

# Haiku Women Connected through Inner Life... whether from Japan, France or Canada (French & English)

by Janick BELLEAU<sup>1</sup> (清水)

Talk given to members of the Modern Haiku Association of Japan  
on October 17, 2013

**Note** : texte modifié par rapport à l'original : n'ai gardé que des poétesses japonaises contemporaines et en ai ajouté quelques-unes; ai ajouté des femmes poètes de la France; ai enlevé quelques phrases du préambule.

English translation: dorothy howard, 2009; Maxianne Berger, 2013

Talk interpreted in Japanese by Kimura Toshio

Haiku in Japanese read by Abigail Friedman

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 little difference between haiku by women poets whether we are from Japan, France or Canada. This evening, we will look at the theme of inner life as perceived, experienced or desired by poets who have dealt with or who deal with various aspects of their inner garden according to their respective environment. Haiku, therefore, over time and space, selected according to my own interpretation as a reader.

All the haiku selected for this talk will be presented in their original language and in English translation if not in English.<sup>3</sup>

Let us start with

**SUGITA Hisajo** (1890-1946) 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 multitasked. She sometimes considered divorce. She died in a sanatorium.

Throughout time, poets have been inspired by butterflies. In Japan, they are considered the emblem of women, and in pairs, synonymous with the fidelity of lovers.<sup>3</sup>

Hisajo:

*chô ôte haruyama fukaku mayoikeri*

chasing a butterfly / deep into the spring woods / I am lost<sup>6</sup>

The late French poet Juliette Clochelune † :

*bruits de neige et d'encre / frôlement d'âmes et d'ailes / deux papillons s'aiment<sup>5</sup>*

sounds of snow and ink / rustles of souls and wings / two butterflies in love

In the following poem, Hisajo alludes to the heroine of Ibsen's novel, *A Doll's House*:

*tabi tsugu ya Nora to mo narazu kyôshizuma*  
she mends socks / not quite a Nora / this teacher's wife <sup>6</sup>

In Canada, Louise Vachon also writes about housework:

*la polyandrie / beaucoup trop de chaussettes / à ramasser* <sup>5</sup>  
polyandry / far too many socks / to pick up

Hisajo about her child:

*haguki kayuku chikubi kamu ko ya hanagumori*  
gums itching / the baby bites my nipple – / spring's hazy sky <sup>6</sup>

The Franco-Algerian poet Catherine Belkhodja also writes of mothering:

*grand-mère se meurt / et bébé exige le sein – / adieux bousculés* <sup>5</sup>  
grandmother is dying/ and baby demands the breast/ farewells put off <sup>3</sup>

Writing of her health, Hisajo shares this moment:

*byôkan ya hasen ni motare hinataboko*  
my illness ebbs – / propped by a wrecked boat / I bathe in the sun <sup>6</sup>

Canadian poet Winona Baker also speaks of a personal concern:

breast self examination / a moth batters / the screened window <sup>2</sup>

**HASHIMOTO Takako** (1899-1963) She first learned haiku from Sugita Hisajo. She was widowed in her late thirties. She published four collections. She died of cancer. A fifth book and her complete works were published posthumously. <sup>3</sup>

The absence of a loved one, whether temporary or prolonged, can give rise to a wide range of emotions – from pain to nostalgia through feelings of abandonment. <sup>3</sup>

Here is one of Takako's haiku:

*hashi toru toki hata to hitori ya yuki furi furu*  
taking up chopsticks / I am all alone – / it snows and snows <sup>6</sup>

And here is one by Monique Lévesque of Canada:

*assise au soleil / des larmes plein les yeux / un téléphone à la main* <sup>5</sup>  
sitting in the sun/ with tear-filled eyes/ phone in hand <sup>3</sup>

Also from Canada, dorothy howard writes:

*sourire pour la photo / le même depuis toujours / à l'écran* <sup>5</sup>  
a smile for the photo/ it's always been that same one/ on the screen <sup>3</sup>

In moments of solitude, Nature may become a friend, may give some hope.

Takako:

*manjushage hi wa yaketsutsumo sora sumeri*<sup>7</sup>

cluster amaryllis / though the sun still scorches / the sky is already serene<sup>8</sup>

Claudia Coutu Radmore of Canada sees:

abandoned farm / the wild pear / in bloom<sup>2</sup>

And here, a haiku by French poet Dominique Champollion:

*du bout de la rue / accourant à ma rencontre / les feuilles mortes*<sup>9</sup>

from the end of the street / rushing to meet me / dead leaves

**SUZUKI Masajo** (1906-2003) Masajo did something that just wasn't done in the 1930s: she took a lover. Their relationship lasted 40 years... until he died. She wrote numerous haiku celebrating the love of her life.

