

A Child of the Universe:
An Analysis of Madeline Wilson's Haiku

by
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Madeline Wilson is a junior English Education major pursuing a Special Education endorsement at Millikin University. She holds various leadership positions both on and off campus as she is the President of Millikin's Panhellenic Council and the Program Director of PALS. She's from Mokena, IL and when she isn't at Millikin, she can be found baking cookies with her mom, getting emotional over the beauty and success of her friends, or fighting the urge to buy more concert tickets.

Madeline and her haiku are very inspirational to me. I love that Madeline had a similar haiku journey to all of us. Haiku was relatively unfamiliar, aside from her elementary school planted knowledge of the 'five-seven-five' pattern, until she took Dr. Brooks' Global Haiku class during the first semester of her junior year at Millikin. Through speaking with her and going through her haiku portfolio, I was able to learn that she too had that fun and uncomfortable learning period where she just had to try different things out until they

worked. When I look back at some of my very first original haiku, I feel a little embarrassed! I can't believe I wrote such terrible haiku! But it took those haiku to get me where I am today. I had to get it all out of my system. Madeline's haiku seem spectacular from the start, but it's prevalent where she started to catch her groove and understand her own form of haiku.

"When I first started on my haiku journey, I was unaware of the potential magic contained within three little lines. Heck, when I started, I was under the assumption that a haiku had to be comprised of three lines of 5-7-5. As I worked through the past few months studying the art of haiku, my eyes have been opened to the power of word choice, image building, and tapping into universal experiences. Haiku can encapsulate the simplicity and complexity of the human condition. Haiku can also encapsulate the simplicity and complexity of the natural world around us. That's why I fell in love with haiku—it has a unique ability to bend and mold into whatever it needs to be."

Madeline's haiku deal a lot with relationships, whether that be with herself, others, her body, her thoughts, or her surroundings. I love reading haiku about people I know. Haiku, although concise, give such an extraordinary amount of information and background on the author. They show the reader what the author cares about, what they notice, what they think about. In Madeline's case, her haiku act as a form of release and therapy. She can think and vent and feel through her haiku. They beautifully and artistically paint her thoughts in just a few lines.

Before reading Madeline's haiku, she wants the reader to keep a few things in mind... "I encourage you to take a step back and find yourself in a space that allows for raw emotions to feel the air around you. It is in this space that the haiku will speak to you most. Whether reading this collection is an exercise in comradery or in empathy building, I hope you lean into the safe, warm embrace of the universe when you conclude. Welcome, stardust sister, to my little corner of the universe. Enjoy your stay."

When I approached Madeline about writing this essay on her haiku, she was more than willing to be a part of it. She generously sent me her haiku portfolio via an emailed word document. The document contained over three hundred of Madeline's haiku. I feverishly examined it and dove into the rabbit hole.

At the entrance of the document, Madeline had assembled her favorites of the bunch. I read them (a lot of them are ones that I chose to examine), but I couldn't stop there. I needed to read them all. Her haiku were beautiful, engaging, and they told a story. I felt the more I read, the more I'd discover.

After experiencing the nine-teen pages of haiku, I picked out some of my favorites. That was a very hard task. Each haiku is special, meaningful, and spectacular in its own way. Throughout the entire document, I never once felt as if a haiku was out of place or lacking in comparison to the rest. The following selections are followed by my imagined felt responses. I couldn't help but notice a trend in Madeline's haiku. As I previously mentioned, the thread that I saw tying them all together was relationships. Relationships don't have to be person to person. In fact, most relationships that we hold in our lives aren't with people at all, but rather time, nature, and our feelings. Madeline did a superb job at painting each haiku with the colors of these relationships.

day old braids
the touch of yesterday
still lingers on my skin

Madeline Wilson

This haiku made me feel warm, sun-kissed, and a little bit tired from the day before. It reminded me of summer days when I put my hair up in braids to go swimming and I don't take them out for a couple of days because "what's one more day of not washing my hair going to do?". The sun is so rejuvenating and tiring at the same time. It brings me peace. This relationship is with nature, my body, and time. The day-old braids and the feeling of my skin take me back to a time of yesterday and all the things I experienced and felt.

