Personae: Narrative Voices in the Haiku of Raymond Roseliep

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In my essay "Haiku Poetics: Objective, Subjective, Transactional and Literary Theories"[1] I discuss various approaches to writing haiku. Each theoretical approach emphasizes a certain characterization of the writer —the writer's perspective, voice, and identity as the creator of a haiku poem. The writer's voice, or narrator, is evident by their use of language, topics, and cultural perspectives in their haiku. Each haiku poetics approach champions a certain conception of the haiku narrator as one of these four general types: (1) an objective, unbiased recorder of human sensory perception in nature; (2) a subjective expression of an autobiographical heartfelt experience; (3) a transactional social role that changes depending on the social situation; or (4) a literary fictional character who provides both the voice and perspective followed in the haiku. All four approaches invoke a narrative stance, a persona for writing haiku.

Whether imagined or experienced by the writer, all haiku provide a scene, a miniature stage, a moment for readers to imagine. Usually, the scene is presented to readers without commentary or interpretation. Readers imagine the things and people mentioned in this scene and respond as if these are being experienced for themselves. Written in the present tense, haiku are written so that readers can be immersed in the scene as it is happening in their imagination. Readers imagine, interpret, respond, feel, and note overall significance. In the best literary works, the readers forget the fourth wall. They forget that a literary work of art is imaginary. Fiction. But deep down they always know there is a creator behind it. There is an author who is credited and acknowledged. There is a writer who has drawn on their own observations of the world, their own life background, their own social interactions with others. There is

a writer who draws on previous works of literature. However, from the reader's imagined experience of the haiku, there is only a narrative voice, a stance. It is not the author they meet in the work of literature; it is the imagined speaker or teller of the story, the haiku narrator. For example, Issa's life might be misery and suffering, but the narrative voice the reader finds in his haiku is playful, empathetic, and caring.

With so few words in a haiku, readers quickly intuit the narrator from the voice, attitude, word choices, and perspective of the poem. We do this intuitively when reading all types of writing. As readers of newspapers, we understand the difference in narrators from news reporters, entertainment feature writers, or opinion editorial authors. We expect news journalists to be objective reporters of facts whereas editorials are written to be opinionated persuasion. As readers of novels and short stories, we imagine the narrator of the fiction and usually trust their perspective (although Edgar Allen Poe, William Faulkner, and other authors have taught us to not trust narrators entirely).

As readers of haiku, we are very adept at understanding the haiku's implied narrator. We may personally know the writer and think that the voice is so THEM. But usually, we don't know the writer. All we know is the narrative voice we hear and imagine from the haiku itself. I would argue that, as a literary experience, we intuitively imagine the narrator and it is a mistake to simply assume that the narrator is the same as the writer. The narrator is the reader's imagined construct. With each haiku, the reader decides whether they accept or doubt this narrator's communication. Do we relate or connect with this narrator's perspective? Do we join them in observations of the world and say "yes, that's true"? Do we imagine what they felt and feel it too? Do we resist their perspective and think the narrator is sexist or nationalist or pushing a political agenda? Do we understand their concerns for social justice, or do we think they are misguided? Do we love their playful words and surprising twists? All of these reader responses are, in part, derived from the imagined narrator. Who is speaking to us in this haiku?

As haiku readers, we are often just there as observers, sharing in the omniscient narrator perspective. Other times we seem to become participants in the haiku moment. In traditional haiku, the most common

narrator is the objective observer, especially a nature-lover or hermit wandering in the outdoors. However, over the last fifty years, that objective observer has also turned attention to Anthropocene nature, which is man-made. English haiku content now addresses urban environments, indoor living spaces, altered nature, pollution, and everyday things experienced in our daily lives. English haiku have sometimes been a vehicle for conveying personal experiences, an autobiographical account of being alive. Such haiku often include memories of childhood, of family, of personal struggles with health or other issues, of travel or of changes in the poet's life. Since at least the 1980s, English haiku often took up the broader psychological topics of relationships, love, loss, friendship, mental health, community, or social justice issues. And in some cases, we have seen literary narrators in haiku—haiku written as if by characters in stories such as David Lanoue's *Haiku Guy* (and related novels) and Carlos Colón's haiku written with the persona of Elvis.

In this essay I ask readers to explore the many personae evident in the haiku of Raymond Roseliep, one of our most playful, creative masters of the art of English-language haiku. He took great pleasure in trying to write haiku employing all approaches possible. I invite you to examine the role of narrative voices employed by Roseliep. Let's consider the extent to which he tries various narrative voices from the objective, subjective, transactional, and imaginative literary approaches to writing haiku.

