; it does not exist without them. Multiple fictions accomplish what these others could only aspire to, lacking a topographic medium, lightspeed, electronic grace, and the willing intervention of the reader.

## Featured Poet: Judy Katz-Levine

### III (GW)

#### Fourth Month Into Fifth

In the mirror I look a little like Harpo. Curly black hair and face tilted. Pellucid August morning. Heat wave gone. Curly hair of a child. I imagine cradling. Some kind of bird calls and souped up cars pull out. Sounds of his kicking, softest punches. Vibrations of a mute who sings. I dreamt of a girl with dark hair, girl sent away. Shouting in the school, "Inside, outside." Car doors slam. Secrets fly from the hands of my psychic friend. She pauses—long lakes of thought as she moves her hands, pulls luminescent popcorn from my future. It's the evolution unraveling as the small lungs ready. A bell in Harpo's smile. When you will push out. Your round head, your perfect feet, and wail.

### VII

She is I. Getting ready to multiply in flesh. Like smooth, tan seal sleeping on a beach of snow. Sunlight accumulates in the drifts. You hide from spears. Wrap your flippers around the waves. Red fish cruise through the clouds, telling stories of pain. She floats, waits. Eats honey. The hunger is hers, not hers. Not a craving not a desperate starving. A lapping of milk, meat. A bowl of pears. She is shaped like a pear. She is I. Photos leaping like red fish to the sun, juggled by a ghost. The ghost is a burning tree clustered with crimson, shimmering fish. It will be different this time, from the scars and wounds of your mother.

### VIII

A black crescent moon lives inside me. It sings in bebop. Making milk. The moon of a microscopic galaxy, it procreates. Notes like an arcade of spines the size of my palm. And I listen for the white moth eyelids. Touch the curve of pulsing blue branch, dream of breasts with warm streams of milk. Dance in the stomach a tango. My womb of shining comets, my bebop fetus, my second stronger heart, my autumn tango.

*Judy Katz-Levine has a book forthcoming this year from Saru Press and new work appearing in River Styx. Several of these Cynosure poems will be in a chapbook tentatively entitled, The Book of Isabel and Daniel, written in collaboration with poet Miriam Sagan and edited by Steve Jacobsen of Guerilla Poetics. She lived in Tokyo for a number of years, and her "kappa" poems were in the very first issue of EDGE.*

## Red Tigers Psalm (after Tamuz Salamun)

Red tigers  
leap out of my coffee cup  
massage the cold rain  
loping through wild violets  
and ferns  
I did not plant

My baby calls me  
high lilted cry  
he turns over  
grins  
I click my tongue  
to make a song  
stretching  
my body, leaning  
down to lift him up  
raise him high  
towards the chandelier  
the lights have gone out  
my bronx cheer  
wet on his belly  
he squeals

Red tigers  
flute ballads  
elongated  
shadows of a pianist's  
hands  
working in the dark

try whiskey  
for sore gums  
hair dryers  
turned low  
for rashes

endure mute awakenings  
at 3:00 a.m.  
walk half-naked  
and barefoot  
through all the rooms

once  
the cold, moist noses  
of blue deer  
emerged  
from snowdrifts

an insomnia  
of white lilacs  
arouses me now

## Lips And Names poem on July 11

For Paul, my brother

Lips are calling out the names of children, syllables  
of their names. This is what my brother  
says. A grassy path has been carved in light.

I love muteness, silence, stern and sober.

My son touches my face as he nurses, pulls my  
lips and pinches my arm.

Names are calling to the lips. She's my friend. She came  
in a dream and I didn't have to worry. She leaned  
over us as we slept in the car, blessed  
us for having our child, passed  
her hand across our faces.

Do I have a choice? That cat, Naima,  
lies down and I brush her. Peering  
over my shoulder, my son

watches every gesture, small  
body taut with  
curiosity. He  
gives a samurai  
yell. Naima  
slinks away.

Come home to me, Barry.

We have problems to solve in the beastly  
heat.

My brother flies to Paris, to  
Switzerland, to Monte Carlo, to  
Monaco. He calls me from the Riviera, his voice  
strong as Tibetan bells  
roaming through Times Square.

My brother says the channeler  
sees me. She's  
a musician with long  
silver-grey hair that flies loosely  
around her shoulders. She  
says I'll have another  
one. The spirits are pulling  
strings, shining  
their hands shaped like  
busted hearts

in a hurricane.