take your freckles
and turn them into constellations
even the cosmos are jealous of

Madeline Wilson

I love extraterrestrial haiku. Usually any haiku that revolves around it is a hit for me. I love that there's an air to it that we don't quite understand, but that we can dream of. Freckles also have an extraordinary aura. They're usually surrounded by warmth and happiness, as they're only produced by time in the sun. I had two responses from this haiku. The first was to take it at face value. Sometimes just basking in the language and the onset response can be the most beautiful way to read a haiku. For me, it's like reading the word 'honeysuckle' in a haiku. I have no idea what a honeysuckle looks like, but for some reason I love the way that it reads in a haiku. That bliss is plentiful and there's no reason to read past it. The second response I had made me think of a relationship with myself and my body. The haiku was to act as a convincing inspirational message to the girl in the mirror, to love her freckles. They're more abundant than stars in the cosmos, tell more stories than the myths behind the constellations, and are more beautiful than she could ever know.

do you think Dr. Frankenstein
meant to make a broken creature?
did god?

Madeline Wilson

This haiku was incredibly thought provoking. It's a question that so many people have asked since the beginning of time, and yet it's one that we won't get the answer to. The relationship here is more existential but feels so personal. I imagine that this isn't a random question, but rather one that is drawn from a specific example or thought. I hate to compare our current Commander in Chief to Frankenstein's creature, because the creature surely doesn't deserve that, but do you think that God meant to make a broken creature such as him? And this whole notion of creation and the comparison of Dr. Frankenstein to God is also thought provoking. There's also an air of innocence to this haiku. It almost feels as if a child is asking this question to their parent, hoping for an answer that quenches their curiosity, but ultimately fueling their parent's own perplexity. I'm curious about the relationship Madeline has to this haiku. Who she had in mind. What her question was leading to.

summer night
the stars whisper sweet nothings
to each other

Madeline Wilson

This haiku made me feel as if the relationship is between space and the stars. Space as in the dimension, not outer space. The space isn't empty, there's something traveling through it, connecting the stars to each other. It's purely a beautiful haiku. One that I liked to take at face value. The language is gorgeous and makes me feel insignificant in all the best ways. It's weightless and silent, while carrying with it a colorful hum.

my fragments
combine with yours
an imperfect mosaic

Madeline Wilson

This haiku starts off broken but fuses together to become a beautiful piece of art. The relationship between self and others is prevalent. The outlook is rather positive, despite the language of "fragments" and "imperfect". The message says that there are parts of me that aren't perfect, but there are also parts of you that aren't perfect. Let's make something beautiful out of them.

his hand swings by his side
and suddenly
my hand swings too

Madeline Wilson

This haiku felt like a delightful surprise. I wasn't sure what would come after the first two lines, but the third one made me smile. The relationship between the author and the other person seems new and progressive. The moment felt nostalgic. It reminded me of being in a new relationship and experiencing the uncertainty of "can we hold hands or is it too soon?" and "I'm not going to reach for his hand because maybe he doesn't want to hold mine". The last line just opened up my lungs though. It took the weight off of my shoulders and left me with nothing but a smile and a warm hand. The relationship in this haiku is sweet, relieving, and hopeful.

summer's final cicadas
a leaf tangoes with
the breeze

Madeline Wilson

Nature's relationship with itself is so cool and this haiku emphasizes that. The sounds and movement in this haiku are some of the reasons why I love it so much. It's so special when a mere three lines is able to stimulate multiple senses. I heard the cicadas, I saw the leaf, and I felt the wind. The word "tango" is

spectacular in this context and it personifies these natural elements. It isn't just a leaf floating around in the wind, it's two characters dancing together. This layer not only adds to the imagery of the haiku, but also gives me a new perspective to take off the paper and into my life.

