

# HAIKU

*This Other World*



*by*

RICHARD  
WRIGHT

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Burning out its time,  
And timing its own burning,  
One lonely candle.

Richard Wright, one of the early forceful and eloquent spokesmen for black Americans, author of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, was also, it turns out, a major poet. During the last eighteen months of his life, he discovered and became enamored of haiku, the strict seventeen-syllable Japanese form. Wright became so excited about the discovery that he began writing his own haiku, in which he attempted to capture, through his sensibility as an African American, the same Zen discipline and beauty in depicting man's relationship, not to his fellow man as he had in his fiction, but to nature and the natural world.

In all, he wrote over 4,000 haiku, from which he chose, before he died, the 817 he preferred. Rather than a deviation from his self-appointed role as spokesman for black Americans of his time, Richard Wright's haiku, disciplined and steeped in beauty, are a culmination: not only do they give added scope to his work but they bring to it a universality that transcends both race and color without ever denying them.

Wright wrote his haiku obsessively—in bed, in cafés, in restaurants, in both Paris and the French countryside. His daughter Julia believes, quite rightly, that her father's haiku were “self-developed antidotes against illness, and that

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*This Other World*

RICHARD  
WRIGHT

Books by Richard Wright

*Uncle Tom's Children*

*Native Son*

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*Black Boy*

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# HAIKU

*This Other World*

by

RICHARD  
WRIGHT

Edited and with Notes and Afterword by  
Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener

Introduction by Julia Wright



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## CONTENTS

Introduction <i>by Julia Wright</i>	vii
Editors' Note	xiii
Haiku <i>This Other World</i>	1
Notes on the Haiku	207
Afterword <i>by Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener</i>	245
Notes	301





## INTRODUCTION

The haiku you are about to read were written during my father's French exile, almost forty years ago, throughout the last eighteen months or so of his life. That they should finally be published as Richard Wright wanted them to be read is definitely a literary event and offers some exciting clues to a biographical enigma: how the creator of the inarticulate, frightened, and enraged Bigger Thomas ended up leaving us some of the most tender, unassuming, and gentle lines in African-American poetry.

One of my last memories of my father during the summer and autumn months before he died is his crafting of thousands of haiku. He was never without his haiku binder under his arm. He wrote them everywhere, at all hours: in bed as he slowly recovered from a year-long, grueling battle against amebic dysentery; in cafés and restaurants where he counted syllables on napkins; in the country in a writing community owned by French friends, *Le Moulin d'Andé*. Although he had at last overcome the amoebas, he was often inexplicably exhausted and feverish in those days as he worked on the revisions of the uncompleted *Island of*

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*Hallucination* and typed up the early chapters of another unfinished novel, *A Father's Law*.

My father's law in those days revolved around the rules of haiku writing, and I remember how he would hang pages and pages of them up, as if to dry, on long metal rods strung across the narrow office area of his tiny sunless studio in Paris, like the abstract still-life photographs he used to compose and develop himself at the beginning of his Paris exile. I also recall how one day he tried to teach me how to count the syllables: "Julia, you can write them, too. It's always five, and seven and five—like math. So you can't go wrong." Back then I was an immature eighteen-year-old and, worried as we all were by his drastic weight loss (the haiku must have been light to carry) and the strange slowness of his recovery, we did not immediately establish a link between his daily poetic exercises and his ailing health. Today I know better. I believe his haiku were self-developed antidotes against illness, and that breaking down words into syllables matched the shortness of his breath, especially on the bad days when his inability to sit up at the typewriter restricted the very breadth of writing.

Today, I also wonder whether these little poetic gems did not serve another deeper purpose as my father attempted to bring closure to the numerous mournings he experienced during the same period. In 1958 he lost his favorite editor and friend, Ed Aswell. And in September of the following year it was the turn of George Padmore, a close friend with whom he

had excitedly planned another trip to Africa. Padmore's sudden death was all the more a shock because my father had sold his beloved country retreat (recaptured in many of these haiku) to move our whole family to England, where "Uncle" George resided. The British Home Office coarsely rejected his immigration application shortly after his friend's death. And so loss followed upon loss. A few weeks before Richard died, he learned of the suicide of a young Danish girl, Bente Heeris, who had asked him during a brief correspondence to dissuade her from her wish to end her life.

And there were other disquieting areas of turmoil. My father's open querying of American counterintelligence tactics targeting radical black expatriates, his research plans around racial tensions on U.S. Army bases in Europe as part of the gathering of background material for *Island of Hallucination*, his attempt to protect his friend and confidant, Ollie Harrington, from the ambushes of cold war politics, all these interests and loyalties culminated in the realization that he himself was being increasingly monitored during those last months. This fact, ascribed by so many critics to his "paranoia," was to be eerily confirmed, years later, by the contents of intelligence reports released under the Freedom of Information Act. In fact, the decision to maintain Richard Wright on the National Security Index was more or less contemporary to his haiku period. As my father wrote so lucidly to another trusted friend, Margrit de Sablonière, on March 30, 1960:



Of course, I don't want anything to happen to me, but if it does my friends will know exactly where it comes from. If I tell you these things, it is to let you know what happens. So far as the Americans are concerned, I'm worse than a Communist, for my work falls like a shadow across their policy in Asia and Africa. That's the problem: they've asked me time and again to work for them, but I'd die first. . . . But they try to divert me with all kinds of foolish tricks.

In a remarkable book, *Alien Ink*, Natalie Robbins chillingly reminds us that we will never know what American masterpieces were nipped in the bud because of the cold war blighting of creative powers unable to blossom. But my father's own response to this onslaught against the deepest springs of his genius was to continue to spin these poems of light out of the gathering darkness.

But, the wound that went the deepest, the piece of news that hit him by far the hardest, was the death of his mother, Ella, in January 1959, the very same month a writer he highly admired, Albert Camus, was killed in an automobile accident.

I do not remember my father uttering a single word after a telegram announced the passing of a mother he had written about so heartrendingly in *Black Boy*. Even his letter instructing his literary agent, Paul Reynolds, to advance a small sum for the funeral, given his dwindling bank account,



was strangely short and emotionless. To the teenager I then was, his silence passed over our household like a long, dark cloud. But today I see things otherwise. The haiku enabled him to mourn a mother whose physical absence from his life had begun way before her death—but whose invisible presence haunted all his exile writings. His vow not to break the fast of self-imposed exile could never entirely suppress his mother-hunger and the yearning for the world of childhood she had given him. A form of poetry which links seasons of the soul with nature's cycle of moods enabled him to reach out to the black boy part of himself still stranded in a South that continued to live in his dreams. With the haiku, a self-nurturing could begin, albeit so close to his own death.

My father had come a long way. Back in the forties, he had written in his journal how much he disliked the countryside because it reminded him of the physical hunger he had experienced as a poor black child in one of the world's most fertile landscapes. And so these haiku not only helped him place the volcanic experience of mourning under the self-control of closely counted syllables, but also enabled him to come to terms with the difficult beauty of the earth in which his mother would be laid to rest.

For Richard Wright, hunger and beauty were once upon a time terrifying and ravaging. But writing these poems kept him spiritually afloat. Some of us will even find these deceptively simple patterns of syllables tap-dancing in our minds long after they are read. They are Richard

Wright's poetry of loss and retrieval, of temperate joy and wistful humor, of exile and fragments of a dreamed return. They lie somewhere in that transitional twilight area between the loss for words and the few charmed syllables that can heal the loss.

*Julia Wright*  
*Connecticut, 1998*

## EDITORS' NOTE

In 1960 Wright selected under the title *This Other World: Projections in the Haiku Manner* 817 out of about four thousand haiku he had composed. The manuscript consists of a title page and eighty-two pages, page 1 containing the first seven haiku and each of the rest ten. The manuscript, dated 1960, is deposited among the Wright collection in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Each of the haiku in this edition is numbered consecutively 1 through 817.

In editing the text for this volume we have emended obvious spelling errors, but retained Wright's typography regarding spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, and punctuation as it appeared in the original manuscript.

Completing this book would have been impossible without the help and cooperation we have received from many sources. First, we would like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Ellen Wright, who suggested in her letter to Robert L. Tener back in 1986 that we might work with her and write an introduction and notes.

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Unfortunately, Wright's unpublished haiku had been restricted till quite recently. We would also like to name Patricia C. Willis, Curator of American Literature, of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, where the manuscript of Wright's haiku is housed, who allowed Yoshinobu Hakutani to read it in its entirety in the spring of 1991.

It also was an honor and pleasure for Yoshinobu Hakutani to meet Julia Wright, Wright's daughter, along with Mrs. Wright, when he attended the African-American Writers conference held in Paris in February 1992. He talked with them about our work in progress.

In the course of the work, Yoshinobu Hakutani has benefited from a research grant and several grants-in-aid provided by the Kent State University Research Council.

We have also been encouraged by Michel Fabre over the years to complete the project. And it has been assisted by Michiko Hakutani and Carolyn Tener from the beginning.

*Y. H. and R. L. T.*

# HAIKU

*This Other World*





1

I am nobody:  
A red sinking autumn sun  
Took my name away.

2

For you, O gulls,  
I order slaty waters  
And this leaden sky!

3

Keep straight down this block,  
Then turn right where you will find  
A peach tree blooming.

4

Sweep away the clouds  
And let a dome of blue sky  
Give this sea a name!

5

I give permission  
For this slow spring rain to soak  
The violet beds.

6

Follow wherever  
The tree branches make arches  
In the torrid sun.

7

Make up your mind, Snail!  
You are half inside your house,  
And halfway out!

8

O finicky cat,  
Forgive me for this spring rain  
That disgusts you so!

Steep with deep sweetness,  
O You White Magnolias,  
This still torpid night!

“Shut up, you crickets!  
How can I hear what my wife  
Is saying to me?”

You moths must leave now;  
I am turning out the light  
And going to sleep.

“Oh, Mr. Scarecrow,  
Stop waving your arms about  
Like a foreigner!”

13

I would like a bell  
Tolling in this soft twilight  
Over willow trees.

14

I grant to sparrows  
The telegraph wires that brought  
Me such good tidings!

15

O Anvil, be beaten,  
Bear all the bitter blows till  
The spring sun goes down!

16

All right, You Sparrows;  
The sun has set and you can now  
Stop your chattering!



17

In a misty rain  
A butterfly is riding  
The tail of a cow.

18

Sparrow's excrement  
Becomes quickly powdery  
On sizzling pavements.

19

A summer barnyard:  
Swishing tails of twenty cows  
Twitching at the flies.

20

The dog's violent sneeze  
Fails to rouse a single fly  
On his mangy back.

21

On winter mornings  
The candle shows faint markings  
Of the teeth of rats.

22

With a twitching nose  
A dog reads a telegram  
On a wet tree trunk.

23

On muddy puddles  
Of the hoof-tramped farmyard,  
Flashing glints of spring.

24

The webs of spiders  
Sticking to my sweaty face  
In the dusty woods.

25

A horse is pissing  
In the snow-covered courtyard  
In the morning sun.

26

From a red tile roof  
A cat is licking beads of dew  
In a humid dawn.

27

Across the river  
Huge dark sheets of cool spring rain  
Falling on a town.

28

In the summer haze:  
Behind magnolias,  
Faint sheets of lightning.

29

A huge drift of snow  
Blocks the narrow pathway to  
The little toy shop.

30

A bloody knife blade  
Is being licked by a cat  
At hog-killing time.

31

In the falling snow  
A laughing boy holds out his palms  
Until they are white.

32

Just enough of light  
In this lofty autumn sky  
To turn the lake black.

33

Just enough of snow  
For a boy's finger to write  
His name on the porch.

34

The sound of the rain,  
Blotted out now and then  
By a sticky cough.

35

Venturing outdoors,  
The children walk timidly,  
Respecting the snow.

36

A brick tenement  
Is receiving furniture  
In a light snowfall.

37

Past the window pane  
A solitary snowflake  
Spins furiously.

38

That abandoned house,  
With its yard of fallen leaves,  
In the setting sun.

39

A soft wind at dawn  
Lifts one dry leaf and lays it  
Upon another.

40

In gray winter light,  
Dead flies fill the window sill  
Of a musty room.



41

Just before dawn,  
When the streets are deserted,  
A light spring rain.

42

Seen from a hilltop,  
Shadowy in winter rain,  
A man and his mule.

43

What river is that  
Meandering through the mist  
In fields of young corn?

44

A man leaves his house  
And walks around his winter fields  
And then goes back in.

45

As though for always,  
Each petal lit by the sun,—  
Apple blossoms!

46

A spring mountain holds  
The foundations of a house  
Long since tumbled down.

47

The spring lingers on  
In the scent of a damp log  
Rotting in the sun.

48

A bursting ripe plum  
Forms a pool upon a leaf  
From which sparrows drink.

49

Burning autumn leaves,  
I yearn to make the bonfire  
Bigger and bigger.

50

One magnolia  
Landed upon another  
In the dew-wet grass.

51

As the sun goes down,  
A green melon splits open  
And juice trickles out.

52

Gazing at her face  
Reflected in the spring pond,  
The girl grimaces.

53

A sparrow's feather  
On a barb of rusty wire  
In the sizzling heat.

54

A September rain  
Tumbling down in drops so big  
They wobble as they fall.

55

Shaking the water  
Off his dripping body,  
The dog swims again.

56

The cool green melon  
Made me trace my forefinger  
Along its whole length.

57

Sleety rain at night  
Seasoning swelling turnips  
With a tangy taste.

58

Heaps of black cherries  
Glittering with drops of rain  
In the evening sun.

59

Gusty autumn rain  
Swinging a yellow lantern  
Over wet cattle.

60

Sun is glinting on  
A washerwoman's black arms  
In cold creek water.

61

The melting snowflakes  
Are wetting the brown horse's back  
Darker than his flanks.

62

A lance of spring sun  
Falls upon the moldy oats  
In a musty barn.

63

From far, far off,  
From over the leaden sea,  
The call of a ship.

64

The harbor at dawn:  
The faint scent of oranges  
On gusts of March wind.



65

A December wind  
Swept the sky clean of clouds  
And froze the lake still.

66

A freezing night wind  
Wafts the scent of frying fish  
From the waterfront.

67

The day is so long  
That even noisy sparrows  
Fall strangely silent.

68

A chill Spanish dawn:  
Vapor from the blood of a  
Freshly slaughtered bull.

69

Whose town did you leave,  
O wild and droning spring rain,  
And where do you go?

70

At the water's edge,  
Amid drifting brown leaves,  
A dead bloated fish.

71

It is not the sun,  
But the spring rain that beats loose  
The rose's petals.

72

Droning into the room,  
The wasp circles angrily,  
Then hums slowly out.

73

Naked to the sky,  
A village without a name  
In the setting sun.

74

Midnight is striking:  
In a cold drizzle of rain  
Two men are parting.

75

Spring begins shyly  
With one hairpin of green grass  
In a flower pot.

76

The path in the woods  
Is barred by spider webs  
Beaded with spring rain.

77

Dewdrop joins dewdrop  
Till a petal holds a pool  
Reflecting its rose.

78

An apple blossom  
Trembling on a sunlit branch  
From the weight of bees.

79

Spring arrives stealthily:  
Scaly flecks of peeling paint  
On a whitewashed wall.

80

After the rainstorm,  
A tendril of Wisteria  
Peeps over the wall.

81

The river ripples  
From the caressing shadows  
Of a willow tree.

82

A butterfly makes  
The sunshine even brighter  
With fluttering wings.

83

A falling petal  
Strikes one floating on a pond,  
And they both sink.

84

On the pond's green scum  
A yellow butterfly lights;  
And then there are two.

85

Upon a pine tree,  
A snail slides out of its shell  
To witness the spring.

86

The wings of a bee,  
Tarnishing the smooth whiteness  
Of a magnolia.

87

Meticulously,  
The cat licks dew-wet cobwebs  
From between his toes.

88

The cat's shining eyes  
Are remarkably blue  
Beside the jonquils.



89

In the hot kitchen  
A feather drags its shadow  
Over steaming rice.

90

How the rain washes  
Wrinkled skins of writhing worms  
To a tender pink!

91

Just enough of wind  
To agitate soundlessly  
The maple tree leaves.

92

A caterpillar  
Has entrapped wet spider webs  
Upon its short hairs.

93

Leaving its nest,  
The sparrow sinks a second,  
Then opens its wings.

94

A snail hesitates,  
Contracting one of its horns  
In a gust of wind.

95

Like a fishhook,  
The sunflower's long shadow  
Hovers in the lake.

96

You could see warm wind  
Drying wet wisps of her hair  
About her forehead.

97

In the setting sun,  
Each tree bud is clinging fast  
To drying raindrops.

98

It took five seconds  
For the barefoot boy's wet tracks  
To dry on the porch.

99

Where the tree's shadow  
Lingers on the macadam,  
Traces of spring rain.

100

Just enough of rain  
To set black ants a-swimming  
Over yellow sand.

101

Quickly vanishing,  
The first drops of summer rain  
On an old wood door.

102

On the pond's bottom  
The faint shadow of a fish  
Flitting on white sand.

103

Just enough of rain  
To bring the smell of silk  
From umbrellas.

104

Trembling on the wall,  
A yellow water shadow  
From the lake outside.

105

A cow chews her cud  
As flimsy heaps of snowflakes  
Sift from off her horns.

106

Beads of quicksilver  
On a black umbrella:  
Moonlit April rain.

107

Just enough of snow  
To make the back of each cow  
Vivid in the dusk.

108

From the scarecrow's sleeve  
A tiny green leaf unfolds  
On an oaken arm.

109

On a pulpy log,  
An ant pauses in the sun  
And waves its feelers.

110

I laid down my book:  
A tendril of Wisteria  
Encircling my leg.

111

With shy yellow smiles,  
Baby pumpkins are hiding  
Under yellow leaves.

112

And though level full,  
The petal holds its dew,  
And without trembling.



113

A twisting tendril  
Tilting off into sunshine,  
Winding on itself.

114

Not even the sun  
Can make oak tree leaves as green  
As the starlight does.

115

Why do I listen  
To the muttering thunder  
This night of spring?

116

A lone lance of sun  
Spotlighting a lone fly  
Washing one blue wing.

117

The crow flew so fast  
That he left his lonely caw  
Behind in the fields.

118

For some strange reason  
Sparrows are congregating  
In an old rose bush.

119

On a clapboard house,  
An old oak tree's shadow fades  
In the spring sunset.

120

Crying and crying,  
Melodious strings of geese  
Passing a graveyard.

121

The consumptive man,  
Who lives in the room next door,  
Did not cough today.

122

And what do *you* think,  
O still and awesome spider,  
Of this summer rain?

123

And now this thing too:  
A drunken girl vomiting  
In the autumn rain.

124

Persistent magpies  
Are pecking amid hot grasses  
At one blue glass eye.

125

Yellow petals gone,  
The sunflower looks blankly  
In a drizzling rain.

126

Yet another dawn  
Upon yellowing leaves  
And my sleepless eyes.

127

Why does the blindman  
Stop so still for a second  
In the drizzling dusk?

128

This autumn drizzle  
Is our bond with other eyes  
That can see no more.

129

This winding dirt path  
Ends in a tangle of thorns  
In the autumn mist.

130

A long autumn day:  
A wind blowing from the west,  
But none from the east.

131

Is this the dirt road,  
Winding through windy trees,  
That I must travel?

132

What stranger is that  
Walking in the winter rain  
And looking this way?

133

Is there some design  
In these deep random raindrops  
Drying in the dust?

134

One autumn evening  
A stranger enters a village  
And passes on through.

135

Six cows are grazing;  
The seventh stands near a fence,  
Staring into space.

136

That road is empty,  
The one leading into hills  
In autumn twilight.

137

A pregnant black rat  
Poking in a paper bag  
In a purple dawn.

138

Upon the roof's edge,  
A cat in autumn moonlight  
Contemplates the road.

139

Pulling him ahead,  
The blindman's dog takes a path  
Between summer graves.

140

A spring pond as calm  
As the lips of the dead girl  
Under its water.

141

An autumn sunset:  
A buzzard sails slowly past,  
Not flapping its wings.

142

A wounded sparrow  
Sinks in clear cold lake water,  
Its eyes still open.

143

Why is hail so wild,  
Bouncing so frighteningly,  
Only to lie so still?

144

Amidst the flowers  
A China clock is ticking  
In the dead man's room.



145

A bright glowing moon  
Pouring out its radiance  
Upon tall tombstones.

146

In a silent room  
A feather rises slowly  
And floats in the heat.

147

It is without taste,  
Or am I a stranger here—?  
These drops of spring dew.