Roseliep and the Objective Haiku Narrator

The objective haiku poetics calls for a narrator who is a Zen-like nature lover. Focused on nature more than the self, this narrator attempts to be ego-less and therefore is a more objective observer of things as they are. The objective haiku narrator shares sensory perceptions and truths about nature without interpretation, explanation, commentary, emotional response, or artistic embellishment. Of course, few English haiku writers have actually been ego-less hermits in the woods, but we do have a strong tradition of American nature writing which goes back to Thoreau and Bashō. In the introduction to *Where the River Goes: The Nature Tradition in English-Language Haiku*, editor Allan Burns notes the im-

portance of Thoreau to nature writing and the development of haiku. He quotes Thomas J. Lyon: "Thoreau appears to have sought above all a pure and direct experience, that is, a nondual experience, which would transcend the usual distance between subject and object and grant participation in the wholeness of nature."[2] Some of Roseliep's earliest haiku attempts were based on Thoreau's writing, but these were not nature haiku. Instead Roseliep wrote what he called "Thoreauhaiku" as an imaginative exploration of Thoreau as a fictional voice. We will see some of these later.

In the essay "This Haiku of Ours," published in the July 1976 issue of *Bonsai: A Quarterly of Haiku*, Roseliep called for writers to focus on realities from their own lives. He wrote that "For subject matter we should dig into our own teeming country, God's plenty when it comes to materials: outer space discoveries, hairy youth, mini skirts, bell bottoms, roller skates, pizza, peanut butter, saucer sleds, circuses, our enormous bird fish animal & insect kingdoms, our homeland flowers-trees-plants-grains-vegetables-&-fruits, motorcycles, ships that plow the sky and deliver people to Japan—the storehouse is without walls. Practically everything under the sun is valid subject matter for haiku as for any poem, except that in haiku it is the affinity between the world of physical nature and the world of human nature that concerns us, and so we focus our images there. It's American images I'm advocating rather than the Japanese cherry blossoms, kimonos, rice, tea, temple bells, Buddhas, fans, and parasols that populate so many supposedly Western haiku; something is not quite right when our poems come out sounding like Eastern poems. Creation is still more exciting than imitation."[3] Note that while calling for American images and content, he is not calling for haiku writers to be objective in their responses to this content. He is interested in the "affinity between the world of physical nature and the world of human nature." Roseliep does not exclude the subjective response to this subject matter. For example, when Roseliep turns to his own backyard, he writes haiku about people engaged with contemporary life and nature in his own backyard.

the first crocus
    how she enjoyed
    not picking it [4]

The narrator of this haiku suggests that someone is outdoors on a walk with a friend, perhaps a child. They have come upon the first crocus of spring and are admiring it. The narrator is observing how much the girl enjoyed not picking it (despite wanting to pick it). Picking it would be an attempt to own a delicate thing that wouldn't last long once it is picked. On the other hand, leaving it be lets it glory in the sunshine of spring, despite the possible late snow or freeze. The haiku is not about the writer nor his ego, but it also does not hold back from a subjective response to the scene: "how she enjoyed" not picking the crocus. Perhaps his narrative voice sees no benefit in being emotionless? He responds subjectively. A few of Roseliep's haiku do appear to be more objective nature poems without subjective response. Let's consider three examples.

spring breeze
puffs through the skeleton
of a bird [5]

In this haiku the focus is on observation, not the observer. With the opening line we feel the chill of the spring breeze. If we are in short sleeves, it lifts the hairs on our arms and gives us goose bumps. The second part suggests the suddenness of this "puff" and the observation that it goes "through the skeleton of a bird." We see that the bird has not survived the winter and is returning to the earth. Only the skeleton and a few imagined feathers remain. Being human, we feel the coldness of the skeleton although it feels no such thing.

swish of cow tail
    peach petals
    fall [6]

Here is another selfless haiku in which the implied narrator is an observer contemplating the significance of these images. Two verbs. Lots of movement and action. The opening image suggests a warm afternoon with flies buzzing about the cow. The "swish" of the cow tail is an automatic response, an everyday occurrence on any farm. The second image "peach petals fall" could be seen as a result of the cow tail or simply being that time when the blossoms are past their prime and fall to the ground. This is a snapshot in time that lets the reader imagine and feel being there on a late spring afternoon.

uncurling butterfly
vibrating
the willow leaf[7]

This is one of Roseliep's last haiku, a nature poem observing the vibrant life of a butterfly. The narrator seems to be up close, watching the butterfly "uncurling" its wings. The willow leaf it holds onto is vibrating as it gets its wings and prepares for adulthood. Without commentary, this haiku narrator just lets us be there too, observing and feeling this moment of creative fulfillment.