strawberry dusk—
a cricket sings
hoping for a harmony

Madeline Wilson

Gorgeous and desolate. The haiku uses such lovely language- "strawberry dusk" "sings" "harmony" but has a lonely undertone. Crickets "sing" because they're looking for a mate. They're searching for the one thing they're programmed to accomplish in life. A cricket no longer needs to sing when it has found that. The use of the word "harmony" however makes it less yearful and more hopeful. The sound of a cricket is one that's debated as either annoying or peaceful. I love that Madeline is able to put the most calming tone on the sound, by calling it a song. The relationship between the cricket and his loneliness can also be reflected upon the person listening to it. Some might hear the sound solely as an act of nature, a mating ritual. But others such as Madeline read further into it, placing more transcendental feelings upon it. With that in mind, the haiku also emulates the relationship that the listener, the author, the reader has with their own loneliness. Their own yearning for a harmony.

the stars whisper to me
you are a child
of the universe stardust in my veins

Madeline Wilson

Wow. I know I mentioned this earlier, but extraterrestrial haiku just make me go wild. Our universe is so much bigger than us and when it's incorporated in art, it's absolutely breathtaking. I think this haiku is a culmination of the relationship theme that I extracted. This is the relationship between Madeline and the universe. This haiku isn't some ethereal message from the stars but rather a manifestation of belonging. It's spectacular, it's comforting, it's exhilarating. Absolutely stunning.

I finished up experiencing the document and I eagerly composed an email to Madeline. I had so many questions to ask her. What was her inspiration? What was her process? Should I be expecting a published book to come out soon??? I felt like I had just binge-watched a TV show and was completely involved and in love with the main character. This is the part where you start to look up the actor's name, their family members, where they grew up, and what other shows they're in. Lucky for me, I didn't have to daydream about a character that didn't exist. This character is a real person and just an email away. In just a few days' time, I received an email back with the subject line: *A Book to Come!* and I just about hopped out of my seat. Madeline mentioned that while she's busy with her schoolwork, her haiku blog, and her leadership positions, she's been taking this time in quarantine to also write and publish a book. Along with this exciting news, she provided me with answers to my most sought-after questions.

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Interview with Madeline Wilson

by
Niki Curatti

How would you describe your individual style?

I have been thinking about the answer to this question for a long while now. I struggle to find the right words because I think that I dip into many different styles when writing. I think if I had to summarize it in two words, I would use “raw and unflinching”.

What is your haiku creation and writing process like? Do they pop into your head sporadically or do you like to sit down and take time to write haiku? What is your best environment for writing haiku?

My haiku is a mirror that I hold up to humanity in an attempt to understand what is around me. Much like the human experience is unpredictable, so is my writing process. Haiku is so much fun because it finds me in everything I do. If I see something beautiful, the lines come to me. This happened when I experienced the sunshine after three weeks in November that didn't bring a single day of sun:

the clouds part
can you hear
the earth humming

Madeline Wilson

If I experience something painful, the lines come to me. This happened when a close friend said something very hurtful to me in “jest”:

it was supposed to be a joke
the fragile girl
cracks

Madeline Wilson

But sometimes, I have to sit down with something in mind to write about because it is something so big, I need to find the words to understand it. A haiku of mine that was written this way was created when I was trying to put words to experiences with my father that I have sort of locked away for a long time:

the storm turns over
mimicking the car engine
daughter forgive me

Madeline Wilson

To sum it all up... Kuro: total mental and existential awareness, thus a very realistic and depressive writing style. Mido: total lack of mental control, thus a sporadic and flamboyant writing style. Which of these authors do you relate most to and why? Is there a specific haiku that you have in mind that you think best exemplifies your point?

I think I have elements of both Kuro and Mido. I think every person that writes haiku has elements of both Kuro and Mido. To reduce any one piece of art into either camp I think reduces the power behind the haiku. But for the sake of this exercise, I think that I would relate most to Kuro because the core of my haiku is in finding the center of humanity. I think a haiku that I wrote that exemplifies this realistic, existential dread-esque philosophy would be one that I wrote during my international literature class after reading deeply saddening story after deeply saddening story:

wilted rose petals
suffering is the only
universal human truth

Madeline Wilson

How does writing haiku make you feel? Is it relaxing? Thought provoking? A form of release?