148

As still as death is,  
Under a circling buzzard,  
An autumn village.

149

I had long felt that  
Those sprawling black railroad tracks  
Would bring down this snow.

150

Late one winter night  
I saw a skinny scarecrow  
Gobbling slabs of meat.

151

The harvest is in:  
The trees on the distant hills  
Have been bought by clouds.

152

After seven days,  
The corpse in the coffin  
Turned on its side.

153

The snow has melted,  
And now all the fields belong  
To the railroad tracks.

154

Standing in spring rain,  
The hitchhiker has a stance  
That nobody trusts.

155

Empty railroad tracks:  
A train sounds in the spring hills  
And the rails leap with life.

156

A winter evening:  
The black craggy mountains  
Are calling down rain.

157

The drumming of sleet  
Against the roof and windows  
Brightly fans the fire.

158

A train crashes past:  
A butterfly still as stone  
On the humid earth.

159

In the melting snow  
That is tracked into the house  
Is one green grass blade.

160

The barking of dogs  
Is deepening the yellow  
Of the sunflowers.

161

The call of a bird  
Sends a solid cake of snow  
Sliding off a roof.

162

Deep green melons  
Anchoring gigantic clouds,  
Dyeing them purple.

163

As the music stops,  
Flooding strongly to the ear,  
The sound of spring rain.

164

I slept so long and sound,  
But I did not know why until  
I saw the snow outside.

165

The caw of a crow,  
Telling of a taut white sail  
On the flashing river.

166

The snow on the bank  
Stains the river water black  
Under a blue sky.

167

Bulging yellow clouds:  
Between peals of spring thunder,  
Deep white silences.

168

Beyond a railroad,  
A river and a sunset  
In the April rain.

169

Turning on the light  
The drip-drip of the spring rain  
Lessens in the dawn.

170

A spring haze wipes out  
The brick wall between my house  
And the hillside graves.

171

With indignation  
A little girl spans her doll,—  
The sound of spring rain.

172

The scarecrow's old hat  
Was flung by the winter wind  
Into a graveyard.

173

The first day of spring:  
The snow on the far mountains,  
Brighter than ever.

174

Merciful autumn  
Tones down the shabby curtains  
Of my rented room.

175

Coming from the woods,  
A bull has a lilac sprig  
Dangling from a horn.

176

Winter rain at night  
Sweetening the taste of bread  
And spicing the soup.



177

Spring dawn is glinting  
On a dew-wet garbage can  
In a city street.

178

From an icy quay:  
When her ship heaves into sight,  
The sea disappears.

179

The summer moonlight  
Gleams upon a blacksmith's forge,  
And cools red embers.

180

The elevator  
Lifts him up twenty stories,—  
A bright summer sea!

181

When the train had stopped,  
A coffin was unloaded  
Amid steam and smoke.

182

A bright window pane  
With one slowly crawling fly  
Against a still cloud.

183

All the city's bells  
Clang deafeningly this midnight,  
Frightening the New Year!

184

No birds are flying;  
The tree leaves are still as stone,—  
An autumn evening.

185

The sound of the wind  
Is shaping long drifts of snow  
On a mountain ridge.

186

From these warm spring days,  
I can still see her sad face  
In its last autumn.

187

In an old woodshed  
The long points of icicles  
Are sharpening the wind.

188

The night must be long  
For even a yellow moon  
Over fields of snow.

189

Does the willow know  
That the tip of its drooping branch  
Is touching the ice?

190

Factory whistles  
Bring flurries of fat snow  
In a winter dawn.

191

Little boys tossing  
Stones at a guilty scarecrow  
In a snowy field.

192

Even the sparrows  
Are attempting to thaw out  
The frozen scarecrow.

193

Standing patiently,  
The horse grants the snowflakes  
A home on his back.

194

A cracking tree limb  
Intensifies the starlight  
Upon blue-white snow.

195

O Blacksmith's Hammer,  
How hot and hard must you pound  
To change this cold wind?

196

Tossing all day long,  
The cold sea now sleeps deeply  
On a bed of stars.

197

A blacksmith's hammer  
Beating the silver moon thin  
On a cool spring night.

198

The first day of spring:  
A servant's hips shake as she  
Wipes a mirror clean.

199

The shuddering flank  
Of a bull in the spring rain  
Calls down the thunder.

200

A silent spring wood:  
A crow opens its sharp beak  
And creates a sky.

201

Over spring mountains  
A star ends the paragraph  
Of a thunderstorm.

202

A cock's shrill crow  
Is driving the spring dawn stars  
From out of the sky.

203

Did somebody call?  
Looking over my shoulder:  
Massive spring mountains.

204

To see the spring sky,  
A doll in a store window  
Leans far to one side.

205

As my delegate,  
With joints stiff with winter cold,  
The first ant of spring.

206

As the spring snow melts,  
All the village houses are  
Huddling together.

207

The shouts of children  
Billowing window curtains  
On spring's first day.

208

A horse gives a neigh  
And shakes down the first spring rain  
With his tossing mane.



209

As my delegate,  
The spring wind has its fingers  
In a young girl's hair.

210

The sprinting spring rain  
Knocks upon a wooden door  
That has just been shut.

211

A fleeing white fence  
Is ripping the moon away  
From the April clouds.

212

From the skyscraper,  
All the bustling streets converge  
Towards a spring sea.

213

Fields of young barley  
Under ten billion hailstones  
In the April sun.

214

While plowing the earth,  
All my crows are visiting  
A neighboring farm.

215

Legions of crows  
Are busily unplanning  
The farmer's barley.

216

The trilling sparrows  
Sound as if they too had got  
A letter today!

217

Surely that spring moon,  
So yellow and so fragile,  
Will crack on a cloud!

218

A far-away fog  
Is troubling the evening star  
Above a spring hill.

219

Enough of dawn light  
To show pearly pear blossom  
Burning from within.

220

The cathedral bell  
Is now rocking the spring moon  
Upon the river.

221

Even the horse looks  
At the duck and her ducklings  
Following in line.

222

Holding too much rain,  
The tulip stoops and spills it,  
Then straightens again.

223

A highway of black ants  
Diagonally bisecting  
A sun-hot white wall.

224

While convalescing,  
The red roses have no smell,  
Gently mocking me.

225

Every sandgrain  
Of the vast sunlit desert  
Hears the snake crawling.

226

Like a spreading fire,  
Blossoms leap from tree to tree  
In a blazing spring.

227

In the damp darkness,  
Croaking frogs are belching out  
The scent of magnolias.

228

The sudden thunder  
Startles the magnolias  
To a deeper white.

229

Fierce sunflowers  
Have forced every cloud fleece  
Out of the hot sky.

230

A lone cricket's cry  
Slices a sliver of moon  
And scatters the stars.

231

At the dying sun,  
Glaring with greedy black eyes,  
Tiger-lilies.

232

A descending moon  
Commanding crickets to sing  
Louder in the woods.

233

The magnolias  
Waft their misty scent skywards,  
Obscuring the moon.

234

O black rattlesnake,  
Why in all hell did you choose  
*This* path to sleep in?

235

The caw of a crow  
Draws a diagonal line  
Across a field of corn.

236

The dusty petals  
Of ferocious sunflowers  
Hold the rain at bay.

237

The caw of a crow  
Loops over a sunburnt hill  
And fills a valley.

238

The crows are boasting  
Of having driven the sun  
Down a murky sky.

239

Sitting in the park,  
Hearing the sound of an axe  
Rippling the lake.

240

In a red sunset  
A frog commands the night wind  
To roll out a moon.



241

A blindman's eyebrows  
Condensing the autumn fog  
Into beads of light.

242

The darting fire-flies  
Are dragging the river along  
To where the sun went down.

243

Leaving the doctor,  
The whole world looks different  
This autumn morning.

244

As day tumbles down,  
The setting sun's signature  
Is written in red.

245

Harvesting over,  
The empty fields are yearning  
Toward a gray sky.

246

In a murky dawn  
The faint moon is sucking smoke  
Out of chimneytops.

247

The wheat has been cut,  
And now a blue-gray mountain  
Is haunting the lake.

248

Harvesting over,  
The empty fields have been bought  
By the horizon.

249

The sleet stops droning  
And the still silence forbids  
Even the sun to shine.

250

Even toy soldiers  
Perspire with weariness  
In the autumn mist.

251

A rooster's sharp crow  
Punctures a gray dawn sky,  
Letting out spring rain.

252

Fiery apples  
Are searing the tree leaves  
And singeing the grass.

253

From a tenement,  
The blue jazz of a trumpet  
Weaving autumn mists.

254

I almost forgot  
To hang up an autumn moon  
Over the mountain.

255

The shore slips away  
From the melancholy ship  
In an autumn mist.

256

Crying of the past,  
Cascading upon my roof,  
A cold winter rain.

257

A wisp of white smoke:  
Out of a widow's chimney  
Winter is rising.

258

A dog's blood-red bark  
Lights up the summer forest  
And blanches the moon.

259

Sounds of red and black:  
Rain beating upon the river  
And upon tree leaves.

260

The shimmering heat  
Undulates the drooping flag  
Atop the courthouse.

261

A night of spring stars:  
Waves breaking beyond the wall  
Have a dark blue sound.

262

After the parade,  
After all the flags are gone,  
The snow is whiter.

263

A departing ship  
Sends forth a deep-throated tone  
That turns the sea blue.

264

Even the cat smiles  
When the hen swallows water  
With back-tilted head.

265

The blue of this sky  
Sounds so loud that it can be heard  
Only with our eyes.

266

The wings of crows  
Are scudding the purple clouds  
And misting the fields.

267

The cock's ready crow  
Is as dark as autumn dawn  
With edges of white.

268

No star and no moon:  
A dog is barking whitely  
In the winter night.

269

The swaying lanterns  
Under the magnolias  
Glow with sweet scent.

270

Lifting the lantern,  
The scent of plums on the tree  
Became more fragrant.

271

The sharper the scent  
Of magnolia blossoms,  
The hotter the sun.

272

They smelt like roses;  
But when I put on the light,  
They were violets.



273

One, two, three June bugs;  
Now there are seven June bugs  
More of torrid heat.

274

The valley is full  
Of the scent of violets  
Scattered by spring rain.

275

The smell of sunny snow  
Is swelling the icy air, —  
The world grows bigger.

276

Just enough of moon  
To make the smell of apples  
Light up the orchard.

277

The chill autumn dusk  
Grows colder as yellow lights  
Come on in skyscrapers.

278

Streaks of fire-flies  
Freezing the magnolias  
As white as ice.

279

This September rain  
Is much colder than the wind  
That sweeps it along.

280

The scent of an orange  
By an ice-coated window  
In a rocking train.

281

An October night:  
Rising from rain-wet shingles,  
The cool scent of pine.

282

The screech of shovels,  
Scooping snow off the sidewalks  
Deepens the cold.

283

By night: "O how cold!"  
But by daylight: "O how hot!"  
Chanting peach blossoms.

284

The metallic taste  
Of a siren cutting through  
The hot summer air.

285

The grate of a saw  
Hacking into a slab of ice  
Is a death rattle.

286

With intense effort  
The blindman's eyes are squinting:  
How bitter the cold!

287

The sun is as hot  
As the big red carbuncle  
On the fat man's neck.

288

A freezing morning:  
I left a bit of my skin  
On the broomstick handle.

289

A spring moon so round  
That my fingers are itching  
To touch its sharp edge.

290

A freezing morning:  
As sharp as an aching tooth,  
A long icicle.

291

A wailing siren  
Scales up sheer skyscraper walls  
In a blinding sun.

292

This tiny pimple,  
So sunny bright on my cheek,  
Is bigger than I am.

293

As the bank teller  
Jiggles a stack of silver,  
I think of sparrows.

294

The sound of a rat  
Scampering over cold tin  
Is heard in the bowels.

295

A fly crawls slowly  
Over a sticky paper,—  
How chilly the dawn!

296

Even my own shoes  
Seem to become heavier  
This warm spring morning.

297

A chill autumn wind  
Filling all the valley  
With mountain voices.

298

The sound of a snake  
Slithering over dry leaves  
Is as hot as fire.

299

A descending fog  
Is making an autumn day  
Taste of buried years.

300

On awakening,  
I feel a cool autumn breeze  
Blowing on my brow.

301

A spring sky so clear  
That you feel you are seeing  
Into tomorrow.

302

There is where I am:—  
Summer sunset loneliness,  
Purple meeting red.

303

A balmy spring wind  
Reminding me of something  
I cannot recall.

304

Lonelier than dew  
On shriveled magnolias  
Burnt black by the sun.



305

This still afternoon  
Is full of autumn sunlight  
And spring memories.

306

Dazzling summer sun!  
But the smell of the past comes  
With rain upon the dust.

307

I feel autumn rain  
Trying to explain something  
I do not want to know.

308

A sleepless spring night:  
Yearning for what I never had,  
And for what never was.

309

She said she would come!  
How yellow are these lilies!  
How white is this sand!

310

Rotting yellow leaves  
Have about them an odor  
Both of death and hope.

311

The spring rain has blown  
A shining little village  
Upon a hillside.

312

How melancholy  
That these sweet magnolias  
Cannot smell themselves.

313

One, two, three stars  
Breed a whole sky of stars,  
Dyeing the night blue.

314

Rustling dry paper  
Sounding in an empty room  
Is a cold mountain.

315

In the setting sun,  
Yellow roses are waving  
All their sharp wan thorns.

316

In the silent forest  
A woodpecker hammers at  
The sound of silence.

317

Shrilling sparrows  
Are sheathing the waterfall  
With glittering light.

318

The fog's density  
Deepens the croak of the frogs  
On an April dawn.

319

How lonely it is:  
A winter world full of rain,  
Rain raining on rain.

320

A bay full of ships,  
All arriving or leaving  
On bright spring waves.

321

The ocean's soft sound  
Lifts the toll of a far bell  
To the half-seen stars.

322

Blowing from the sky,  
And being blown toward the sky,—  
Wild snow in April.

323

How lonely it is:  
Black brittle cornstalks are snapping  
In the winter blast.

324

Only one faint star,  
One yellow-windowed ship  
And one heaving sea.

325

Streaming on the hills,  
Swirling past the horns of cows,  
Steeply slanting snow.

326

Spring rain from the south,  
And then spring rain from the north,—  
How the green corn glistens!

327

Just enough of wind  
To sway all the forest trees  
In winter harmony.

328

The round horizon  
Is black save for a red ball  
In the cold mountains.

329

A little dog barks  
At a roaring waterfall  
That swallows his voice.

330

White as it is young  
And as black as it is dead,—  
One magnolia!

331

With her beak open,  
A fat white hen is panting  
In the August heat.

332

While mounting a cow,  
A bull ejaculates sperm  
On apple blossoms.

333

The neighing horses  
Are causing echoing neighs  
In neighboring barns.

334

A lakeshore circus:  
An elephant trumpeting  
Waves on blue water.

335

In an ice-wagon,  
A snow-white pigeon sipping  
Drops of cold water.

336

Hidden by snowflakes,  
A horse neighs excitedly  
In a white silence.



337

Blue-black beak open,  
The crow hurls a caw straight at  
A sinking red sun.

338

Tongue and tail drooping,  
The dog trots in the noon-day sun,  
Looking at nobody.

339

A cathedral bell  
Dimming the river water  
In the autumn dusk.

340

A bounding puppy  
Chases a blue soap bubble  
And barks when it bursts.

341

The indentation  
Made by her head on the pillow:  
A heavy snowfall.

342

A sinking red sun  
Staining a snowy village:  
A cock crows softly.

343

In winter twilight  
A cawing crow flies over  
A rain-wet village.

344

Out of icy fog,  
Advancing with its sharp horns,  
A white-faced cow.

345

The sad sound of hymns  
Flooding on to autumn fields  
In hazy moonlight.

346

Throughout the spring night,  
The intermittent hooting  
Of an owl in the rain.

347

As the sun dies down,  
Last night's dew is still sparkling  
Upon the lilacs.

348

A September fog,  
Mute upon the empty porch  
Of an empty house.

349

A church bell at dusk:  
The evening sun's slanting rays  
Dying on my wall.

350

Through sifting snow.  
The ghostly outline of ships  
In the quiet harbor.

351

Under a low sky  
A boy walking with a dog  
In the spring rain.

352

Why do I listen  
To each low of the cow  
This still autumn night?

353

Ascending swallows  
Winging to cottony nests  
In warm red clouds.

354

Tossing pine trees  
Lulling a village to sleep  
In the winter dusk.

355

An Indian summer  
Heaps itself in tons of gold  
Over Nigger Town.

356

In the cathedral,  
In a lance of rosy light,  
Clouds of lazy flies.

357

Above a gray lake,  
In skyscraper window panes,  
A dying spring day.

358

From out of the thickets  
The sounds of trickling water  
Fill the hazy fields.

359

Subsiding spring waves  
Continue their slow rhythm  
In the swaying trees.

360

A pink afterglow.  
Behind nodding sunflowers  
And the smell of mint.

361

At slow intervals  
The hospital's lights wink out  
In the summer rain.

362

The drone of spring rain;  
A lonely old woman strokes  
The fur of her cat.

363

A little girl stares,  
Dewy eyes round with wonder,  
At morning glories.

364

Hurdy-gurdy sounds  
Soften the glow of streetlamps  
In the evening dusk.

365

The Christmas season:  
A whore is painting her lips  
Larger than they are.

366

A cow is licking,  
With long slow strokes of her tongue,  
Spring rain from her thigh.

367

An old blindman  
Playing a black violin  
Amid fallen leaves.

368

While she undresses,  
A spring moon touches her breasts  
For seven seconds.



369

A tall sunflower  
And a grinning little boy  
With snagged teeth.

370

The baby's hiccough  
Dies down and the hum of flies  
Fills the sunny room.

371

A peg-legged man  
Stumps about in the garden,  
Pruning the roses.

372

A dead green beetle  
Bobbing on a flowing creek,  
Beaten by spring rain.

373

A hunchback carries  
A big black umbrella  
In the falling snow.

374

Hands behind his back,  
An old priest on the seashore  
In the autumn sun.

375

The first day of spring:  
The servant wears her blonde hair  
In a new manner.

376

A newspaper boy  
Shouts "Extra!" in the cool night:  
Spring wind flaps his coat.

377

In the winter dusk,  
A thin girl leads a black cow  
By a dragging rope.

378

Upon crunching snow,  
Childless mothers are searching  
For cash customers.

379

In a freezing haze  
The lowing of distant cows  
Fogs the window panes.

380

In the sea-scented wind  
A prostitute is laughing  
With moon-glinting teeth.

381

On the summer air,  
Flowing like rich creamy milk,  
The low of a cow.

382

A valley village  
Lies in the grip of moonlight:  
How lonely it is.

383

Softer than sound,  
The moon-struck magnolias  
On a still hot night.

384

A dim yellow light  
Glowing in a misty dawn  
Makes a village cold.

385

Squeezing his eyes shut,  
The cat yawns as if about  
To eat the spring world.

386

A lost cat mews  
In the sunset fleeciness  
Of a cotton field.

387

The low of a cow  
Answers a train's long whistle  
In the summer dusk.

388

Faint in summer haze,  
The contours of green hills  
Through clouds of flies.

389

An autumn sunset  
Casting shadows of tombstones  
Over mounds of graves.

390

The crowded harbor:  
Soft lights are blazing at dawn  
In a drizzling rain.

391

The moon is over  
The horns of a pregnant cow  
In the April dusk.

392

Through white cotton fields,  
Lifting toward the sunset,  
A golden river.

393

An owl in moonlight  
Perches on a sagging fence  
In a summer field.

394

From a far valley  
Comes the faint bark of a dog  
Over yellow leaves.

395

The stars are dredging  
The bottom of the spring river  
For bits of blue steel.

396

A Spanish village:  
Flowers and gurgling water,—  
How silent it is!

397

Below hot wires  
Throbbing with urgent appeals,  
Poppies are blooming.

398

The October wind  
Has blown the moon to a bit  
Of brittle brass.

399

In the autumn woods  
Mules grind juice from sugar cane  
Under heavy clouds.

400

Under swelling clouds  
Cutlasses flash in the sun  
Amid sugar cane.



401

A thin mangy dog  
Curls up to sleep in the dust  
Of a moonlit road.

402

In the summer storm  
A window shade is flapping  
In my neighbor's house.

403

A pregnant cat  
Licking its fuzzy belly  
In a warm drizzle.

404

Out of autumn leaves,  
An owl spits an angry hoot  
At a dull-red moon.

