

Grant Unruh

Dr. Brooks

Global Haiku

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### The Little Things: An Examination of Randy Brooks Haiku

When starting the semester in Dr. Brooks' Global Haiku course, I initially didn't know what to expect. At that point, I was still under the impression that a haiku was strictly three lines, with a five-seven-five syllable pattern. However, thanks to his teachings and the haiku that he has shared with us, I've come to better understand and even create my own haiku. I feel that through both the accessibility and deeper meanings of Brooks' haiku, one can better analyze the types of things that influence or bring about such writing. During the course, I started to notice a few running trends and particular themes that came up frequently - mainly, transporting the viewer through scenery and examining the relationships of those around him, as well as his previous memories and influences of those around him. While they may seem simple on the surface, I feel that the details interwoven between the lines really help bring these haiku to life.

school's out—  
     a boy follows his dog  
         into the woods

Brooks, *SO*, page 17

This haiku was one of the first by Dr. Brooks that left quite the impression on me. Already painting a vivid summer scene in just three lines, the passage establishes everything we need to know and lets the reader's mind fill in the blanks and flourishes. Taken from his collection *School's Out*, this haiku spoke to me of a carefree time where summer meant one thing at its core - freedom. Capturing the essence of the adrenaline rush, the young boy dashing into the woods with his trusty canine companion, ready to take on whatever lies beyond the tree line. I feel that, especially with *School's Out*, Brooks draws upon his experiences as an educator and being in that type of environment, hearkening back to the anticipation of summer and the elation of when that last bell finally goes off. Ready to get lost in the sea of trees, not a care in the world.

up late with old friends . . .  
     my daughter and her blankie  
         out of the dark again

Brooks, *SO*, 81

With this haiku, I feel that the smaller details and emphasis that Brooks places on them help bring the piece to life. Allowing the reader to fill in the blanks for themselves, the specific yet easy to visualize scene of a child up past their bedtime. A nightmare, too much noise, whatever the reason may be, Brooks illustrates the scene effectively by highlighting the details of the child with their favorite blanket - as well as the use of "again" right at the end. Making it clear to the reader that this is a recurring event, perhaps multiple times that night. The word choice that Brooks employs also adds to the haiku, using "blankie" as if it was the daughter herself speaking it straight out of her own vocabulary. I also love how the haiku is taken as a whole - in my readings, I didn't detect any anger or animosity toward the child, as it's clearly an unfortunate yet delicate situation. A very well-written snapshot that again uses detail to great effect.

one leg over the oar,  
 the college graduate  
 drifts

Brooks, SO, 76

The imagery on display with this haiku and the way it intertwines with the deeper meanings are both fantastic. Most likely due to the word choice, I was very heavily reminded of the 1967 film *The Graduate* and the aimlessness associated with post-collegiate decisions and free time. Feelings of dissociation, wasted time and unease permeated this haiku as I read it. Whether the graduate is drifting closer toward a destination of greater intent or is slowly moving toward a waterfall, I don't think I'm to say. Taken solely as a snapshot, as Brooks is skilled at doing, it very effectively creates a scene and mood to be in - disaffected youth, unsure of what to do with themselves once out of the school system.

toes dangle in the lake . . .  
 watermelon juice  
 drips off his chin

Brooks, SO, 37

If there was one haiku that was more emblematic of the *School's Out* title, I'd be hard-pressed to say it'd be something other than this haiku. To me, Brooks masterfully captures the blissful, sunny essence of a warm summer's day and a cool, refreshing treat. Almost as if you're experiencing the haiku as it's being read or told to you, connecting the sights, sounds, tastes and other sensations of a perfect day during summer vacation. I'd like to bring attention to the ways that Brooks is able to effortlessly describe a specific scene or environment consistently - whether it be a summer day at a lake or pool, or a harsh, cold winter's night, his word choice and placement works seamlessly with his subject matter as he describes the various experiences and events that have happened to him in his life.

after all these years  
 she asks about her mother . . .  
 I put on another log

Brooks, SO, 91

Brooks' haiku here expressed a great deal of melancholy to me. In just three short lines, he brings up (as I interpreted) a girl asking about her divorced, or possibly late mother. He skillfully integrates these conflicting feelings of being with family and discussing not-so-pleasant family matters. The line of placing another log presumably on a fire speaks to the intimacy and closeness of the haiku while keeping up the heavy juxtaposition as seen in so many other haiku. This piece truly makes you get comfortable with being uncomfortable - also evidenced by the first line, clearly showing that this has taken a long time to bubble to the surface. It's not an easy conversation by any means, but it appears to be a necessary one - whether it goes well or badly is yet to be determined, but the subtle tension captured here is very well executed.