Masajo:

*futokoro ni tegami kakushite hinataboko*

your letter concealed/ in my kimono's breast pocket –/ basking in winter sun<sup>10</sup>

From Spain and France, poet Isabel Asúnsolo:

*crépuscule – / sa voix murmure je t'aime / le grillon plus fort*<sup>5</sup>

sunset –/ his murmured I love you/ the cricket louder<sup>3</sup>

Canadian poet Luce Pelletier sees:

*roses capitenses / cumulus un soir d'été / un autre loukoum*<sup>5</sup>

heady roses/ puffy clouds of a summer's evening/ another Turkish delight<sup>3</sup>

Celebration of love, yes, ... but at times, Love can be the Gypsy's child<sup>3</sup>:

Masajo:

*koi shita ya ichigo hitotsubu kuchi ni ire*

longing for love / I place a single strawberry / in my mouth<sup>10</sup>

In Canada, Dina E. Cox writes:

hiding from me / the robin / but not its song<sup>2</sup>

Tunisian poet Amel Hamdi Smaoui:

*insomnie –/ sur le livre de chevet / un rayon de lune*<sup>5</sup>

insomnia –/ on the book at my bedside/ a moonbeam<sup>3</sup>

And then, Love reclaims its due<sup>3</sup>:

Masajo:

*sunayama ni hito no koi mishi hinaga kana*  
on the seaside dunes / other people in love... / lingering daylight <sup>10</sup>

In Canada, Joanne Morcom writes:

rain on the roof / the rhythm of our lovemaking / slower paced <sup>11</sup>

Also in Canada, Janick Belleau sees:

*bord de mer / couple centenaire assis / dans l'éternité* <sup>12</sup>  
seashore / a hundred-year-old couple / seated in eternity <sup>12</sup>

**KATSURA Nobuko** (1913-2004) She started writing haiku in her early twenties. She published nine collections and won several prizes. She served as vice president of the Modern Haiku Association of Japan. We see, from this haiku, how she valued friendship: <sup>3</sup>

*onna no kokoro fureôte ite fuji taruru*  
women's hearts / touch one another – hanging / plumes of wisteria <sup>6</sup>

So does Canadian poet Carole Melançon:

*discuter sous les étoiles / dans le cabriolet / salon à ciel ouvert* <sup>5</sup>  
talking under stars / in the convertible / living room open to the sky

I have noticed that whatever our age, our origin or the season, it seems we've always watched our weight:

Nobuko:

*yuagari no mi wo nose yuki no yo no bakari*  
on the scale / my bathed and steaming body / this night of snow <sup>6</sup>

Here is the same subject from two Canadian poets.

Jessica Tremblay:

*sa diète / ce mois-ci / seulement vingt-huit jours* <sup>5</sup>  
diet / this month / only twenty-eight days

And Diane Descôteaux:

*j'ai pris bien du poids / ce printemps, dit la rivière / d'une grosse voix* <sup>13</sup>  
I've put on weight / this spring, says the river / in a fierce voice

**KURODA Momoko** (1938 - ) She started to write haiku when she was young, then left it for her career in public relations. She returned to haiku after a stay in hospital. She wrote her first haiku book in her early 40s. It won her two prestigious prizes. After she retired, she had the time to devote herself to haiku and published several books. In 1990

she founded her magazine, *Aoi*, which she still publishes. She became a haiku *sensei*. The American poet Abigail Friedman wrote a book about her apprenticeship with Momoko *sensei* and dedicated it to her: *The Haiku Apprentice – memoirs of writing poetry in Japan*.<sup>14</sup> For several years now, Momoko has been a judge for the Japanese section of the annual contest sponsored by the *Mainichi Daily News*.<sup>3</sup>

Growing old – at times noted fatalistically, and at times experienced through humour. It is difficult to accept and difficult to live through.<sup>3</sup>

Momoko:

*taki ochite yuku hito oite yuku jikan*<sup>15</sup>  
cascading waterfall / people aging / the flow of time<sup>16</sup>

While Line Michaud in Canada writes:

*la lune s'est voilée / les nuages annoncent la pluie / mes vieux os aussi*<sup>5</sup>  
covered moon / clouds too speak of rain / my aged bones too

One can ignore aging and affirm life, like French poet Monique Coudert:

*marron dans ma main / cachant ma ligne de vie / je suis éternelle*<sup>5</sup>  
chestnut in palm / hiding my life line / I will live forever

They say that dog is man's best friend. I believe the best companion for women is the cat – because of its serenity and independence. Even when not around, a cat is present.<sup>3</sup>

Momoko:

*neko wa kawazu kingyo mo kawazu ware o kan*<sup>15</sup>  
no cat to keep / no goldfish either / just me to keep<sup>17</sup>

Here, two poets from France write of cats.