405

In a bar's doorway,  
Wiping his mouth in spring wind,  
Seeing nobody.

406

Over railroad ties,  
Heat rushes from hot mountains  
On an August day.

407

In a light spring rain  
An old woman is spitting  
Into a handkerchief.

408

A dead mouse floating  
Atop a bucket of cream  
In the dawn spring light.

409

An icy drizzle  
Slowly solidifying  
All the city's ash piles.

410

In the falling snow  
The thick wool of the sheep  
Gives off a faint vapor.

411

When the school bell sounds,  
A momentary silence  
Falls upon the birds.

412

In this rented room  
One more winter stands outside  
My dirty window pane.

413

Why does that peach tree,  
Arrayed in its pink blossoms,  
Stand so near the pond?

414

A dog barks sharply  
From the frozen black timbers  
Of a burnt down house.

415

In a drizzling rain,  
In a flower shop's doorway,  
A girl sells herself.

416

A shaggy brown dog  
Squatting under winter trees,  
Shitting in the rain.

417

From a farmhouse porch,  
A girl calls into the dusk  
Over snowy fields.

418

Whitecaps on the bay:  
A broken signboard banging  
In the April wind.

419

In a hot valley,  
White cattle standing as still  
As their black shadows.

420

A single letter  
Fluttering in the mailbox:—  
A gusty spring wind.

421

This tenement room  
In which I sweat this August  
Has one buzzing fly.

422

My cigarette glows  
Without my lips touching it,—  
A steady spring breeze.

423

Settling on the screen  
Of the crowded movie house,  
A white butterfly.

424

Bits of confetti  
Spotting a black umbrella  
In an April rain.

425

An empty sickbed:  
An indented white pillow  
In weak winter sun.

426

A farmer's daughter  
Screams at a contrary cow  
In the driving sleet.

427

While crows are cawing,  
Poppies are dutifully  
Deepening their red.

428

From a green hilltop,  
One tolling cathedral bell  
Tints the spring sky blue.

429

Naked black children  
Chasing down an alleyway  
After a gray cat.

430

Raindrops are tilting  
Pink from magnolias  
In the setting sun.

431

Eating a red apple,  
A little girl stares dreamily  
At the autumn sea.

432

A gust of spring wind  
Lifts a girl's white straw hat;  
It floats on the lake.



433

Across her freckled face  
Flitting shadows of snowflakes  
Make her blue eyes blink.

434

A cock crows for dawn  
And then a neighing horse tells  
Of spring in his blood.

435

Look, look, look!  
These are all the violets  
Left by last night's rain!

436

A nude fat woman  
Stands over a kitchen stove,  
Tasting applesauce.

437

Through an open door,  
Ruffling the skirts of the dolls,  
A wind from spring hills.

438

About the kitten,  
Who sleeps in a round white ball,  
Are yellow tulips.

439

A church bell at dusk:  
The evening sun's slanting rays  
Dying on my wall.

440

Enough of spring rain  
On the gutted country road  
To fill wagon ruts.

441

In the autumn dusk:  
A faintly lighted window  
And the smell of rain.

442

Over yellow corn,  
As muted as the sunset,  
The low of a cow.

443

Snowing on the lake,  
Snowing on the limbs of elms,  
Snowing on spring snow.

444

When the letter came,  
The autumn sea sounded sad  
And the clouds stood still.

445

A loud ticking clock  
Sounds in rhythm with the heat  
Of a long slow day.

446

Sleepy bumble bees  
Buzzing about plum blossoms  
In the setting sun.

447

An early dawn breeze  
Blowing with slow tenderness  
On tall sunflowers.

448

A washerwoman  
Dyes a tub of water blue,—  
The sunlit spring wind!

449

Announcing autumn,  
One dry leaf taps with crisp sound  
On my window pane.

450

In a barbershop  
The stench of soap and hair,—  
A hot summer day!

451

As though sleepwalking,  
A gray cat crosses the sand  
In yellow moonlight.

452

A black woman sings:  
Filling the sunlight with steam,  
Bubbling molasses.

453

The sound of a rat  
Gnawing in the winter wall  
Of a rented room.

454

Waving red banners  
Are whipping the clouds along  
In a wild spring rain.

455

The green cockleburs  
Caught in the thick wooly hair  
Of the black boy's head.

456

Is it possible  
That those wildly cawing crows  
Know it is sunset?

457

A railroad station:  
A crowd of summer children  
Laughing in the rain.

458

A tall pretty girl  
Wearing a purple raincoat  
In the month of June.

459

I am paying rent  
For the lice in my cold room  
And the moonlight too.

460

Sunday's church bell tolls  
On a bright green sloping hill  
Over grazing cows.

461

Entering my town  
In a heavy fall of snow,  
I feel a stranger.

462

A train roars past  
The eternal green of fields  
In a rush of steam.

463

Of generations  
Comes this wild red rose to me,  
As I come to it.

464

In a vast silence  
A wooden gate is open  
In a spring farmyard.



465

Your cargo tonight,  
Is it rain or hail or sleet,  
Caravan of clouds?

466

The sound of spring thunder,  
As wide as the wet plain  
Over which it rolls.

467

A radiant moon  
Shining on flood refugees  
Crowded on a hill.

468

I have lost my way  
In a strange town at night,—  
A sky of cold stars.

469

The spring flood waters  
Lap slowly at the doorsteps,—  
A radiant moon.

470

As I stand stockstill,  
A viper undulates past,  
Unaware of me.

471

Rushing to the gate  
To give her her parasol:  
The dawn stars were bright.

472

Even the serpent,  
Magically beautiful  
In silver moonlight.

473

Between today's snow  
And that which fell yesterday,  
A night of bright stars.

474

A white butterfly  
Sits with slowly moving wings  
On a dead black snake.

475

Walking home alone  
From the sporting arena:  
A curve of spring moon.

476

A rain-wet buzzard  
Amid dripping magnolias  
In the setting sun.

477

On a bayonet,  
And beyond the barbs of wire,—  
A spring moon at dawn.

478

Wisps of winter fog  
Left by the streetsweeper's broom  
Along the gutters.

479

Head bent in spring sun,  
A dog whimpers now and then,  
Licking his penis.

480

Bolting the gate tight  
Against all the autumn world,  
Save the fiery stars.

481

Shut in the ice box,  
A cricket chirps sleepily  
In an alien winter.

482

At a funeral,  
Strands of filmy spider webs  
On coffin flowers.

483

Does the snail know that  
The green leaf on which it sleeps  
Is obeying the wind?

484

The horse's hot piss  
Scalds a fragile nest of ants  
In a sea of foam.

485

After a great yawn,  
The cat blinks his eyes and stares  
Past the autumn sun.

486

Two flies locked in love  
Were hit by a newspaper  
And died together.

487

“What a huge snowflake!”  
But as I spoke my hot breath  
Made it disappear.

488

As a big cloud melts,  
Smaller and whiter clouds appear  
Deeper in the sky.

489

Standing in the field,  
I hear the whispering of  
Snowflake to snowflake.

490

Waking from a nap  
And hearing summer rain falling,—  
What else has happened?

491

How lonely it is:  
A ram unskins his penis,  
Shows the moon his teeth.

492

When I turn about,  
My shadow lies alongside  
That of a scarecrow.

493

Wetting everything,  
Wafting unseen and unheard,  
Misty winter rain.

494

Turning a corner,  
I duck my head to dodge  
A new winter moon.

495

Through the church window,  
Into the holy water,  
A dry leaf flutters.

496

Sowing turnip seed  
And glancing up and seeing  
That the sun has gone.



497

A cool April breeze  
Clears out the smoke of incense  
From the cathedral.

498

How lonely it is:  
The snowstorm has made the world  
The size of my yard.

499

Just one lonely road  
Stretching into the shadows  
Of a summer night.

500

The sport stadium:  
Every seat is taken  
By whirling snowflakes.

501

Autumn moonlight is  
Deepening the emptiness  
Of a country road.

502

While the village sleeps,  
The autumn stars come and fade,  
Leaving a thin mist.

503

A long empty road  
Under a lowering sky  
In a winter dawn.

504

Across the table cloth,  
Ants are dragging a dead fly  
In the evening sun.

505

An empty canoe  
Turning slowly on a river  
In the autumn rain.

506

Pathetically,  
A moth haunts a moonlit patch  
Of white-plastered wall.

507

From out of nowhere,  
A bird perches on a post,  
And becomes a crow.

508

It is September,  
The month in which I was born;  
And I have no thoughts.

509

Tell me, Tin Soldier,  
Of the spring daydreams you had  
And never told me!

510

With its first blossom,  
The little apple tree brags:  
“Look, look! Me too!”

511

The fire in the grate  
Lights up six dead soldiers,  
And five standing.

512

If pumpkins could talk,  
I am sure that they would be  
Reactionary!

513

A toy railroad train  
Stalled in a dusty station  
By webs of spiders.

514

“Say, Mr. Beetle,  
Are you taking a detour  
Crawling on my knee?”

515

An old winter oak:  
Once upon a time there was  
A big black ogre . . .

516

The lighted toy shop  
Seen through a frozen window  
Is another world.

517

Like a big black giant  
The child's shadow grimaces  
On the moonlit wall!

518

Creamy plum blossoms:  
Once upon a time there was  
A pretty princess . . .

519

Even my old friends  
Seem like newly met strangers  
In this first snowfall.

520

O if I could live  
In that house where a peach tree  
Blooms in the rain!

521

Just enough of snow  
To make you look carefully  
At familiar streets.

522

My binoculars  
Show me far across the bay,  
Narcissus flowers.

523

Just enough of snow  
To make a strutting black cock  
Unbelievable.

524

A green postage stamp:  
Blooming in an exotic land,  
A far-away spring.

525

Only the horses  
Really know the exact hour  
When snow fell last night.

526

The arriving train  
All decorated with snow  
From another town.

527

Would not green peppers  
Make strangely lovely insects  
If they sprouted legs?

528

In the setting sun,  
Red leaves upon yellow sand  
And a silent sea.



529

Fire-fly, why play here?  
The boys and girls are in the backyard,  
Waiting for you.

530

My shadow was sad  
When I took it from the sand  
Of the gleaming beach.

531

O dark green melons,  
Who shines your slick skins so smooth,  
Making them mirrors?

532

As my delegate,  
My shadow imitates me  
This first day of spring.

533

What do they tell you  
Each night, O winter moon,  
Before they roll you out?

534

A winter tempest  
Has blown all the cloud stuffings  
Right out of the moon.

535

Has the day been long,  
Morning, noon, and the cold night,  
O open-eyed dolls?

536

What did the moon hit  
To make all those blue-green sparks  
Shower in the sky?

537

As silent as the snow  
Sleeping in the cold moonlight  
Of winter mountains.

538

What giant spider spun  
That gleaming web of fire-escapes  
On wet tenements?

539

Putting out the light,  
The sound of the sleet hums sharper  
Upon the tin roof.

540

As dark spring clouds sag,  
The white buildings on the beach  
Seem to come closer.

541

After the sermon,  
The preacher's voice is still heard  
In the caws of crows.

542

The dazzling spring sun  
Dwindles the glittering sea  
And shrinks the ships.

543

"Let's make a scarecrow!"  
But after we had made it,  
Our field grew smaller.

544

The spring sun has set;  
The lake in its loneliness  
Draws near the mountain.

545

The moon has gone down,  
But its gleam is lingering  
On magnolias.

546

The sudden sunrise  
Made the blooming apple tree  
Distant and smaller.

547

A layer of snow  
Is pulling the mountains nearer,  
Making them smaller.

548

One caw of a crow  
Tints all of the fallen leaves  
A deeper yellow.

549

A fluff of cotton  
Floats up and is swallowed  
By a vast white cloud.

550

Summer mountains move  
To let a sinking sun pass  
To the other side.

551

A black mountain peak  
Is arching a summer sky  
And its just-felt moon.

552

A small spring island  
Is being measured by a  
Ribbon of ship smoke.

553

Dazzling moonlight:  
The shadows are as solid  
As the dewy leaves.

554

The summer rainstorm  
Drenches chickens in the fields,  
Making them smaller.

555

So cold it is now  
That the moon is frozen fast  
To a pine tree limb.

556

The big light in the fog  
Was but a little lantern  
When we came to it.

557

The gale of autumn  
Swept the trees clean of leaves  
And drew the hills near.

558

Gleaming yellow pears  
Were never so translucent  
As in this scant rain.

559

Is this tiny pond  
The great big lake in which  
I swam as a boy?

560

For seven seconds  
The steam from the train whistle  
Blew out the spring moon.



561

An old lonely man  
Had a long conversation  
Late one winter night.

562

A winter tempest  
Is hurling the black-limbed trees  
Swiftly past the moon.

563

Could this melody  
Be sung in other countries  
By other birds?

564

A hesitating sun  
Turns a slow deep red and then  
Falls into the wheat.

565

A slow autumn rain:  
The sad eyes of my mother  
Fill a lonely night.

566

Into the dim room  
A butterfly flits and flees,—  
But can still be seen.

567

Bedraggled scarecrow,  
What a time you must have had  
In last night's rainstorm!

568

It is not outdoors  
That the baby sparrow cheeps,  
But here in the house!

569

A thin waterfall  
Dribbles the whole autumn night,—  
How lonely it is.

570

For what does she wait,  
Huddled in the winter rain,  
That young girl out there?

571

From across the lake,  
Past the black winter trees,  
Faint sounds of a flute.

572

What will these moths do  
When the bright streetlamps wink out  
And summer rain falls?

573

Twisting violently,  
A lost kite seeks its freedom  
From telegraph wires.

574

Standing in the crowd  
In a cold drizzling rain,—  
How lonely it is.

575

Between wagon shafts,  
A horse waits in a cold rain  
With its head hung low.

576

Calling and calling,  
The faint voice of a sparrow  
From the autumn rain.

577

Scarecrow, who starved you,  
Set you in that icy wind,  
And then forgot you?

578

In winter moonlight:  
An empty railroad station  
And one whining cat.

579

Amid the daisies  
Even the idiot boy  
Has a dignity.

580

My cold and damp feet  
Feel as distant as the moon  
On this autumn night.

581

Don't they make you sad,  
Those wild geese winging southward,  
O lonely scarecrow?

582

A limping sparrow  
Leaves on a white window sill  
Lacy tracks of blood.

583

A long winter rain:  
A whistling old man whittles  
A dream on a stick.

584

From the rainy dark  
Comes faint white cries of wild geese,—  
How lonely it is.

585

Suddenly one spring  
She did not skip any more,  
And her eyes grew grave.

586

Under plum blossoms,  
Just castrated rams have tears  
Bulging in their eyes.

587

In a damp attic,  
Spilling out grains of sawdust,  
A wounded rag doll.

588

For six dark dank years,  
A doll with a Christmas smile  
In an old shoe box.

589

From the cattle truck,  
An anxious cow is staring  
At springtime streets.

590

An old consumptive  
Coughs so spasmodically  
He disturbs the birds.

591

A sick cat seeks out  
A stiff and frozen willow  
Under which to die.

592

Sitting in spring rain,  
Two forgotten rag dolls,  
Their feet in water.



593

Lighting on my fence,  
The crow tosses me a glance,  
Wipes his beak and goes.

594

O Cat with Gray Eyes,  
Do you feel this autumn too,  
Are you also sad?

595

Two white butterflies  
Fluttering over green grass:  
One goes east, one west.

596

A blue butterfly  
Dips over a prison wall,  
Then slowly returns.

597

A slow encircling,  
Inquisitive butterfly  
Follows the blindman.

598

The blindman stumbles,  
Pauses, then walks slower  
Into the autumn night.

599

She has departed:  
All the globes of golden pears  
Are pointed in pain.

600

Crying out the end  
Of a long summer's sun,—  
Departing wild geese.

601

The train that took her  
Steams into the autumn hills  
And becomes silent.

602

A slow creeping snail;  
Moments later I could not  
See it anywhere.

603

The sound of a train  
Fading in the autumn hills,—  
And tomorrow too.

604

Departing wild geese  
Are fanning the moon brighter  
With their tireless wings.

605

Her train has now gone:  
Where handkerchiefs were waving,  
Moonlight on hot rails.

606

I last saw her face  
Under a dripping willow  
In a windy rain.

607

A cold winter sea  
Blowing the hazy dawn stars  
Higher and paler.

608

One vanishing ship  
On an autumn horizon:  
How lonely it is.

609

Black men with big brooms  
Sweeping streets in falling snow,  
Are absorbed by flakes.

610

In the blazing sun  
The sand rose from the desert  
And fled with the wind.

611

As the popcorn man  
Is closing up his wagon,  
Snow begins to fall.

612

Above leafless trees,  
A crow skims a dark brown hill  
And heads for the sun.

613

While plucking the goose,  
A feather flew wildly off  
To look for snowflakes.

614

Like the day also,  
Clouds are blown behind the hills  
By a winter wind.

615

Their watching faces,  
As I walk the autumn road,  
Make me a traveler.

616

The snowball I threw  
Was caught in a net of flakes  
And wafted away.

617

Starting a journey—  
The scent of burning dry leaves  
Stains the sky lonely.

618

High above the ship  
On which immigrants sail,  
Are departing geese.

619

As you leave the gate,  
A skinny old dog barks once,  
Then goes back to sleep.

620

In the post office,  
A clerk sorting out letters  
Hears spring rain falling.

621

A fleeing viper  
Rippling rows of gold tassels  
In a field of wheat.

622

Pen me a letter  
From where plum trees are blooming,  
Pilgrimagining geese!

623

Through the winter rain,  
Calling to the scattered ships,  
One floating sea gull.

624

Running here and there,  
Twisting down the winter stream,  
A tiny red shoe.



625

The caw of a crow:  
On a distant summer field  
Goes a silent train.

626

Off the cherry tree,  
One twig and its red blossom  
Flies into the sun.

627

As early as June,  
One yellow leaf flutters down,  
Calling to its brothers.

628

One umbrella  
Entering into the woods  
In a cold rain.

629

An autumn fog stares  
At a cat in a doorway,  
Then steals slowly on.

630

For each baptized,  
The brown creek laughs and gurgles,  
Flowing on its way.

631

In a winter dawn,  
Fleeing an opening door,  
A scampering rat.

632

In the rainy dark  
A train screams at each village,  
Then rolls on to the next.

633

A steamboat's whistle  
Was blasted by the spring wind  
To another town.

634

Over gleaming snow,  
Lashing the moon on its way,  
One swaying treetop.

635

An empty seashore:  
Taking a long summer with it,  
A departing train.

636

How lonely it is:  
A rattling freight train has left  
Fields of croaking frogs.

637

Was it a young man  
Who went into the graveyard  
In the summer rain?

638

In my sleep at night,  
I keep pounding an anvil  
Heard during the day.

639

And also tonight,  
The same evening star above  
The same apple tree.

640

The spring hills grow dim,  
Today joining other days,  
Days gone, days to come.

641

Another day falls  
Out of a rainy curtain  
Of dark autumn days.

642

It is as it is:  
Yesterday's spring rain falling  
All night and today.

643

In the autumn air,  
Distant mountains are dreaming  
Of autumns to come.

644

How many autumns  
Has this giant rock been host to  
The moon and its light?

645

From the mountain peak,  
Crystal clear in summer air,  
Winter without end.

646

This night too is night,  
Night in a full net of nights  
Made of autumn days.

647

Burning out its time,  
And timing its own burning,  
One lonely candle.

648

I am positive  
That this is the same spring wind  
That I felt yesterday.

649

Breathless and weary,  
The fog lays its huge white head  
On cherry blossoms.

650

How could this rose die?  
This rich red color perish?  
This sweet odor fade?

651

On a spring evening,  
Clumsy clouds are teasing a moon  
Too sleepy to care.

652

The leaves and the rain  
Are whispering hurriedly  
Under growling skies.

653

You can see the wind  
Absentmindedly fumbling  
With apple blossoms.

654

Defending themselves,  
The green leaves beat back the rain,  
Smashing it to mist.

655

With nervous pleasure,  
The tulips are receiving  
A spring rain at dusk.

656

The storm singles out  
The tallest pine in the woods  
And flays its branches.



657

Under the first snow  
Yellow leaves are surrendering  
With faint dry whispers.

658

The naked mountains,  
Washing themselves in spring rain  
As green fields look on.

659

The spring dawn comes so fast  
That the yellow streetlamps  
Turn pale and grow shy.

660

Between night and dawn,  
A plum tree apologized  
With profuse petals.

661

The lake gulps spring rain,  
Sucking the falling drops  
With a million mouths.

662

I wonder how long  
Was that violet dancing  
Before I saw it?

