
SPECIAL SPOTLIGHT

HAIKU HOW-TO BOOKS: RETROSPECTIVE REVIEWS

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As translations of Japanese haiku became more available and interest in Japanese aesthetics grew, it was natural that books on how to write haiku in English emerged. Most of the earliest haiku how-to books included a broad introduction to Japanese haiku by scholars and translators with a few suggestions for writing haiku as poetry in English. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, several leading haiku poets and editors with twenty or thirty years of experience wrote more detailed guides to writing haiku in English. While acknowledging a range of approaches, each emphasized a more fully developed understanding of the art. Over the last decade, several new haiku how-to books have been published showing how haiku writing is a social art calling writers to become engaged in “the haiku life” of various literary communities.

For this retrospective review, I will be examining how the author of each of these books states his or her own primary goals about writing haiku by highlighting their theoretical conception of haiku (the art of reading and writing haiku). Some authors clearly state their approach and the basic principles of haiku poetics, whereas others operate from assumptions that are never stated as a theory. There is nothing better or worse about being explicit or implicit in their theory of haiku poetics; I simply want to help readers understand that all haiku how-to books do operate from underlying assumptions and core principles. Several of the more recent authors recognize other approaches to writing haiku, sometimes embracing a variety of approaches or arguing against what they view as a misguided approach. I will note the disagreements.

As a framework for analyzing the haiku poetics of these books, I will draw on my article, “Haiku Poetics: Objective, Subjective, Transactional and Literary Theories” published in *Frogpond* 34.2 in 2011. Here is a synopsis of these theories of haiku poetics as published in that article.

Objective Haiku Poetics emphasize the importance of reality, usually referred to as nature. The haiku moment is characterized as an instance of sensory perception of reality, without the blurring lens of human values or perspective. The writer is present as an “everyman” representative of human beings in general, perceiving nature (or reality) without stated explanation, commentary, or emotional response. The writer is supposed to be ego-less, so that the haiku will be about the thing observed instead of the observer. The goal is to show things “as they are” without interpretation or emotional coloring of significance.

Subjective Haiku Poetics emphasize the inner world and life of the writer. The haiku moment is characterized as an instance of self-awareness about the feelings and significance of “being in my own world.” The writer explores his or her own identity and life’s experiences through haiku, writing about themselves, their family, their hometown, or their culture in an ongoing autobiographical haiku journal. Many haiku writers in this tradition embrace haiku as therapy or as a means of spiritual growth through meditation and self-contemplation. The subjective haiku writer hopes that readers accept his or her haiku as genuine, authentic expressions of the writer’s life.

Transactional Haiku Poetics emphasize the social nature of haiku as a call and response process of creative collaboration between the writer and reader. The haiku moment is characterized as a union of reader and writer who meet in a haiku as co-creators of the felt significance of the poem. In transactional haiku poetics, reality is socially constructed as images and language connected to culturally shared memories and experiences (a community’s shared collective consciousness). Language is also viewed as a shared social construct, with culturally sensitive word choice and phrasing being a primary means of sharing significance between writer and reader. The reader relates to the images in the haiku through his or her own memories and associations with the things mentioned in the poem in order to create their own felt experience and understanding of the haiku moment. Overall, sharing haiku creates a sense of community often on multiple levels—locally, regionally, internationally, and online.

Literary Haiku Poetics emphasize language, through which the writer crafts an imaginative stage of possibilities—a fiction. The writer crafts

a literary artifact with all of the linguistic tools and imaginative resources available in his or her poetry toolkit. The haiku moment is characterized as an experience of the poem itself—its sound, its structure, its images, its characters and its overall significance. Literary haiku are written from memories, experiences, imagination, and in response to other works of art. As a language-based approach, literary haiku celebrate playful language employing puns, slant rhyme, alliteration, allusions, implied analogies, metaphors and other poetic techniques. Haiku is an experience of the language construct. The primary goal of literary haiku is to be an engaging literary artifact with an immediate aesthetic literary experience with lasting value to readers.