Anne Brousmiche:

*course sur les toits – / l'ombre soyeuse d'un chat / glisse sous la lune*<sup>18</sup>  
running over the rooftops –/ the silky shadow of a cat/ slides under the moon<sup>3</sup>

Agnieszka Malinowska:

*défi du chat – / monter à la plus haute branche / toucher le ciel*<sup>18</sup>  
the cat's challenge –/ to reach the highest branch/ touch the sky<sup>3</sup>

**FUYUNO Niji** (1943-2002) Haiku poet and illustrator, appreciated for her great sensitivity. Deceased too soon.

We, as women, are often drawn by water – one of our characteristic symbols.

Niji:

*minasoko no kusa ni yobare nu haru matsuri*<sup>19</sup>  
from the water's depths / the grasses call out to me / – spring festival<sup>8</sup>

In Canada, Louve Mathieu feels:

*mes doigts dans l'eau / le temps passe / et la rivière*<sup>5</sup>  
my fingers in the water / time passes / and the river

Niji's poetic originality is an invitation to dream and to believe in magic.<sup>3</sup>

Niji:

*awayuki ya hoboeme ba sugu no no usagi*<sup>19</sup>  
light snow – / if I were to smile, then *hop!* / I'd turn into a hare<sup>8</sup>

And here, a haiku from Canada by Huguette Ducharme:

*le long de mon bras / une chenille grimpe / son Himalaya*<sup>5</sup>  
along my arm / climbs a caterpillar / its Himalaya

**MAYUZUMI Madoka** (1965 - ) Her idol was none other than Sugita Hisajo. Her first collection, *B men no natsu* (Kadokawa shoten, 1994) earned her immediate fame. Her preoccupations, those of a young modern woman, resonated among her compatriots .. and so she influenced her own generation as well as the one that followed. In 1996, she successfully founded a haiku magazine which she edited for ten years: *Gekkan Heppubân* (Monthly Hepburn)... a tribute to Audrey Hepburn who was admired by several generations of Japanese women.<sup>20</sup> The magazine was also an opportunity to give voice to thousands of women. Madoka was the poetic disciple of Suzuki Masajo with whom she co-authored two collections. As had Bashō and Kikusha-ni, Madoka crisscrossed her own country on foot, and also made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. In 2010, she resided in France as a Japanese Cultural Envoy and gave lectures, through interpreters. A selection of poems from five of her collections was translated by Corinne Atlan, and published in 2012 under the title *Haïkus du temps present*<sup>21</sup> [Present-Day Haiku]<sup>3</sup>.

There are women everywhere who defy aging, and remain young and forever feminine... whatever the circumstances<sup>3</sup>:

Madoka:

*haru tonari yameru toki ni mo tsume somete*<sup>21</sup>  
spring around the corner / even sick / I paint my nails<sup>8</sup>

In France, Lydia Padellec notices:

*sac à main doré / eye-liner noir rouge à lèvres / cheveux sous le voile*<sup>5</sup>  
golden handbag / black eyeliner red lipstick / her hair under a veil

And to end, here are two poems that bring to mind the idealism of youth<sup>3</sup>

By Madoka:

*tobu yume wo mitakute yoru no kingy- tachi*  
impelled to dream / of soaring in the sky – / goldfish at night<sup>6</sup>

And by Canadian poet Denise Therriault-Ruest:

*brindilles et plumes / tournoient dans la margelle / tentative d'envol*<sup>5</sup>  
twigs and feathers/ aswirl on the shore/ trying to fly<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

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 France or Canada.

Before leaving, please allow me to quote a poem by H el ene Bouchard of Canada that addresses us all, soul-sisters, whether clad in kimono, jeans or a Chanel suit.

*cagoule ou burqa / dehors sous un froid glacial / toutes les m emes*<sup>5</sup>  
mask or burka / outside in the glacial cold / we are all one

御静聴有難うございました。O seich o arigatougozaimashita.