663

In the autumn dusk  
A spider patiently darns  
A hole in a wall.

664

In the summer dawn,  
Before it has time to dress,  
How sad the willow.

665

Winter wind brings snow  
And gives the cat a litter  
Of spotted kittens.

666

Golden afternoon:  
Tree leaves are visiting me  
In their yellow clothes.

667

That sparrow bent down,  
Its head tucked beneath its wing,—  
Sewing a button?

668

It is so hot that  
The scarecrow has taken off  
All his underwear!

669

A leaf chases wind  
Across an autumn river  
And shakes a pine tree.

670

Accidentally  
Cut by the tip of the hoe,  
The scarecrow shudders.

671

A pale winter moon,  
Pitying a lonely doll,  
Lent it a shadow.

672

When the horse whinnies,  
The scarecrow waves both his arms,  
Asking for silence.

673

A flood of spring rain  
Searching into drying grasses  
Finds a lost doll.

674

How it is bristling  
Toward that big brassy sun,  
This one sunflower.

675

In rippling water  
A short black broomstick handle  
Is a runaway snake.

676

After a meeting  
Held in the corner garden,  
The leaves scattered.

677

A skinny scarecrow  
And its skinnier shadow  
Fleeing a cold moon.

678

Turning here, there,  
Leaping before sleety wind,  
A lost yellow fan.

679

Suddenly mindful,  
The tree was looking at me,  
Each green leaf alive.

680

That fog standing there,  
Inspecting the store window,  
Is white with envy.

681

“Come out of the cold!”  
A lighted window beckons  
Through falling snow.

682

August noon hour:  
All the objects of the world  
Digesting shadows.

683

The cold is so sharp  
That the shadow of the house  
Bites into the snow.

684

As my delegate,  
The scarecrow looks pensively  
Into spring moonlight.

685

Jagged icicles  
Are snapping off as they bite  
Into the morning sun.

686

A darting sparrow  
Startles a skinny scarecrow  
Back to watchfulness.

687

Each moment or two  
A long tongue of autumn wind  
Licks the river white.

688

The autumn river  
Utters one long crow cry,  
Then rustles again.



689

His task completed,  
The scarecrow watches the truck  
Leave loaded with corn.

690

And now once again  
Winter wind breathes sighingly  
Amid the pine trees.

691

Made stiff by the sleet,  
The flag stands out from the pole,  
Like a general.

692

The ocean in June:  
Inhaling and exhaling,  
But never speaking.

693

One sad, one shy,  
Low on the spring horizon,  
The sun and the moon.

694

It was so silent  
That the silence protested  
With one lone bird cry.

695

My decrepit barn  
Sags full of self-consciousness  
In this autumn sun.

696

Having appointed  
All the stars to their places,  
The summer wind sleeps.

697

Smoking brick chimneys  
Belching up a misshapen moon  
In an autumn haze.

698

Black winter hills  
Nibbling at the sinking sun  
With stark stumpy teeth.

699

Flitting through the trees,  
Some snowflakes cling to the twigs,  
Others flutter free.

700

A dark forest plain  
Is eagerly swallowing  
Its first winter snow.

701

The sticky snowflakes  
Cling stubbornly to the broom  
Brushing them away.

702

The pennants are down,  
But their black poles are boasting  
To the snowy fields.

703

In tense dry panic,  
A fallen leaf goes flying  
Over other leaves.

704

The scarecrow's big sleeves  
Advertising in the sun:  
Huge, red tomatoes!

705

On a scarecrow's head,  
A sparrow braces itself  
Against the spring wind.

706

Chattering dryly,  
Yellow leaves are fleeing,  
Huddling in corners.

707

A shower of hail  
Has beaten the spring moon thin  
And flattened the lake.

708

A wild winter wind  
Is tearing itself to shreds  
On barbed-wire fences.

709

With the forest trees cut,  
The lake lies naked and lost  
In the bare hills.

710

Light flakes of snow  
Being driven from the sky  
By one yellow rose.

711

With solemnity  
The magpies are dissecting  
A cat's dead body.

712

The clouds are smiling  
At a single yellow kite  
Swaying under them.

713

The creeping shadow  
Of a gigantic oak tree  
Jumps over the wall.

714

He hesitated  
Before hanging up his coat  
On the scarecrow's arm.

715

Before blossoming,  
A cherry bud looks eager,  
As if about to speak.

716

With mouth gaping wide,  
Swallowing strings of wild geese,—  
Hungry autumn moon.

717

Backing off slowly,  
The dog barks at a spring moon,  
Just to make certain.

718

While plowing the earth,  
Hills that were invisible  
Are now to be seen.

719

Crystal April air:  
A distant crow's beak opens,  
Then a lagging caw.

720

A wilting jonquil  
Journeys to its destiny  
In a shut bedroom.



721

As my anger ebbs,  
The spring stars grow bright again  
And the wind returns.

722

Lines of winter rain  
Gleam only as they flash past  
My lighted window.

723

In the afterglow  
A snow-covered mountain peak  
Sings of loneliness.

724

As the stores are closing,  
Yellow streetlamps spring to life  
In an April fog.

725

From a cotton field  
To magnolia trees,  
A bridge of swallows.

726

In the April sun,  
The top of a damp sand mound  
Is slowly sifting.

727

Hopping on the fence,  
A sparrow casts its shadow  
On a horse's flank.

728

Beneath pale stars,  
Breathing wet on cattle horns,  
A faint winter fog.

729

Each ebbing sea wave  
Makes pebbles glare at the moon,  
Then fall back to sleep.

730

From the cherry tree  
To the roof of the red barn,  
A cloud of sparrows flew.

731

Even while sleeping,  
The scabby little puppy  
Scratches his fleas.

732

In the summer rain  
A spider clinging grimly  
To a sunflower.

733

In a dank basement  
A rotting sack of barley  
Swells with sprouting grain.

734

A magnolia  
Fell amid fighting sparrows,  
Putting them to flight.

735

Just before sunrise,  
And after the milkman has gone,  
A jonquil blooms.

736

In the July sun,  
Three birds flew into a nest;  
Only two came out.

737

In the summer sun,  
Near an empty whiskey bottle,  
A sleeping serpent.

738

In the burning sun,  
A viper's tongue is nudging  
A cigarette butt.

739

Out of the forest  
One bird cry comes over snow,  
Then black silence.

740

Drying in the sun,  
Gleaming in a dirt pathway,  
The track of a snail.

741

In the vast desert,  
The whisper of stirring sand  
Deepens the silence.

742

The sun is drying  
Yellow leaves stuck on the wall  
By last night's rainstorm.

743

In the still orchard  
A petal falls to the grass;  
A bird stops singing.

744

Only where sunlight  
Spots the table cloth with gold  
Do the flies cluster.

745

In the summer lake,  
The moon gives a long shiver,  
Then swells round again.

746

Spring snow melting,  
But under the dark hedges  
Are patches of white.

747

A crow calls out twice,  
Then after a long silence  
Calls out twice again.

748

Three times a bird calls;  
At last there comes a response,  
Meek and far away.

749

From the woods at night  
Comes the sound of something walking  
Over fallen leaves.

750

The mailman's whistle  
Makes the weeping baby pause  
And stare waitingly.

751

During spring cleaning,  
She comes across her old dolls  
And stares musingly.

752

How quiet it is when  
The rain stops and changes  
Into driving snow.



753

I saw the dead man  
Impatiently brush away  
The flies from his mouth.

754

While urinating,  
I feel slightly self-conscious  
Before the spring moon.

755

A bloated dead cat  
Emerging from melting snow  
On a tenement roof.

756

So insistently  
A crow caws in the spring field  
That I want to look.

757

In a quiet forest,  
Out of a pool of cold rain,  
A rat laps the stars.

758

Damp with autumnness,  
On a dusty mantelpiece,  
A porcelain hen.

759

Like remembering,  
The hills are dim and distant  
In the winter air.

760

An autumn river:  
A crow with a broken wing,  
Cawing as it floats.

761

An autumn evening,  
With all its somber joy,  
Is a lonely thing.

762

Droning autumn rain:  
A boy lines up toy soldiers  
For a big battle.

763

Beyond a sea wall,  
An occasional wave flings  
Foam at the autumn sky.

764

The oaken coffin,  
Between the porch and the car,  
Was christened by snow.

765

On a glassy sea  
There is not a single ship  
In the August sun.

766

Standing in the snow,  
A horse shifts his heavy haunch  
Slowly to the right.

767

A moment ago  
There was just one icy star  
Above that mountain.

768

This well-thumbed novel  
Was the tale she loved best,—  
Fields of autumn rain.

769

The calliope fades,  
But the autumn wind still echoes  
Its tune in the street.

770

My guests have now gone;  
The grate fire burns to white ashes,—  
How lonely it is.

771

Waving pennants gone,  
The white houses now belong  
To a summer sky.

772

The autumn wind moans:  
I would like to talk to her,  
If she were here now.

773

The parade has gone:  
A cloudy sky rests heavier  
Upon the houses.

774

On my trouser leg  
Are still a few strands of fur  
From my long dead cat.

775

After the parade,  
And after the pounding drums,  
Winter trees are distant.

776

Empty autumn sky:  
The bright circus tents have gone,  
Taking their music.

777

The wild geese have gone;  
The hills over which they flew  
Are grieving and black.

778

Having sold his cows,  
His wide green pasture becomes  
A part of the world.

779

The descending fog  
Wipes out the foreign freighters  
Anchored in the bay.

780

The parade has gone,  
But the pounding drums still sway  
The magnolias.

781

There is nobody  
To watch the kitten playing  
With the willow tip.

782

From the dark still pines,  
Not a breath of autumn wind  
To ripple the lake.

783

I cannot find it,  
That very first violet  
Seen from my window.

784

In this dry orchard  
There are no red ripe apples  
Dripping with rain.



785

I see nobody  
Upon the muddy roadway  
In autumn moonlight.

786

In the winter dusk,  
No trees are dotting the banks  
Of the little river.

787

This autumn evening  
Is full of an empty sky  
And one empty road.

788

Around the tree trunk,  
A kitten's paw is flicking  
At an absent mouse.

789

In the spring hills,  
My dog sits and stares at me,—  
Just us two alone.

790

In winter twilight  
A black rat creeps along  
A path in the snow.

791

In deep deference  
To the fluttering snowflakes,  
The birds cheep softly.

792

Does that sparrow know  
That it is upon my roof  
That he is hopping?

793

Not even the cat  
Could escape the sudden rain  
From the July sky.

794

After the snowstorm,  
The cattle stands aimlessly,  
Blinking at whiteness.

795

A tolling church bell:  
A rat rears in the moonlight  
And stares at the steeple.

796

Escaping spring rain,  
Scuttling over a door sill,  
A fuzzy spider.

797

A freezing midnight:  
An empty house creaks slightly,  
Settling in the earth.

798

Above corn tassels  
Half lost in the evening's haze,  
A single frog's croak.

799

A caterpillar  
Sleeping in his spotted skin  
On a sunlit leaf.

800

From under the house  
My cat comes with dusty fur  
And cobwebbed whiskers.

801

In a full zinc tub,  
Winter rain pelting a rat,  
Floating and bloated.

802

A cat is watching  
The fog as it is rising  
Out of frozen grass.

803

That rotting plant  
Must be something delicious  
To that butterfly.

804

The guard on duty  
Sees all visitors except  
The beads of spring dew.

805

One crow on a limb;  
Another goes to join him,  
Then both fly away.

806

The plow-split anthill  
Reveals scurrying black cities  
Under the horse's tail.

807

It was the first time  
I had ever seen the rain  
Blow a bird away.

808

Moonlit stillness:  
One sear leaf makes sixty fall  
With a sighing hiss.

809

Why did this spring wood  
Grow so silent when I came?  
What was happening?

810

That frozen star *there*,  
Or *this* one on the water, —  
Which is more distant?

811

All the long spring day  
Poplar trees flinging raindrops  
Against sunlit clouds.

812

Blossoming purple,  
A forgotten artichoke  
In a dark cupboard.

813

A winter dawn breathes  
Tiny beads of sweat on a  
Sooty oil-lamp globe.

814

Clutching from the trees,  
Thick creepers are strangling clouds  
In the lake's bosom.

815

Glittering with frost,  
A dead frog squats livingly  
In the garden path.

816

Heading toward the sea,  
Drifting into the cold rain,—  
How strong the smoke is!



On a scaly oak,  
In the glare of sunset rays,  
Ice on eagle's wings.



## NOTES ON THE HAIKU

### 1

This haiku first appeared in Ollie Harrington, "The Last Days of Richard Wright," *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, eds. Ellen Wright and Michel Fabre (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 253. In both versions the first line reads: "I am nobody" without a colon. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

### 2

This haiku first appeared in Richard Wright, "Fourteen Haikus," *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251, as the first one. Both versions read: "For you, O gulls / I order slaty waters / And this leaden sky."

In Wright's manuscript, an exclamation mark at the end of the third line may be a substitute for a *kireji* (cutting word). The classic *renga* (linked verse) had eighteen varieties of *kireji* for dividing its sections: *ya*, *kana*, *keri*, etc. Basho

increased the variety to forty-eight as the use of *kireji* was re-defined and expanded. In “The Old Pond” the syllable *ya* is attached to the words *furu ike* (old pond): Basho is expressing a feeling of awe about the quietness of the pond. In another celebrated haiku, Basho uses *ya* to emphasize the deadly quiet atmosphere of the woods he visited: “*Shizukesa ya / Iwa ni shimi iru / Semi no koe*” (It’s deadly quiet: / Piercing into the rocks / Is the shrill of cicada). Above all, adding a *kireji* is a structural device to “cut” or divide a whole into parts. Since composing a haiku is confined to seventeen syllables in three lines, the parts of a vision or idea must be clearly segmented and united in its development. Dividing the whole into its sections, in turn, gives the section with a *kireji* great weight. The use of cutting words in haiku thus signifies the poet’s conviction about a natural phenomenon with which he or she is struck. Because the poet’s response to the scene is interpreted as decisive, the overall vision created in the poem is further clarified. Traditionally, cutting words convey one’s hope, wish, demand, call, question, resignation, awe, wonder, surprise, and the like.

### 3

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 253. Both



versions delete the comma at the end of the first line and the period at the end of the third line. Wright might have used a comma as a substitute for a cutting word, as explained in note 2.

The third line constitutes a *kigo* (season word) referring to spring. The close tie haiku has to nature is manifested by making reference to one of the four seasons and appreciating its beauty. Conventionally, a letter in Japanese begins with a seasonal greeting and a reference to weather. This custom may have derived from the poets of the Muromachi period (1392–1573) who perceived the season in each climatic, environmental, and biological phenomenon—spring rain, winter snow, cherry blossoms, falling leaves, autumn sunset, the harvest moon, and the like—by which it became a literary representation. A seasonal word gives each haiku a vastness and universality it might not ordinarily have. This reference gives the poem a sense of infinity and eternity as it itself remains finite and temporary. In addition, the *kigo* serves an aesthetic function since it has a capacity to evoke commonly perceived images of beauty. Buson's "Yama Dori no" (The Mountain Pheasant) uses the spring setting sun for the *kigo*: "*Yama dori no / O mo fumu haru no / Iri hi kana*" (Also stepping on / The mountain pheasant's tail is / The spring setting sun). Seasonal words are often associated with certain conventional perceptions and implications. For example, morning glories evoke the thought of quickly fading beauty, autumn winds imply loneliness and sadness, and

plum blossoms suggest that they are merely precursors of perfect beauty to be created by later cherry blossoms.

7

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 253. Both versions read: "Make up your mind snail! / You are half inside your house / And halfway out!" For a commentary, see Afterword.

13

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in Richard Wright, "Haiku," *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 101. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251. Both versions omit a period in the third line. The haiku in its simple depiction of a spring scene is reminiscent of a well-known haiku by Buson:

*Tsuri-gane ni*

*Tomarite nemuru*

*Kocho kana*

On the hanging bell

Has perched and is fast asleep,

It's a butterfly.

A misty rain and a butterfly suggest spring. This haiku expresses the poet's perception of a harmony that exists among the insect, the animal, and their climatic environment.

In this description of a summer scene, the pavements—man-made objects—appear as a discordant element against the natural background: a sparrow, its excrement, and the summer heat.

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 101. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251. All three versions omit a period at the end of the poem.

Although this haiku describes an interaction between man and nature, as does Kikaku's famous haiku "The Harvest

Moon,” the central image created in it represents a different kind of interaction, one between man and animal. The interaction in “The Harvest Moon” creates a far more luminous image than moonlight itself. For a further commentary on Kikaku’s poem, see Afterword.

22

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 254. A period is lacking in both versions. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

25

A sense of incongruity that the courtyard, part of man’s world, and the urination of a horse convey makes this verse a *senryu* rather than a haiku. The incongruity, however, seems to lie in the human perception rather than in the scene, as the situation is common. For *senryu*, see Afterword.



For a commentary, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 253. A period is lacking in both versions. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

This piece finds unity in man and nature: a man, a mule, a rain, a meadow, and a hill.

Although the final line is in four syllables, it provides emphasis with an exclamation mark. This haiku expresses a perception that nature is intricate and infinite. For the syllabic convention in haiku, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 93. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 254. Both versions omit a period at the end of the poem. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

This haiku describes the arrival of spring with a transference of the senses: the scent of oranges and the warmth of March

wind. The image of a harbor at dawn suggests the protection of man from the winter weather.

66

For a commentary, see Afterword.

69

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 94. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 254. In both versions, the first line does not have a comma after “leave,” nor does the second line after “rain.” For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

83

This one, in a simple description of change and loss in nature, expresses a sense of *yugen* characteristic of classic Japanese haiku. For a discussion of *yugen*, see Afterword.

This is a haiku of balance and harmony: not only does a yellow butterfly, an image of beauty, counterbalance the pond's green scum, an image of ugliness, but the entire scene becomes beautiful because of two yellow butterflies, perhaps a couple, instead of one.

## 103

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 100. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. In all three versions, a period is lacking at the end of the poem.

## 106

An image of nature, "beads of quicksilver," is reinforced by a man-made object, "a black umbrella," under a natural environment.

This haiku first appeared in *Ebony*, no. 16 (February 1961): 94. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 100. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 254. A period is lacking in all three versions. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

This one, with a vague reference to autumn, expresses a sense of loneliness as do many classic Japanese haiku. For a discussion of classic Japanese haiku, see Afterword.

Even though human beings try to take advantage of nature, it does not always let them. Nature has its autonomy.

This haiku describes a dark, desolate scene in autumn. Like Basho's haiku on autumn, it conveys a sensibility of *yugen* and *sabi*. For a discussion of *yugen* and *sabi*, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251. Both versions read: “An autumn sunset / A buzzard sails slowly past / Not flapping its wings.” For an expression of quietude and loneliness, it bears some resemblance to Basho’s celebrated haiku “A Crow.” For a discussion of Basho’s poem, see Afterword.

For a critical commentary on this haiku, see Afterword.

This one first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 100. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. All three versions lack a question mark at the end and read: “Why is hail so wild / Bouncing so frighteningly / Only to lie so still.”

For a commentary, see Afterword.

This haiku in an irregular measure of 5,6,4, and without a seasonal reference, sounds more like a modern haiku than a traditional one.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

This haiku depicts the arrival of spring with winter lingering over the mountains. Because of the bright sun, the beauty of snow is intensified; as a paradox, the poem extols winter while celebrating spring.

This one first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251. A period is lacking in both versions. In describing one's poverty and isolation the haiku expresses the sensibility of *wabi*. For a discussion of *wabi*, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 100. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. A period is lacking in all three versions. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 101. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 251. A period is lacking in all three versions.



185

In this haiku, a transference of the senses between the sound of the wind and the shape of drifting snow occurs.

194

A transference of the senses between the cracking of a tree limb and the starlight reflected on snow creates a beautiful image.

212

The convergence of the bustling streets into a spring sea suggests a harmony between humanity and nature.

220

The interaction between the bell and the spring moon reflected on the river suggests the unity of man and nature.

The scene arouses a tender feeling about nature: the mother duck's love and protection of her offspring and their obedience to and reliance upon her. "Even," placed at the beginning of the first line, functions as a cutting word and emphasizes the point of view. For more on the use of cutting words in haiku, see note 2.

This one expresses, as some contemporary Japanese haiku do, a sense of balance and harmony in human life. A feeling of happiness, suggested by the red roses, compensates for the loneliness suggested by convalescing, as the color of the flowers does for the absence of smell.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

A stark contrast between a lone cricket's cry and the serenity of the moon and stars, as well as an interaction of the senses

between sight and sound, does create a sense of infinite space and silence.