## interview

## The Way(s) of Haiku

A Conversation with William J. Higginson, Penny Harter, and Tadashi Kondo



Tadashi Kondo, Penny Harter, William J. Higginson, Richard Evanoff

William J. Higginson is the author of *The Haiku Handbook*, former editor of *Haiku magazine*, and founder of *From Here Press*. Penny Harter taught in the *Poets-in-the-Schools Program* and is a noted poet. Tadashi Kondo is well-known for his efforts to make haiku and *renku* more widely known in English. The following is a highly edited and condensed version of an interview conducted by *EDGE* Editor Richard Evanoff in Tokyo last year.

**Richard:** How has haiku influenced you each as poets?

**Bill:** Penny and I have two very different experiences. In my case haiku was my starting verse. It was the first poetry I encountered that consciously drove me to seek poetry in a broader sense. It was haiku that awakened in me the desire for finding that community of poets to whom I could relate as “family.” When I found William Carlos Williams, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, they were the family. They were the elders of the family that I wished to be included in.

**Penny:** I think haiku has helped to clean up my act in my longer poetry and made me much more aware of the necessity to be concise. I’d been writing long poetry for about ten years and then I encountered haiku. Unconsciously it influenced me, not only toward clarity, image, and conciseness, but also towards more awareness of seeing relationships, juxtapositions, and movement over that “spark gap,” which I like to sustain in a longer poem as well.

**Richard:** How did you get started with haiku?

**Bill:** During a course for the Air Force at Yale University in 1960, I heard an instructor recite *furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto* [Basho’s most well-known poem: *old pond . . . / a frog leaps in / water’s sound*]. Somehow I was immediately struck by this poem. It meant something to me that I couldn’t define. Early in 1962 [while in Japan] I discovered R. H. Blyth’s four volumes entitled *Haiku*, flipped it open, and very soon found *furu ike ya*. At that time I was very open to Blyth’s “Zen-full” interpretation, and particularly enjoyed the first volume of the *Haiku* set, because it focused on an overview of Japanese culture and how it came to produce the haiku. I didn’t start writing haiku until years afterward. I was translating—I call it translating in self-defense—because Blyth was not getting the com-

pression of what I think of as the very tough grammar of haiku. Not tough in the sense of being difficult to understand what’s happening grammatically, but tough in the sense of being very compact.

**Richard:** How did you get started Penny?

**Penny:** I was already writing poetry, met Bill, and got involved with the Haiku Society of America. Then I read some haiku, understood how to do them, and did them. It’s really that simple. I didn’t study about haiku. I think I just learned by osmosis.

**Bill:** She’s a natural!

**Richard:** It does seem as if your approach to haiku is very intuitive.

**Penny:** Absolutely. I’m intuitive when I write haiku, although I’m also more aware now of some of the things that define haiku for me than I could name when I began. When I began I was just doing them and there they were. I knew in my tummy whether they succeeded or not.

**Richard:** In contrast to Penny’s intuitive approach, it seems, Bill, as if you’ve been very interested in the use of language in haiku.

**Bill:** The thing that really impressed me—especially when contrasting what I saw in the Japanese with what I saw in Blyth’s translations—was that the grammar of haiku in Japanese is really spare. Frequently there is no obvious grammatical connection from one segment of a poem to another. Or if there is one, it’s ambiguous. For instance, *furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto* can be read either with *tobikomu* as the end of the sentence—the frog leaps in (and since you have the pond earlier, you assume that that’s the pond the frog is leaping into). But then you have *mizu no oto*. *Tobikomu* can be attached grammatically to the water. So I translate it *old pond . . . / a frog leaps in / water’s sound*. It doesn’t have quite the same effect as the Japanese, but it does what the Japanese does in that the focus can be on the “sound”; “sound” is the primary noun, everything else modifies and leads up to it.

**Richard:** So you get the image of the frog leaping into the *sound* of the water, not into the water itself?

**Bill:** Well, that’s what I say in the English. The Japanese doesn’t quite say that, but it’s very

close.

**Penny:** That’s sort of like the poem I composed in Iga-ueno [Basho’s birthplace] during our visit a few days ago: *arriving home / my feet / dust on the road*.

**Richard:** When you wrote that haiku you mentioned it as having come from “somewhere” [perhaps as a personal, psychic identification with Basho returning home three centuries earlier]. How does the psychic and the mystical fit into your work?

**Penny:** It seems that I have many voices. Some of them I recognize as my own, and others I have no idea where they come from. It’s what I call my AM and my FM channel. My AM channel is the everyday me, the poem that I am consciously constructing about something I have experienced or consciously fantasized. The FM poem sometimes comes so fast it falls out of the pen. Of course, I may look at it with an AM eye later and see if I want to shape it or not.

