

## CANADIAN HAIKU WOMEN AND INNER THOUGHTS

© Janick BELLEAU, 2009; for Haiku Canada Conference, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Vancouver.

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Just my luck, I get to give my presentation right after a meal, our bellies full. I'll do my best to deliver and hope you'll do yours reception-wise.

Let's begin with an observation: whatever our age, origin or era, it seems we've always watched our weight:

*Jessica Tremblay, British Columbia:*  
*sa diète / ce mois-ci / seulement vingt-huit jours*<sup>1</sup>  
diet / this month / only twenty-eight days

*Diane Descôteaux, St-Nicéphore, QC:*  
*j'ai pris bien du poids / ce printemps, dit la rivière / d'une grosse voix*<sup>2</sup>  
I've put on weight / this spring, says the river / in a fierce voice

*Nobuko Katsura:*  
On the scale / my bathed and steaming body / this night of snow<sup>3</sup>

I am here with you to talk on the theme, **Connections**; kinship or links which bring together women haiku poets. With that in mind, I came across this haiku by Alice Frampton, the Coordinator of this annual conference – a haiku right on target for the weekend:

rock throwing / our circles / about to meet<sup>4</sup>

The one idea I would like to get across in our time together would be: as women, whatever our nationality, our political or sexual allegiance, we are soul mates. In my opinion, there is very little difference between haiku by women poets whether they be from Japan, Canada or elsewhere.

French-speaking feminist theorists<sup>5</sup> have identified, from the late 1970s, our writing's characteristics. Recognizable through recurrent themes, it makes use of first person narrative, the mother-daughter relationship, and our own body (sometimes seen with humour).

I'll not get into any of these themes as they can be found in *Regards de femmes – haïkus francophones* – the last compilation under my direction. Tonight, I want to deal with the theme of inner life as perceived, experienced or desired by living contemporary poets. Most of the haiku I'll be reading are from Canadian women – Francophones who have contributed to *Regards de femmes*<sup>1</sup> and Anglophones who have contributed to *Carpe Diem*<sup>4</sup>. I'll also be reading haiku by Japanese women of the seventeenth, eighteenth and twentieth centuries, who have dealt with various aspects of their inner garden. Haiku, therefore, over time and space.

On the one hand, haiku is a snapshot of the present moment; on the other, women find nourishment in dreams, desires and aspirations on a daily basis: the synergy between the world of the 17 or so syllables and women's universe is solid.

**Sutejo DEN** (1633-1698); 17<sup>th</sup> century. She lived in the same period as Bashô.  
is there / a short cut through the clouds, / summer moon?<sup>3</sup>

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*Anita Krumins, Ontario:*

cracked mortar / between the housebricks / I smooth on extra make-up <sup>4</sup>

**Chigetsu KAWAI** (1634?-1718); 17<sup>th</sup> century. Contemporary of Bashô and one of the very few women admitted to the master's circle.

As women we spend endless hours in the kitchen; there, we can often hear, see and smell Nature.  
a bush warbler – my hands in the kitchen sink / rest for a while <sup>3</sup>

*Luce Pelletier, St-Basile-le-Grand, QC:*

*poisson écaillé / fines herbes au jardin / des pas dans l'allée* <sup>1</sup>  
scaled fish / fine herbs in the garden / steps in the aisle

*Micheline Beaudry, Boucherville, QC :*

*lune d'août / elle se penche à la fenêtre / un melon sur la table* <sup>1</sup>  
august moon / she leans by the window / a melon on the table

*Angela Leuck, Montreal, QC:*

in my kitchen / a jar of pickled lemons – / winter sunlight <sup>4</sup>

**Sonome SHIBA** (1664-1726); 17<sup>th</sup> century. A contemporary, Bashô found very beautiful. Widowed at thirty-nine, she never remarried.