239

There is a transference of the senses between the sound of an axe and the ripples on the lake.

241

The autumn fog, while keeping the living from seeing, creates beads of light, an image of beauty, for a man who unfortunately cannot see.

243

A feeling of isolation and loneliness, a modernist theme, is balanced by the presence of the doctor, just as night is by day and sadness by happiness.

264

This verse sounds more like a *senryu* than a haiku for an expression of humor and levity. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

A transference of the senses between the color and the sound of the sky makes the image of nature infinitely vast.

The first line, with two negative articles and a colon, functions as a *kireji* (cutting word). The coldness of the winter night is reinforced by a dog's barking whitely. For more on cutting words in haiku, see note 2.

This haiku depicts a transference between the smell of apples and the light of the moon.

This verse is a *senryu* rather than a haiku for an expression of light humor. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

As an expression of sympathy for a fly, this one is reminiscent of Issa's famous haiku "Do Not Ever Strike!": "Do not ever strike! / The fly moves as if to pray / With his hands and feet." In Issa's haiku, the negative particle attached to the verb "strike" functions as a cutting word. In Wright's haiku, the final line with "how" and an exclamation mark accomplishes the same effect. For a discussion of Issa's Buddhist philosophy and his haiku, see Afterword. For cutting words in haiku, see note 2.

This haiku first appeared in Constance Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), p. 393. It also appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1, and in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 100. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 253. Webb's version conforms to the manuscript but the other versions do not have a period at the end.

Describing the deep silence of the forest, this haiku is reminiscent of Basho's celebrated haiku "It's Deadly Quiet," quoted in note 2.

This verse is a *senryu* rather than a haiku. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

However spontaneously the scene is depicted, this verse sounds like a *senryu* rather than a haiku. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

This one gives a sensation similar to that of a modernist haiku by Yamaguchi Seishi: "Lo the Jupiter! / A prostitute was swimming / On the sea by day."

Since an erotic sensation expressed here is tempered by a reference to a spring moon, this haiku creates an image of fleeting beauty like that of cherry blossoms. In its subject matter, this piece smacks of modernist haiku.

It is not clear whether a girl leads a cow or a cow her: creating such an ambiguous image suggests the unity and harmony between man and nature.

In its subject matter this haiku, like 365, “The Christmas Season,” is least traditional.

While this piece has an unusual 5,6,4 syllabic rhythm, it captures an aesthetic sensibility of *yugen*. For *yugen*, see Afterword.

For a critical commentary, see Afterword.

This piece has a 5,6,6 syllabic measure. The thick wool protecting the sheep from cold weather suggests a harmonious relationship between the animal and its natural environment.

Cast in a manner of *wabi*, this haiku focuses on the beauty of a winter scene in contrast to loneliness and poverty in human life. For a discussion of the aesthetic principle of *wabi*, see Afterword.

However spontaneous raining and shitting are, a sense of incongruity between the two natural phenomena makes this verse a *senryu*. For *senryu*, see Afterword.



Although this haiku describes nature's intrusion upon the human world, it suggests that the insect is perching on the screen as if it were flying in a natural scene projected on the screen.

This piece first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also appeared in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 101. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. In all three versions, a period is lacking at the end of the poem. For a critical commentary, see Afterword.

A transference of the senses between the tolling of the cathedral bell and the blue sky creates a harmonious picture of man and nature.

In its rhythm and subject matter, this piece resembles a modern haiku.

This piece has an unusual syllabic rhythm of 3,6,5. A repetition of the command “look” in the first line, with an exclamation mark, functions like a *kireji* in Japanese haiku. For *kireji*, see note 2.

The poet makes nature convey his sentiment, a manner that resembles T. S. Eliot’s objective correlative.

This haiku first appeared in Constance Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography*, p. 393. See note 303. It also appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1, and in *New Letters* 38 (Winter 1971), 101. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 253. Webb’s version is identical with the manuscript version. The other versions do not have a period at the end of the poem. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

For an expression of *wabi*, this haiku focuses on the beauty of the moonlight in contrast to the lice. For a discussion of the sensibility of *wabi* and Rotsu the beggar-poet in seventeenth-century Japan, see Afterword.

As an expression of *wabi*, this haiku depicts the beauty of the moon and the affinity people have with their fellow human beings.

This verse expresses a typical haiku perception that all life belongs to nature.

In a coarse manner, this verse reads more like a *senryu* than a haiku. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

This haiku first appeared in Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography*, p. 394. It also appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. The versions in *Studies in Black Literature* and *Richard Wright Reader* both read: “Standing in the field / I hear the whispering of / Snowflake to snowflake.” Webb’s version is identical with the manuscript version, except that in Webb’s the first line is not indented.

As an expression of *yugen* to portray loneliness, this haiku is essentially flawed. Not only is a ram’s action graceless, but the entire scene fails to evoke a sense of mystery. The kind of incongruity and humor the poet tries to interject does not even make the verse a good *senryu*. For a discussion of *yugen*, see Afterword. For *senryu*, also see Afterword.

In depicting the spring atmosphere that permeates the cathedral, this is reminiscent of a modern Japanese haiku,

“From Hoojoo’s,” by Takano Suju: “From Hoojoo’s / Huge  
and lofty temple roof: / Butterflies of spring.”

508

This haiku first appeared in Webb’s *Richard Wright: A Biography*, p. 394: “It is September / The month in which I was born, / And I have no thoughts.” It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 254: “It is September / The month when I was born / And I have no thoughts.” Whether the *Richard Wright Reader* version is in error is not certain, but the manuscript version is in a usual syllabic measure of 5,7,5, whereas that of the *Richard Wright Reader* is in a 5,6,5 measure. For a critical commentary on the haiku, see Afterword.

535

This haiku without a seasonal reference and with slight humor sounds like a *senryu*. For seasonal references, see note 3. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

539

A transference of the senses between the light and the sound of the sleet intensifies the natural phenomenon.

Conceptually, this haiku reminds one that in contrast to nature, the human world is necessarily limited. Structurally, the poem thrives with the use of an exclamation mark in “cutting” the first line from the rest, as well as with the use of the comparative adjective “smaller” in the final line. For cutting words in haiku, see note 2.

For a perception of loneliness in autumn, this piece is reminiscent of Basho’s famous haiku: “A crow / Perched on a withered tree / In the autumn evening.” For a discussion of Basho’s poem, see Afterword. For a commentary on this haiku by Wright, also see Afterword.

This one first appeared in *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 1. It also is included in *Richard Wright Reader*, p. 252. Both versions read: “From across the lake / Past the black winter trees / Faint sounds of a flute.” An interaction of nature and art occurs through a transference of the senses between the black winter trees and the faint sounds of a flute.

Both images, in turn, intensify each other. For further discussion of the haiku, see Afterword.

574

For a commentary, see Afterword.

577

For a commentary, see Afterword.

580

This one as an expression of pure sensation resembles one of Basho's lesser-known haiku: "How cool it is, / Putting the feet on the wall: / An afternoon nap." For a discussion of the haiku by Basho, see Afterword.

581

The middle line originates from a passage in *Black Boy*: "There were the echoes of nostalgia I heard in the crying strings of wild geese winging south against a bleak, autumn

sky.” See *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper, 1966 [1945]), p. 14.

584

Although this haiku is similar to 581, “Don’t They Make You Sad,” a transference of the senses occurs between the faint cries of wild geese and the whiteness of the birds against the rainy dark background.

600

For a commentary, see Afterword.

608

This haiku in a manner of *yugen* expresses the loneliness man feels in the wide world. For *yugen*, see Afterword.

626

This describes a scene in which a twig with its red blossom flies into the sun as if a bird flew off the cherry tree. In



creating an illusion the poem is reminiscent of Moritake's famous haiku, which Ezra Pound quotes in his discussion of Japanese haiku: "The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: / A butterfly." For Pound's discussion of Moritake's haiku, see Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," *Fortnightly Review*, no. 573, n.s. (1914): 467; and Yoshinobu Hakutani, "Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and Imagism," *Modern Philology* 90 (August 1992), 56.

647

This piece was first published in Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography*, p. 400. According to Webb, Wright's daughter, Julia, while sitting with the haiku manuscript in her father's study after his death, wrote "This is Daddy," referring to the haiku. For a commentary on this haiku, see Afterword.

650

This haiku expresses in a manner of *yugen* that change constitutes one aspect of man and nature. For *yugen*, see Afterword.

657

This haiku in a manner of *yugen* expresses a perception that inevitable change takes place in nature. For a discussion of *yugen*, see Afterword.

660

For a commentary, see Afterword.

661

This one is in an unusual measure of 5,6,6 syllables.

668

Light humor makes this verse an excellent *senryu*. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

669

An illusion created in this haiku is akin to that in the classic haiku by Moritake, “The Fallen Blossom.” For a discussion

of Moritake's poem, see note on Wright's haiku 626, "Off the Cherry Tree." Wright's "A Leaf Chases Wind" is also similar to his other haiku, such as 627, "As Early As June," and 629, "An Autumn Fog Stares."

671

While the second line alludes to man's loneliness, a pale winter moon, natural beauty, is intensified by the presence of a manmade object. In this respect, the haiku bears some resemblance to Kikaku's "The Harvest Moon." For a discussion of Kikaku's haiku, see Afterword.

684

For a commentary, see Afterword.

695

In a manner of *wabi*, this haiku describes a contrast between man's poverty and nature's grandeur.

698

For a commentary, see Afterword.

709

This piece, in an unusual 6,7,4 syllabic rhythm, depicts a distortion of natural beauty brought about by man's exploitation of nature.

720

For a commentary, see Afterword.

721

Describing control of emotion, this haiku alludes to a state of mind called *mu* in Zen. For a discussion of Zen philosophy that underlies much of the classic Japanese haiku, see Afterword.

Only when an interaction between man and nature occurs can natural beauty be appreciated. For a further commentary, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

This haiku, in an unusual 5,8,4 syllabic measure, depicts a beautiful natural phenomenon without human intervention.

For a description of serenity in nature, this and 739, “Out of the Forest,” resemble Basho’s famous haiku “It’s Deadly Quiet,” quoted in note 2.

Because urinating and the spring moon are both natural phenomena, the scene of incongruity described makes this verse an excellent *senryu*. For *senryu*, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword. In a style of *yugen*, this haiku expresses an affinity between man and nature. For the poetic sensibility of *yugen*, see Afterword.

The term “calliope,” which is also the name for the most important of the ancient Greek muses, here refers to the musical instrument with air or steam whistles used in carnivals, circuses, and on river boats. The reference plays the role of an intermediary between nature and art.

In a style of *wabi*, this poem expresses a feeling of isolation and loneliness: only the poet can appreciate such a beautiful play of the cat. For *wabi*, see Afterword.

For a commentary, see Afterword.

For an expression of *wabi*, this one is similar to 781, “There Is Nobody,” above. For *wabi*, see Afterword.

With the use of a paradoxical word, “full,” this piece conveys the sensibility of *wabi*. For *wabi*, see Afterword.

A single frog’s croak intensifying a scene of mystery and nebulosity, this haiku is composed in a style of *yugen*. Traditionally, a frog is a seasonal reference to spring, but Yone Noguchi, a Japanese bilingual poet and critic, regarded Basho’s famous haiku on a frog, “The Old Pond,” as an autumn haiku. For Noguchi’s discussion of Basho’s haiku, see Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed., *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: An East-West Literary Assimilation*

(Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1992), Vol. II, pp. 73–74.

803

A transference of the senses, especially among the sight of the butterfly, the smell, and the taste of the rotting plant occurring, this haiku is reminiscent of 47, “The Spring Lingers On.”

808

For a depiction of nature’s serenity, this haiku bears some resemblance to Basho’s “It’s Deadly Quiet,” quoted in note 2.

809

This haiku seems inspired by Zen philosophy. For a discussion of haiku and Zen, see Afterword. For a further commentary on this haiku, also see Afterword.



## AFTERWORD

### I

Like transcendentalists such as Emerson and Whitman, Japanese haiku poets were inspired by nature, especially its beautiful scenes and seasonal changes.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact origin of haiku is not clear, the close relationship haiku has with nature suggests the ways in which the ancient Japanese lived on their islands. Where they came from is unknown, but they must have adapted their living to ways of nature. Many were farmers, others hunters, fishermen, and warriors. While they often confronted nature, they always tried to live in harmony with it: Buddhism and Shintoism taught them that the soul existed in them as well as in nature, the animate and the inanimate alike, and that nature must be preserved as much as possible.

Interestingly, haiku traditionally avoided such subjects as earthquakes, floods, illnesses, and eroticism—ugly aspects of nature. Instead, haiku poets were attracted to such objects as flowers, trees, birds, sunset, the moon, genuine love. Those who earned their livelihood by labor had to

battle with the negative aspects of nature, but noblemen, priests, writers, singers, and artists found beauty and pleasure in natural phenomena. They had the time to idealize or romanticize nature and impose a philosophy on it, and as a result they became an elite group in Japanese culture. Basho was an essayist, Buson a painter, and Issa a Buddhist priest—and each was an accomplished haiku poet.

The genesis of haiku can be seen in the *waka* (Japanese song), the oldest verse form, of thirty-one syllables in five lines (5,7,5,7,7). As an amusement at court someone would compose the first three lines of a *waka* and another person would be challenged to provide the last two lines to complete the verse. The haiku form, a verse of seventeen syllables arranged 5,7,5, with such exceptions as 5,7,6 and 5,8,5, etc., corresponds to the first three lines of the *waka*. *Hyakunin Isshu* (*One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*, A.D. 1235), a *waka* anthology compiled by Fujiwara no Sadaiye, contains haiku-like verses. Sadaiye's "Chiru Hana wo" ("The Falling Blossoms"), for example, reads:

*Chiru hana wo*  
*Oikakete yuku*  
*Arashi kana*<sup>2</sup>

The falling blossoms:  
Look at them, it is the storm  
That is chasing them.

The focus of this verse is the poet's observation of a natural object, the falling blossoms. To this beautiful picture Sadaiye adds his feeling about the phenomenon: it looks as though a storm is pursuing the falling flower petals.

This seventeen-syllable verse form was preserved by noblemen, courtiers, and high-ranked samurai for nearly three centuries after the publication of *Hyakunin Isshu*. Around the beginning of the sixteenth century, the verse form became popular among the poets. It constituted a dominant element of another popular verse form called *renga*, linked song. *Renga* was a continuous chain of fourteen (7,7) and seventeen (5,7,5) syllable verses, each independently composed, but connected as one poem. The first collection of *renga*, *Chikuba Kyojin Shu* (*Chikuba Mad Men's Collection*) contains over two hundred *tsukeku* (adding verses) linked with the first verses of another poet. As the title of this collection suggests, the salient characteristic of *renga* was a display of ingenuity and coarse humor. *Chikuba Kyojin Shu* also collected twenty *hokku* (starting verses). Because the *hokku*, which was an earlier term for *haiku*, was considered the most important verse of a *renga* series, it was usually composed by the senior poet attending a *renga* session. The fact that this collection included far fewer *hokku* in proportion to *tsukeku* indicates the poets' interest in the comic nature of the *renga*.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1680s, when Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) wrote the first version of his celebrated poem on the frog jumping into the old pond, an older poetic genre from which *haiku*

evolved, *haikai*, had become a highly stylized expression of poetic vision.<sup>4</sup> Basho's poem was totally different from most of the *haikai* poems written by his predecessors: it was the creation of a new perception and not merely an ingenious play on words. As most scholars observe, the changes and innovations brought about in *haikai* poetry were not accomplished by a single poet.<sup>5</sup> Basho's contemporaries, with Basho as their leader, attempted to create the serious *haikai*, a verse form known in modern times as haiku. The haiku, then, was a unique poetic genre in the late seventeenth century that was short but could give more than wit or humor: a haiku became a crystallized expression of the poet's vision and sensibility.

To explain Basho's art of haiku, Yone Noguchi, a noted bilingual poet and critic, once quoted "Furu Ike ya" ("The Old Pond"):

*Furu ike ya*

*Kawazu tobi komu*

*Mizu no oto*<sup>6</sup>

The old pond!

A frog leapt into—

List, the water sound!

One may think a frog an absurd poetic subject, but Basho focused his vision on a scene of desolation, an image of nature. The pond was perhaps situated on the premises of an ancient temple whose silence was suddenly broken by a frog plunging into the deep water. As Noguchi conceived the experience, Basho, a Zen Buddhist, was "supposed to awaken into enlightenment now when he heard the voice bursting out of



voicelessness.”<sup>7</sup> According to Noguchi, Basho realized at the moment of enlightenment that life and death were merely different aspects of the very same thing. Basho was not suggesting that the tranquillity of the pond meant death or that the frog symbolized life. Basho here had the sensation of hearing the sound bursting out of soundlessness. A haiku is not a representation of goodness, truth, or beauty; there is nothing particularly good, true, or beautiful about a frog’s leaping into the water.

It seems as though Basho, in writing the poem, carried nature within him and brought himself to the deepest level of nature, where all sounds lapse into the world of silence and infinity. Though his vision is based upon reality, it transcends time and space. What a Zen poet like Basho is showing is that man respects nature, appreciates it, and achieves his peace of mind. This fusion of man and nature is called “spontaneity” in Zen. The best haiku, because of their linguistic limitations, are inwardly extensive and outwardly infinite. A severe constraint imposed on one aspect of haiku must be balanced by a spontaneous, boundless freedom on the other.

From a Zen point of view, such a vision is devoid of intellectualism and emotionalism. Since Zen is the most important philosophical tradition influencing Japanese haiku, the haiku poet aims at understanding the spirit of nature. Basho thus recognizes little division between man and nature, the subjective and the objective; he is never concerned with the problems of good and evil. A Zen poet seeks satori,

the Japanese term for enlightenment. This enlightenment is defined as the state of *mu*, nothingness, which is absolutely free of any thought or emotion; it is so completely free that such a state corresponds to that of nature. For a Zen-inspired poet, nature is a mirror of the enlightened self; one must see and hear things as they really are by making one's consciousness pure and clear. Classic haiku poets like Basho, Buson, and Issa avoided expressions of good and evil, love and hate, individual feeling and collective myth; their haiku indeed shun such sentiments altogether. Their poetry was strictly concerned with the portrayal of nature—mountains, trees, flowers, birds, waterfalls, nights, days, seasons. For the Japanese haiku poet, nature reflects the enlightened self; the poet must always make his or her consciousness pure, natural, and unemotional. "Japanese poets," Noguchi wrote, "go to Nature to make life more meaningful, sing of flowers and birds to make humanity more intensive."<sup>8</sup>

The haiku poet may not only aim at expressing sensation but also at generalizing and hence depersonalizing it. This characteristic can be shown even by one of Basho's lesser-known haiku:

*Hiya hiya to*

*Kabe wo fumaete*

*Hirune kana*<sup>9</sup>

How cool it is,

Putting the feet on the wall:

An afternoon nap.

Basho was interested in expressing how his feet, anyone's feet, would feel when placed on the wall in the house on a warm

summer afternoon. His subject was none other than this direct sensation. He did not want to convey any emotion, any thought, any beauty; there remained only poetry, only nature.

Because of its brevity and condensation, haiku seldom provides the picture with detail. The haiku poet delineates only an outline or highly selective parts and the reader must complete the vision. Above all, a classic haiku, as opposed to a modern one, is required to include a clear reference to one of the four seasons. In Basho's "The Old Pond," said to be written in the spring of 1686, a seasonal reference to spring is made by the frog in the second line: the plunging of a single frog into the deep water suddenly breaks the deadly quiet background.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the poet's perception of the infinitely quiet universe is intensified. It is also imperative that a haiku be primarily concerned with nature; if a haiku deals with man's life, that life must be viewed in the context of nature rather than society.

The predilection to portray man's life in association with nature means that the poet is more interested in genuinely human sentiments than in moral, ethical, or political problems. That haiku thrives upon the affinity between man and nature can be illustrated by this famous haiku by Kaga no Chiyo (1703–1775), a foremost woman poet in her age:

*Asagao ni*

*Tsurube torarete*

*Morai mizu*<sup>11</sup>

A morning glory

Has taken the well-bucket:

I'll borrow water.

Since a fresh, beautiful morning glory has grown on her well-bucket overnight, Chiyo does not mind going over to her neighbor to borrow water. Not only does her action show a desire to preserve nature, but also the poem conveys a natural and tender (as opposed to individual and personal) feeling one has for nature. A classic haiku, while it shuns human-centered emotions, thrives upon such a nature-centered feeling as Chiyo's. Nor can this sensibility be explained by logic or reason. Longer poems are often filled with intellectualized or moralized reasoning, but haiku avoids such language.

