

**CANADIAN HAIKU WOMEN PIONEERS
FROM SEA TO SEA (1928-1985)**
by Janick BELLEAU © 2006-2007

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Haiku can boast a few women pioneers in Quebec and several in English Canada. First steps and early years come to an end, I believe, with the 1985 publication of *Haïku: Anthologie canadienne/Canadian Anthology* edited by Dorothy Howard and André Duhaime. This anthology is the sequel to George Swede's 1979 *Canadian Haiku Anthology*... too soon out-of-print. The twelve pioneers mentioned in this paper were chosen because they had published prior to 1985. We shall see among these women, women who have devoted a good part of their creativity to the writing and publication of haiku, and women who spent great creative energy in haiku promotion through critical studies, journal publications, mentoring and leadership in haiku associations.

BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

Simone Routier (Québec 1901 - Québec 1987). Poet, writer, journalist. Author of a first poetry collection containing 14 haiku, *L'Immortel adolescent*. Published in 1928, the collection tied the following year, with *Poèmes*, by Alice Lemieux, for Québec's Athanase-David prize.

Mon coeur qui t'attend, Toujours le silence, Et l'immense effeuillement...

My heart awaiting you, Silence still, And the vast falling of leaves...¹

Simone had abandoned a promising career as a violinist to devote herself to her writing. The prize confirmed her in her decision and she put the prize's financial award to good use by going to Paris. Correspondent for several publications both in Québec and in France and a friend to poets, she quickly gained access to the literary circles. One can suppose that as a friend of the poet and literary critic, Fernand Gregh (1873-1960), that Simone could have met, in various literary salons of the capital, the pioneer of haikai in France, Dr Paul-Louis Couchoud (1879-1959), coauthor of the first volume of haikai, *Au fil de l'eau* (1905).² She resided in the City-of-Lights until the beginning of World War II. On her return, she spent some time as a cloistered nun, which explains perhaps the spiritual tone of her poetry. She became a member of the well-regarded *Académie canadienne-française* in 1947. In the fifties, she worked in diplomatic circles in Brussels, and in Boston as a press *attachée* and finally as vice-consul.

1965 – A TURNING POINT

Claire Pratt (Toronto 1921 - Toronto 1995). Artist, poet, editor. Daughter of Viola Whitney, editor of an international magazine, and of E. J. Pratt, eminent poet and educator, she contracted poliomyelitis at age four, and struggled against its sequels all her life. A university graduate, she was editor-in-chief at McClelland & Stewart. Eventually her health required more extensive care forcing her to abandon her regular employment and take up freelance work. Her articles and poems were published in several literary reviews and her woodcuts exhibited in various galleries. She was, in 1965, the first author in English Canada to put out a collection of haiku, called *Haiku*. It was reprinted some 14 years later by Eric Amann and the Haiku Society of Canada (now known as Haiku Canada).

Green is the wet night, and fingers at my casement linger crookedly.

An artist of many talents, it was through her interest in Japanese prints that she discovered haiku. She illustrated her own poems, which made her an early *haiga* enthusiast. She also had the great honour of seeing two of her haiku sequences from *Music of Oberon* (1975) inspire the Canadian composer Euphrosyne Keefer, who created two works from these poems: the first in 1975, for soprano and flute and the second, eight years later, for soprano and pianoforte. Claire Pratt published a final small collection of haiku, *Black Heather* in 1980. Canada Post issued in 1983 a stamp commemorating her father, the poet. The stamp's design is a reproduction of Claire's woodcut, *Sea-gulls*.

Because of her openness to the exterior world and her large conception of art, she contributed to the advancement of haiku on Canadian soil.

THE PROLIFIC SEVENTIES

Joan Giroux (Ottawa 1922 - Pierrefonds 2005). Haiku Theorist. A nun with Montreal's Notre-Dame Congregation from 1945, she obtained her Master's degree in English Literature from the University of Ottawa. After having been professor, she was chair for more than 20 years of the English Department at Sakura no Seibo Junior College in Fukushima, Japan. She became interested in haiku, both in Japanese and in English, from the late fifties.

Ever since the arrival of haiku in the West, at the beginning of the twentieth Century, analysts have observed poets' interest in the vocabulary and themes of haiku, and deplored their lack of understanding of its form. Surely in an attempt to clarify the situation, she wrote the essay *The Haiku Form* in 1974 – she polished her research for more than 16 years. In it she explained the spirit and significance of the Japanese poem, as well as its techniques. She defended the importance of seasonal references (*kigo*) linked to various feasts and celebrations from different North-American climates. She wrote:

“English (or French) haiku must not be pale imitations of Japanese haiku, or mere pseudo-Buddhist travesties. Native haiku in English (and in French) must be an outcome of the poet's own experience, a rediscovery of the richness of the poet's own cultural tradition. Subjects must be native – there is no place for the cherry blossom, the *hototogisu*, the rice planter, the Buddha statue or the windbell. There is a place, however, for such typically Western subjects as apple blossoms, swallows, wheatfields, beaches, grey cathedrals, ice cubes – anything which may be an expression of the haiku moment for Western (poets). (...) The haiku moment is an intuitive instant of unity and harmony with Nature.”