Haiku as a Closed Form is an approach that views haiku as a closed form within the traditional range of general poetics. In the haiku community we are all aware of the popular misconception of haiku as a closed form in which the defining characteristic is the 5-7-5 syllable count for a three-lined poem with a seasonal reference (See the Webster dictionary definition.) This form-only approach to haiku ignores the various ways that haiku traditions typically define reality, language, and roles of writers and readers. According to this approach anyone can write a haiku with any possible content as long as the language is organized in three lines with 5-7-5 syllables. That's all it takes for it to be a haiku. This approach denies that haiku is a literary genre with its own poetics or underlying aesthetic traditions. This approach conceives of haiku as merely a closed form of poetry with a set pattern of syllables.

RETROSPECTIVE REVIEWS

Haiku in English, by Harold G. Henderson (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1967).

As a scholar and translator of Japanese haiku, Henderson speculates about the possibilities of writing haiku in English. He discusses the four “rules” of Japanese haiku: (1) consists of seventeen Japanese syllables, (2) contains some reference to nature, (3) refers to a particular event, and (4) presents that event as happening now. He discusses the possibilities

of how these rules might or might not apply to haiku in English. His primary recommendations for teaching students and beginners how to write haiku is to follow the syllable pattern and attempt to “master this purely objective type of haiku” (56). He also states that “The greatest difficulty all beginners seem to have with picture haiku is that of concentrating on making the picture clear, and omitting their own interpretations” (57). For more advanced haiku writers, he suggests they may go beyond this objective approach and share emotions and more nuanced insights. They can “advance” to a more literary craft of writing haiku. As seen in his translations, he emphasizes the possibility of haiku that embody the beauty of language in the literary art of poetry—employing rhyme, poetry techniques such as enjambment, and musical phrasing. His translations and own examples of original work in English suggest that he views writing haiku as the creation of carefully crafted literary artifacts. Henderson discusses how the haiku tradition calls for certain content and tropes including the kigo (season word) and a moment of contemplation, but overall, he values haiku as poetry. He also followed several poetry conventions of his day, such as titles, capital letters for first lines, punctuation, and the 5-7-5 form, closing each haiku as a complete sentence with a period. Even though his advice focuses on writing objective haiku, Henderson calls for experimentation and a variety of approaches for haiku in English. He concludes, “Our poets have the task of developing traditions, standards, and presumably conventions of our own” (65). He adds, “Experimentation is needed in all kinds of devices, such as assonance, alliteration, internal rhyme, etc. Here the great danger is that of making the poem too beautiful, so that the words get between us and ‘the thing’” (66). This earliest how-to book is based primarily on an objective haiku poetics, with advanced poets achieving a more sophisticated work based on literary haiku poetics.

Aware—A Haiku Primer, by Betty Drevniok (Bellingham, WA: Portals Publications, 1981).

This is one of the first how-to write haiku books written by an active English-language haiku poet. Drevniok provides a short overview of haiku as

a journey of awareness. She writes that “The haiku journey is a journey everywhere and a journey nowhere at the same time . . . It is eternity and it is now . . . We all live together on the great global-village, and we are all basically the same no matter where we live—with the same emotions with the same love of life and nature” (2). She argues that if we take time to “step outside” and be alone, the universe will “touch you” so the art of writing haiku is to allow yourself to become aware “of reality, aware of the here and now, aware of the moment, the haiku-moment” (4). She encourages writers to keep a logbook of these moments of awareness and to write about what you know and encounter. She provides advice on how to work with the notebook, combining images into haiku and revising rough drafts into more polished haiku. For example, she says, “A haiku can be considered to be two scenes of a short film” (16). She also discusses the reader’s experience with haiku and how “you must not impose your thoughts upon a reader . . . It is the reader’s own awareness that directs his/her own emotion as he/she enters into the haiku-moment” (19). She concludes with a transactional haiku poetics goal of shared awareness: “The poet and reader stand together to view and experience one moment of time—the eternal now” (44). The second half of this book features eighteen haiku by contemporary haiku poets, including each writer’s own story about how that haiku came into being.