Because haiku is limited in its length, it must achieve its effect by a sense of unity and harmony within. Feelings of unity and harmony, indicative of Zen philosophy, are motivated by a desire to perceive every instant in nature and life: an intuition that nothing is alone, nothing is out of the ordinary. One of Basho's later haiku creates a sense of unity and relatedness:

*Aki fukaki*

*Tonari wa nani wo*

*Suru hito zo*<sup>12</sup>

Autumn is deepening:

What does the neighbor do

For a living?

Though a serious poet, Basho was enormously interested in commonplace and common people. In this haiku, as autumn approaches winter and he nears the end of his life, he takes a deeper interest in his fellow human beings. His observations



of the season and his neighbor, a total stranger, are separate yet both observations intensify each other. His vision, as it is unified, evokes a deeply felt, natural, and universal sentiment.

In haiku, two entirely different things are joined in sameness: spirit and matter, present and future, doer and deed, word and thing, meaning and sensation. Basho's oft-quoted "A Crow" depicts a crow perching on a withered branch, a moment of reality:

<i>Kare eda ni</i>	A crow
<i>Karasu no tomari taruya</i>	Perched on a withered tree
<i>Aki no kure</i> <sup>13</sup>	In the autumn evening.

This image is followed by the coming of an autumn nightfall, a feeling of future. Present and future, thing and feeling, man and nature, each defining the other, are thus unified.

The unity of sentiment in haiku is further intensified by the poet's expression of the senses. Basho's "Sunset on the Sea," for instance, shows the unity and relatedness of the senses:

<i>Umi kurete</i>	Sunset on the sea:
<i>Kamo no koe</i>	The voices of the ducks
<i>Honoka ni shiroshi</i> <sup>14</sup>	Are faintly white.

The voices of the ducks under the darkened sky are delineated as white as well as faint. Interestingly, the chilled wind after dark evokes the whiteness associated with coldness. The voices of the ducks and the whiteness of the waves refer to two entirely different senses, but both senses, each reinforcing the other, create a unified sensation.

The transference of the senses may occur between color and mood, as shown in a haiku by Usuda Aro, a contemporary Japanese poet:

*Tsuma araba*

*Tozomou asagao*

*Akaki saku*<sup>15</sup>

Were my wife alive,

I thought, and saw a morning glory:

It has blossomed red.

The first line conveys a feeling of loneliness, but the red morning glory reminds him of a happy life they spent when she was living. The redness rather than the whiteness or blue color of the flower is transferred to the feeling of happiness and love. The transference of the senses, in turn, arouses a sense of balance and harmony. His recollection of their happy marriage, a feeling evoked by the red flower, compensates for the death of his wife, a reality.

Well-wrought haiku thrive upon the fusion of man and nature, and upon the intensity of love and beauty it creates. A haiku by Takarai Kikaku (1661–1707), Basho's first disciple and one of the most innovative poets, is exemplary:

*Meigetsu ya*

*Tatami no uye ni*

*Matsu no kage*<sup>16</sup>

The harvest moon:

Lo, on the tatami mats

The shape of a pine.

The beauty of the moonlight here is not only humanized, in that the light is shining on a man-made object, but intensified by the shadows of a pine tree that fall upon the mats. The beauty of the intricate pattern of the ageless pine tree as it stamps the dustless mats is far more luminous than the light itself. Not only does such a scene unify the image of man and the image of nature, but also man and nature interact.

During the eighteenth century a satirical form of haiku called *senryu* was developed by Karai Senryu (1718–1790) as a kind of “mock haiku” with humor, moralizing nuances, and a philosophical tone, expressing “the incongruity of things” more than their oneness, dealing more often with distortions and failures, not just with the harmonious beauty of nature, as can be seen in the following *senryu*:

When she wails  
At the top of her voice,  
The husband gives in.<sup>17</sup>

Because *senryu* tend to appeal more to one’s sense of the logical than to intuition, many of Wright’s haiku can be read as *senryu*.

As the haiku has developed over the centuries, it has

established certain aesthetic principles. To define and illustrate them is difficult since they refer to subtle perceptions and complex states of mind in the creation of poetry. Above all, these principles are governed by the national character developed over the centuries. Having changed in meaning, they do not necessarily mean the same today as they did in the seventeenth century. Discussion of these terms, furthermore, proves difficult simply because poetic theory does not always correspond to what poets actually write. It has also been true that the aesthetic principles for the haiku are often applied to other genres of Japanese art such as Noh plays, flower arrangement, and tea ceremony.

One of the most delicate principles of Eastern art is called *yugen*. Originally *yugen* in Japanese art was an element of style pervasive in the language of Noh. It was also a philosophical principle originated in Zen metaphysics. In Zen, every individual possesses Buddhahood and must realize it. *Yugen*, as applied to art, designates the mysterious and dark, what lies under the surface. The mode of expression is subtle as opposed to obvious, suggestive rather than declarative. In reference to the *Works* by Zeami, the author of many of the extant Noh plays, Arthur Waley expounds this difficult term, *yugen*:

It is applied to the natural graces of a boy's movements, to the gentle restraint of a nobleman's speech and bearing. "When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to



the ear,” that is the *yugen* of music. The symbol of *yugen* is “a white bird with a flower in its beak.” “To watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill, to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return, to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid [*sic*] by far-off islands, to ponder on the journey of wild geese seen and lost among the clouds”—such are the gates to *yugen*.<sup>18</sup>

Such a scene conveys a feeling of satisfaction and release, as does the catharsis of a Greek tragedy, but *yugen* differs from catharsis because it has little to do with the emotional stress caused by tragedy. *Yugen* functions in art as a means by which man can comprehend the course of nature. Although *yugen* seems allied with a sense of resignation, it has a far different effect upon the human psyche. A certain type of Noh play like *Takasago* celebrates the order of the universe ruled by heaven. The mode of perception in the play may be compared to that of a pine tree with its evergreen needles, the predominant representation on the stage. The style of *yugen* can express either happiness or sorrow. Cherry blossoms, however beautiful they may be, must fade away; love between man and woman is inevitably followed by sorrow.

This mystery and inexplicability, which surrounds the order of the universe, had a strong appeal to a classic haiku poet like Basho. His “The Old Pond,” as discussed earlier, shows that while the poet describes a natural phenomenon

realistically, he conveys his instant perception that nature is infinitely deep and absolutely silent. Such attributes of nature are not ostensibly stated; they are hidden. The tranquillity of the old pond with which the poet was struck remained in the background. He did not write “The rest is quiet”; instead he wrote the third line of the verse to read: “The sound of water.” The concluding image was given as a contrast to the background enveloped in quiet. Basho’s mode of experience is suggestive rather than descriptive, hidden and reserved rather than overt and demonstrative. *Yugen* has all the connotations of modesty, concealment, depth, and darkness. In Zen painting, woods and bays, as well as houses and boats, are hidden; hence these objects suggest infinity and profundity. Detail and refinement, which would mean limitation and temporariness of life, destroy the sense of permanence and eternity.

Another frequently used term in Japanese poetics is *sabi*. This noun derives from the verb *sabiru* (to rust) and implies that what is described is aged. The portrait of Buddha hung in Zen temples, as the Chinese painter Lian Kai’s *Buddha Leaving the Mountains* suggests, depicts the Buddha as an old man in contrast to the young figure typically shown in other temples.<sup>19</sup> Zen’s Buddha looks emaciated, his environment barren: his body, his tattered clothes, the aged tree standing nearby, the pieces of dry wood strewn about, all indicate that they have passed the prime of their life and function. In this kind of portrait the old man with thin body is

nearer to his soul as the old tree with its skin and leaves fallen is to the very origin and essence of nature.

*Sabi* is traditionally associated with loneliness. Aesthetically, however, this mode of sensibility smacks of grace rather than splendor; it suggests quiet beauty as opposed to robust beauty. Basho's "A Crow," quoted earlier, best illustrates this principle. Loneliness suggested by a single crow on a branch of an old tree is reinforced by the elements of time indicated by nightfall and autumn. The picture is drawn with little detail and the overall mood is created by a simple, graceful description of fact. Furthermore, parts of the picture are delineated, by implication, in dark colors: the crow is black, the branch dark brown, the background dusky. The kind of beauty associated with the loneliness in Basho's poem is in marked contrast to the robust beauty depicted in a poem by Mukai Kyorai (1651–1704), Basho's disciple:

*Hana mori ya*

*Shiroki katsura wo*

*Tsuki awase*<sup>20</sup>

The guardians

Of the cherry blossoms

Lay their white heads together.

The tradition of haiku established in the seventeenth century produced eminent poets like Buson and Issa in the eighteenth, but the revolt against this tradition took place toward the end of the nineteenth century under the banner of a young poet, Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902). On the one hand, Basho's followers, instead of becoming innovators like their

master, resorted to an artificiality reminiscent of the comic *renga*; on the other hand, Issa, when he died, left no disciples. The Meiji restoration (1868) called for changes in all aspects of Japanese culture, and Shiki became a leader in the literary revolution. He launched an attack on the tradition by publishing his controversial essay, “Criticism of Basho.” In response to a haiku by Hattori Ransetsu (1654–1707), Basho’s disciple, Shiki composed his own. Ransetsu’s haiku had been written two centuries earlier:

<i>Ki giku shira giku</i>	Yellow and white chrysanthemums:
<i>Sono hoka no na wa</i>	What other possible names?
<i>Naku-mogana</i> <sup>21</sup>	None can be thought of.

To Ransetsu’s poem, Shiki responded with this one:

<i>Ki giku shira giku</i>	Yellow and white chrysanthemums:
<i>Hito moto wa aka mo</i>	But at least another one—
<i>Aramahoshi</i> <sup>22</sup>	I want a red one.

Shiki advised his followers that they compose haiku to please themselves. To Shiki, some of the conventional poems lack direct, spontaneous expressions: a traditional haiku poet in his adherence to old rules of grammar and devices such as *kireji* (cutting word), resorted to artificially twisting words and phrases.

A modernist challenge Shiki gave the art of haiku, how-



ever, kept intact such aesthetic principles as *yugen* and *sabi*. Classic poets like Basho and Issa, who adhered to such principles, were also devout Buddhists. By contrast, Shiki, while abiding by the aesthetic principles, was regarded as an agnostic: his philosophy of life is demonstrated in this haiku:

<i>Aki kaze ya</i>	The wind in autumn
<i>Ware ni kami nashi</i>	As for me, there are no gods,
<i>Hotoke nashi</i> <sup>23</sup>	There are no Buddhas.

Although Shiki's direct references to the divinities of Japanese culture resemble a modernist style, the predominant image created by "the wind in autumn," a conventional *kigo* (seasonal word), suggests a deep-seated sense of loneliness and coldness. Shiki's mode of expression in this haiku is based upon *sabi*.

Some well-known haiku poets in the twentieth century also preserve the sensibility of *sabi*. The predicament of a patient described in this haiku by Ishida Hakyo arouses *sabi*:

<i>Byo shitsu ni</i>	In the hospital room
<i>Su bako tsukuredo</i>	I have built a nest box but
<i>Tsubame kozu</i> <sup>24</sup>	Swallows never appear.

Not only do the first and third lines indicate facts of loneliness, but the patient's will to live suggested by the second line also evokes a poignant sensibility. To a modern poet like

Hakyo, the twin problems of humanity are loneliness and boredom. He sees the same problems exist in nature as this haiku by him illustrates:

<i>Ori no washi</i>	The caged eagle;
<i>Sabishiku nareba</i>	When lonely
<i>Hautsu ka mo</i>	He flaps his wings.

The feeling of *sabi* is also aroused by the private world of the poet, the situation others cannot envision, as this haiku by Nakamura Kusatao, another modernist, shows:

<i>Ka no koe no</i>	At the faint voices
<i>Hisoka naru toki</i>	Of the flying mosquitoes
<i>Kui ni ker<sup>25</sup></i>	I felt my remorse.

Closely related to *sabi* is a poetic sensibility called *wabi*. Traditionally *wabi* has been defined in sharp antithesis to the folk or plebeian saying, “*Hana yori dango*” (Rice dumplings are preferred to flowers). Some poets are inspired by the sentiment that human beings desire beauty more than food, an attribute lacking in animals and other nonhuman beings. *Wabi* thus refers to the uniquely human perception of beauty stemmed from poverty. *Wabi* is often regarded as religious, as the Western saying “Blessed are the poor” suggests, but the spiritual aspect of *wabi* is based upon the aesthetic rather than the moral sensibility.

This mode of expression is often attributed to Basho, who did not come from a well-to-do family. Basho's life as an artist was that of a wandering bard as recorded in his celebrated diaries and travelogues, the most famous of which is *Oku no Hosonagashi Michi* (*The Narrow Road of Oku*). *Nozarashi Kiko* (*A Travel Account of My Exposure in the Fields*), one of Basho's earlier books of essays, opens with this revealing passage with two haiku:

When I set out on my journey of a thousand leagues I  
packed no provisions for the road. I clung to the staff  
of that pilgrim of old who, it is said, "entered the realm  
of nothingness under the moon after midnight." The  
voice of the wind sounded cold somehow as I left my  
tumbledown hut on the river in the eighth moon of the  
Year of the Rat, 1684.

*Nozarashi wo*  
*Kokoro ni kaze no*  
*Shimu mi ka na*

Bones exposed in a field—  
At the thought, how the wind  
Bites into my flesh.

*Aki too tose*  
*Kaette Edo wo*  
*Sasu kokyoo*<sup>26</sup>

Autumn—this makes ten years;  
Now I really mean Edo  
When I speak of "home."

The first haiku conveys a sense of *wabi* because the image of his bones suggests poverty and eternity. Although Basho has

fallen on fatigue and hardship on his journey, he has reached a higher state of mind. The expression of *wabi* in this verse is characterized by the feelings of aging, leanness, and coldness. Basho's attachment to art rather than to provision on his travel is shown in this haiku:

<i>Michi nobe no</i>	Upon the roadside
<i>Mukuge wa uma ni</i>	Grew mallow flowers: my horse
<i>Kuware ker<sup>27</sup></i>	Has eaten them all.

Rikyu (1521–1591), the famed artist of the tea ceremony, wrote that food which is enough to sustain body and a roof that does not leak are sufficient for man's life. For Basho, however, an empty stomach was necessary to create poetry. Among Basho's disciples, Rotsu (1651?–1739?), the beggar-poet, is well known for having come into Basho's legacy of *wabi*. This haiku by Rotsu best demonstrates his state of mind:

<i>Tori domo mo</i>	The water-birds too
<i>Neitte iru ka</i>	Are asleep
<i>Yogo no umi<sup>28</sup></i>	On the lake of Yogo?

Rotsu portrays a scene with no sight or sound of birds on the desolate lake. The withered reeds rustle from time to time in the chilly wind. It is only Rotsu the beggar and artist who is awake and is able to capture the beauty of the lake.

The sensibilities of *yugen*, *sabi*, and *wabi* all derive from the ways in which Japanese poets have seen nature over the centuries. Although the philosophy of Zen, on which the aesthetics of a poet like Basho is based, shuns emotion and intellect altogether, haiku is nonetheless concerned with one's feeling and thought. If haiku conveys the poet's feeling, that feeling must have been aroused by nature. That the art of haiku comes from man's affinity with nature is best explained by Basho in his travelogue *Oi no Kobumi* (*Manuscript in My Knapsack*):

One and the same thing runs through the waka of Saigyô, the renga of Sôgi, the paintings of Sesshû, the tea ceremony of Rikyû. What is common to all these arts is their following nature and making a friend of the four seasons. Nothing the artist sees is but flowers, nothing he thinks of but is the moon. When what a man sees is not flowers, he is no better than a barbarian. When what he thinks in his heart is not the moon, he belongs to the same species as the birds and beasts. I say, free yourselves from the barbarian, remove yourself from the birds and beasts; follow nature and return to nature!<sup>29</sup>

Not only does this passage reveal that Basho had great confidence in his art, but that he also believed that although the form of haiku differs from that of any other art, the essence of haiku remains the same.



## II

The evidence of Wright's identification with nature and his use of its motifs stretches from "Big Boy Leaves Home," with its rural events around the swimming hole, to *Black Boy*, and it culminates in the haiku. In *Black Boy* he expresses his delight "in seeing long straight rows of red and green vegetables," or his nostalgia when he hears "the crying strings of wild geese winging south against a bleak, autumn sky." He even wishes to "imitate the petty pride of sparrows" and finds an "incomprehensible secret embodied in a whitish toadstool hiding in the dark shade of a rotting log." Most revealing, perhaps, is his yearning for identification when he sees "a solitary ant carrying a burden upon a mysterious journey."<sup>30</sup> The evidence is a record of his early childhood days and sensations, transformed beyond the expansive symbolism of *Black Boy* into those patterns from Mississippi days when Wright learned to identify his mood and self with specific aspects of nature. The domain of nature was a world Wright wanted to inhabit. Perhaps he did for a while when, with his wife and daughter, he lived from 1947 to 1960 on his farm in Ailly, Normandy.<sup>31</sup> There he liked to work afternoons in his garden.

When Wright turned to writing haiku he was certainly not working in an artistic vacuum. Artists in the Western world had been interested in haiku, its history and meaning, and had been writing haiku since early in the twentieth century. As a result of visits to Japan, French writers Julien Vo-

cance, Paul-Louis Couchoud, and others began to write haiku in French. In 1910 a translation of a Japanese anthology of literature was made by Michael Revon, who referred to Basho's hokku as "haikai." Then in 1915 Vocance wrote a group of poems called *Cent Visions de Guerre* in the haiku form. By 1920 at least a dozen poets were writing haiku for the *Nouvelle revue française*. In London at the end of 1910, Basil Hall Chamberlain's second edition of Japanese poetry was published, with his essay "Basho and the Japanese Poetical Epigram."<sup>32</sup>

Soon American poets began to write haiku, the most famous, perhaps, being Ezra Pound, who wrote "In a Station of the Metro."<sup>33</sup> Some might consider his poem to be the first published haiku written in English. Other Americans rapidly followed Pound's lead: Wallace Stevens in 1917, William Carlos Williams in 1919, and Amy Lowell in the same year.<sup>34</sup> As early as 1909 the Imagist group of poets were influenced by both the tanka (a short verse form of five lines with 5,7,5,7,7 syllables respectively) and the haiku forms. The group included Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and John Gould Fletcher.<sup>35</sup> In 1915 in Boston, Lafcadio Hearn's translations of hokku and tanka were collected and published as *Japanese Lyrics*.<sup>36</sup> By the mid-1930s, Georges Bonneau began to publish a series of books, with his translation into French, of Japanese poetry, *Le Haiku*. English translations of Japanese haiku by Harold G. Henderson came out in 1934 as *The Bamboo Broom*.

The Second World War temporarily sidetracked the

Western world's interest in haiku. But after the war, British writers in Tokyo began to renew Western interest in haiku. The most important of these writers were Harold G. Henderson and R. H. Blyth. Their interest in haiku and subsequent books and translations once again made haiku a viable literary art form for Western poets. Blyth had studied Zen and believed that "Zen Buddhism was the dominant influence on the traditional Japanese arts, particularly haiku." His *Haiku: Volume I*, the first of four volumes, came out in 1949 and later was reissued in 1952 under the title *Haiku*.<sup>37</sup>

John Gould Fletcher introduced the West to Kenneth Yasuda's *A Pepper-Pod*, a translation of Japanese haiku with selections of original haiku written in English in 1946. Gary Snyder wrote haiku in his diary, published in 1952 under the title *Earth House Hold*. Allen Ginsberg read Blyth's work on haiku and started to write haiku himself. An entry in his journal reads as follows: "Haiku composed in the backyard cottage at . . . Berkeley 1955, while reading R. H. Blyth's 4 volumes *Haiku*."<sup>38</sup> In 1958 Harold G. Henderson's revised 1930 work, retitled *An Introduction to Haiku*, appeared in America and generated more interest in haiku. Another influential work that year was Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Kerouac's character Japhy Ryder writes haiku and had read a four-volume work on Japanese haiku. This could easily be a reference to Blyth's four volumes on haiku. Anyway, hundreds of Americans began to write haiku.<sup>39</sup>



Harold G. Henderson, in *An Introduction to Haiku*, gives thanks to R. H. Blyth, with whom he had had personal contact, and refers to Blyth's "monumental four-volume work on haiku."<sup>40</sup> And William J. Higginson, in *The Haiku Handbook*, refers to the American writer Richard Wright and says that he had studied R. H. Blyth's books and "wrote several hundred haiku during the last year and a half of his life."<sup>41</sup>

In 1953 Wright traveled to Africa and published *Black Power* the following year. In 1955 he attended the Bandung Conference of the Third World; two years later he was a member of the First Congress of Negro Artists and Writers, which met in Paris in September. During that same period he liked to work in his garden on his Normandy farm,<sup>42</sup> an activity that supplied many themes for his haiku.