**Richard:** What actually comes to you is not the language, but the image, and then you put that into the language?

**Penny:** Well, I think they come simultaneously. I’m definitely seeing the landscape. It’s like I’m watching a movie. I see as if watching a slow-motion movie what’s going on, but I’m hearing words at the same time. I can deliberately access that, as I have done more than once. I can sometimes feel that it may be coming from the spirit of Basho or the spirit of Emily Dickinson. But who knows? Or it can just be coming from the deeper layer of myself that knows more than I do. I’ve *dreamed* poems. I’ve *dreamed* entire texts.

**Bill:** I’ve seen her wake up and furiously scribble in a notebook, trying to remember before the writing fades from her mind.

**Penny:** The problem is that after you dream it, if you haven’t retained it or if you haven’t dreamed the entire poem, you’re stuck with having to finish it while you’re awake.

**Richard:** Bill, you mentioned being interested in Zen. Does any of what Penny’s been talking about influence your work? In other words, are you coming at haiku more from the language, or as Penny seems to be doing, more from the image, more from the intuition?

**Bill:** Part of it for me is that I have an interest in literary history, particularly in influences and how they flow and what not. So on the one hand, the initial hook for haiku for me was the business of the language. As for this business with Zen, I have problems with Blyth’s position now and I’ve had them for years, because a haiku is really a poem. And when he goes on about a haiku not being a poem, he’s crazy. A haiku is a constructed object. It’s an *art*-ifact. It’s a fact made by art.

**Penny:** See, I don’t think what I just described has anything to do with Zen.

**Richard:** Well, not directly. I’m thinking more just in general terms of the mystical, the intuitive.

**Bill:** The *aha!* The *aha* experience, if you want to talk about it that way. Or the epiphany, if you want to use Joyce’s term. Sure, I think many, although not all, good haiku may have their origin in some kind of little click that hits you in the head.

**Richard:** Sometimes called the “haiku moment.”

**Bill:** Exactly. First hearing Basho’s frog poem was like *that* [slaps his hands]. Some of the poems I’ve written were like that. But with others, the experience of writing the poem became a process unto itself and it was a very involved process, compared to the supposedly “simple” result. In at least a few cases, the poem ends up creating its own previously-not-existing experience. This is a “made-up” haiku, if you will. Most people regard that as a pejorative. But I don’t regard that as a pejorative, provided there is an essential honesty about the elements that you’re combining and the richness of the new experience you create for yourself in that combination.

**Penny:** Well, that’s an intuitive thing.

**Richard:** In this case, the source being the imagination?

**Bill:** Imagination and memory, a mixture. One of the things we’ve done in teaching haiku to kids is to make them aware that there are at least three sources for haiku in your life. One of them is the here-and-now, which is perhaps the most common source in the experience of most people who write haiku on a regular basis. But there is also memory. When I first started writing haiku I immediately recognized that I had many, many memories from childhood, from young adulthood, that would be appropriate to encapsulate or somehow capture in a haiku. You try to focus the language so sharply that it will assist you in recreating some touch of that experience and hopefully also communicate some elements that may be meaningful to others as well. I think that the process of constructing a haiku, on the one hand, is practically like building a memory aid; on the other, it is building something that will create a paradigm that can be shared.

**Richard:** Direct experience, memory, and what was the third?

**Bill:** Fantasy.

**Penny:** I would say the same thing—the unknown.

**Bill:** I use imagination to mean all of those. To look at something and to make the image in your mind is imagination, as well as to remember. Even fantasy is a subdivision of imagination.

**Penny:** Who knows? My unknown may be a form of memory.

**Richard:** From the collective unconscious?

**Penny:** That, or reincarnation.

**Bill:** You get to the point where you get irritated with those who try to pin down which type of thing it is, because those are empty categories. It's experience, it's given. Whether it's given in the sense that it's dropped in your mind from who-knows-where or in the sense of the growing ability to bring words to an experience that you've been trying to capture, it's still given.

**Penny:** Yes, because when I wrote *the monkey's face / between my hands / winter twilight* I felt it. I lived it. I held the monkey's face between my hands. I remembered it. I did it. And yet I've never done it.

**Richard:** We talked about the idea of a haiku not expressing the emotion a writer has, but rather

as objectively presenting something.

**Bill:** I have an experiment that I conduct with classes when I try to make this point. I stand in front of the class and I say very slowly, "Sad . . . sad . . . sad"—I've got tears in my eyes. The kids are all laughing! I say, "Why are you laughing?" And it's because there's no stimulus. There's nothing there to make you feel sad except a person emoting at you, and that doesn't work. It's not honest.

**Penny:** I do it another way. I do it the 5-7-5 way [sing-songy]: *on the way to school / a dead cat was in the road / I felt very sad.*

**Bill:** Right! So what?

**Penny:** But then I quote Michael McClintock's poem to the students: *dead cat . . . / open mouthed / to the pouring rain.* The kids all go *uuggghh!* And I say, "See!"