I thank you for your attention, and would be pleased to respond to your comments, if you have some.

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1 Janick Belleau lives on the South Shore of Montreal, Canada. She published five personal collections and directed/co-directed five collective works. Her poetry appears in literary journals in French and in English. Her feature articles (in Canada) and talks (France, Canada, Japan) concentrate on the writing of women haiku and tanka poets. She is a member of Association francophone de haiku (France), Haiku Canada and Haiku International Association (Japan).

2 *Carpe diem*. Direction: Francine Chicoine, Terry-Ann Carter & Marco Fraticelli; haiku by 40 poets in English, haiku by 40 poets in French. Ottawa, David & Borealis, 2007

3 Additional material added for October 17, 2013, translated by Maxianne Berger

5 *Regards de femmes – haikus francophones*. Janick Belleau, anthology editor (86 women poets and 283 of their previously unpublished poems) and author of the essay « Francophone et f eminin, le haiku » ( [Francophone and female: haiku]; this essay also features 43 haiku by 43 other women poets whose work had previously been published elsewhere). Montr el/Lyon, 2008. The rights (copyright) reverted to the author in 2010. [janickbelleau.ca/](http://janickbelleau.ca/)

6 *Far Beyond the Field – Haiku by Japanese Women*. Anthology compiled, translated and introduced by Makoto Ueda. Short bio-biblio of 20 women poets in English and a selection of their haiku in Romaji and in English. New York, Columbia University Press, 2003

- 7 *Neige des lointaines cimes – Cent haïkus de Hashimoto Takako*. Translation and introduction by Kemmoku Makoto; adaptation by Kemmoku Makoto & Patrick Blanche. Haiku in Japanese, Romaji and French. February 1998. Available from both translator and adapter.
- 8 Translation by Abigail Friedman in an email dated September 1<sup>st</sup> 2013
- 9 *GONG 19* – revue de l'Association francophone de haïku, April 2008
- 10 *Love Haiku – Masajo Suzuki's Lifetime of Love*. Translated by Lee Gurga & Emiko Miyashita; introduction by Patricia Donegan & Yoshie Ishibashi; translators' Introduction. Haiku in Japanese, Romaji and English; some comments by Masajo; kigo explanation by the translators. Illinois, Brooks Books, 2000
- 11 *Erotic Haiku*, compiled and edited by Hiroaki Sato, English/Japanese. Japan, 2004
- 12 revue *ellipse* mag n° 77; responsable / guest editor: Janick Belleau; *haïku et poèmes courts au féminin / haïku & short poems by women*. New-Brunswick, 2006
- 13 *L'Heure du thé*, Diane Descôteaux. Paris, Karedas, 2008
- 14 *The Haiku Apprentice – memoirs of writing poetry in Japan*. Abigail Friedman. Berkeley, California, Stone Bridge Press, 2006
- 15 *Du rouge aux lèvres – haïjins japonaises*, an anthology of 40 Japanese women poets plus a section of haiku on atomic bombs. Translation by Kemmoku Makoto & Dominique Chipot. Haiku in Japanese, Romaji and French. Introduction in French. Paris, La Table ronde, 2008
- 16 This haiku by Kuroda Momoko is translated by Abigail Friedman. I am grateful to Ms Friedman who spontaneously offered her translation from Japanese to English.
- 17 Unpublished haiku in English – courtesy of Kuroda Momoko's translator Abigail Friedman.
- 18 *GONG 36* – revue de l'Association francophone de haïku, September 2012
- 19 *Les herbes m'appellent*, Niji Fuyuno & Ryu Yotsuya, haiku in Japanese, Romaji and French; forward and essays in French by Thierry Cazals. Beauvais, L'iroli, 2012
- 20 To understand the fascination held by Japanese women for Audrey Hepburn, please read this essay: [http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/publications/hr/issue1\\_2004/6\\_Yipu-HRC11.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/publications/hr/issue1_2004/6_Yipu-HRC11.pdf)
- 21 *Haïkus du temps présent*, Mayuzumi Madoka; presentation, selection & translation by Corinne Atlan. In Japanese, Romaji and French. Comments by Madoka, explanations by the translator. Arles, Philippe Picquier, 2012. The translator's introduction and the first chapter of haiku can be read on the web: <http://www.editions-picquier.fr/catalogue/fiche.donut?id=800>
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