The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku, by William J. Higginson (New York: Kodansha International, 1985).

Higginson’s *The Haiku Handbook* was first published in 1985 and remains in print. It is a compendium of resources for beginning readers and writers of haiku including a brief history of Japanese haiku as well as the “haiku movement in English” and around the world. There are four chapters on the art of writing haiku. Higginson opens with the statement, “The primary purpose of reading and writing haiku is sharing moments of our lives that have moved us, pieces of experience and perception that we offer as received gifts. At the deepest level, this is the one great purpose of all art, and especially of literature. The writer invites the reader to share in the experience written about, and in the experience of the

shared language itself” (v). The chapters on writing haiku address: (1) the use of seasons, (2) traditional and modern form, (3) the use of sensory images, and (4) presentation of haiku on the page. While the book does not provide direct advice on how to write or revise haiku, it provides extensive examples and resources for study of haiku. Overall, Higginson calls for readers to view haiku as a literary art of sharing experiences and perceptions. I would place Higginson’s underlying haiku poetics as primarily transactional. In the final chapter on “The Uses of Haiku” he writes “Reading haiku helps us to respect the experience of others. Through reading haiku we can come to know the sensations and events which have moved fellow human beings” (244). Later he adds, “Haiku teach us not only to respect the experience of others but to recall and treasure our own experience” (246). He concludes with a vision of global collaboration: “The arts have always transcended national boundaries The haiku has also been a democratizing force: since before Bashō’s day people of all levels of society have written what we call haiku. As people within a society, or in different societies, share with one another the objects and events that mean something in their lives they come to know one another better. Perhaps the haiku, in its small way, will help us toward a world with greater understanding among all people, of whatever class or nation” (pages 258-259).

Hokku—Writing Traditional Haiku in English: The Gift to Be Simple, by David Coomler (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 2001).

Coomler writes about hokku as a simple, ascetic way of life. He prefers the term “hokku” as a means of distinguishing his approach from “the distortions and misunderstandings that arise through the conscious or unconscious mixing of hokku with European-American notions of poetry” (7). He explains that his approach is “based on the best of classic Japanese hokku which have their roots in Buddhism, Taoism, Chinese nature poetry, and specifically in the directness and non-intellectuality of Ch’an and Zen” (11). He acknowledges that R.H. Blyth is “the chief ‘spiritual ancestor’ of hokku in English” and that when he “wrote his monumental and unsurpassed series of books on haiku, he was really

writing primarily about hokku, even though he used Shiki's 'new' term for it" (13). Coomler opens his book urging, "It is not enough simply to write hokku; one must live hokku as well" (7). "So hokku is not an intellectual pursuit, not a poetic pastime or literary hobby. It is learning to direct the attention away from our constant thinking and imagining so that we may begin to experience" (9). He also states, "To write hokku we must ourselves become very simple. We must learn to get out of the way and let things speak for themselves instead of trying to speak for them. So the first step in learning hokku is the loosening of our attachment to the ego" (10). He encourages writers to take up some form of meditation to clear the mind in order to become detached and calm. He has chapters on form, punctuation, the three elements (setting, subject, action), line breaks, brevity, content, and sensation. His recommendations usually follow the conventions of capital letters and ending periods in R.H. Blyth's translations. Coomler notes that hokku avoids certain subjects that are too disturbing, such as war, romance and sex because these draw "attention too strongly to the writer" (69). Other subjects, such as technology and urban scenes, should also be avoided because the subject of hokku is nature and our sensations of experiencing nature. The overall emphasis in this book is the pure experience, an objective haiku poetics. For example, in his chapter on "Leave Out Thoughts and Self" he states, "the writer of hokku must become 'nobody.' Hokku is a way of life, and the writer of hokku is the 'nobody' who follows that way" (65). This is the objective haiku poetics emphasis on the writer as a universal "everyman" who writes in order to show us the way things are, especially in nature.