**Bill:** —See, I didn't tell you how to feel. You were allowed to have your own feelings. That's the point. As a poet I don't want to control your feelings; I want to give you some possibility of experience and let you have your own feelings.

**Penny:** Some feel genuinely sad because they've lost their own cat. Others think, oh how gross. There's a whole range of responses. I'll say, "You can't see a 'beautiful.'" If you want to put into your poem the line "The sky was beautiful last night," I'll say right to your face, "So what?" What does that mean? All you're doing is telling me how you felt about it. You're not making me see that sky.

**Bill:** We have to modify this to a certain extent. It's true that there are some classical haiku, and in particular some haiku of Basho's, which name emotions. But they invariably do so in a context that gives you more than just the naming of the emotion. You get some sense of a passage of time or a physical place or whatever, that will provide you with some understanding of what it is that motivates that emotion. Without that, you're dead.

**Richard:** How do you think this relates to poems written out of the individual ego in contrast to poems written out of the collective ego?

**Tadashi:** I think this goes back to the issue of Zen and language. Zen has to do with not just

clearing the mind, but when we talk about clearing the mind, the content of the mind itself is ego. So if you try to clear the ego or clear the self, what's left? That's super-ego or super-self. Clearing your mind is not just becoming empty. When we interpret that level of experience in terms of a system of symbols—and we definitely need symbols to express that—description doesn't work, because that domain of experience rejects analytical representation. So we just have to directly point at it. And in order to do that, we still have to use symbols, the language. But the language is so made that it can only represent analytical concepts. So there is a conflict here. We choose to either use the symbol in an ordinary way or to use it in a particular way, as a kind of meta-proposition. Since propositions reflect our analytical understanding of the world, we just go back to that and get closer to the original stage of experience. In that sense we can get rid of this judgmental attitude, which has to do with the personality or more personal activities of the mind. A lot of people think that haiku is just a shorter form of a proposition, but that's not right. Brevity is not the only issue; we're talking about an entirely different level of language.

**Bill:** When you say "proposition" you mean a statement about reality.

**Tadashi:** A propositional form consists of a subject and a predicate. The subject states what we're aware of; the predicate may describe its nature or the nature of our understanding.

**Bill:** It's action or its qualities.

**Tadashi:** But we can't really express this predicate content without our mental activities—judgment or self or ego. So we try not to do it. Also, the propositional level is much more abstract than the deeper, intuitive level of understanding. So why don't we get down to this more intuitive use of our symbol system? I think haiku is a form of symbol which is equivalent to that level of experience.

**Bill:** So we're driving the symbols closer to the things they represent—closer to an experiential level rather than an intellectual (or a propositional) level. That ultimately for me is the *sine qua non* of poetry in the broadest sense. We want poetry that will create in the reader some sense of direct contact with experience, rather than a veil between the reader and experience, which is what I think a lot of modern poetry is about.

**Richard:** A lot of modern poetry is a veil between the author and the audience?

**Bill:** Exactly. I think so.

**Richard:** Deliberate obscurantism?

**Penny:** Not always deliberate.

**Bill:** Whether it's deliberate or not, I think there are two ends of it. On one end there's a kind of sloppy, naive, untrained group of writers who simply don't know how to communicate experience. So what they try to communicate is their own subject-

ive response to the experience, and they get into bathos. On the other end are people like Ashbery who become tied up in the linguistic trap in itself. He's literally trying to destroy meaning. That is his effort; that's what he says he wants to do. And so whenever he finds three consecutive syntactical units that seem to make sense, he throws one away and turns in a new direction—not in the way that renku does, where the movement and flow shifts like a river or a stream coming down over a bunch of rocks, hitting a rock and moving in a new direction, but rather jumps out of the riverbed and goes off into some other area. I find, in fact, the presentation of work by the supposed professional poets—

**Richard:** Such as Ashbery?

**Bill:** —such as Ashbery—more irritating than the naive writings of, for example, adolescents. Adolescents can learn to find the experience they want to focus on with proper training. The main problem the adolescent has is that the concept of poetry in their minds tends to mean the expression of emotion. They don't understand that emotion can only be expressed by connection with an event, with experience.

**Tadashi:** That's the second point I was going to make related to Zen or to the issue of ego. The conventional Zen aesthetics of the Heian Period said that beauty was the balance between the subjective self and the objective world. Then, from the end of the Heian Period up to the Edo period they became more and more sensitive towards the objective representation of the subjective content. You can see in classic *waka*, for example, in the first half the subjective feeling is expressed with words such as "sad." Then in the bottom half, they present a subjective snapshot of the physical object. The two are superimposed, the subjective feeling and objective world, trying to achieve a balance or interpretation in terms of the subjective content.