Aging often calls for humour, self-mockery even, at times.  
when you grow old / even mice avoid you – / how cold it is! <sup>3</sup>

*Line Michaud, Montreal, QC:*

*la lune s'est voilée / les nuages annoncent la pluie / mes vieux os aussi* <sup>1</sup>  
covered moon / clouds speak of rain / my old bones too

*Philomene Kocher, Ontario:*

using the mirror / my mother gave me / the other side magnified <sup>4</sup>

*Patricia Benedict, Alberta:*

birthday gift / 'Fountain of Youth' / needs two batteries <sup>6</sup>

**Chiyo ni** (1703-1775); 18<sup>th</sup> century. She is, unless I'm mistaken, the only woman poet of Ancient Japan who has enjoyed continuous reknown, almost equal to Bashô's. Three books translated into Western languages, are dedicated to her and her haiku: one in English and two in French <sup>7</sup>. Widowed at twenty, she became a Buddhist nun in her early fifties. She befriended several poets and was mentor to young women poets and nuns. Here is a poem written for a very dear deceased woman friend, a nun as well:

farewell / flower of the floating world / poppy flower <sup>7</sup> (Moundarren)

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*Chiyo-ni* has also written haiku on her own evanescence:

trout going downstream / day by day the water / frightens me more <sup>3</sup>

Other poets also write on the theme of death:

*Ava Kar*, British Columbia:

the funeral home – / a birdbath / with no water <sup>4</sup>

*Maxianne Berger*, Montreal, QC:

my obituary ? / one candle and / a little wind <sup>4</sup>

A variation on the same theme, a metaphysical question is asked by *Hélène Boissé* from Sherbrooke, QC:

*le maringouin / sa vie vaut-elle vraiment moins / que la mienne* <sup>1</sup>

the mosquito – is its life really worth less / than mine

**Seifu ENOMOTO** (1732-1815); 18<sup>th</sup> century. A contemporary of Buson. Very famous in her time. Widowed at 38, her output was prodigious.

rumbles from the rocks – cherry blossoms in the moonlight / far from the world of men <sup>3</sup>

Occasionally, Nature becomes a close friend in our moments of solitude. Again from *Seifu*:

at daybreak / speaking to the blossoms / a woman all alone <sup>3</sup>

*Claudia Coutu Radmore*, Ontario:

abandoned farm / the wild pear / in bloom <sup>4</sup>

**Kikusha TAGAMI** (1753-1826); 18<sup>th</sup> century. An accomplished artist: poet, painter, calligrapher, musician. Widowed at 24, she made a courageous decision for her time: she shaved off her hair and started to travel across her country.

The night star, feminine symbol *par excellence*: the moon and I / left alone –/ cool on the bridge <sup>3</sup>

*Hélène Leclerc*, Drummondville, QC:

*quatre heures du matin / dans un coin de la tente / la lune* <sup>1</sup>

four a.m. / in a corner of the tent / the moon

*Ann Goldring*, Ontario:

the moon / coming along with us / from puddle to puddle <sup>4</sup>

At times, one looks for the moon without finding it.

*Terry Ann Carter*, Ontario:

underground parking / no space / for the moon <sup>4</sup>

**Hisajo SUGITA** (1890-1946); 20<sup>th</sup> century. All her life, she was tortured by the idea of combining her roles as spouse and mother with her calling as a poet. Like many women, she combined many tasks. She sometimes considered divorce. She died in a sanatorium.

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she mends socks / not quite a Nora / this teacher's wife <sup>3</sup>

In this poem, of course, Hisajo is alluding to the heroin of Ibsen's novel, *A Doll's House*.

*Monique Parent, Trois-Rivières, QC:*

*sur les meubles / une pellicule de poussière / ma page toujours blanche* <sup>1</sup>  
on the furniture / a film of dust / the page still white

Here's another one by *Hisajo*:

my illness ebbs – propped by a wrecked boat / I bathe in the sun <sup>3</sup>

*Winona Baker, British Columbia:*

breast self examination / a moth batters / the screened window <sup>4</sup>

**Masajo SUZUKI** (1906-2003); 20<sup>th</sup> century. Masajo did something that just wasn't done in the nineteen thirties: she left her husband to join her lover. The relationship lasted forty years... until her lover died. She wrote numerous haiku celebrating the love of her life.

on the seaside dunes / other people in love... / lingering daylight <sup>8</sup>

*Joanne Morcom, Alberta:*

rain on the roof / the rhythm of our lovemaking / slower paced <sup>9</sup>

*Janick Belleau, South Shore of Montreal, QC:*

*bord de mer / couple centenaire assis / dans l'éternité* <sup>10</sup>  
seashore / a hundred-year-old couple / seated in eternity <sup>10</sup>

**Nobuko KATSURA** (1913-2004); 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was in Osaka when it was bombarded in 1945. She published nine collections and won several prizes. An advisor to the Modern Haiku Association (Tokyo) celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

women's hearts / touch one another – hanging / plumes of wisteria <sup>3</sup>

*Carole Melançon, Canton de Hatley, QC:*

*discuter sous les étoiles / dans le cabriolet / salon à ciel ouvert* <sup>1</sup>  
talking under stars / in the convertible / living room open to the sky

**Niji FUYUNO** (1943-2002); 20<sup>th</sup> century. Haiku poet and illustrator, appreciated for her great sensitivity. Deceased too soon in 2002.