Roseliep and the Subjective Narrator: An Autobiographical Memoir of Life Experiences

The subjective haiku poetics celebrates the unique perspective and voice of the haiku poet. The implied or invoked narrator is the writer. This approach usually assumes that the narrator is the poet's self, an autobiographical memoir of their life experiences. Although I believe that Issa is much more complex in his actual practice, his haiku are often presented as a diary with biographical context used to contrast his tragedies with the light-hearted humorous voice of his haiku that champion the little creatures. Roseliep embraced writing haiku in the first person, and sometimes in the plural "we" narrator's voice.

In the essay "This Haiku of Ours" Roseliep addressed the use of the first person in haiku even though objective theories of haiku at the time frowned on its use. He writes that "The first person singular—in spite of

constant war against it by our more conservative haiku writers and editors—is prevalent in the work of the best Japanese haiku artists. I shudder to think of Issa without the very personal self in those whimsies of his. So, I favor the perpendicular pronoun when we can somehow universalize the experience, prepare the reader to recognize himself in the 'I' or to participate in the captured insightful moment." Aware of the literary construct of voice and narrator available only in the first person, Roseliep's haiku create a sense of immediacy with the first-person narrator, clearly attempting to convey universal rather than private moments of the self. Even when his haiku speak from the first person, Roseliep still invites us to become the narrator, the viewer, the person alive as anyone who therefore speaks the feelings of everyone. He does not want to keep the reader out from the first-person perspective.

Let's start with a plural narrator perspective that clearly invites readers to become one of the "we" perspective.

> the bee
> stops singing.
> we find who we are [8]

This narrator speaks for us as "we find" and "we are" participating in this moment as a member of the assembled people. This voice speaks for the group. There is a shared mystery as to why the bee stops singing. Has something alarmed it? Is there some danger disrupting its usual busy buzzing work? Maybe we are the bees and when one of us "stops singing" all of us stop. Perhaps the plural voice is appropriate with bees, who are of course hive creatures. Could bees ever act or think or buzz in any voice other than we? The bee is not left to its own nature. It is our nature that brings the intrigue of this haiku.

Here is another haiku from 1983 showing how Roseliep liked to mix up our natures:

> monarch drying
> for a flight I plan
> to join [9]

As in the previous butterfly haiku discussed, the narrator is watching a recently hatched monarch butterfly. It is filling out and waiting for its wings to dry so that it can begin its journey ... its flight into the beyond. This time instead of merely describing the vibrating willow leaves, the narrator imagines joining the butterfly in flight. The narrator identifies with this monarch's emergence from the cocoon and sees himself on that same trajectory. He imagines or is preparing to join in that flight to the beyond, or at least off on the adventures that await when his wings are ready. Given that this is written in 1983, the year that Roseliep died, it could be viewed as a death haiku.

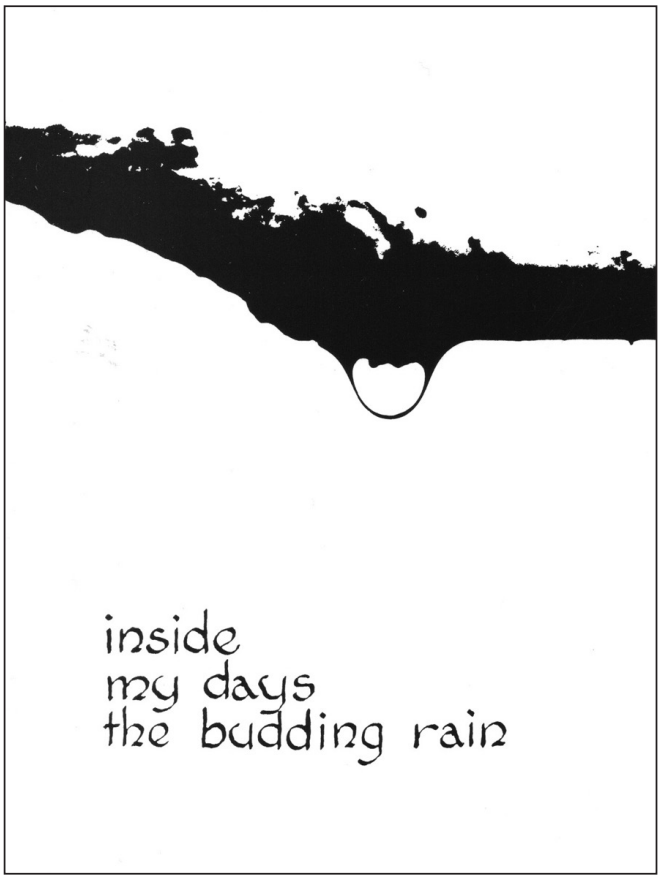
the first snow
took me indoors
of my real self [10]

This first-person narrator haiku is written as an inward-looking meditation. The first snow keeps the person home, without social interactions. Alone enough to just be. To ask questions of the self. To confront who I really am, what matters most. The narrator of this haiku is confronting themselves, a bit of navel gazing.