**Bill:** What Eliot said with the theory of the objective correlative is that we have these emotions and we look out into the world for objectification—for objects, events, whatever—which will somehow project that emotion into the poetry and into the mind of the reader.

**Richard:** We look for something inside the landscape that will become a symbol of the feeling that we have?

**Bill:** Yes, following Eliot. But my feeling is that in the haiku process we more typically look at the landscape and then it generates feelings. So then we look for words which will capture the essential elements of the landscape that created the feeling, rather than looking for elements in the landscape to reflect the feeling. So I'm wondering if *waka* is closer to Eliot's idea.

**Tadashi:** Well, if there is a split between the object and subject, then I can still talk about the objective correlative. Now the issue of truth comes

## Penny Harter

### The Way Home

There is a way home.

It runs through the cornfields beneath the stars.  
It rises like a river to wash the apple trees below the barn.  
If you are careful you will not disturb the snakes  
who curl in the tall weeds  
beside the grassy path your feet have known.

Sometimes in the distance  
you will see the others,  
silhouettes on moonlit hills  
carrying hoes over their shoulders,  
returning from their fields  
even as you go to yours,  
sure-footed as a goat  
down the stubbled rows toward sleep.

When you climb to the graveyard on the hillside,  
stop among the old ones,  
take off your clothes,  
lie down on the earth,  
your head in the shadows the moon throws  
between tombstones, and begin  
to count the stars in the Milky Way.

You will run out of numbers.  
You will run out of words.  
You will forget how to talk to the sky.  
You will forget where you have come from,  
or where you are going.  
You will only know that you are light  
among the stars,  
and that cornfields spiral out from you  
on every side, shining corn  
as far as you can see—  
even over the edge of the world,  
that dark circle you have found  
at last.



up. Haiku and waka have to be based on truth. That is, this connection between the object and subject has to be real.

**Bill:** So it doesn't make much difference which way it goes, from feeling to object or from object to feeling, as long as the connection is real?

**Tadashi:** Yes, as far as it is real, it is the expression of self-feeling. A good poem has an object which has an absolutely necessary connection with the feeling. That is universal, and among a community. So perhaps everybody may feel the same.

**Richard:** You used the word "community" there and I find that interesting. Because it's not a purely subjective gush of the emotion that the individual poet has, but it's rather connecting up with emotions that a group of readers or an audience or members of a community would have.

**Bill:** Another one of the irritating trends in any given period is the "hermetic" trend, where the poetry may be attractive, may have well-constructed verses, and may have interesting images, but the meaning that is there for the writer is so different from the literal presentation that the reader is, again, somehow being closed out. We have examples of that from ancient Chinese poetry as well as from twentieth-century American and British poetry. Certainly a lot of surrealist poetry is like that. There may be Jungian tendencies to go for what people would think of—perhaps what the authors would think of—as archetypes. The archetypes which Jung proposes may well exist, but if you start playing with those in ways that don't communicate, then they don't communicate and you're cutting yourself off from the community. One of the biggest blights on poetry, to me, is the period in the eighteenth century, both in England and America, where there was a tendency to make light verse about serious things. When you think about Alexander Pope, the Connecticut wits, and people like that, poets were practically writing doggerel about the most important questions of life. They were not examining these questions from the point of view of deep personal angst and questioning and trying to understand the world, but rather simply reorganizing platitudes.

**Richard:** Do you see poets today doing something similar?

**Bill:** I think what happened is that poetry's popularity was rising—poetry in the sense of the individual poet who writes a poem and then shares it through the medium of publication—into that period, then turned. The Romanticism which followed had its day, but it died out. When you get through all that, you find poets more and more cutting themselves off from the community, focusing more on their own inner processes, and not seeing themselves as having the function of the voice of the community. In the West it's not the

same idea of community as in Japan, nor is it the same relationship of the poet to the community. But you still have the basic sense that the poet has a mission with respect to the community. That goes back to tribal culture. There's also a community of experience which is not just a matter of this particular group in this place and time having a collective sensibility, but we are connected to others in other times and places. One of the attractions of traditional Japanese poetry, for me at least, is that, even though with haiku we work separately, there is a community of experience which is shared, and a community of tradition. You feel yourself connected to something larger than your own poem at this moment.

**Tadashi:** I think this concept of community is best represented by the season words in haiku.

**Richard:** As being something that everyone can readily understand, appreciate, and share?

**Penny:** Everyone in Japan.

**Bill:** Well, not even everyone in Japan, but everyone in the community of haiku poets.

**Penny:** In the community that recognizes and shares that view.

**Tadashi:** But even in the States people would understand it. Although your season words are not organized yet, they will be.

