



The Healing Spirit of Annual Retreat

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In October, Atlanta Jung Society members again set time aside from the busy world of everyday work and gathered for renewal at the Simpsonwood Center for our annual retreat. The center is a magical place, a wooded wonderland of reds and golds that splash across gentle slopes and spill into the Chattahoochee.

David Rosen, physician, professor, and poet, facilitated our workshop on the healing spirit of haiku. He began the weekend with an informal lecture and slide show that taught us the history of haiku and the elements that distinguish it from other verse forms.

It is more than structure, those seventeen syllables set in a standard pattern of five-seven-five. In fact, much of the haiku currently being published is nontraditional in form; it is still comprised of three succinct lines but there is less emphasis on conforming to a certain number of syllables. Rosen himself has dropped this restriction from his writing. He is a minimalist who concentrates on the elimination of extraneous words rather than their inclusion for the sake of form.

Consistent with the spirit of haiku, one way to reduce the num-

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ber of words it takes to capture a scene is to remove those that reference the ego of the observer, leaving only a snapshot of the observed.

Oval Moon
Illuminates night sky -
Owl screeches
-Cathy Shepherd

Poet/participant Shepherd doesn't tell us it is she who is watching this scene, or what mental processes are taking place behind her gaze. Moon, night sky, owl, are the primary characters in this story. We are left with no sense of what the experience of viewing them might have been like for Shepherd; we have our own experience through the picture painted by her words.

Throughout Friday evening and Saturday morning, Rosen taught us the concepts that haiku works to illustrate, embrace, and embody: egolessness, aloneness, acceptance, universality, humor, silence, awakening, love and death. Haiku honors nature, spirit, and the present moment. It is a sensory, more than an intellectual, exercise.

At lecture's end, in keeping with the spirit of aloneness, Rosen sent us one by one into the woods to write, cautioning each of us to travel in solitary fashion, to stick with and study our own path. Alone, we were to observe an aspect of nature, capture the sight in haiku and bring it back to share with the tribe. The resulting banquet was truly a feast for the ears.

Many of our works centered around the time of the year. Haiku honors the natural cycle of the seasons, and they are frequently named directly in the body of the verse, as in these examples created by members of our group.

Ritual harvest
Whirling sticks of Autumn wind
Balancing turtle
-Gay Allen

Autumn mists caress
A star reveals its presence-
Day flames out
-Pat Mathews

Sometimes the season is revealed in haiku less directly, by describing elements of the landscape that only occur in certain times of the year, such as budding flowers in the spring, or snowfall in the winter. Simpsonwood, brightly clad in fall's signature colors, offered an abundance of material on which poems could be penned.

Nature's teacher knows
All paths lead to river
Dogwood's red leaf falls
-Suzanne Wright

Quiet river
Shimmering fire in center
Blazing Maple on other side
-David Rosen

The “quiet river” to which “all paths lead” was a perfect mirror for fall foliage and its serene shimmer drew many of our seekers to its shore.

Across the river
Reeds bend over driftwood
Current ripples
-Suzanne Wright

Water trickles
Rocks glisten
Stillness in the dance
-Cathy Shepherd

Wind brushes bamboo branch
Ripples in slow flowing river
Male cardinal hopping
-Deborah Huntley

Light shines on water
Shadows lurk below surface
Grape leaves have fallen
-Suzanne Wright

Twirling leaf submerged,
ripples over unseen rocks -
Which way next?
-Don Huntley

Five geese flying south,
The green river bares her breast -
Lighting in sun’s dazzle
-Pat Mathews

Pat just happened to be wearing a tee-shirt picturing five geese when she read this haiku. Jungians, it seems, are naturally drawn to geese, perhaps due to the creatures’ ability to both soar above the earth and dive beneath its watery surface.

Something surfaces
Ring follows ring toward shore
Canada geese call
-Suzanne Wright

With shiny black eyes
Goose watches quietly
The patient fisherman
-Cheryl Emery

Geese drift downstream
in expanding swirls of new paths -
Water bugs dance
-Don Huntley

Joined to the wind
Separated from the flock
Goose calls his own name
-Kathy Brown

Geese are not the only denizens of the Simpsonwood forest. Herds of graceful deer populate the grounds, drawing our poets’ attention and appreciation.

Four white tail deer, right to left
Pause, stop
Continue slowly
-Lyle Peters

Green River in sight
A rustling sound
Five deer bound across path
-David Rosen

Milky sun, deer half hidden
Turn their heads -
Woodland peace broken
-Betsy Wallace

Autumn is the time of year usually associated with dying. In the woods, the vibrancy associated with this process was palpable. Everywhere new life and fresh growth sprang with exuberance from the dank and rotting bodies of its predecessors.

Maple soon to flame
Do you dread cold winter’s frost?
Portal to new life
-Pat Mathews

Fallen tree trunk
Heart and legs open
Black beetle explores
-Cheryl Emery

Fallen trees decaying
Forest floor embraces,
Return to Essence
-Betsy Wallace

Old fallen tree
Ferns surround its branches
Sound of the wind
-David Rosen

Some of the haiku shared at the gathering were so similar it seemed that its writers must have stumbled upon the same scene, but nature is a fractal that reproduces itself in ways that reverberate through the universe like variations on a theme.

Green Mantis
Steps quietly across autumn leaves
To pray
-Cheryl Emery

Leaves fall
On praying mantis
Autumn wind
-David Rosen

The image is universal and timeless, although the emphasis is slightly different; Emery’s focus is on the mantis, Rosen’s on the windswept leaves. The world can be seen in an infinite number of ways.

Just as nature offers a canvas colored not only by its own brilliance, but also by that of the observer, haiku's sharing ritual includes a process for exploring every scene through several sets of eyes. After the verse is read, the listeners are free to make suggestions about its wording or arrangement, which the writer may then accept or reject. For example, a gem by Don Tyner began as...

Solitude, a time to reflect
Footsteps in the distance
She is with me

...and through the group's retelling became...

She is with me
Solitude, a time to reflect
Footsteps in the distance

Suggestions are not offered in the spirit of editorial criticism. By sharing his or her viewpoint, every individual in the group can honor the beauty of the image conjured up by the writer's words. When all have seen and spoken, the haiku is considered to be finished, at least for the present telling. It is reread in its final form and group members acknowledge the author's creation by saying, "I accept."

Haiku accepts without judgment that which is found in nature. Even potentially disturbing sights are reported dispassionately, leaving translation to the reader. The writer only observes.

Mossy log, toadstool,
Nearby a Pepsi bottle -
Nature bears it all
-Marian Harrison

Most of the participants felt that what healed in the annual retreat was about more than the creation of haiku. It was about the beauty of the setting and the support of the community, ingredients expressed beautifully in these two haiku by Deb Herberger.

Green meadow quiet
Gives way to sun drenched pearls
Jagged stones washed smooth

Moment to moment
Syllable by syllable...
We arrived together

