

## Reading One-Line Haiku with Kat and Robin: Blurring the Boundaries

### Blurring the Boundaries

Many haiku include a juxtaposition or comparison between two images or elements. By placing two elements adjacent to one another, we arrive at a more profound understanding of the nature of each element.

A technique that is available in one-line haiku is that the two elements can be presented in a way that is more slippery or more compressed than in three-line haiku. One word might have the ability to function as both a noun and a verb, so fewer words are needed to express the poem. Or perhaps one string of words hints at the second string of words, so the idea can be presented more succinctly without the need to elaborate on each element.

In the first poem, the word “sighs” functions as both noun and verb. We feel the action of the verb in the way “how the wind sighs” blurs into “every September song” as if it is blowing straight through the line. Yet “sighs” as a noun—or “wind sighs” as noun phrase—could be read as a metaphor for “every September song” further reinforcing meaning yet with efficiency of verbiage.

how the wind sighs every September song

– Beverly Acuff Momoi

*whiptail: journal of the single-line poem*, Issue 1

As Emily Dickinson wrote, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.” These approaches to haiku, although they might play with “proper” syntax, sometimes hit a deeper note because they express what we know intuitively—that everything is related to everything else. When a poem about a bird feels like it is also about us, that may be because it is hinting to our bird-nature, and the bird’s human nature. We are blurred together, which may be part of the deeper truth within the poem. This is one way we can “tell the truth, slant” in haiku.

In Japanese, something similar to this is called *bosomi* or “thinness,” which describes a lowering of the facade of discrete personhood in favor of oneness and the non-objectification of nature. When we view the world through the lens of thinness, we do not think of the tree as being separate from ourselves. I am the tree, and you are the tree. What tree-ness within us surfaces within this moment that we want to express?

the river taking wing with each upstroke of his prayer

– Julie Schwerin

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In Julie’s poem, we can feel the oneness of the river, a prayer, and a bird, which enhances the poem’s power as if all of nature is a part of the prayer.

learning to become no one firefly

– Deborah A. Bennett

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Deborah’s poem has multiple readings. The first reading indicates that we are learning to become “no one firefly,” which perhaps means we are learning to become all fireflies. In another reading, we see a break as “learning to become no one / firefly”. In our firefly nature, we are learning to become no one, periodically turning our light on and off. The first reading feels expansive, and the second reading feels diminishing. These seemingly contrary readings suggest a truth that we can sit within these feelings of connection with everyone and connection with no one at different times.

One way to approach writing haiku that blurs the boundaries is a technique described by Alan Summers called Slip-Realism. Using this technique, our senses take the lead and an impressionistic view conveys the scene. In the below poem, the train station is comprised of eyes, and the feeling of searching in a crowded area is expressed with minimal words:

rush hour the train station cornea by cornea

– Alan Summers

Second Prize, The Australian Haiku Society Spring Haiga Kukai: Non-Seasonal, 2017

Poems that connect scale from the micro to the grandiose can blur the boundaries too. Here is a poem that zooms out from the blue flowers of a single plant to a view that observes our planet from space.

ground ivy flowering the small blue earth

– Peggy Willis Lyles

*Roadrunner*, Nov 2008

What other examples of poems can you share that utilize the concept of “thinness” or blurred boundaries—between self and other, between elements of our environment, or between units of scale? What are some other ways that blurring boundaries can lead to a more resonant or effective haiku, to express the essence of a moment that would be difficult to do otherwise? Can you write a poem that blurs the boundaries between eras of time or between eras of your life? Feel free to share your thoughts and examples in the comments!

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