

## Review

pissed off poems and cross words  
by Marlene Mountain

why am i now angry why are you not angry  
haiku how life can change it  
can't wait for morning

Breaking fresh ground for haiku is nothing new for Marlene Mountain, feminist painter-poet, Appalachian cabin dweller, whose chapbook moment/moment moments (High Coo Press, 1978) painted haiku images both visual and verbal (e.g.

rain  
dr p  
o )

and whose contributions to the development of the haiku "one-liner"--

at dusk hot water from the hose

--attracted the attention of Newsweek as well as a number of haiku guidebooks and anthologies.

In her latest book, pissed off poems and cross words, Mountain's innovations have less to do with the form of haiku than with its content. There are probably no conventions for the writing of haiku which Mountain has not already circumvented, even though ultimately, as she says, "art . . . has no rules to be broken."

What is ground-breaking about the new book is the issues it attempts to address through haiku. Mountain has uprooted haiku from the rock-still garden and washed it in the turbulent waves of protest, political and otherwise. Rejecting haiku which overemphasizes man's "harmony with nature," Mountain concentrates on the disharmonies, going so far as to parody Basho with a dose of modern realism:

old pond a frog rises belly up

If, as haiku writers have always maintained, haiku requires Zen-like minds able to mirror the world as it is, then the bad must eventually come to be mirrored with the good and the haiku of those who continue to write only about flowers, birds, and circadas will seem increasingly one-sided and inauthentic. Mountain recaptures the authenticity of haiku by refusing to look at the world with the

presupposition that at some level all the disparities, incongruities, and inequalities must finally dissolve/resolve into a sense of "oneness:"

acid rain less and less i am at one with nature  
chemicalburger  
here a leak there a spill everywhere a . . .

These lines, from the sequence entitled "free country," are thematically related, yet each of them is in fact a self-contained haiku. Through such one-line sequences Mountain's anger ranges from complaints against nuclear disasters to patriarchal religion to the custom of female circumcision still practiced in some polygamist societies: by removing a woman's clitoris, center of feminine lust, a man feels he has a better chance of keeping his woman faithful--

and to his advantage she's never satisfied in bed.

From the din of outrage in these poems, the outcry on behalf of women is heard the loudest. In the "cross words" which follow the main body of the book, words and expressions with connotations derogatory to women have been arranged in the form of crossword puzzles. The very first consists of the names of animals: bitch, beaver, bunny, pussy, dog, fox, ass, nag, dingbat, and so on.

The inclusion of such words--and probably also the poet's political diatribes ("the FBI ought to open a file on me")--ended up raising as many problems as it did eyebrows. Although the book is self-published, the first printing company Mountain approached with her manuscript refused to print it, fearing reprisals from the now-infamous Meese Commission on Pornography. The irony, of course, is that the only organ Mountain is interested in stimulating is the mind--and perhaps the heart--with the purpose of sensitizing readers to pornography's infiltration of everyday language. Mountain turns out to be as anti-pornographic as the Meese Commission (although both pissed off poems and the Meese Commission Report are graphically explicit) and she is equally outraged at porn's demeaning portrayal of women. But her approach is to shockingly persuade, not to coerce or blacklist. "Pornography / fuck it," she writes.

To the charge that Mountain's poems are "subversive" or "anti-" or "un-American" it only needs to be stated that Mountain stands squarely in the very long and very American tradition of dissent, which extends from the non-conformist Pilgrims to Thoreau to the various protest movements of the '60's. Mountain's rage is a moral rage, born of the frustrating awareness that what ought to be done isn't getting done:

peace banner moves all but those who should be moved

As for the literary inquisitors who would claim that what Mountain is doing is "not haiku," it should be further noted that creative heresy also has distinguished precedents in American literature and art. At a time when haiku writers in Japan are re-emphasizing traditional forms and themes, Mountain is forging ahead with the creation of haiku firmly rooted in the American sensibility that for art to grow it must never be allowed to stagnate in a "tradition." Long gone are the 3-line, 5-7-5 constructions which have always been better suited to the Japanese language than to English anyways. What Mountain retains is the sense of haiku as "moments keenly perceived," although in pissed off poems and cross words it's regrettable that the moment is sometimes expressed more in the form of political rhetoric than in concrete images:

democrats tax and tax spend and spend  
reagan goof and goof goof and goof

Nonetheless, here we have haiku which confronts rather than charms, is more aggressive than it is passive, more frank than it is subtle, and which ultimately is willing to discard familiar poetic pleasantries in favor of the brutally honest.

--Richard Evanoff

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### Contests & Anthologies

Aardvark Enterprises' poetry contest has the very liberal deadline of December 31, 1987! \$3 reading fee. Prizes dependant on the number of entries. Send money order to Aardvark Enterprises, 192 Balsam Place, Penticton, B.C. V2A 7V3.

Legrete International Writers Union offers a \$150 first prize in their 1987 competition in drama, fiction, poetry, illustrations, and photographs. \$10 entry fee. Send SASE for rules before sending submissions. Deadline: July 1, 1987. Write to: Legrete Press, P.O. Drawer 1410, Daphne, AL, USA 36526.

Poets Study Club's 1987 annual poetry contest has three categories: serious poetry, light verse and traditional haiku (these category titles are on loan from the Coca Cola Cultural Foundation and may not be reprinted without permission). No entry fee. One entry per category. Deadline: February 1, 1987. Send entries to: Martha Oprisko, 1609 South 5th St., Apt.2, Terre Haute, IN, USA 47802.

The Poetry Society of Japan is sponsoring two competitions this year, the First International Tanka Contest and the Third International Haiku Contest. Any form or theme is acceptable but length must not exceed 17 syllables for haiku and 31 syllables for tanka. The poems must be original (in English) and must be unpublished poems which have not been submitted to any other editor or publisher at the time of submission. Awards will total ¥120,000 (approximately \$650). The prize money in each category will be \$200 for 1st prize, \$75 for 2nd prize and \$25 for 3rd prize. Honorable Mentions will receive a copy of Poetry Nippon. The deadline is December 31, 1986 and the winning poems will be printed in the spring 1987 issue of Poetry Nippon. Entry fee per entry for non-PSJ members is two International Reply Coupons or ¥200's worth of Japanese postage stamps. Entry is free for PSJ members. Entries must be typed on four separate 4" by 6" (10 cm by 15 cm) white cards. For further details send an SASE to: The Poetry Society of Japan, 5-11, Nagaike-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya 466, Japan.

### Periodicals

Haiku Zasshi is an annual publication featuring haiku, haiga (pictures to accompany haiku), essays, book reviews and haiku notices. Send an SASE to George Klacsanzky, 6416 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA, USA 98107.