The decade of the 1950s was rich in possibilities for Wright. The Third World was coming into its own artistically, socially, and politically, and Wright was gradually shedding his romantic belief that in denying men the chance to act on the basis of their feelings, social institutions cause the individual to destroy such feelings.<sup>43</sup> But set against this positive mood were the effects of his financial and personal problems. His works were not bringing in much money, nor had he written anything in the previous few years that was financially successful. In addition, by the beginning of 1959 he was sick and often confined to his bed. He was approaching the end of the decade in an ambivalent mood, ready for union with that which lies beyond the artist, a theme appropriate

for haiku. Exhausted by his financial problems, sickness, and the polemics surrounding him that were a drain on his rational powers, Wright was mentally and emotionally receptive to the ideas, beauty, and form of haiku. Under these conditions he seemed to be liberated from the restrictions of rationality and to enjoy his intuitive responses to other powers and images latent within him.

Sometime during the summer of 1959 he had been introduced to haiku by a young South African friend who loved its form.<sup>44</sup> Wright borrowed from him R. H. Blyth's four volumes on the art of haiku and its relationship to Zen and settled down to rediscover his old dream of oneness with all life. By March 1960 he was so captivated by its beauty that he was already in the midst of composing what was to turn out to be almost four thousand separate haiku. In response to a letter from his friend and Dutch translator, Margrit de Sablonière, he said that he had returned to poetry and added, "During my illness I experimented with the Japanese form of poetry called haiku; I wrote some 4,000 of them and am now sifting them out to see if they are any good."

In his discussion of this event, Michel Fabre notes that Wright's interest in haiku involved his research into the great Japanese masters, Buson, Basho, and Issa. Wright ignored the European and American forms that were then becoming popular. Fabre notes further that Wright made "an effort to respect the exact form of the poem," and adds that it was curious for Wright to become interested in haiku at a time when he

was fighting his illness. As Fabre reasons, “Logically he should have been tempted to turn away from ‘pure’ literature and to use his pen instead as a weapon.”<sup>45</sup> Just as curiously, Wright’s biographer Constance Webb refers to none of this material. She merely says that Wright had lost his physical energy and that “while lying against the pillows one afternoon he picked up the small book of Japanese poetry and began to read it again.” Apparently it had been given to him earlier, and he read and reread it, excited by its style. She comments that Wright “had to study it and study to find out why it struck his ear with such a modern note.” Then she adds that Wright “would try to bring the life and consciousness of a black American” to its form. Again according to Webb, the haiku “seemed to answer the rawness he felt, which had, in turn, created a sensitivity that ached. Never had he been so sensitive, as if his nervous system had been exposed to rough air.” In a letter to Paul Reynolds, his friend and editor, Wright said that he had sent to William Targ of the World Publishing Company a manuscript of his haiku.<sup>46</sup> In that same letter he commented that “these poems are the results of my being in bed a great deal. . . .”<sup>47</sup>

Until we read the poems in *Haiku: This Other World* and his unpublished haiku we will probably never know the other reasons why Wright turned to haiku during the last years of his life. But that knowledge, while helpful, is not necessary to reread and enjoy these newly published haiku. What is necessary, both for enjoyment and understanding of

Wright's haiku, is some knowledge about haiku as the great Japanese poets developed the genre. For this, see Part I of Afterword.

In "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Wright wrote that "the Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. In order to do justice to his subject matter, in order to depict Negro life in all of its manifold and intricate relationships, a deep, informed, and complex consciousness is necessary; a consciousness which draws for its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people, and moulds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today." Despite the context of that idea, drawn from a discussion of "Social Consciousness and Responsibility," the concept of an individual consciousness dependent on the "fluid lore" of a people raises, as Wright noted, "the question of the personality of the writer. It means that in the lives of Negro writers must be found those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today." Wright felt that in his new role the black writer must "create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die." In his discussion of "The Problem of Theme," he adds that "this does not mean that a Negro writer's sole concern must be with rendering the social scene"; instead, he must have a sense of "the whole life" that "he is seeking" and that needs to be "vivid and strong in him."<sup>48</sup>

What was "vivid and strong" in Wright, and had been from childhood on, was the haiku moment—the *where*, the



when, and the *what*—not that he in his early years would have called it that. Being a responsible agent for his people meant that Wright had to draw on the materials of his own life, much of which was deeply involved with his feelings about nature. To have a sense of “the whole life” and “create values” for his people meant that Wright had to contend with his deepest yearnings about a harmonious union between people and nature. In haiku he must have found echoes of all he believed in and desired, both in the form, which was pleasurable and challenging to him as an artist, and in the content, so strongly appealing to his inner self. In the haiku moment he found his best self.

Joan Giroux says that the haiku moment “may be defined as an instant in which man becomes united to an object, virtually becomes that object and realizes the eternal, universal truth contained in being.” In quoting from the poet Kenneth Yasuda’s point of view about the moment, she adds that the writer of haiku “ ‘in a brief moment . . . sees a pattern, a significance he had not seen before.’ ”<sup>49</sup> In his own discussion about Wright’s poetry, Michel Fabre points out, commenting on the “hymns to nature” in *12 Million Black Voices*, that “the symbolism leads to the discovery of a metaphysical reality in the scene before the poet’s eyes. Poetry no longer appears as a creation—as it did in ‘Old Habit and New Love’—but as a revelation. The poetic moment becomes an epiphany.”<sup>50</sup>

Wright’s “poetic moment” may not be as sharply and

traditionally defined as it is for the great Japanese writers of haiku, but it grew out of his childhood relations with nature, as Fabre has gone to some pains to reveal. To the themes of black suffering, desire for interracial unity, and the triumph of socialism, Wright added “a keen sensitivity to nature,” grounding his lyricism in personal experiences. In his early poems, such as “Everywhere Burning Waters Rise,” the references to nature focus on its destructive aspects. But in “We of the Streets,” another early poem, Wright borrows from nature and begins, according to Fabre, to use nature as the “touchstone of his poetic sensitivity: it was the Mississippi country that restored his strength during a childhood of struggle and deprivation.”

Wright’s tendency to see himself set against the background of nature was strongly influenced by his love for Carl Sandburg’s and Walt Whitman’s poetry. Thus he made his own poetry “the vehicle of his enthusiasm or his indignation.” In *12 Million Black Voices*, however, for the first time he began to use an imagery that links the individual with nature, comparing children to black buttercups. As Fabre comments, “Here evocation and image are one; the lyricism springs from an open sympathy long considered the distinctive trait of Negro sensitivity and the psychological foundation of negritude. It is in the childhood memories of the author that this lyricism has its root, memories that will be revived in the autobiographical *Black Boy*.” That all of this is important in leading up to the writing of the haiku Fabre

clearly understands. In discussing *12 Million Black Voices*, Fabre refers to the nostalgia that Wright developed in the lines, and then observes, “The sense of universality is suggested by simply the sight of the birds’ flight. This is exactly what will occur in the haiku that Wright composed in the final stages of his poetic evolution.”<sup>51</sup>

The haiku moment is the heart of haiku because it links complementary and antithetical qualities; that is, directness and paradox, austerity and joy, love of nature and the ordinary. It is an expression in words of “the instant of intuition uniting poet and object.”<sup>52</sup> Wright achieves this rare quality, the haiku moment, in an excellent poem (571):

From across the lake,  
Past the black winter trees,  
Faint sounds of a flute.

The visual image of blackness, trees, lake, and winter is joined with the aural image of a manmade sound from the flute. Two kinds of life become one in the setting placed in the distance. Everything is muted by the adjective “faint,” which seems to stress quietness as the natural condition of man, trees with the lake, and winter as provider of a sense of place and time. All nature is unified with human beings through the poet’s perception and expression, but the author’s personality seems almost imperceptible. The quality of the haiku cannot bear too much sound or thought, either

of which would increase the tone of the flute and force human beings and their philosophizing to dominate the scene.

As Joan Giroux says, quoting from Kenneth Yasuda, “ ‘The intent of all haiku and the discipline of the form’ is to render the haiku moment, to express the ‘ah-ness.’ ”<sup>53</sup> In linking directness and paradox, the essential aspects of haiku indicate that the poet needs to look straight at things and to transform the perception into words that do not depend upon metaphors or symbols.<sup>54</sup> Rather, the poet should present the event or object nude, so as to form a doorway for the mind. The paradox results from the simultaneity of two different things being perceived as one through the response of the poet, an effect that cannot be expressed solely through individual words. But the ability to reject metaphor and symbol did not come easily to Wright. Much more at hand was his own preoccupation with the black and white meanings in his life, a concern that becomes an effective theme in his haiku. In haiku 226:

Like a spreading fire,  
Blossoms leap from tree to tree  
In a blazing spring.

and in haiku 1:

I am nobody:  
A red sinking autumn sun  
Took my name away.



Wright interjects such anthropomorphic characteristics and metaphors as leaping blossoms and a sun that takes one's name, making them elements of the natural world that reflect how the speaker assigns the vegetative world animal characteristics or makes it sympathize with him. In haiku 226 the speaker provides "blossoms" with the ability of a squirrel or cougar, and in the last example above he turns the red autumn sun into a symbol, perhaps of the Western world, America, which has deprived the speaker of his name and identity, perhaps that of a black African.

In these haiku Wright supplies the *where* and *when*, an orchard setting, a season of spring, a vague place in autumn. The approach is indirect, with the meanings coming from within the poet. Behind symbol and metaphor Wright seems to hide the depth of his personal feelings, as he does in haiku 31:

In the falling snow  
A laughing boy holds out his palms  
Until they are white.

Although the speaker is not directly in the scene, the poem presents one of Wright's favorite themes through the emphasized use of the word "white," indirectly through reference to snow and directly through a description of the boy's hands. But the effect of describing the boy as laughing creates a question: Why is he laughing? The possible answers drive one to

consider the possibility that the boy's hands are not originally white. In either case, whether the boy is white or black and is laughing because of sheer delight or because he has become white for a moment, the term "white" has symbolic overtones not present in "snow," "falling," "boy," or "palms."

As for paradox, Wright clearly was experimenting. In an excellent haiku (455) Wright captures the paradox of color and shape of two separate things, one a cocklebur and one a black boy:

The green cockleburs  
Caught in the thick wooly hair  
Of the black boy's head.

The two objects, disparate in shape, size, and color are held together by one quality both share: the matching texture of the boy's hair and the cockleburs, as perceived by the poet. By chance in a moment of intuition, two aspects of nature, two forms of life are seen as one without the poet naturalizing the boy or humanizing the burr. In this haiku Wright has presented in direct statement the paradox of union, expressing the desire to be a part of nature while simultaneously maintaining one's separate identity. Although the *where* is vague, someplace in nature, the *when* is summer before the time of ripeness, and the *what* is the sense of complete harmony with nature.

As for austerity and joy, Wright as an artist must have

struggled to develop these characteristics in his haiku. Austerity refers to the absence of philosophical or metaphysical comment, the absence of intellectualization or imposition of an excessive rationality. It calls for a simplicity of language, thought, and image, a lack of complication often revealed in the spontaneous joy of union. As R. H. Blyth says, the joy comes from the “(apparent) re-union of ourselves with things.”<sup>55</sup> It is the “happiness of being our true selves.”<sup>56</sup> Austerity is not only a lack of intellectualization, it is almost a wordlessness, a condition in which words are used not to externalize a poet’s state of feeling, but to “clear away something,” according to Blyth, “that seems to stand between” the poet and real things. Because the real things are not actually separate from the poet, they “are then perceived by self-knowledge.” Certainly, haiku ideally removes as many words as possible, stressing non-intellectuality, as thought, like passion, must depend upon and not substitute for intuition. The joy lies in the humor, the lightness, the lack of sentimentality. Blyth states: “It goes down to something deeper than the unconscious where repressions wait with ill-concealed impatience. It goes beyond this into the realm where a thing is and is not at the same time, and yet at the very same time *is*.”<sup>57</sup>

In a good haiku (22) that presents a Zen kind of humor,

With a twitching nose  
A dog reads a telegram  
On a wet tree trunk.

the austerity and joy are central. The language is simple. Except for “telegram,” all are native English words, most being one-syllable words. The poem has a simplicity unadorned with sentimentalism or sententious comment. It is the season of rain in a place of dogs and trees. Ironically, the metaphor “telegram” unites the elements of nature, the tree, and the dog with a construction of human beings—a telegram—through the personification embodied in “reads.” Here Wright maintains some intellectual distance by refusing to elaborate, to go beyond the idea of a telegram with its sense of a code in communication, chemical for the dog, and electrical for people. The humor lies in the visual image of the dog twitching his nose, especially in “twitching,” which carries a double meaning: one is visual, suggesting how the dog comes in contact with—that is, reads—his message; the other, also visual, suggests a sense of the sharpness of the message, the odor, that causes a slight physical movement. Thus the key terms “telegram” and “reads” are central to the poem.

The last major characteristic of the haiku moment is a love of nature that is inseparable from the ordinary. A love of nature without humanizing or sentimentalizing it stems from the Taoist belief in the unity and harmony of all things, a sense of kinship between all things, reflecting at times an irony which derives from the paradox that the more one learns, the more that knowledge tends to abolish the arbitrary division between man and nature.<sup>58</sup> For



R. H. Blyth this characteristic is explained in terms of selflessness, meaning that the poet has identified with nature. The loss of his individuality within the union involves a generalized melancholy aspect or loneliness as an underlying rhythm. It represents a state of Zen, of “absolute spiritual poverty in which, having nothing, we possess all.” We rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, are moved as all things in nature are moved, by the same forces—the inevitability of nature.<sup>59</sup>

Such concepts are also part of the idea of materiality that suffuses haiku, in which the material or the concrete is emphasized without the expression of any general principles or abstract reasoning. Animate and inanimate lose their differences to such an extent that one can say that haiku are about things. In this almost stoical sense, the ordinary thing and the love of nature are reduced to a detached love of life as it is, without idealistic, moralistic, or ethical attachments. Things are equal to human beings; both exist through and because of each other.<sup>60</sup> These ideas are apparent in Wright’s snail haiku (7), though it is perhaps closer to being a *senryu* than a true haiku:

Make up your mind, Snail!  
You are half inside your house,  
And halfway out!

Wright's poem presents a consideration of a simple living thing from nature through the poet's perception of the visual scene.

Despite the large number of haiku that he wrote, it was difficult for Wright to master in such a short time—a year perhaps—the complexities of haiku. Many of these haiku represent his best poetry, but he never totally learned to eliminate his political and personal attitudes in them. Clearly he was experimenting with his own African-American approach to the haiku form. Constance Webb is correct in saying that to this uniquely Japanese form of poetry Wright was trying “to bring the life and consciousness of a black American.” He was not only writing out of the themes and desires that filled his earlier work, he was writing out of his loneliness. He explained to his friend Margrit de Sablonière: “I’d like to be alone, as much alone as possible. Have you taken up solitude for your friend? I have. When I’m alone and wake up in the morning, with my world of dreams close by me, I write without effort. By noon, I’ve done a day’s work. All else, after that, is gravy, as the Americans say.”<sup>61</sup> Wright never tired of trying to fuse his two dreams—of black union with white and of his personal symbolical union with nature.

The major themes in Wright's haiku reveal his desire to create another world in which his black and white focus would be part of his feeling for nature. He writes most often about death and the setting sun, about the moon and loneli-

ness, about scarecrows, the rain, about farms and farm animals, about birds and insects, and about spring, the season of blossoms and blooming magnolias. In the following haiku (508), for example,

It is September,  
The month in which I was born;  
And I have no thoughts.

he offers the *when*. It is September, a time that has special meaning for the poet-speaker. It is not only his birth month, but it is associated with specific behavior that is supposed to occur on one's birthday or during that month. There seems to be no *where*, no place, no concept of nature. The poem anchors itself to a rational process that can be summarized by saying, "It is my birthday; one has thoughts (about the past or oneself?) on one's birthday; but I have no thoughts." What seems to emerge from the poem is a sense of the passing of a creative mood in which his creativity is associated with the fall season and its cyclical overtones. Both the poet and the year seem to be in a quiescent phase, part of a cycle preparing for sleep or death.

Similarly, in 425,

An empty sickbed:  
An indented white pillow  
In weak winter sun.

the theme of death in a white world under a weak sun emerges strongly. Death and its associations with bones and graveyards occur frequently in Wright's haiku. In 172,

The scarecrow's old hat  
Was flung by the winter wind  
Into a graveyard.

and in 698,

Black winter hills  
Nibbling at the sinking sun  
With stark stumpy teeth.

Wright combines death with winter, with a sinking sun (his personal symbol). He also associates death with birds, which he so frequently writes about, and with tombstones, as in the following haiku (142 and 145):

A wounded sparrow  
Sinks in a clear cold lake water,  
Its eyes still open.

and

A bright glowing moon  
Pouring out its radiance  
Upon tall tombstones.



A second major theme is the relationship between nature and people based on nostalgia for a lost past, a transference of feeling from poet to nature, a sense of loneliness, or the desire for a quest. Sometimes in relating nature to people, Wright draws on the domestic world for his images, as in 57:

Sleety rain at night  
Seasoning swelling turnips  
With a tangy taste.

and 66:

A freezing night wind  
Wafts the scent of frying fish  
From the waterfront.

The visual images of rain, night, wind, turnips, frying fish reveal a time of nature pleasant with its associations to tangy taste and scent, associations that tend to contradict the opening lines with their references to sleep and freezing. Both poems suggest the separation of the speaker from nature and a movement into memory.

Loneliness never seems far removed from memory, however. One of Wright's often repeated ending lines is the phrase "How lonely it is," as in 574:

Standing in the crowd  
In a cold drizzling rain,—  
How lonely it is.

or 569:

A thin waterfall  
Dribbles the whole autumn night,—  
How lonely it is.

A good haiku relating loneliness with mountains and twilight  
is 723:

In the afterglow  
A snow-covered mountain peak  
Sings of loneliness.

The same sense of loneliness and separation coupled  
with nostalgia or an unstated desire occurs in 69:

Whose town did you leave,  
O wild and droning spring rain,  
And where do you go?

The visual image of wild rain is set within a frame of questions that generate a quality of loneliness as Wright associates his feelings with nature. There is also a lovely though

sad feeling that emerges from “wild and droning spring rain,” emphasizing not a destructive but a creative aspect of things.

Often Wright identifies himself closely with some aspect of nature directly or indirectly. More commonly, he selects an element of nature whose characteristics, he emphasizes in the haiku, resemble similar ones in him. For example, in a fine haiku (117),

The crow flew so fast  
That he left his lonely caw  
Behind in the fields.

Wright creates the impression on the surface of a pastoral setting with fields and a crow. The bird's characteristics are blackness and flight coupled with the quality “fast” and his caw, which is “lonely.” The poem thus reveals color, sound, and movement. The term “lonely,” applicable to the crow only if one anthropomorphizes the bird, suggests that Wright has externalized his state of mind and memory through the crow, seeming to identify with it in terms of color, movement (Wright living in various places, especially during his childhood), and loss of something, the caw or voice, that is lonely. Just as the crow outflew his caw, so Wright outstripped his childhood voice in nature, his own sense of what he was in rural Mississippi. This aspect of Wright's feelings is echoed hauntingly in one of his

scarecrow haiku (684) where he identifies closely with the scarecrow, which has special meaning for him:

As my delegate,  
The scarecrow looks pensively  
Into spring moonlight.

And it is echoed in another haiku (577) where he addresses the scarecrow directly, asking,

Scarecrow, who starved you,  
Set you in that icy wind,  
And then forgot you?

Wright is, however, quite capable of separating his social and political responses to his own life from his reaction to nature. He wrote literally scores of haiku about animals, birds, and insects, from cats, rats, dogs, cows, snails, to sparrows, buzzards, crows, geese, and even crickets, spiders, and butterflies. He writes about their setting, their habitats, the farms of his memory and of his immediate experience in Normandy. A fine haiku (47), more in the Japanese sense than in the Western mode, is:

The spring lingers on  
In the scent of a damp log  
Rotting in the sun.