I whispered of death
one winter night in a voice
we both never knew [11]

Again, we don't really have reason to believe this is Roseliep writing about himself, but rather a haiku written about how someone can be surprised by their own thoughts. For me, the interesting thing about this haiku is who "I whispered of death" to? Was this whispered to the self or someone else? The "we" in the third line could be a companion or lover. Or the "we" could be the usual self, conversing with this surprising new self. We don't often talk about death, especially our own death.

inside
my days
the budding rain [12]



In this minimalist first-person haiku, it is best to read and imagine this very slowly. Inside. Not outdoors or in social situations but just "inside." My days. Not just one day or once in a while, but inside for several days. Alone. Nobody else filling my days. My. Days. Then "the budding rain" begins. Just one drop, then another. Spring renewal. Nourishing rain. Growth. Just enough rain to start something new. This haiku, published as a poem card with a drop of rain dangling off a bare branch, is a beautiful example of a first-person narrator in a minimalist haiku. It is written as "my days" but we relate to it as our own private "my days." The best first-person haiku allow the reader to imagine themselves and the "my days" speaker.

Although not always written in the first person, several of Roseliep's haiku appear to be written from memories of childhood. The narrator's voice is often the voice of a child or parent. Others appear to be autobiographical memoir, written with a narrator "looking back" on his parents, family, or childhood.

the firefly you caught
lights the church you make
with your hands [13]

Consider the narrator's perspective in this haiku. I see a child's eyes looking into the church formed by hands with index fingers forming a steeple. Inside, there is the glow of a firefly—the magic or mystery within the church. Who made the light? Who brought it into the church? Who is this you, your hands? Roseliep leaves it up to the reader to imagine and decide. We feel the child's sense of wonder. Maybe this is a voice of Sunday School instruction—how you make a little church come alive with firefly light which represents the light of God. Our little narrator is showing a friend how it's done.

musical top
sprung since boyhood
its music there [14]

This haiku presents an artifact from childhood, a musical top. Initially it appears that this haiku is about the broken top that has been sprung "since boyhood." However, in the last line, the perspective shifts from a child's sadness that the toy is broken to the narrator's joy of remembering the music of the spinning top. The haiku ends with an adult's melancholy of missing a simple pleasure of childhood.

Breaking the silence
of Mama's knitting needles
the click-click of sleet [15]

The narrator in this haiku is a child sitting in the same room with "Mama". This is a record of perception ... in the moment when the knitting needles pause, we hear the "click-click" of sleet. There is a connection in the similar sounds of the needles and sleet hitting the window. Even though the storm may be frightening to the child, Mama's everyday activity is reassuring, warm and safe. Perhaps she is knitting a sweater or mittens to keep the child warm?

her hourglass figure
in
my father's watch [16]

Roseliep also wrote several memorial haiku about his father. In this one we get a double perspective on the photo in his father's watch. First, we get the narrator's perspective. A child is admiring the father's old pocket watch. It has a photo inside of a beautiful woman. Who is this woman with the "hourglass figure"? Is it their mother or someone else? Perhaps the narrator has never seen a photo of their mother as a young attractive woman? Which leads to the second perspective. This is a photo the father treasured and looked at often. We are seeing the woman with the "hourglass figure" through the father's eyes. But all of this has passed. Maybe the watch is being examined because the father has died? Maybe the "hourglass figure" no longer exists anywhere else but "in my father's watch" where it lived on for years and years. To read this haiku as merely a haiku about Roseliep's own father, as an autobiographical poem, is to limit the way we get to enter into the poem and imagine these perspectives for ourselves, for our own fathers and mothers.

boiling beet tops
only for the scent
Papa loved [17]

On first take, the narrator of this haiku appears to be cooking supper, specifically "boiling beet tops" which I imagine are very pungent or fragrant depending on your taste preferences. I personally like mustard greens but have never had the pleasure of eating beet tops. However, the second half of the haiku suggests that the cook may not be planning to eat the boiled beet tops. They are boiling them "only for the scent" which evidently is a unique aroma. The scent brings back memories of childhood and how much Papa loved the scent of beet tops. Perhaps he loved the taste of them as well? In the last line "Papa loved" we are reminded that the narrator is telling a story of his childhood. This is about trying to remember a time when Papa was still alive and present to enjoy the beet

tops. When I teach this haiku, I ask my students what difference it makes that the last line is in past tense. What happens if the author wrote "Papa loves" instead of "Papa loved." They say he would be resurrected and with us! It is through the literary device of the narrator that we know this is a haiku about remembering Papa's joy from years ago.

Roseliep and Transactional Narrators: Writing from Shifting Social Roles or Identities

Transactional haiku poetics provides for more variety in narrative and reader stances. The language of each haiku implies a social perspective or role and calls on the reader to enter the imagined scene of the poem with an appropriate partnership to the narrator's role. Transactional haiku poetics emphasize the social nature of haiku as a call and response process of creative collaboration between the writer and reader. The narrator is socially constructed as a voice or perspective, given the specific social role and cultural context of the haiku.