Writing and Enjoying Haiku: A Hands-on Guide, by Jane Reichhold (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, 2002).

Jane and Werner Reichhold were champions of linked verse in English, editing a journal called *Lynx*. Therefore, I expected that this how-to book would probably champion haiku as a transactional collaborative art. In the section of this book on renga she clearly expresses a transactional view that "Poetry is a social function" (107) with two or more persons collaborating to write the poem. However, I was surprised to find that

her view of haiku was actually an example of subjective haiku poetics. In the introduction she discusses our need to “evolve away from tribal living and thinking” and that “One way of expressing our distinctiveness is with words, and that can be with the haiku we write. As our skills with words are honed, as the techniques become second nature, the haiku even more faithfully reflect the individuality of the person. Really all we have to offer the world is the gift of our individuality” (16). She recommends “distinct attitudes that will increase and enrich the haiku you write as well as your life” (17). These attitudes include: being aware, being nonjudgmental, being reverent, having a sense of oneness, having a sense of simplicity, and having humility. The last attitude of humility is a cautionary warning to avoid egotistical goals. She states, “contemporary poetry is based on what the author feels or thinks—which is extremely ego-inflating. Haiku is based on what the author observes” (21). For Reichhold, haiku come as mysterious gifts of inspiration: “Another factor of humility that haiku teaches is that you are not the author of any of the haiku. They are gifts given to you by your spirits. They come to you but they are not yours” (21). The largest section of the book is “The Guide to Haiku Writing” which includes seventeen lessons on writing haiku, such as “Clearing up the Conflict over Counting Syllables” and “The Fragment and Phrase Theory”. One of the most interesting lessons includes examples of “Twenty-Four Valuable Techniques” including: comparison, contrast, association, riddle, sense-switching, narrowing focus, metaphor, simile, sketch, double entendre, puns, wordplay, verb/noun exchange, close linkage, leap linkage, mixing it up, *sabi*, *wabi*, *yūgen*, paradox, improbable word, humor, as it is above is below, and finding the divine in the common. Reichhold is an experienced writer and translator so she understands a great deal about writing haiku, especially as an art of self-discovery through which the author develops a distinct individuality.

How to Haiku: A Writer's Guide to Haiku and Related Forms, by Bruce Ross (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 2002).

In the introduction Ross talks about how “this tiny poem can say important things about how we feel about what we see around us” (1). He adds,

“to write a haiku means to write about how you feel at a certain moment in time even if you are writing it down sometime after” (1). There are two parts to haiku. “One is joining of two images where you are really comparing the relationship between the two” and “The other important part of traditional Japanese haiku is to connect our feelings to nature and the natural seasons” (2). He says that conveying experiences and the feelings arising from those experiences is the primary goal of haiku. “Haiku is not like most poetry. It is not trying to present strong emotions through made-up comparisons and imaginative expression. Rather, it is trying to present feelings through images that were part of an experience” (pages 4-5). Ross avoids the subjective haiku poetics explaining, “If we tone down our own personality, what is called our ego, we can develop the kind of attention that haiku needs. The world of things will open up to us, and our feelings for those things will lead us to compassion” (5). This is a very well developed expression of the objective haiku poetics—an encounter with things as they are. Haiku consists of, “heartfelt presentations of feelings for what is happening here and now at this present time” (6). Ross titles his chapter on writing haiku “Looking at Nature” and makes it clear that the writer is to avoid explanations, poetic expressions, and figurative language. He discusses the importance of images and separating the images with silence. He also warns writers to avoid both sentimentality and mere description. “Remember that haiku is not merely description. You are not taking a snapshot of an object or a scene. Rather, you are expressing the feeling that you had while experiencing that object or scene” (20). He also cautions against imaginatively making the haiku into a “little drama. You are not orchestrating something by putting this image with that image for dramatic effect like a stage director. There should be a naturalness to what happens in a haiku” (20).

