

Do not seek to follow in the footsteps
of the wise, rather seek what they
sought. -Matsuo Basho



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Towards a Philosophy of Haiku



Haiku, like any form of poetry, maybe except the new modern single short thought, is born rather than designed. First, an idea comes into existence and only later when it gets to the university, into the hands of academics, or scientists, is it abstracted as a form and later interpreted as “a haiku is a form of poetry that is syllable count 5-7-5.” I would like to take a moment and philosophy over what is a haiku? For each of us the answer will be different. I would love to hear your impression of haiku as a reader or writer of them.

The universality of haiku is built upon the central precept of juxtaposition, and/or triad. A setting, a foundation, and then a house. A thought physical, a second thought metaphysical, and a last thought atmospheric. In that sense, it is truly saying more with less. Its apophatic glory is that in a world where we try so hard to express ourselves with language, haiku is a way to express oneself by chiseling away and simply leaving the image to be interpreted by the reader. In haiku, one finds an etiquette; allowing a proper space and distance between one’s expression and it’s interpreter.

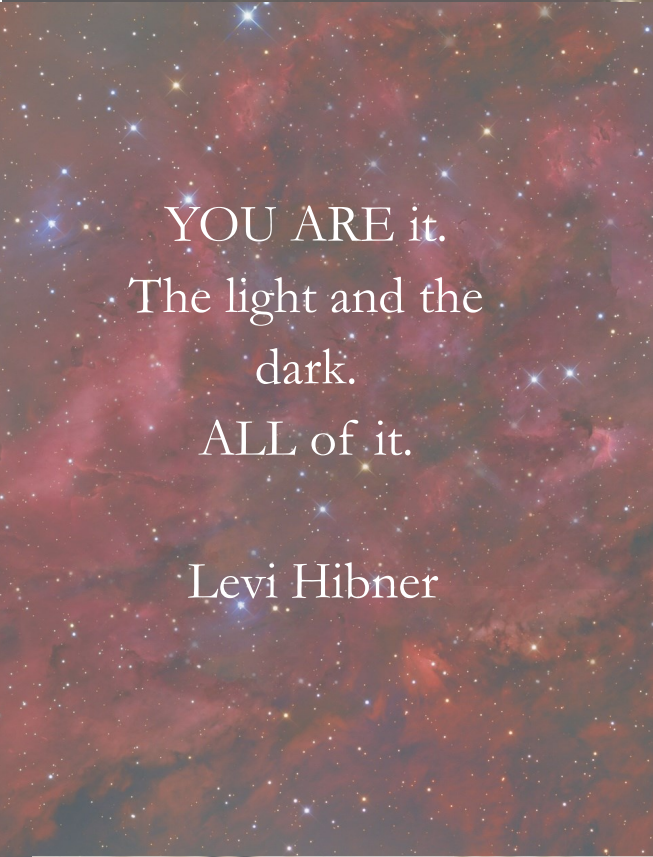
Matsuo Basho’s poems were influenced by his firsthand experience of the world around him, often encapsulating the feeling of a scene in a few simple elements. The life of Basho can be explored in one of his only surviving works “The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches.” This is an autobiography of his wanderings. Basho likely had nothing other than a simple idea that he wished to say more with less, or maybe no idea at all.

Haiku are a death of time, an entering of the non-linear; an exploration of space. It is a doorway, the doorway, into the dark. Never is dialectics ever entered into. This is its glory and uniqueness. It is space that is explored. When looked at from that angle, it is entirely Japanese in its character. Japanese culture has always had a backdrop of Zen Buddhism and that is the case with Matsuo Basho. He was a practitioner of Zen. Basho made a living as a teacher, but then renounced the social, urban life of the literary circles and was inclined to wander throughout the country, heading far into the northern wilderness to gain inspiration for his writing.

This summer at the Fulton County Public Library our theme for Summer Reading is space. Do you have any ideas for programs you may like to have in context? What form of writing would you like to explore this summer? How does language explore space? How is haiku different from our last poetry contest on the ancient Persian form, Ghazal? On the backside of this newsletter see the entries and maybe take some time yourself and soar around in space. Thanks to all who came by the office and explored haiku.



Haiku: Entries from Learn's Winter Contest



YOU ARE it.
The light and the
dark.
ALL of it.

Levi Hibner



Rust collects above me.
A rain falling on the steel roof.
I hear it- erode.


Tim Hartzler



(trademark)
space, *n*
lunar,
logical



Seeds of Potential



Seeds in each apple
can be counted. But apples
in each seed cannot.



Lisa Hooley