**Bill (laughing):** It's coming!

**Tadashi:** You're already doing it.

**Bill:** Yes, we're doing it.

**Penny:** The difference between Bill and me in this, though, is that he wants to do that, he sees the importance of doing that, and he pays attention to doing that when he writes his haiku. I back off from it. I don't want to hear about it. Just let me write my poem! And if there's a season word in it, wonderful; and there probably will be because I'm going to be attuned to the nature and time that I'm in. But I really don't want to see any lists, thank you. Keep them far away from me.

**Tadashi:** Yes, stick with that purely empirical approach and, if your mind has reason, some day your concept of season will find a kind of uniformity.

**Penny:** Well, perhaps. But I don't want to know about it. I just want to write my poems!

**Bill:** Well, there's a problem. To me the *saijiki* [a dictionary of season words used in haiku] is simply a codification of a set of otherwise informally agreed-upon understandings. This takes place, of course, over generations. It doesn't happen in one week. We notice that we tend to write poems about frogs in the spring. We notice that mosquitoes are particularly pestiferous at a certain time of year, so when we write about mosquitoes, that's a poem of that time of year. This sensibility builds and after awhile you find you've named 98% of the world's natural phenomena and they fit into these perceptions.

**Penny:** Where that becomes important to me is if I want my poem to be appreciated by someone who has that viewpoint.

**Bill:** Then you're knocking on the door of that community.

**Penny:** And I hope it falls into one of these categories so that it can be received. But that is the *farthest* thing from my mind when I write a poem.

**Tadashi:** My hypothesis of the season word is that the world has reason and the universe has a reason.

**Penny:** No, it does not!

**Tadashi:** If it has a reason—

**Penny:** It doesn't have to have a reason.

**Tadashi:** —and if our mind is in tune to it, and if we think our mind has reason, and if in finding out all the laws of the world, of the universe, we think all the things scientists are finding out have regularity and universality—you believe the scientists' theory of the world, right? You believe Einstein?

**Penny:** I don't care. It doesn't matter to me at all. What I know about the nature of reality from my own experience is that categories, names, codifications, mean nothing!

**Tadashi:** But the earth still goes around. The earth doesn't care if you know it or not. It's still there.

**Bill:** This is why I think it's a very legitimate activity to look at poems by Westerners who are not attuned to the *saijiki*, who don't even know it exists, and to see if I can find in those poems phrases which literally translate into elements which are recognized in the *saijiki*. And when they are, say *aha!* For me, and certainly for Japanese readers of the haiku tradition, a certain poem will appear to be a poem of autumn, spring, or whatever season it is. That doesn't mean I restrict the poet—

**Penny:** You're building a bridge.

**Bill:** —and tell the poet you must have written the poem in that season. But it says to me that it's more enjoyable for me to give the poem that context. The beauty of the season word is that it immediately expands the meaning of this very short poem. It immediately provides an extra element of context which is not semantically in the poem. When I say "frog" to a ten-year-old American kid, it could be the latter end of August, which traditionally is more or less the middle of autumn in the Japanese haiku sensibility. But nonetheless, when I read "frog" in a haiku, I'm going to think spring because I know that most poems about frogs in the haiku tradition have to do with spring.

**Penny:** I understand what you're saying, but it just doesn't enter into my mind when I'm writing.

**Tadashi:** Understanding and practice are different, I think. I can't explain how I ride a bicycle, but I ride it.

**Bill:** A physicist could give a very complete ex-

William J. Higginson

## Surfing on Magma

Try to understand it  
as riding a wave  
on the planet's crust,  
cast like bread  
on molten waters.

Some day a fish will come,  
open its steaming mouth,  
and take us home  
to the bottom of the lake.  
The only hooks it knows  
are apogee and perigee  
pulling each satellite back  
to the blazing core.

planation, but maybe the physicist couldn't ride a bike, though!

**Penny:** Obviously society needs both. There's a wonderful book called *The Medium, The Mystic, and The Physicist* by LeShan which talks about how the outer fringes of mystical experience and the outer fringes of physics research are both coming up with the same things, but they're just putting different names on them. The physicist codifies on the basis of his knowledge of physics and the mystic doesn't care to. But if pressed, the mystic will describe his or her experience. You find that you can take some—most—of the elements of the mystic's experience and correlate them with some of the most advanced theories of astrophysics. The mystic speaks of timelessness, and the physicist will have a further development of Einstein's theory, or whatever. But frankly, I don't think the mystic cares. It's not relevant.

**Bill:** You can't speak for all mystics, though. You can say that most mystics, perhaps, don't care. But there are some of us mystics who are very interested!