night drive home  
 we unravel all the things  
 unsaid

Brooks, HWL, P.2

My immediate response to reading this haiku was two partners driving home from a family holiday gathering. Pitch black outside, headlights on the highway as they drive home in silence - until one of them breaks the ice. Perhaps from behavior at the get-together, maybe from things that had been building up for a

while, or maybe even just talking about things that'd been troubling them - either way, Brooks masterfully illustrates the scene, yet strikes a balance of the tone and doesn't go overboard into dramatism and only tells what needs to be said. In a way, he leaves enough unsaid, like in the haiku, to draw the reader in that much more.

the bedtime story  
her grownup brothers listen  
to mother's voice

Brooks, HWL, P.1

I loved the imagery shown in this passage. Writing this haiku from the perspective of a younger sister looking up to her older brothers as they settle down for bed was an interesting shift compared to a lot of Brooks' other haiku. Bedtime stories are something I doubt many people get to experience at older ages, and those kinds of memories seem like the type to look back on fondly. Despite being older, it doesn't necessarily mean that one can't enjoy a good story, as evidenced here. Leaving the exact age of "older" up to interpretation, I feel that this haiku weaves the story exceptionally well, reminding the reader of a simpler time when the most one had to worry about was what would happen to the hero next.

hot tub beneath the stars  
her finger over my lips  
to shut me up

Brooks, HWL, P.2

I absolutely loved the intimacy expressed with this passage. It becomes clear through the language and actions depicted that this is a moment between the author and his wife, and the mind takes over from there - filling in a starry night sky, the steam spilling out of the spa, perhaps with a few wine glasses sitting on the side. Brooks' language makes it clear that some sort of discussion was going on, whether he'd been rambling or simply talking for too long, and the silencing of his speech clearly showing how him and the woman being described here are close. It seemed to me like a cute haiku and an observation of a moment that might not happen often.

miles to go . . .  
no tracks ahead of us  
in the snow

Brooks, HWL, P.1

Once again, the imagery exhibited in this haiku is exquisite. Instantly transporting the reader to a snow-covered road or field, freshly fallen powder and a wintery landscape ahead, this haiku paints a beautiful image without having to use all three of its lines describing it. I personally love newly-fallen snow, and this haiku just resonated with me. Imagining that the only sounds in the scenery (aside from the occasional bird) being their footsteps and breath. I also really enjoy how much action Brooks is able to inject into just a few short lines, implying that the person he's with is on this hike for the long haul with "miles to go", as well as being able to illustrate an environment within those same three-lined constraints.

evening walk  
after office politics  
lilac scent

Brooks, HWL, P.2

Speaking as someone who has had various jobs both corporate and local, I can safely say that office politics and discussions are a slippery slope and a rough mental trap. That being said, a lovely evening walk to decompress and relax, as illustrated in Brooks' haiku above, is exactly what one would need after a day like that. I particularly enjoyed the usage of "lilac scent" that is incorporated in the last line - whether he is implying there are lilacs blooming nearby, or he's walking with someone who has a lilac-scented perfume isn't clear, but the parts open to interpretation really benefit Brooks' haiku on repeated readings. Picturing the hazy orange sky as the sun sets, gradually drawing darker shades of purple and blue to the approaching night sky, it's a simply breathtaking note contrasting the dull, rote "office politics."

A running trend I noticed throughout all of Brooks' work listed here, as well as the other haiku not shown was the intimacy of it all. It's easy to see that all of his haiku are viewed solely through his viewpoint and lens, emphasizing the different situations and events he's experienced, as well as the relationships to those around him and close to him. Noting the positivity and beauty in many things around him, while also taking time to reflect on the more melancholic or dour moments of his life. Through it all, it seemed both personal and accessible, like the interpretations reached in his haiku could be applied to more than just "haiku by Randy Brooks." I sensed an underlying optimism and appreciation for everything experienced when reading, and I feel like that is one thing that most definitely transfers to the reader when going through his haiku.

#### Works Cited

Brooks, Randy. *School's Out*. Press Here, 1999.

Brooks, Randy. *Haiku With Legs*. Brooks Books, 2015.