A large portion of Roseliep's collected haiku are written with the narrator as a social role player. Sometimes they are farmhands, neighbors, husbands, lovers, artists, or even priests. Like fellow American poets, Carl Sandberg and Walt Whitman, he admired and celebrated the everyday work and contributions of ordinary people in our communities.

under goose music
hum
of the scythe [18]

As I imagine this haiku, I become one of the harvest crew workers. We are focused on getting the crop cut and gathered for storage. Overhead, we hear the geese starting to make formations for the coming migration. They fly back and forth over the harvest fields honking, a sort of music that we hear far below. This haiku is full of sounds. The swishes or "hum" of the scythe blending in with the faraway "goose music." The farm workers and geese are both fulfilling their callings. Roseliep's narrator stays in the background, just an observer of both the geese overhead and the harvest crew.

she sings
the bean-planting song
to her sick man [19]

The narrator of this haiku is a visitor or neighbor who has come by to check on the sick farmer and his wife. Perhaps it is springtime, and the crops need to be planted soon. Who will plant the corn? What will happen if her sick man doesn't recover and get well? The bean-planting song is comforting. She will be singing it in the garden soon, but for now she sings it to her sick man, hoping to plant the seeds of hope in his recovery. The narrator asks, "What can we do to help?" This is clearly a haiku written as observation, but again, not merely an objective observation.

bringing lemonade
the farmer's daughter
becomes the thresher's song [20]

Roseliep often admires the spirit someone brings to their daily life or work. In this haiku the narrator is one of the farm workers. They have been threshing all morning and are pleased to get a break. The farmer's daughter not only brings lemonade but also a refreshing spirit ... a song that stays with the workers as they continue the monotonous work. My imagined narrator hears the farmer's daughter singing as she arrives and has the song stuck in his head after she leaves.

the sailor
peeling potatoes
around himself [21]

This is another haiku about someone immersed in their work. I imagine the narrator of this haiku as another sailor on the ship, perhaps another sailor on kitchen duty. There's a lot of people to feed on a ship and this sailor's mission is to peel potatoes. It's a big job and he's been at it for several hours. More potatoes to peel, he keeps going.

the banker
cancels
a moth [22]

The banker appears to be doing his job without significant thought or care. He cancels one document or check after another then automatically cancels a moth. That's not very nice. Nor creative. Evidently the narrator is a customer in the bank, and he is probably not impressed with the banker's lack of compassion for the moth. Although the haiku does not tell us what to think, my imagined narrator frowns at the killing of the moth.

In addition to exploring the social roles of everyday people, Roseliep enjoyed writing from the perspective of being a lover. He received some concerns from Catholic leaders who did not approve of his sometimes erotic narrators. In an interview with Sister Mary Thomas Eulbert, "Poet of Finespun Filaments: Raymond Roseliep," she asked him about how a priest could write such evocative, sometimes erotic, love poetry. Roseliep answered her directly: "To talk about that," he said, "I should return for a moment to that Catholic-poetry period of mine, and I can briefly tell you how it was inevitable that I needed a fresh theme. In those early days I was writing about the Mass, the sacraments, parish experiences, religious encounters of all dimensions—in people, nature, anywhere."[23] He added: "I needed a new outlook. I knew that religious poetry and love poetry are the hardest of all to write, and since I hadn't attained full success in one, I would try the other. And I have been exploring the love theme ever since. It's wonderful. It keeps me alive and young and remembering; and always with feelings that are deepest and most sacred in all of us." For Roseliep, the social roles of lover and husband were interesting narrative perspectives for writing haiku. Although he was never married, he wrote this haiku:

hold me closer, wife,
the plum blossom is so strong
on midnight air [24]

The narrator of this haiku is a married man speaking to his wife. He asks her to "hold me closer" because he loves her? Or because he is so drawn to "the plum blossoms on midnight air"? Maybe both. The plum blossoms seem to be overwhelming, calling out to him. He needs her to hold on. Closer. This is an example of Roseliep's fictional use of narrative voice. He doesn't have to be married to know or to imagine the feelings a married man might have.

the girl tossed a flame
or flower in the old well
—I'm too late to tell [25]

Another lover's haiku, or I should say ex-lover. The narrator in this haiku seems to be confused. What was it the girl tossed down the old well? A flower? A flame? Either way they seem to have been discarded. Thrown away. Lost to the darkness. The lover is left with confusion and questions about what went wrong. "I'm too late" to understand why things didn't work out. This is another dramatic monologue haiku written in first person. Although we have vivid images, it is written with the inner voice of a confused ex-lover.

waiting for my love.
the incurled
apple bud [26]

The narrator of this haiku is eager for love. He is waiting. Period. Meanwhile it's spring and the apple buds are unfurling without him. He is the "incurled" apple bud waiting to bloom in full fragrant flourish. But for now, it's all about … someday "my love" will arrive. Metaphor. Implied emotion. A narrative voice. This is a great example of the literary art of narrative haiku mastered by Roseliep.