**Richard:** Don't you think the mystic has an obligation, though, to try to understand his or her experience to the extent possible, because that itself is a state of consciousness?

**Tadashi:** I think they have a responsibility toward the world.

**Penny:** Yes, but that doesn't involve understanding the physics of the thing. It involves living out on an experiential level the fruit of what you have experienced.

**Tadashi:** If there's only one mystic who can ride a bicycle in this world, he'll have to teach others how to ride it.

**Penny:** You can't teach it—

**Tadashi:** Well, obviously you have to help.

**Bill:** Maybe there will be some mystics who are very open to an investigation of the physics of mysticism. There are Zen Buddhist monks who have participated in psychometric experiments to try and discover what is the actual electrical status of their body—not just their brain, but their whole body—during deep meditation. And that's very important to them.

**Penny:** To get back to the discussion of haiku, to me, a list of season words doesn't mean community. If I were to live in Japan and wanted my haiku to be integrated into the community of Japanese haiku writers, I would study up on season words and use them more. I would want that sense of community. But what I'm after communicating more is the essence of that moment and the thing-in-itself, whatever it needs to be at a given moment. If it doesn't shoot a season word at me, I don't want to clutter my mind with having to remember to use a season word or anything like that. I just want the thing to come into me and come out of me.

**Bill:** But for many the season word is a readily available tool for promoting that experience in their own practice.

**Richard:** What type of community, then, do you see developing in the United States for haiku?

**Penny:** There are a lot of people interested in it. I don't feel a particular sense of *community* with any of them, though. Those whose haiku I really vibrate with and respect, I feel a sense of community with them.

**Bill:** The community of haiku poets is a rag-tag bunch of people, most of whom don't know what the hell they're doing. That's as true in Japan as it is in the United States. But we're a part of that community, whether we want to be or not. You have a sense of community with people with whom you share a language base and with whom you share a perceptual base of the world. We have, first of all, the community of English-language people, and within that the subset of poets, and within that the subset of people involved with haiku. It's not a community in the sense of those you see every day and get to know personally. Rather it's a community of those who see and are struggling to apprehend the world in a way similar to yours.

**Tadashi:** The whole world is a community.

**Penny:** Sure it is, but that's different. I think that every living being is linked—the plants and the rocks and the animals and the planet itself. The haiku community, in the sense that Bill was using the term, is quite separate from the larger "poetry community" in the United States, although there are those few people who are in both. And, of course, within the larger poetry community, there are many polarities.

**Richard:** What kind of influence do you think haiku is going to have on poetry in the future?

**Bill:** To me the relationship between haiku and, quote, "poetry" is a non-issue. That relationship has already been demonstrated in the histories of individual poets, in the Imagistic movement that saw a certain aspect of haiku and tried to incorporate that into their work. What is significant as a trend is that more and more people are writing haiku now than have ever written haiku before—everywhere, even in Japan. There are groups of poets in Yugoslavia, Belgium, Holland, and Germany who write haiku regularly. There are contests in newspapers in Senegal and Morocco. People are showing an interest now in places that have never shown an interest before. And now Japan is much more open to the possibility of haiku in the West being something that Japanese can accept as relating positively to their tradition. There's a sense in which the popularity of haiku is part of a reactionary phenomenon against the increasing impact of man-made and earth-destructive technology on our lives. People are looking for ways to touch each other and to touch life in a meaningful way. So to a certain extent haiku may be something of a fad and may not have real depth to it. But on the other hand, haiku forces you to pay attention to your environment. You can't write haiku without seeing what's in front of you. You may do it poorly. You may not see very well. You may not write very good haiku. But you're going to have to, sooner or later, pay attention to what you're looking at. So I think this is hopeful for a shift in the application of technology to the environment. Maybe if a higher percentage of people cherish some minute aspect of their physical environment—collectively if we can get enough people to join that bandwagon so to speak—that may help each of us to be more conscious of preserving the environment. The other great threat to the environment is obviously our incredible self- and mutual destructive nature in terms of warfare and lack of understanding. I appreciate more and more deeply the need for sharing between human beings—

**Penny:** Absolutely.

**Bill:** —the need for that wider sense of community. I don't care if it's based on a *saijiki* or not! What is relevant ultimately is the basis of the everyday experience that has a small importance in our lives, that is more typical than any other important experience in our lives. You don't stand up too many times in front of people wearing long black gowns getting something put on your head or something shoved in your hand. You don't stand up too many times being told you're going to receive a fantastic promotion or a new job. You don't stand up too many times and receive a gold watch as you retire. But you stand up every day out of your bed and look at the world.