Haiku: Asian Arts & Crafts for Creative Kids, by Patricia Donegan (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 2003).

In the preface Donegan explains that “This book’s purpose is to show you the way to write haiku, to teach you to take your ‘haiku eyes’ and put what you see and feel down on paper.” She explains that “Haiku is simply

noticing, noting and recording moments that are happening around us all the time—moments that make us wake up and see and appreciate the world around us” (6). She discusses seven keys to writing haiku: “1. Form: Your haiku should have three lines with or without a seventeen syllable count. It should be one breath long. 2. Image (a picture or sketch): Your haiku should have a descriptive image—for example, not ‘a flower,’ but instead ‘a purple iris in the sun.’ 3. Kigo (Season Word): Your haiku should refer to nature and hint at the day’s season or weather. 4. Here and Now: You should write from real experience or memory, not imagination; record the present moment. 5. Feeling: Your haiku should not explain or tell, but instead show the feeling through your image. 6. Surprise: Your haiku should have an ‘ah!’ moment that wakes us up. 7. Compassion: Your haiku should express openheartedness toward nature” (8). This subjective haiku poetics approach of noticing and writing about “the world around us” is a quantum leap beyond the usual 5-7-5 syllable-count approach so often taught in schools. Donegan also includes lessons in editing, renga, haibun and even a short guide to making a small book of haiku by a student to share their feelings with others.

Haiku: A Poet’s Guide, by Lee Gurga (Lincoln, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2003).

As the title indicates, this book is written from a haiku poet’s perspective with “fifteen years of practice” (viii). His primary view is that “Haiku is a poetic genre that has enjoyed a long tradition” (vii) and “More fundamental than its form—whatever this may take—haiku is informed by a set of aesthetic principles and a very special way of seeing the world” (viii). Gurga states that “content and treatment of subject matter are what distinguish haiku from other kinds of poetry” (2). He notes “Poets writing haiku in English during the past fifty years have distilled several characteristics from Japanese haiku that they believe have allowed the transmission of the haiku essence from the Japanese culture and language to ours. In addition to brevity, the seasonal word, and the juxtaposition of images that can result from the ‘cutting’ mentioned above, essential haiku characteristics include the so-called haiku moment and the

aesthetic principle of ‘lightness’ (*karumi* in Japanese). An understanding of these characteristics enables poets today to write a special kind of haiku, one that uses ‘images reflecting intuitions’ to present the significance of a single moment of life” (2-3). With this view of haiku as a literary genre with long-standing and evolving traditions of content and techniques of craft, Gurga values a wide range of approaches and techniques. In his chapter on “The Art of Haiku” he stresses the point that “a haiku is a poem, words are the stuff of its composition, and we must consider how words fit together to create a haiku experience for the reader” (13). As a literary artifact, a haiku is a crafted event for the reader, not merely capturing an experience for the writer. Therefore, “To write haiku requires, first, that we cultivate our powers of attention and perception so that we do not miss the moment of the experience, and, second, that we cultivate our understanding of haiku techniques and how they can be used to transform a simple record of that experience into a poem worth sharing” (13). He organizes his subsequent discussion around “five principle elements that the haiku writer must address: form; season; a particular event in the present tense, often referred to as the ‘haiku moment’; the ‘cut’ or caesura; and internal comparison” (14). In a subsequent section Gurga takes up “The Craft of Haiku” addressing use of various aspects of poetry techniques including sound, rhyme, alliteration, consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia, rhythm, arrangement, enjambment, titles, capitalization, and punctuation. Throughout all of these discussions, the underlying principle is that haiku is a genre of poetry that improves with the development of craft by the poet. This approach emphasizes a literary haiku poetics with the goal being to craft a haiku poem worth sharing.

Haiku—the Sacred Art: A Spiritual Practice in Three Lines, by Margaret D. McGee (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009).