Love Poem
who will I give it
to [27]

This beautiful first-person haiku is written from the perspective of someone who seeks, but hasn't yet found, love. This is a romantic narrator who writes love poems. He's written a great one, if only he had someone to give it to. Or maybe the narrator knows exactly who they will give the love poem to, but it's a secret so they are pretending not to know. Here is this "Love Poem" in initial capital letters followed by a whimsical finale.

on my bed
her gloves
hold each other [28]

In this haiku the lover narrator notices his lover's gloves on "my bed." The visitor has left her gloves behind. I prefer to imagine that she is there but temporarily out of the bedroom. While he waits for her to return the narrator notices that her gloves are neatly placed, as if they "hold each other." The suggestion is that he would rather be with her, holding her. But he will see how things unfold. Is she coming or going? Why are her gloves still there? How long will they hold each other before she's gone?

Roseliep wrote several haiku from the perspective of being an artist or with other artists. Here is one of his most well-known, award-winning haiku:

unable
        to get hibiscus red
the artist eats the flower [29]

The narrator of this haiku admires the artist's problem solving. After several attempts to mix the paint into the right shades for the hibiscus, the artist eats the flower. Sometimes you can't capture the vivid reality of a vibrant living thing, so you just have to move on and finish the "still life" painting. The artist can't keep up with nature's creation.

by the autumn hill
my watercolor box
unopened [30]

The narrator of this haiku is the landscape painter. He has found the perfect landscape to paint and is perhaps waiting for the light to be perfect. Or the painter simply wants to admire the beauty of nature. Why bother opening the watercolors when nature has already done this in real life?

To conclude this consideration of haiku employing the transactional social role of narrators, I will consider the ways that Raymond Roseliep embraced his role as a priest and wrote haiku from a persona as Father Roseliep. Ordained in 1943, it is not surprising that many of his haiku are written from the perspective and voice of a priest.

spring!
my sin
stops me [31]

In this simple minimalist haiku, we get the voice of the narrator crying out "spring!" This is immediately followed by a sense of guilt over "my sin" which "stops me" from celebrating or enjoying the renewal of spring. This haiku is the second haiku in a sequence called "Out of Winter."

never expecting
the lilies in November
nor the small coffin [32]

Priests often officiate for funerals. This haiku comes from a heartfelt loss and is written with an implied "I was never expecting" in the first line. It is written in the voice of someone who is shocked by the loss of a little child or baby. I imagine that it is the loss of a baby so the narrator's words of "never expecting" is about how everyone had made extensive plans in anticipation of the arrival of this new child. But instead, there are "lilies in November" which is, of course, out of season but a common flower for funerals. This haiku breaks our hearts as we step into the shoes of this narrator. This is one of Roseliep's most frequently anthologized haiku. It received an honorable mention award in the 1979 Haiku Society of America Harold G. Henderson haiku competition.

Roseliep and Imaginative Literary Narrators

Imaginative literary haiku are narrative, written from a fictional writer's voice and perspective. There is a long-standing tradition of "haigo" in the Japanese traditions. We know that Issa means "cup of tea" and Bashō is "banana tree." Some English-language haiku writers have employed such haigo to sign or write certain types of haiku such as Evelyn Tooly Hunt's haiku written in three vertical lines attributed to her Asian penname, Tao Li. There are several senryu that satirize and parody various haiku writers with fictional pennames. Alan Pizzarelli is a master of satire and includes some parodies of Roseliep in the collection, *Senryu Magazine*.[33]

violin practice
through an open window
the violin

Redmond Rosehip

Although there are not many examples of English haiku written by fictional characters, there are a few precedents. Jack Kerouac introduced a generation of readers to haiku through his novel *Dharma Bums*, in which one of the characters, Japhy (loosely based on Gary Snyder), writes haiku. We also have David Lanoue's series of novels, starting with *Haiku Guy*, in which the characters are writing haiku. And there are the infamous Elvis Presley haiku written and performed by Carlos Colón. Although I have suggested that most of Roseliep's haiku narrators are fictional, there are two types of haiku he wrote deliberately employing a fictional character for perspective, voice, and content. Roseliep wrote a series of Thoreau haiku and haiku by or about Sobi-Shi.