**Penny:** That's what history really is.

**Bill:** Yes, the *real* history.

## Marginalia:

**Lynx**, a new quarterly journal of renga, is being published by Terri Lee Grell, at POB 169, Toutle, WA 98649 USA. \$2 for sample copy and guidelines.

**Tengu Natural Foods:** Freshly Baked Whole Wheat Bread, Sugar Free Granola, Mexican Foods, 100% Natural Organic Peanut Butter, Herbal Teas, Maple Syrup, Whole Wheat Flour, Blue Corn Chips—and a variety of organic and healthy foods. Write or call for a free catalog: Inari-cho 11-14, Hanno-shi, Saitama-ken 357 (tel. 0429-74-3036).

**New Age Video Events**—an ongoing program of videos being shown in Harajuku, followed by discussions on the growth of consciousness and respect for all forms of life. Japanese/English. For a schedule and more info call René at 03-707-9257 or Takako at 03-705-5060. They also have info on public appearances and private sessions with psychic channel Rev. Neville Rowe in June and July.

**Zyzyva**, a West Coast American art/literary magazine currently seeks new translations of modern Japanese literature/poetry for future Japan issue. Non-mainstream. Send excerpts, query, SASE to Leza Lowitz, 3-6-8 Yanaka, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110.

**Book Reviewers Needed!** Short (750-word), paid reviews on recent Japanese literature/poetry for the University of Hawaii's literary magazine, *Manoa*. Send letter, clips, ideas, SASE to Leza Lowitz, 3-6-8 Yanaka, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110.

**Sirius Productions**, a Kyoto-based professional theatre company, is planning to present Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto in July 1990 and is currently looking for sponsors. For more info on the group contact Dan Furst, Artistic Director at 822 Bomon-cho, Bukkoji Omiya Nishi-iru Sagaru, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600, or phone 075-822-2744.

## NETWorks:

**Matrix**, c.p. 100, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec H9X 3L4, Canada. Editor: Linda Leith. Biannual. Overseas sub: \$15. "New fiction, poetry, interviews, translations and book reviews" and a broader cultural focus which includes "travel writing, polemical essays and articles on theatre, on film, on television. . . ."

**The Plowman**, Box 414, Whitby, Ontario L1N 5S4 Canada. Editor: Tony Scavetta. Bimonthly. Overseas sub: \$37. International journal publishing "all holocaust, religion, didactic, ethnic, eclectic, love, and other. . . . We see the poet as a philosopher and lean toward poems of social commentary" (including "environmental issues"). *Literary Markets* warns, however, "If you send . . . manuscripts or money, it's at your own risk."

## notes on Japan and abroad

**Poets in the Kyoto area** meet regularly with Cid Corman to discuss their work. For details contact Barry MacDonald at 075-712-7445.

**Chikyu Saisozo** (Renewing the Earth), Japan's Bilingual Journal of Gaian Thought and Global Activism, began publication following the Media for the New Millennium Conference held in Kyoto this past April. For info write to the Center for Global Action, Kachofugetsukan, 9-12 Ichiban-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102.

## Books, etc.

*The Dance of the Dust on the Rafters, Selections from Ryojin-hisho*. Translated by Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins. Broken Moon Press, P.O. Box 24584, Seattle, Washington 98124 USA. Ancient folk songs of the common people—a Japanese classic.

B. R. Naggal, *Varied Textures*. Writers Workshop Books, 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700 045 India. One of over 900 titles available from the press.

Atsuo Nakagawa, *Tanka in English: In Pursuit of World Tanka*, Second Edition. New Currents, 22-12, Koraku 2-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112 Japan. Covers theory/history, ancient/modern, Japanese/English tanka.

Vernon Frazer, *Sex Queen of the Berlin Turnpike*. 132 Woodycrest Drive, East Hartford, Connecticut 06118 USA. Good mix of poetry and jazz at 33-1/3 rpm.

*Mountain Tasting: Zen Haiku by Santoka Taneda*. Translated by John Stevens. Weatherhill, 7-6-13 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106. A welcome third printing of one of haiku's most unconventional practitioners.

## recommended reading from Canada

**Tabula Rasa**, P.O. Box 1920, Station B, London, Ontario N6A 5J4 Canada. Editors: Paul Laxon, Gord Harrison, John Kirnan. Bimonthly. Overseas sub: \$25. Features short fiction, poetry and artwork from new and established writers and artists.

**Secrets from the Orange Couch**, 2508—34th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alberta T2L 0V5 Canada. Rotating editors. Triannual. Sub: \$10. "New and innovative poetry and fiction."

**The Conspiracy of Silence**, P.O. Box 153, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2S7 Canada. Editors: Stephen Pender and Michael Holmes. Overseas sub: \$10. Energetic!

—Chad Norman