Three different kinds of images come together through and in the poet. The visual images of the damp log and of the sun, along with the vague image of spring, are closely related through prepositional patterns with the thermal image of warmth from the sun and the rotting log, as well as with the olfactory image in the odor of the log. The poet's intuitive perception of spring is thus the interaction of all five images. The poem reveals the paradoxical union of three seemingly disparate processes of nature with a fourth: man, the moisture in the log, the warmth of the sun, and the rotting process. In effect spring is suddenly perceived as being part of decay, a recycling process, not death but a creative pattern.

Humor is also a part of Wright's theme in his relationship with nature, as evidenced in a haiku (175) with a gentle whimsical Zen humor of its own:

Coming from the woods,  
A bull has a lilac sprig  
Dangling from a horn.

In this poem the *when* and *where* are clearly apparent; it is springtime for lilacs and a farm for the woods and bull. But the *what*, or moment, lies in the harmonious union of the images and their paradoxical relationships in the poet's sudden perception. The three visual images—the woods for a generalized sense of nature, the bull for the sense of the strong, vital male animal, and the lilac sprig—provide a sense of



spring and nature associated with flowers, beauty, and sadness. The potential danger or destructiveness of the bull and his horns is thrust into the background. Their threat seems to be lessened through the humor of the visual image of the flower dangling from the bull's horn. What Wright has done is to perceive suddenly how the dangerous aspect of nature can become harmless and humorously casual in relationship to other aspects.

An equally humorous haiku (401) is one about a dog:

A thin mangy dog  
Curls up to sleep in the dust  
Of a moonlit road.

The ordinary image of a dog in ill health sleeping on a dusty road is gently lessened by the romantic associations of moonlight. The dog who could not care less, the dusty yet attractive setting, the moonlight seem united in the poet's perception. All things become one, gaining and losing importance at the same time, a theme echoed in one of Wright's wild geese haiku (600):

Crying out the end  
Of a long summer's sun,—  
Departing wild geese.

The theme of nature, drawn not only from his immediate experiences on his farm in Normandy, his view out a

window from his sickbed, and from childhood memories of Mississippi, echoes throughout many of Wright's haiku. This is especially evident in 759:

Like remembering,  
The hills are dim and distant  
In the winter air.

While Wright's memory might have been distant, it certainly was not dim. Nor was his love of magnolias faint. Several of his haiku contain references to or are built around magnolias or plum trees, as in 28:

In the summer haze:  
Behind magnolias,  
Faint sheets of lightning.

or in 50:

One magnolia  
Landed upon another  
In the dew-wet grass.

and 660:

Between night and dawn,  
A plum tree apologized  
With profuse petals.

The relationships with plum trees and magnolias are always rich and thick with nuances set against simple but fundamental aspects of nature. The dew-wet grass, lightning, the morning hours of darkness are scenes that became part of Wright's perception of nature, past and present, as much as farm life must have been for him, as witness the following haiku (62):

A lance of spring sun  
Falls upon the moldy oats  
In a musty barn.

There is in some of these nature haiku a scent of sadness, like the remembrance of the perfume a man's first love might have worn. Nature is cyclical; its beauty and power come and go, often reflected in a person's memory and awareness. One can only wonder what mood Wright was in, for example, when he composed the following haiku (783):

I cannot find it,  
That very first violet  
Seen from my window.

It is a delightfully simple haiku, capturing the inadequacies existing between vision from inside and that from outside, a loss of perspective that leads one in a new direction.

Like the Japanese poet Basho, Wright had achieved in many of these haiku, which he selected himself for publica-



tion, the sense of sad oneness in nature, coupled with an ironic smile of joy and compassion. He had learned to create, as it were, his own Wordsworthian “spots of time,” seeing into the life of things. In September 1960, Wright declared that he had “finished nothing this year but those damned haiku. . . .”<sup>62</sup> But that was enough, because in the many fine haiku that emerged from his thousands, he had found his moment, his time, his place, his union, peaceful and complete, with some aspect of life, his other world. Even if it was not with a white America, it was with a nature that had dominated his childhood and had remained forever powerful in all of his work.

On November 28, 1960, Richard Wright died at the age of 52. His daughter, Julia, reading through the haiku in manuscript after the funeral, felt this one (647) would speak for his legacy:

Burning out its time,  
And timing its own burning,  
One lonely candle.<sup>63</sup>

The major image in this haiku does not come from nature, which Wright sought unconsciously and consciously all his life; it comes from the world of manmade things, the other world of poetic images. Like all things, however, it is subject to the changes of nature, and, like people, it is also capable of speeding up the process. Wright's haiku reveal more

clearly than his great novels or polemical tracts his sympathetic awareness of the complex relationship between people and nature—that a person needs to know *where* he or she is going, *when* one will reach the destination, and *what* one will be when that happens.

### III

A reading of the selections in *Haiku: This Other World*, as well as the rest of Wright's haiku, indicates that Wright, turning away from the moral, intellectual, social, and political problems dealt with in his prose work, found in nature his latent poetic sensibility. Above all, his fine pieces of poetry show, as do classic Japanese haiku, the unity and harmony of all things, the sensibility that man and nature are one and inseparable. While his prose exhibits a predilection for a rational world created by human beings out of the concept of their narcissistic image of themselves, humanism expressed in his haiku means more than a fellowship of human beings. It means an awareness of what human beings share with all living things. To create a human image in his haiku is to experience harmony with life at its deepest level.

The primacy of the spirit of nature over the strife of man is pronounced in Wright's later work, especially *Black Power*. In "Blueprint for Negro Writing," one of his theoretical principles calls for an African-American writer's explo-

ration of universal humanism, what is common among all cultures. “Every iota of gain in human thought and sensibility,” Wright argues, “should be ready grist for his mill, no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications.” After a journey into the Ashanti kingdom in West Africa in 1953, he wrote in *Black Power*:

The truth is that the question of how much of Africa has survived in the New World is misnamed when termed “African survivals.” The African attitude toward life springs from a natural and poetic grasp of existence and all the emotional implications that such an attitude carries; it is clear, then, that what the anthropologists have been trying to explain are not “African survivals” at all—they are but the retention of basic and primal attitudes toward life.<sup>64</sup>

Wright’s exploration of the Ashanti convinced him that the defense of African culture meant renewal of Africans’ faith in themselves. He realized for the first time that African culture was buttressed by universal human values—such as awe of nature, family kinship and love, faith in religion, and a sense of honor. For the purpose of writing haiku, this primal outlook on life, witnessed in Africa, had a singular influence on his poetic vision.

Before discussing Ashanti culture, he quotes a passage from Edmund Husserl’s *Ideas*, which suggests that the world of nature dominates the scientific vision of that world—the

preeminence of intuition over knowledge in the search for truth. Similarly, Wright's interpretation of the African philosophy recalls a teaching in Zen Buddhism. Unlike the other sects of Buddhism, Zen teaches that every individual possesses Buddhahood and all he or she must do is to realize it. One must purge one's mind and heart of any materialistic thoughts or feelings, and appreciate the wonder of the world here and now. Zen is a way of self-discipline and self-reliance. Its emphasis on self is derived from the prophetic admonishment Gautama Buddha is said to have given to his disciples: "Seek within, you are the Buddha." Satori, as noted earlier, is an enlightenment that transcends time and place, and even the consciousness of self. In the African primal outlook upon existence, a person's consciousness, as Wright explains, corresponds to the spirit of nature.

In Zen, if the enlightened person sees a tree, for instance, the person sees the tree through his or her enlightened eye. The tree is no longer an ordinary tree; it now exists with different meaning. In other words, the tree contains satori only when the viewer is enlightened. From a similar point of view, Wright saw in African life a closer relationship between human beings and nature than that between human beings and their social and political environment:

Africa, with its high rain forest, with its stifling heat and lush vegetation, might well be mankind's queerest laboratory. Here instinct ruled and flowered without be-



ing concerned with the nature of the physical structure of the world; man lived without too much effort; there was nothing to distract him from concentrating upon the currents and countercurrents of his heart. He was thus free to project out of himself what he thought he was. Man has lived here in a waking dream, and, to some extent, he still lives here in that dream.<sup>65</sup>

Africa evokes “a total attitude toward life, calling into question the basic assumptions of existence,” just as Zen teaches a way of life completely independent of what one has been socially and politically conditioned to lead. As if echoing the enlightenment in Zen, Wright says: “Africa is the world of man; if you are wild, Africa’s wild; if you are empty, so’s Africa.”<sup>66</sup>

Wright’s discussion of the African concept of life is also suggestive of Zen’s emphasis on transcending the dualism of life and death. Zen master Dogen (1200–1254), whose work *Shobogenzo* is known in Japan for his practical application rather than his theory of Zen doctrine, observed that since life and death are beyond human control, there is no need to avoid them. Dogen’s teaching is a refutation of the assumption that life and death are entirely separate entities, as are seasons.<sup>67</sup> The Ashanti funeral service Wright saw showed him that “the ‘dead’ live side by side with the living; they eat, breathe, laugh, hate, love, and continue doing in the world of ghostly shadows exactly what they had been doing in the world of flesh and blood,”<sup>68</sup> a portrayal of life

and death reminiscent of Philip Freneau's "Indian Burial."

Wright was, moreover, fascinated by the African reverence for the nonhuman living, a primal African attitude that corresponds to the Buddhist belief. He observed:

The pre-Christian African was impressed with the littleness of himself and he walked the earth warily, lest he disturb the presence of invisible gods . . . he dared not cut down a tree without first propitiating its spirit so that it would not haunt him; he loved his fragile life and he was convinced that the tree loved its life also.<sup>69</sup>

The concept of unity, continuity, and infinity underlying that of life and death is what the Akan religion in the Ashanti kingdom and Buddhism share.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Wright's reading of the African mind conforms to both religions in their common belief that humankind is not at the center of the universe. It is this revelatory and emulating relationship nature holds for human beings that makes the African primal outlook upon life akin to Zen Buddhism.

Traditionally, haiku, in its portrayal of man's association with nature, often conveys a kind of enlightenment, a new way of looking at man and nature. In some of the haiku, as the following examples indicate, Wright follows this tradition:

A wilting jonquil  
Journeys to its destiny  
In a shut bedroom.

Lines of winter rain  
Gleam only as they flash past  
My lighted window.

“A Wilting Jonquil” (720) teaches the poet a lesson that nature out of its environment cannot exhibit its beauty. In “Lines of Winter Rain” (722), the poet learns that only when an interaction between man and nature occurs can natural beauty be savored.

This revelatory tradition, derived from Zen philosophy, informs many of Wright’s haiku. Several of the pieces Wright selected and included toward the end of *Haiku: This Other World* reflect his conscious effort to emulate the Asian philosophy. For example, in 721,

As my anger ebbs,  
The spring stars grow bright again  
And the wind returns.

Wright tries to attain a state of mind called *mu*, nothingness, by controlling his emotion. This state of nothingness, however, is not synonymous with a state of void, but leads to what Wright calls, in *Black Power*, “a total attitude toward life.”<sup>71</sup> “So violent and fickle,” he writes, “was nature that [the African] could not delude himself into feeling that he, a mere man, was at the center of the universe.”<sup>72</sup> In this haiku, as Wright relieves himself of anger, he begins to see the stars

“grow bright again” and “the wind” return. Only when he attains a state of nothingness and a total attitude toward life can he perceive nature with his enlightened senses. How closely this perception of nature is related to his latent interest in the Asian philosophy can also be seen in the following:

Why did this spring wood  
Grow so silent when I came?  
What was happening?

This haiku (809) suggests the kind of questions asked by a Zen master who teaches ways of attaining the state of *mu*. Wright here tries to give an admonition, as he does in many of his other haiku, that only with the utmost attention human beings pay nature can they truly see themselves.

Writing four thousand haiku at the end of his life was a reflection of change in his career as a writer. But, more important, the new point of view and the new mode of expression he acquired in writing haiku suggest that Wright was convinced more than ever that materialism and its corollary, greed, were the twin culprits of racial conflict. Just as his fiction and nonfiction directly present this conviction, his haiku as racial discourse indirectly express the same conviction.



## NOTES

1. Poetry by Emerson and Whitman has an affinity with Japanese haiku in terms of their attitude toward nature. See Yoshinobu Hakutani, "Emerson, Whitman, and Zen Buddhism," *Midwest Quarterly* 31 (Summer 1990), 433–48.

2. The translation of this verse and other Japanese poems quoted in this book, unless otherwise noted, is by Yoshinobu Hakutani.

3. Donald Keene, *World within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600–1868* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 13.

4. A detailed historical account of *haikai* poetry is given in Donald Keene, *World within Walls*, 337–55.

5. A certain group of poets, including Ito Shintoku (1634–1698) and Ikenishi Gonsui (1650–1722) of the Teitoku school, and Uejima Onitsura (1661–1738), Konishi Raizan (1654–1716), and Shiinomoto Saimaro (1656–1738) of the Danrin school, each contributed to refining Basho's style (Keene, 56–70).

6. The translation of this haiku is by Yone Noguchi. See Yone Noguchi, *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: An East-West Literary Assimilation*, ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1992), Vol. II, 73–74.

7. Noguchi, *Selected English Writings*, Vol. II, 74.

8. *Ibid.*, 69.

9. The original of "How Cool It Is" is quoted from Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1958), 49.

10. Although the frog traditionally is a *kigo* (seasonal reference) to spring, Yone Noguchi interprets "The Old Pond" as an autumnal haiku: "The Japanese mind turns it into high poetry (it is said that Basho the author instantly awoke to a knowledge of the true road his own poetry should tread with this frog poem; it has been regarded in some quarters as a thing almost sacred although its dignity is a little fallen of late) . . . because it draws at once a

picture of an autumnal desolation reigning on an ancient temple pond. . . .” (*Selected English Writings*, Vol. II, 74).

11. The original of “A Morning Glory” is quoted from Fujio Akimoto, *Haiku Nyumon* (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1971), 23.

12. The original of “Autumn Is Deepening” is quoted from Noichi Imoto, *Basho: Sono Jinsei to Geijitsu* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1968), 231.

13. The original of “A Crow” is quoted from Imoto, *Basho*, p. 86. The English version is quoted from R. H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1963–1964), Vol. II, xxix. The middle line in a later version of the poem reads: “*Karasu no tomari keri*” (Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, 18). The earlier version has a syllabic measure of 5,10,5, while the later version has 5,9,5 syllables, both in an unusual pattern.

14. The original of “Sunset on the Sea” is quoted from Imoto, *Basho*, 117.

15. The original of “Were My Wife Alive” is quoted from Akimoto, *Haiku Nyumon*, 200.

16. The original of “The Harvest Moon” is quoted from “*Meigetsu ya tatami-no ue ni matsu-no-kage*” (Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, 58).

17. Joan Giroux, *The Haiku Forum* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1974), 22–23.

18. Arthur Waley, *The No Plays of Japan* (New York: Grove Press, 1920), 21–22.

19. See Max Loehr, *The Great Paintings of China* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 216.

20. The original and translation of “The Guardians” is quoted from Blyth, *History of Haiku*, Vol II, vii.

21. The original of Ransetsu’s “Yellow and White Chrysanthemums” is quoted from Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, 160.

22. The original of Shiki’s “Yellow and White Chrysanthemums” is quoted from Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, 160.

23. The original of “The Wind in Autumn” is quoted from Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, 164.

24. The original of “In the Hospital Room” is quoted from Akimoto, *Haiku Nyumon*, 222.

25. The original of “The Caged Eagle” is quoted and translated by Blyth, *History of Haiku*, Vol. II, 347. The original of “At the Faint Voices” is also quoted from *ibid.*, Vol. II, 322.

26. Quoted and translated by Keene, *World within Walls*, 81.

27. The original of "Upon the Roadside" is quoted from Keene, *World within Walls*, 85.
28. Quoted and translated by Blyth, *History of Haiku*, Vol. II, viii–ix.
29. *Ibid.*, 93.
30. Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper, 1945), 7.
31. Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (New York: Morrow, 1973), 447.
32. William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 49–51.
33. For the composition of this poem and Pound's indebtedness to Japanese poetics and to haiku in particular, see Yoshinobu Hakutani, "Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and Imagism," *Modern Philology* 90 (August 1992), 46–69.
34. Higginson, *Haiku Handbook*, 51–52.
35. Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1957), xvii.
36. Higginson, *Haiku Handbook*, 51.
37. *Ibid.*, 57–58.
38. *Ibid.*, 58.
39. *Ibid.*, 63–64.
40. See Henderson, *Introduction to Haiku*, xi.
41. Higginson, *Haiku Handbook*, 65.
42. Fabre, *Quest*, 375, 447.
43. *Ibid.*, 481.
44. *Ibid.*, 505.
45. *Ibid.*, 505–6.
46. See Editors' Note on page xiii of this book.
47. Constance Webb, *Richard Wright* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 387, 393–94.
48. Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," in *Richard Wright Reader*, eds. Ellen Wright and Michel Fabre (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 43–44, 46.
49. Giroux, *Haiku Forum*, 46.
50. Michel Fabre, "The Poetry of Richard Wright," *Studies in Black Literature* 1 (Autumn 1970), 17.
51. Fabre, "Poetry," 13–16, 18.
52. Giroux, *Haiku Forum*, 45–47.

53. Ibid., 76.
54. Ibid., 50–51.
55. R. H. Blyth, *Haiku* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1949), Vol. I, viii.
56. Giroux, *Haiku Forum*, 55–59.
57. Blyth, *Haiku*, Vol. I, 190, 192–204, 214–17.
58. Giroux, *Haiku Forum*, 63–67.
59. Blyth, *Haiku*, Vol. I, 168–72.
60. Ibid., 247–56.
61. Webb, *Richard Wright*, 393–94.
62. Fabre, “Poetry,” 21.
63. Webb, *Richard Wright*, 400.
64. Richard Wright, *Black Power* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 266.
65. Ibid., 159.
66. Ibid.
67. Kodo Kurebayashi, *Dogen Zen Nyumon* (Tokyo: Daiho Rinkaku, 1983), 121–29.
68. Wright, *Black Power*, 213.
69. Ibid., 261–62.
70. Interviewed by *L'Express* in 1955 shortly after the publication of *Black Power*; Wright responded to the question, “Why do you write?”:  
  
The accident of race and color has placed me on both sides: the Western World and its enemies. If my writing has any aim, it is to try to reveal that which is human on both sides, to affirm the essential unity of man on earth.

See “Richard Wright: I Curse the Day When for the First Time I Heard the Word ‘Politics,’” *L'Express*, 18 October 1955, p. 8, introductory paragraph and questions translated by Keneth Kinnamon, in *Conversations with Richard Wright*, eds. Keneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 163.

71. Wright, *Black Power*, 159.
72. Ibid., 262.







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**WITHDRAWN**

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breaking down words into syllables matched the shortness of his breath." They also offered the novelist and essayist a new form of expression and a new vision: with the threat of death constantly before him, he found inspiration, beauty, and insights in and through the haiku form. The discovery and writing of haiku also helped him come to terms with nature and the earth, which in his early years he had viewed as hostile and equated with suffering and physical hunger. Fighting illness and frequently bedridden, deeply upset by the recent loss of his mother, Ella, Wright continued, as his daughter notes in her introduction, "to spin these poems of light out of the gathering darkness."

Quite simply, the publication of *Haiku: This Other World* constitutes a major literary event.

**Richard Wright** was born in rural Mississippi in 1908 and died in Paris in 1960. His *Native Son*, published in 1940, established him as one of America's major literary voices. His other books include *The Outsider*, *Black Boy*, *Black Power*, and *White Man, Listen!*

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# “A clutch of strong flowers.”

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“The haiku you are about to read were written during my father’s French exile, almost forty years ago, throughout the last eighteen months or so of his life. That they should finally be read is definitely a literary event and offers some exciting clues to a biographical enigma: how the creator of the inarticulate, frightened, and enraged Bigger Thomas ended up leaving us some of the most tender, unassuming, and gentle lines in African-American poetry....

“These haiku not only helped him place the volcanic experience of mourning under the self-control of closely counted syllables, but also enabled him to come to terms with the difficult beauty of the earth in which his mother would be laid to rest. For Richard Wright, hunger and beauty were once upon a time terrifying and ravaging. But writing these poems kept him spiritually afloat. Some of us will even find these deceptively simple patterns of syllables tap-dancing in our minds long after they are read. They are Richard Wright’s poetry of loss and retrieval, of temperate joy and wistful humor, of exile and fragments of a dreamed return. They lie somewhere in that transitional twilight area between the loss for words and the few charmed syllables that can heal the loss.”

—FROM JULIA WRIGHT’S INTRODUCTION

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