In this book McGee explores the possibilities of sharing haiku as a means of spiritual development. She calls for an ecumenical spirituality: “While I am a Christian, and my own practice is grounded in the Episcopal Church, I have seen that writing haiku touches a human longing that lies

deep within all great faith traditions: the need to find our place in the world, to feel in our hearts our relationship to each other and to all of creation” (6-7). She views the haiku moment as a spiritual experience when “the mind stops and the heart moves” (3) in response to God's creation. In the introduction she writes, “Capturing moments of deep feeling that make you feel alive and whole—moments that make you aware of holiness—is a way to relate to the Creative Spirit through the ‘now’ of this moment, just as it is” (8). McGee shares the story of her own discovery of haiku as a sacred moment, as a means of prayer, as a means of thanksgiving, as a means of celebrating sacred places, and most importantly, as a means of sharing a communion of spirit with others. She writes “In sharing haiku with others, we discover that we are not alone in our feelings, but that sorrow, joy and all that comes between are part of the universal human spirit” (51). As the leader of a haiku group, she encouraged members to seek *utamakura*, “the Japanese tradition of recognizing sacred places in poetry” (71). She says that she “began to wonder which spots in my hometown or country might make good ‘poetic pillows’—places that evoke feelings common to the community or larger culture” (71). She surveyed her haiku friends about American sacred places and identified three categories of sacred places including: “a sense of belonging, or home; a sense of awe, or wonder; and a sense of wholeness, or healing from divisions” (73). McGee emphasizes a social approach to writing haiku, which is a hallmark of transactional haiku poetics. As she explains in her chapter *Haiku in Community*, “Writing a haiku on your own is a way to record and share the deep feeling of a moment; doing it with others is a way to both create and nurture community. Not only that, but writing haiku as a group experience can be flat-out fun” (102). McGee’s final chapter offers suggestions for living the haiku life—writing haiku every day, “paying attention to small things, the haiku poet honors the sacredness of everyday life” (138). She concludes, “Listening to the haiku of others and sharing your own ... opens multiple pathways for its meaning to enter your heart” (144).

Haiku and Senryu: A Simple Guide for All, by Charlotte Digregorio (Winnetka, IL: Artful Communicators Press, 2014).

Digregorio makes it very clear at the beginning of her book that “Learning to write haiku well allows poets to capture life’s moments and awaken their eyes to everything that surrounds them” (xii). Her primary emphasis is that writing and reading haiku is an intuitive process. “Haiku are from the heart, and they can touch the reader by evoking any type of emotion, from sadness to happiness. Effective haiku is thoughtful, insightful and intuitive, and it captures the moment. To capture the moment, it must be written in present tense” (1). She asserts that haiku is not merely a thought; it is a poem with its own traditions of literary craft. For example, a haiku often uses a juxtaposition of images that “create a revelation that readers recognize as the ‘aha’ moment” (2). She discusses a variety of styles and approaches to haiku in English but considers the ultimate goal of all haiku to be a poem that evokes an emotional response. She notes “Today, what we love about American haiku is that there is such a range of poetry being written, from nature and season haiku to human interest and humorous haiku Haiku should be evocative, not a comment about something” (49). She notes that “Some of the more contemporary haiku intrigue us, but others strike us as being obscure or abstract, as subjective states of emotion are explored in them. Whether or not haikuists appreciate all contemporary and abstract forms of haiku, they must consider whether they have an emotional response to them” (49). So although she wants to help everyone “chronicle the moments of their lives in thoughtful poetry” (xi), the ultimate goal for a haiku is to be crafted into poetry that evokes an emotional response in readers. What counts the most is sharing life’s moments and insights with readers. “Haiku helps us to articulate and share our experiences and perceptions with others. It helps us to understand ourselves, our feelings and our emotions. As with other forms of poetry, it’s simply good therapy and allows us to dust ourselves off. Haiku is healing. It is our anchor. And, when we read others’ haiku, we share in their joy and suffering” (19). Presenting haiku as a bridge between understanding the self and sharing emotions with others, this how-to book is another example of transactional haiku poetics.