This author's thesis seems to be still pertinent today: published in 1974, it was reprinted in 1999 by Barnes & Noble. Giroux never wrote haiku... to my knowledge, at least...

Besides Joan Giroux' study, the seventies seem to have been a decade of various types of haiku contributions by women where categories tend to fuse.

THE SASKATCHEWAN TRIAD

Catherine M. Buckaway (North Battleford 1919 - Regina 1996). Poet and story teller. The year 1975 saw the publication of her *Silver Cuckoo*, soon followed by three other books. Having spent a great deal of her life writing haiku, she was able to say, the year before she died, when she was living in a rest home, that she had written 3,751 published haiku. The following haiku was first published by *Abilities Magazine*:

The autumn moon shines Whitely on my loneliness Lonely too the night

Mildred A. Rose Although she studied haiku in Japan in 1970, she wrote that it was only at Ms Buckaway's insistence that she published her first haiku. She wrote four books, the first of which, *Esor Derdlim* (1974) contains several haiku as well as *The Fuchsia Tree* (1980).

L. Pearl Schuck was guided in turn from 1978 in the subtleties of the haiku by Ms Rose, and published *The Moon is Still* in 1982.

THE LIONESS' SHARE

Betty Drevniok (St. Louis, Missouri 1919 - Combermere, Ontario 1997). Poet, essayist, illustrator, former president of the Haiku Society of Canada.

Drevniok arrived in Canada as a nurse, shortly after WWII. She discovered haiku in the late sixties through her work with *sumi-e*, an ancient Japanese painting technique, often used for *haiga*. In 1976-77, under her haiku name Makató, she published three collections of haiku, of which *Inland, Three Rivers from an Ocean*. In 1977, with Eric Amann and George Swede, she founded the Haiku Society of Canada. Haiku Canada secretary for the first two years, Drevniok became the Society's president for the next three. In 1980 she organised the First International Haiku Society of Canada Meeting in Toronto. Several Festivals of the Falling Leaves followed in Combermere where she lived. In 1993, she published a final individual collection, *Thoughts of Spring*. Her collaborative renga collections are still available at Dorothy Howard's proof press and include the 1995, *concorde on time* with Ruby Spriggs and Dorothy Howard; as well as the posthumously published in 2001, *Day's End* with Anna Vakar. Since 2002, that is five years after her death, Haiku Canada honours her memory through the Betty Drevniok annual Haiku Award.

Her legacy for future generations resides, in my opinion, in her essay – handwritten and illustrated by the author; prefaced by Anna Vakar; published in 1980 and entitled *Aware – a haiku primer*. This book still represents for several haiku writers an invaluable resource not only for the advice on writing, but also for the haiku it contains. This seminal work is both a guide and a method for writing and reading haiku for poets and teachers interested in the haiku moment.

American poet, Penny Harter, proposed something similar in her chapter “A Lesson Plan That Works” in *Haiku Handbook* (1985) by William J. Higginson.

The moment is perceived as a voyage where the Floating World and the Universe are merged. A Zen moment that thus expresses compassion for all things (*mono no aware*), compassion for all the living worlds (*yo no aware*), a moment that makes us aware of the here and now, a moment that shows felt emotion, without however naming it. Like Bashô, Betty Drevniok anchors the particular event in space and in time.

Brilliant sunshine through autumn maples a glimpse of the lake

She writes: “The SOMETHING that draws the poet is always noticed in context with SOMETHING – ELSE (...), *something - else* with which it may be COMPARED, CONTRASTED or ASSOCIATED in some way. In haiku, the SOMETHING and the SOMETHING – ELSE are set down together in clearly stated images. Together they complete and fulfill each other as ONE PARTICULAR EVENT. (...) By using this principle, the poet expresses an observed relationship between two things, a juxtaposition which makes the break in the poem structure. This technique provides the pivot on which the reader's thought turns and expands.”

BEYOND THE EIGHTIES

Margaret Saunders (Scotland 1926 – Hamilton, Ontario 2005). Ms Saunders adopted Ontario in her twenties. She contributed to the development of haiku in the eighties by founding the quarterly *WEE Giant* and later the biannual *Daybreak*. She also published three collections of haiku, notably, *A Flock of Blackbirds* (1979).

Jocelyne Villeneuve (Val d'Or 1941 - Sudbury 1998). Although originally from Québec, Villeneuve became Franco-Ontarian from the age of 12. With her degree in Library Sciences, at 23, she worked first as librarian, then as Head of Acquisitions at Laurentienne University. Three years after her promotion, in 1967, a serious car accident confined her to her bed more or less permanently. She undertook a new career as a writer. Fluent in both French and English, her haiku poems were published in Canada, the U.S. and Japan. Paralyzed for 30 years, she nonetheless published collections of haiku, notably two in French, *La Saison des papillons* (1980) and *Feuilles volantes* (1985) in Québec, and *Marigolds in Snow* (1993) in English, in Ontario. She died at age 57.