I touched on this a little bit earlier, but writing haiku for me serves many purposes in my life: a way to capture beauty, to humanize pain, to understand the complexities that come along with being human, to find beauty within everything, to connect with everyone around me. When I found the art of haiku, I had finally found the art form that allowed me to process anything that comes my way and find a sort of release from the burden of feeling things as deeply as I do.

Have you noticed the events happening in your life or the feelings that you're having when you are most productive in writing haiku?

Honestly it is sometimes annoying when they come to mind. I will be very deep into doing something productive and they will suddenly come to mind, and they will not back off until I write them down somewhere. My notes app on my phone is full of haiku and my workplace has post-its with lines that I will one day create a full haiku with. But haiku usually comes to me when I find myself in a quiet space: driving alone, in the shower, on the train. In these pieces of quiet, the haiku come out of hiding and find their home in my head.

What do you believe haiku is all about? What's the point?

My first intent when writing is to understand what I am feeling. My second intent is to provide a place for people to connect to me, to themselves, and the world around them. Haiku is all about connection. Connection to beauty, pain, one's self, the world, nature, kindness.

In your opinion, how is haiku supposed to be written?

Honestly and vulnerably. It is the only way for people to truly understand one another and the world around them. In regards to the form of a haiku, I think that the form is just as powerful as the words behind it. The

form should serve the purpose of the haiku. As you can see in some of my haiku, I try to force the one liner form even when it is not appropriate just because I wanted to have a good one liner SO bad. My truly successful one liner came in a time in which the brevity of the form was appropriate:

i gave loneliness the key to my room

Madeline Wilson

Manipulating the form of a haiku can really change the weight behind it. Take one of my haiku as an example. The distance between the words emphasizes the metaphorical distance:

i miss you
the moon shouts to the sun
but in space . . . silence

Madeline Wilson

Compare that to the same haiku, but with typical spacing:

i miss you
the moon shouts to the sun
but in space...silence

Madeline Wilson

Feels much different, don't you think?

Do you have a favorite haiku author and/or style? Who/why?

I do not think I have a favorite haiku author because I find beauty in the work of every author I read. During my time in the haiku class, I found the most enjoyment in reading the haiku of my classmates! My favorite type of haiku to read are ones that make me feel something deeply. When I did this project myself, I wrote about an up-and-coming poet named Chase Gagnon. His poetry is raw and honest and unafraid to talk about heavy, hard things. I admire his vulnerability and because of that, I look up to him and his art.

If you were to publish a book of your favorite haiku, what would you title it?

I really loved the title of my collection I wrote for this class titled "a child of the universe". I think, if and when I publish a collection one day, I may use the same title. I would also consider "the key to my room" or "the ghosts within me". What do you think?

What is your favorite part about your haiku?

I love how I can read through my haiku and find my entire life story. Every piece of me lives within my haiku. It's interesting because I feel like I have let you into the very pieces of me I have never let anyone into, seeing my entire portfolio. There is beauty and pain and love and loss and celebration and distress

within these pages and they are all loved and celebrated equally. I give equal credit to each piece of the human experience. How cool is that??

Interviewer's Conclusion

The thought and emotion that Madeline puts into her haiku is obvious, both through her haiku and the way that she talks about them. Haiku is so much more than a hobby for her. Haiku is a special part of her life. She said that "haiku is a mirror that I hold up to humanity in an attempt to understand what is around me". This is such an introspective statement and has changed my perspective on haiku. It also better helps me understand Madeline's haiku and the haiku of other authors. I've learned a lot through Madeline's haiku. Most discernibly, I've learned that her haiku shouldn't be read, it should be experienced. It can't be reduced down to words because its most incredible power is the way that it makes you feel. I feel so honored to have been able to experience Madeline's haiku and I'm so excited to be able to share it with others through this essay.

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