Earth in Sunrise: A Course for English-Language Study, by Richard Gilbert and David Ostman (Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2017).

This is not really a how-to write haiku book; it is a textbook on learning English as a second language. However, one of the primary artifacts used to learn English throughout this book is contemporary haiku, so you could say that this book is about how to learn English by sharing haiku. Chapters in this textbook are based on various topics for discussion, with related haiku included in each chapter. There are a few assignments to try writing haiku on the topic of discussion. For example in the chapter on animals, students are asked to write a haiku about a familiar animal by becoming the animal; “write as that animal.” The authors discuss a few haiku at the beginning of each chapter modeling the way readers share interpretations. Supplemental resources and a short appendix include more resources on contemporary haiku. Although the book does not directly address how to write haiku, it places haiku in the middle of the ESL or EFL student experience. I like the way this book opens a door for the students into this broader community of haiku writers. In terms of haiku poetics, the examples and commentary emphasize the imagination of haiku writers and their literary creations. It also models the transactional process of reading and sharing interpretations of haiku. In the context of learning English as a second language, the literary haiku poetics works very well. The contemporary haiku are examples of literary works of art, ripe for fruitful analysis and discussion.

Write Like Issa: A Haiku How-to, by David G. Lanoue (New Orleans, LA: Haiku Guy, 2017).

David Lanoue is a well-known scholar and translator of Issa, and he acknowledges his love of Issa’s haiku as the inspiration to learn Japanese in order to study and translate Issa’s poetry. He is also an accomplished writer of haiku and haiku fiction. One of his novels, *Haiku Guy*, is the tale of a young writer seeking to learn the art of writing haiku from “Cup of Tea” (Issa). This how-to book is an unapologetic argument for learning how to write haiku like Issa. On the question of why Issa, he explains:

“Issa’s poetry isn’t, as a rule, focused on doom and gloom. More typically, his haiku celebrate life on a living planet with appreciation, empathy, and good humor. Maybe this is why I and many of my fellow poets turn to Issa rather than to Bashō for our deepest inspirations. So human, so compassionate, so insightful; Issa has a lot to teach poets today, two centuries after. To write like Issa means writing tenderly about one’s fellow creatures, human and otherwise. It means writing with an attitude of childlike perceptiveness, keeping one’s mind and heart wide open to the universe and its infinite surprises. It means writing with a willingness to laugh at life’s intrinsic absurdities. It means writing with bold subjectivity, defying all teachers and pundits who harp about the need for ‘objectivity’ in haiku. And, writing like Issa means writing with a kind of free-flowing imagination that discovers shockingly fresh juxtapositions and revelations” (8-9). This book is an example of subjective haiku poetics. It includes six lessons based on writing like Issa, with many examples by Issa as well as contemporary haiku. In the lesson on “bold subjectivity” Lanoue discusses this haiku by Issa: *hole in the wall — / my harvest moon / comes in* which is followed by a haiku by Stanford M. Forrester: *autumn colors — / the scarecrow’s shirt / nicer than mine*. In the conclusion to this book, he explains why he wrote it. “Who, today, will guard over the fragile blossom of haiku? Who will protect it against the threats of societal indifference to all forms of poetry, of selfish materialism, and of a widespread blindness to nature and to our absolute inclusion in it? Who will defend haiku against the heresy, rampant on the Worldwide Web, that this type of poetry consists of any random string of words tossed together in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern? And who will save it from perhaps well meaning but sadly misguided editors who publish books of ‘haiku’ filled with obtuse, abstract, and vapid language games? Instead of inviting readers into the intimacy of real experiences and the joy of real discoveries, such editors and the poets whom they champion threaten to rob haiku of its very essence” (102-103). Lanoue’s book is an unapologetic manifesto of the potential joys of haiku as a celebratory art, if we write like Issa and explore our own real experiences and discoveries.

How to Write a Haiku, by David Lindley (Northamptonshire, UK: Verborum Editions, 2017).