Throughout the 1970s, Raymond Roseliep wrote many haiku based on the writings of Thoreau. These early haiku were often published in the *Thoreau Society Quarterly* and eventually gathered into his first collection of haiku, *Flute Over Walden: Thoreauhaiku*, published by Sparrow Press in 1976.[34] In the introduction to this book, he writes: "The voice in these poems is sometimes the Waldener's, sometimes mine, and I hope also my reader's. Sometimes maybe all three. Christening the poems 'Thoreau-haiku,' Wade Van Dore suggests what I am about. My footsteps dig native

soil ... I trust Thoreau's frog and mine are not distantly related to Basho's." Roseliep's book of Thoreau haiku begins with an invocation of Thoreau's spirit to serve as the muse for this collection:

moon, find my bedroom,
the sweet Walden ghost tramping
its pine-needle floor [35]

In this opening haiku, Roseliep's narrator is addressing the moon as if conjuring up Thoreau's ghost in a séance. He is asking Thoreau's spirit to enter "my bedroom" and transform it imaginatively to a "pine-needle floor" in the woods. He wants to take on the spirit of Thoreau's perspective and voice.

wait, will-o'-the-wisp
in the marshes, till I come
with my walking stick [36]

This haiku is an example of one written from Roseliep's fictional Thoreau narrator. Thoreau is calling out "wait, will-o'-the-wisp" until I can join you in this morning. Let me get my walking stick and join you in the songs and discoveries awaiting in the marshes. Thoreau, as haiku narrator, calls on nature for his inspiration. Roseliep enjoyed reading Thoreau and imagines Thoreau as a haiku writer and enjoys employing him as a haiku narrator with content somewhat derived from Thoreau's writings. Several subsequent American haiku writers have enjoyed this same imaginative approach to finding haiku in Thoreau's journals. Two of the most well-known collections beside Roseliep's early work are Ian Marshall's book, *Walden by Haiku*, and Vincent Tripi's *Haiku Pond: A Trace of the Trail ... and Thoreau*. Here is one of my favorite haiku from Roseliep's use of Thoreau as haiku narrator:

Welcome-mat of snow
with readable small type set
by a meadow mouse [37]

I love the imagined voice of Thoreau in this haiku with the quirky observation of the tracks left in the snow by mice. The narrator reads the mouse tracks like type for significance and meaning. The welcome mat also reflects Thoreau's attitude that he shares his home with the mice. They are his friends. His visitors.

In Roseliep's book, *A Day in the Life of Sobi-Shi*, there is an explanation of the origin of his Japanese haigo: "Casting about for a haigo, or haiku-name, Raymond Roseliep called upon his friend Nobuo Hirasawa, in Tokyo; and they both thought it would be meaningful if they could come up with a name for this other-self based upon Ray's Germanic surname. (Roseliep originally was Roselieb: 'rose/love,' or 'lover of the rose.') Nubuo suggested Sobi-Shi. Though 'bara' is the usual name for 'rose' in Japanese, 'sobi' means exactly 'rose' in the world of poetry. 'Shi' is literally 'child,' but for haigo 'shi' means 'a man of art.' Now christened, Sobi-Shi then is 'a rose man of art,' or 'a man of art who loves the rose'."[38]

The earliest Sobi-Shi haiku and the explanation of his haiku-name were featured in the Spring 1978 issue of *Uzzano* magazine. Through the Sobi-Shi Japanese persona, Roseliep could write haiku in the third person about this character, Sobi-Shi. The haiku narrator is a fictional biographer or chronicler about what Sobi-Shi is doing. This allowed Roseliep to maintain a degree of fictional distance in his haiku while featuring this Japanese haiku poet, another self or alter-ego. Roseliep has fun imaginatively observing and telling haiku stories about this fellow. He imaginatively becomes the haiku poet whose Japanese kanji means "the rose-lover child-artist." Here are a few examples of Sobi-Shi haiku:

Sobi-Shi
has no more to say
the frog said it [39]

The narrator for these Sobi-Shi haiku is a sort of omniscient, all knowing, storyteller. He sees what Sobi-Shi sees, knows what he has to say, and understands why the fireflies are more attractive than the street of red lights. Most of these haiku include "Sobi-Shi" as an agent within the haiku. Later, some of the haiku seem to be attributed to Sobi-Shi as the

writer. Sobi-Shi starts as a kind of objectified fictive character (the haiku artist), but eventually becomes a penname. If this is just another way to disguise the use of the first person "I voice" it would not be significant. However, the fact that Roseliep does take on another voice, perspective, and aesthetic from the Sobi-Shi persona is a literary innovation in the haiku tradition. For the most part, Sobi-Shi likes to tell stories about himself. Does he exaggerate? Does he like to be more honest than he could be otherwise? Are these haiku more confessional than most of his other haiku? I believe he leaves it to his readers to decide for themselves. Many of the Sobi-Shi haiku explore dark hours and emotional struggles as well as times of frivolity and pleasure. The range of emotions and feelings of Sobi-Shi are not limited to one realm of human experience.