We, as women, are often drawn by water – another one of our characteristic symbols. The following haiku from *Niji* is on the wall of a subway station in Paris:

Spring Day – / from the bottom of the water / grasses call me

Women can brush against the minuscule as well as the immense:

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*Louve Mathieu, Chicoutimi, QC:*  
*mes doigts dans l'eau / le temps passe / et la rivière*<sup>1</sup>  
my fingers in water / time flows / and the river

**Madoka MAYUZUMI** (1965- ); 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her idol was none other than Hisajo SUGITA. She successfully founded and edited a haiku magazine for ten years: *Monthly Hepburn...* an homage to the fiercely independent actress, Katherine Hepburn. At the present time, she hosts a Tokyo TV program on haiku. Her influence on the young is vastly appreciated by poets of previous generations. She is interested in the modern but in the mother-child relationship as well.

Mother's Day – / I end up making / my mother cry<sup>3</sup>

*dorothy howard, Gatineau, QC:*  
endless scales / on the neighbour's flute / my mother ironing<sup>4</sup>

Inner life goes much further than I was able to say or read this evening. I hope nonetheless that my presentation has given an inkling of the secret world of women poets be they from Japan or from English or French Canada.

Before leaving, please allow me to quote a poem by *Hélène Bouchard* from Sept-Iles, QC which addresses us all, soul-sisters, whether clad in kimono, jeans or a Chanel suit.

*cagoule ou burqa / dehors sous un froid glacial / toutes les mêmes*<sup>1</sup>  
scarf or burka / outside in the glacial cold / we are all one

I'll conclude by mentioning that, this weekend, we have the opportunity to weave tighter links between us, even more so as Jessica, Micheline, Diane and I will be here knotting exchanges.

I thank you for your attention. I would like to respond to your comments / statements.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Regards de femmes – haïkus francophones*, direction : Janick Belleau (86 auteures et 283 de leurs poèmes inédits); collective work introduced by the author with an overview of women writing haiku in French « Francophone et féminin, le haïku », Adage, Montréal/AFH, Lyon, 2008

<sup>2</sup> *L'Heure du thé*, Diane Descôteaux ; Karedas, Paris, 2008

<sup>3</sup> *Far Beyond the Field – Haiku by Japanese Women*, Makoto Ueda; Columbia University Press, New York, 2003 (Romaji & English)

<sup>4</sup> *Carpe diem*, direction: Francine Chicoine, Terry-Ann Carter & Marco Fraticelli; David & Borealis, 2007 (some poems in English; *des poèmes en français*)

<sup>5</sup> dont Hélène Cixous, Annie Leclerc, Louky Bersianik, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Madeleine Gagnon, France Théoret

<sup>6</sup> *Haiku Canada Review*, 3:1

<sup>7</sup> *Chiyo-ni, Woman Haiku Master*, Patricia Donegan & Yoshie ISHIBASHI; Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1998 (Japanese, Romaji & English); *Une poétesse japonaise au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : Kaga No Tchiyo-jo*, Gilberte Hla-Dorge; Maisonneuve, Paris, 1936; *Chiyo ni, bonzesse au jardin nu*, Cheng Win Fun & Hervé Collet; Moundarren, Millemont, 2005 (*japonais & français*)

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<sup>8</sup> *Love Haiku – Masajo Suzuki’s Lifetime of Love*; translated by Lee Gurga & Emiko MIYASHITA; Brooks Books, Illinois, 2000 (Japanese, Romaji & English)

<sup>9</sup> *Erotic Haiku*, compiled and edited by Hiroaki Sato, English/Japanese, Japan, 2004

<sup>10</sup> revue *ellipse* mag n° 77 ; responsable / guest editor: Janick Belleau; *haïku et poèmes courts au féminin / haiku & short poems by women*; New-Brunswick, 2006 (*français* & English).