As a relative newcomer to haiku, Lindley is like a kid in a candy store, excitedly learning about the haiku tradition. However, his choices appear to be limited by a short list of resources—books on Japanese haiku published several years ago. He does not appear to be aware of the vibrant English-language haiku community that has been actively exploring the art of haiku over the last four decades. So he does not appear to have a fully formed haiku poetics at this time. However, based on his translations and original haiku in English, I would say he favors a conception of haiku as a closed form of poetry written in 5-7-5 syllables employing common English poetry techniques. He discusses haiku as a tradition of writing about “concrete things” with simplicity and intuition. Through his practice as a translator and writer, it is clear that he views haiku as a literary craft. For example, here is one of his “regular” 5-7-5 haiku: *Spring. Lost in the woods. / White wild garlic and bluebells. / A lone pink flower*. Note the alliteration, the personification, the use of punctuation, the adjectives, the accumulation of images. This is a little narrative poem in 5-7-5 syllables. It is an example of the naïve view of haiku as a closed form of poetry. This implies that you write haiku the same way you write any poetry, so long as it is contained in the 5-7-5 form. To be fair, Lindley does discuss and provide some examples of “non-regular” haiku, but these are mostly 17-syllable poems with line breaks other than the three 5-7-5 lines. Overall, this book provides a beginner’s introduction to the Japanese haiku tradition in general with some of the author’s own attempts to write haiku in English. The book provides little guidance on how to write haiku in English because of the limited experience of the author as a haiku writer and because of his limited understanding of haiku as a genre with its own poetics traditions.

The Haiku Life: What We Learned as Editors of Frogpond, by Francine Banwarth and Michele Root-Bernstein (Lincoln, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2017).

As the title indicates, this most recent haiku how-to book emerged from the authors' experience as co-editors of the journal *Frogpond*. In some ways, this is a book on how-to edit a haiku magazine—how to recognize excellence. The authors start with “What did we really know about recognizing high-quality haiku? The ones we liked the most touched us in our hearts and in our minds. They tapped into some magic amalgam of insight and awareness. Yet, the haiku formula, so to speak, also depended on implicit matters of art and craft” (2). They describe the back and forth exchange of selecting haiku to publish, and implicitly suggest that this is how the larger community of writers gains consensual agreement about excellence. They talk about three levels of contexts for creativity: “If personal creativity involves what is novel and effective to an individual poet or to a small circle of her family and friends, public (professional) creativity depends on what is deemed novel and effective to select communities of enthusiasts. Historical creativity has to do with innovations in the art or craft of haiku that stand the test of time” (12). In each case, this is a transactional haiku poetics where the context enlarges from the individual to friends to a haiku community to a socially constructed literary history. They conceive of writing haiku as a social process of intuition where an insight becomes the basis for a first draft which improves through sharing and receiving feedback from readers then evolving through editing and revision into a well-crafted evocative poem. The editors have an acronym for what they sought in the best haiku: LIFE (language; imagery; form; and elusiveness of expression). They discuss each of these with examples from contemporary poets. “L is for language that surprises” (22). “I is for imagery that is fresh” (24). “F is for form that functions” (26). “E is for elusiveness that engages imagination” (28). True to their communal social approach, the authors also analyze *Frogpond* haiku that were selected for recent anthologies, formulating their answer to “What makes haiku haiku?” from characteristics evident in these most frequently anthologized haiku. The result is the following bullet list of observations: the best haiku have “some kind of • sensual imagery, sometimes coupled with thoughts or introspections • juxtaposition of disparate images, triggering an unexpected comparison or relationship • brevity of thought or suggestion • ambiguity of reference or association in order to create

- conceptual space for the reader to (re)experience or (re)create insight or resonance of meaning” (46-47). The book ends with a vision for continued growth and communal development of haiku. “Altogether, the day-to-day aesthetic choices of poets and editors and readers have crafted a supple, evolving poetic art, capable of building on the best of tradition, making room for contemporary exploration, and maintaining relevance for the future” (80).