on so dark a day
they can't tell Sobi-Shi's tears
from rain [40]

This haiku positions a "they can't tell" group of people outside the narrator's and Sobi-Shi's inner circle of understanding. Only the haiku narrator (and Sobi-Shi) can tell his tears from the rain. And this is "on so dark a day" when it is hard to see clearly. This darkness is of course literally the darkness of a rainy day and figuratively the darkness of depression or sorrow. As Peggy Lyles would say, the outer weather reflects the inner weather in this haiku. Does this haiku let us see behind the narrative veil to the real Roseliep? Or is it just a literary artifact? Who can tell?

taking flame
from Sobi-Shi's candle
    the beauty sighs [41]

In this haiku we imagine Sobi-Shi in a love relationship. There is a candle being passed from one person to another, the flame passing from his candle to "the beauty" who sighs. This suggests an intimacy or romantic interlude, a sharing of the flame. An emotional sigh.

Sobi-Shi cools
the stolen melon
in the baptismal font [42]

In this haiku Sobi-Shi has evidently stolen a melon and is now cooling it in the baptismal font. A bit sacrilegious, but practical since stealing the melon was already a sin. A bad boy move for sure, but playful and similar to a famous Japanese haiku by Bashō about the coolness of melons in the morning dew.

in her formal garden
Sobi-Shi wears
his codpiece [43]

Here we see Sobi-Shi embrace the social dress and identity of a priest. This is a formal social occasion, so Sobi-Shi wears the appropriate dress of his social role. This haigo and his codpiece are just costumes or roles that can be worn as the occasion needs.

Conclusion

Raymond Roseliep was one of our most playful, creative masters of the art of English-language haiku. The narrators evident in his poems are not exclusive to certain time periods of writing, but represent different viewpoints, voices, subjects, and approaches to writing haiku. Some of the narrative voices come directly from Roseliep's memory or lived experiences, but others are derived from a more imaginative stretch beyond his own life. Roseleip enjoyed writing haiku from a wide variety of approaches. Although he less frequently wrote haiku from an objective observer approach, he loved observing people, exploring social roles and interactions, and creating fictional narrators for writing haiku. It is not surprising that his treatment of haiku narrators is also diverse and appropriately complex.

Notes

[1] Brooks, Randy. "Haiku Poetics: Objective, Subjective, Transactional and Literary Theories" in *Frogpond* 34.2 (2011): 25-41.

[2] Burns, Allan, ed. *Where the River Goes: The Nature Tradition in English-Language Haiku*. United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2013.

[3] Roseliep, Raymond. "This Haiku of Ours." in *Bonsai* 1.3 (1976): 11-20.

[4] Brooks, Randy and Shirley, eds. *The Collected Haiku of Raymond Roseliep*. Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2018, 100

[5] *Collected Haiku*, 54

[6] *Collected Haiku*, 122

[7] *Collected Haiku*, 203

[8] *Collected Haiku*, 190

[9] *Collected Haiku*, 190

[10] *Collected Haiku*, 54

[11] *Collected Haiku*, 58

[12] *Collected Haiku*, 67

[13] *Collected Haiku*, 120

[14] *Collected Haiku*, 151

[15] *Collected Haiku*, 90

[16] *Collected Haiku*, 159

[17] *Collected Haiku*, 67

[18] *Collected Haiku*, 82

[19] *Collected Haiku*, 68

[20] *Collected Haiku*, 62

[21] *Collected Haiku*, 122

[22] *Collected Haiku*, 62

[23] Eulberg, Sister Mary Thomas. "Poet of Finespun Filaments: Raymond Roseliep" in *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal* 24 (1979): 100-105.

[24] *Collected Haiku*, 76

[25] *Collected Haiku*,79

[26] *Collected Haiku*, 98

[27] *Collected Haiku*, 124

[28] *Collected Haiku*, 190

[29] *Collected Haiku*, 55

[30] *Collected Haiku*, 70

[31] *Collected Haiku*, 104

[32] *Collected Haiku*, 114

[33] Pizzarelli, Alan. *Senryu Magazine: Out to Lunch*. Garfield, NJ: River Willow Publications, 2001.

[34] Roseliep, Raymond. *Flute Over Walden: Thoreauhaiku*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Sparrow Press, 1976.

[35] *Collected Haiku*, 51

[36] *Collected Haiku*, 52

[37] *Collected Haiku*, 42

[38] Roseliep, Raymond. *A Day in the Life of Sobi-Shi*. Ruffsdale, Penn.: The Rook Press, 1978.

[39] *Collected Haiku*, 107

[40] *Collected Haiku*, 123

[41] *Collected Haiku*, 86

[42] *Collected Haiku*, 137

[43] *Collected Haiku*, 118