Le pic s'arrête... L'homme à son tour cogne des clous.

The woodpecker has stopped... The dozing man's head bobs on.¹

Ruby Spriggs (Leicester, England 1929 – Ottawa, Ontario 2001). Artist, poet, editor, she came to Canada at 28. A woman of many literary talents and interests (among which haiku, tanka and renga), her poems were published in several reviews and anthologies, such as *Erotic Haiku* (1983), *The Haiku Handbook* (1985) and *Haiku World* (1996). She wrote several haiku collections, of which, *Sunshadow/Moonshadow* (1986). She was editor of the *Haiku Canada Newsletter* from 1990 to 1992 then joint-editor of *RAW NerVZ Haiku* in 1994. She illustrated books of fellow haiku writers as well as *The Swan's Wings* (1995) a renga written with her companion, the poet, Grant Savage.

switching off the lights switching off the shadows¹

Anna Vakar (Paris, France 1929 - Oliver, British-Columbia). Essayist, literary critic, poet. She sometimes writes under the name Ava Kar – which is a contraction of her name.

Her feature articles on the situation of haiku in North America, like *Toward a Foundation for Western Haiku* and *Some Thoughts on Teaching Haiku in the Schools* (both in 1979), as well as *It's not the Form that Makes a Haiku* (1980) and *Connecting With Feeling: 5 Favorites* (1984) were published in *Cicada*, *Frogpond*, *Canadian Author & Bookman*, and Andy Brook's *Haiku Review*, respectively (sentence updated March 8, 2017). In the early eighties, Ms Vakar wrote: "I see haiku as an important 'psychic tool' for the West: directly dependent as it is on sensory experience of the world outside oneself, and insisting as it does on the use of specific, concrete images (...)." ¹ *Frogpond* published her literary critiques in 1982 and from 1978 to 1990, her haiku and senryu. In an e-mail received on October 30, 2006, she mentioned: "A booklet of my own favourite haiku is still in the 'one of these days' stage. I write or attempt very few, relatively speaking – like less than a dozen a year probably, haven't counted lately." Here is an unpublished haiku – written in May 2006:

built from the bottom up in four clay parts a Tree of Life

Dorothy Howard (Shawinigan 1948 - Aylmer). Illustrator, calligrapher, editor, translator, former president of Haiku Canada, poet. Versatile and committed, she did the calligraphy and illustrations of André Duhaime's collection *Haïkus d'ici* (1981), coedited with him *Haïku: Anthologie canadienne / Canadian Anthology* (1985) and translated into English *Pelures d'oranges/Orange Peels* (1987). She was

co-president (1985 - 1988) and president (1988 - 1990) of Haiku Canada; in a way she is the memory of this association as she remains its archivist to this day.

Although Howard (also known by the inversion of her middle name as “zéni b”) published rengas with other poets like Suezan Aikins, Elizabeth St. Jacques and Claudia Rosemary Coutu, Marco Fraticelli, Michael Dudley and Zane Parks among others and small individual collections (*CADatonia AZ on the Rocks: 2* and *the photographer’s shadow*). She made her mark, and continues to do so, by editing independent reviews of haiku and short poetry *RAW NerVZ Haiku* (1994 - 2007) and *casse-pieds* (since May 2006; with French co-editor, Jean Michel Guillaumond). She is editor-publisher of *éditions gammes*/proof press since 1994, although *éditions gammes* have been more active since 2006. Dorothy published, in November 2006, the excellent translation of Frenchman Daniel Py of Canadian Eric Amann’s cult-book, *The Wordless Poem (Le poème sans mots)*.²

arrivant en ville par l’autoroute-spaghetti tout à coup trop chaud

entering the city spaghettiway suddenly too hot¹

CONCLUSION

There have been many journals devoted to haiku in English for several decades. Haiku in French, however, had to wait. A few have finally appeared since the year 2003: *Gong* (France), *Marco Polo magazine* (France, 2005) and *casse-pieds* (France & Québec, 2006). The magazine *Haikai* (Québec & Florida) was published from April 2006 to October 2007; then, it was transformed into electronic anthologies of thematic haiku to be published on the Web site, *Haiku sans frontières*.²

A memorable event took place in October 2007: the English unilingual review of Haiku Canada opened its pages to French-writing poets; this new section is under the coordination of Micheline Beaudry.²

An examination of these literary journals quickly confirms that women haiku and short poems are faring quite well around the world and in Canada, English and French. Let us wish them, as it is the custom in Japan, a long and prosperous life for a thousand years.

Notes:

¹ From Dorothy Howard and André Duhaime. *Haïku: Anthologie canadienne / Canadian Anthology*, Éditions Asticou, 1985. If there is no number beside a haiku it means that it is cited from publication mentioned above.

² This sentence is added information and has been translated from French by J. Belleau.

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