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Natalia L. Rudychev's Haiku

In reading haiku by author Natalia L. Rudychev, I was intrigued by her style. She is a dancer, photographer, painter, and poet. Her collection of haiku in *Simple Gifts* follows the seasons. Reading her book as a whole, there is a movement and flow to the haiku that feels like a dance, leaping from one moment to another, but sharing one life. She writes on the back cover of *Simple Gifts*, "I transform echoes, images, memories, emotions and thoughts into the works of art. Words, photographs, brushstrokes and movements are just tools for making magic." I definitely felt that magic reading her poetry. Her haiku are magical because the language she uses is so simple and accessible. Rudychev's word choice and diction truly transforms each moment in each haiku into something extraordinary.

Spring

April
 the shadows
 bloom

Natalia L Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 14

The wording of this haiku is clever and light. It has the same feel as the saying "April showers bring May flowers." So many elements of spring are captured in these four words. The first line establishes a time of spring. It is not quite the comfortable part of spring, but it is the beginning where life is just starting to come back from its winter hibernation. The shadows are a reminder of that cold, dark winter. The days are lengthening, but not significantly enough to notice until someone decides to pay close attention. The last line brings in the most nature with an action, blooming. This haiku juxtaposes hot and cold temperatures plainly, but indirectly. Blooming is something that most people associate automatically with flowers, and flowers bloom in the warmth of the sun. Describing the shadows as blooming gives this wonderful hope through darkness and warmth beyond the cold. The word choice of "bloom" creates some beautiful and specific imagery. Normally, a word like "grow" could be used, but "bloom" is more creative and specific for capturing the moment.

nameless
 a stepped-on flower
 slowly reshapes itself

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 16

While some haiku rules state that personification should not occur in haiku, the humanization of the flower in this haiku is powerful. The personification is subtle enough that it really works to give the reader different images and readings. The first time I read it, I saw a person bullied in school, trying so hard to keep themselves whole as they are trampled by their peers. In a second reading, I saw the perseverance of a

dandelion. So often these flowers are stomped on because they are considered weeds. The strength of dandelions astounds me and that strength translates to a will to live. The choice to open the haiku with “nameless” is so interesting to me. I wonder if the flower or person is ignored or invisible, or does no one care enough to learn its name. Rudychev successfully crafted this haiku to give the reader endlessly specific readings.

Summer

heat wave
the curve
of cicada song

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 42

Rudychev’s imagery is so full and has a wonderful shape to it. The first line has the round image of the heat wave. The audience can feel the humidity and the mid-late summer heat. Another round layer is added when in the second line Rudychev simply describes a shape. I can see the curve of an ocean wave, or the curve of the heat wave on the weather map. However, it is completely changed by the “cicada song”. The addition of song puts an image of the music staff in my head - five lines with the curve of a melody. The shapes and images are so active and play on all of the senses so beautifully.

curve of a swan’s neck
your question
still haunts me

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 48

Another haiku full of vivid imagery, it creates an incredibly specific shape. The “curve of a swan’s neck” is not something that is typically associated with the curve of a question mark. However, it allows the audience to follow the thought process of the haiku. Rudychev uses a sort of personification in those first two lines, connecting the swan’s neck to a question. It serves to give the haiku a sort of lonely and reflective feel to it. Choosing the word “haunts” also serves to give the poem that reflective and distant mood. It captures the feeling of being overpowered by an important task, question, or decision. The shape association and the word choice makes such a creative path to describe that feeling and that moment.

Autumn

a ginger tea
extra spice
in your kiss

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 53

Rudychev’s wordplay in this haiku is so brilliant and light. The whole poem has a warmth to it. I can see the steam and smell the ginger tea. I also see the warm color of the tea. There is added heat with the line “extra spice” and the last line really seals the romantic side of this haiku. The amount of different ways to add onto

and interpret the moment in this haiku seem endless. For example, the tea could add a spiced taste to the kiss, or the kiss itself could be spicy, as in passionate. Rudychev paints the reader's vision with warm colors, like an orange-yellow tea, the reds and oranges of spicy heat, and maybe even some red lipstick to tie it together. This haiku is incredibly well crafted with the word choice and line arrangement.

Winter

approaching silence

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 64

This might be the smallest haiku I have read so far, but it is by no means the shortest. Rudychev is masterful in the crafting of this haiku. In the book, it is surrounded by the blankness of the page. I imagine that blankness to be the approaching silence. She manages to describe that uneasy silence that we anticipate coming after the fire alarm stops going off, or after a dangerous storm. The silence does not mean calm, it is in anticipation of what is coming next. Those two words manage to make a successful and spooky haiku. The haiku may make more impact on the page, but its complexity within the simplicity makes this haiku so satisfying. If it were a dance, I would compare it to the moment in a dramatic piece where the whole stage goes still and then breaks into chaos. After dancing for such a long time, and choreographing pieces of my own, there is a build in the silent moments. The moments of silence are the most important, which may be why this haiku resonates with me so strongly. The moments of silence are the ones where tension is at its height and can then start to break and resolve.

valentine

a pair of tracks

is crossed by one

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 71

Rudychev creates this wonderful visual in this haiku of different paths. It seems like a choreographed moment, one that would fit in with the lyrics to the song "Ironic" by Alanis Morissette. The tracks and valentine put the reader in the winter snow on a bitter cold February fourteenth. "Valentine" almost has a sweet taste to it because of all the candy and chocolate associated with the holiday. That sweet taste is juxtaposed by the bitter sadness of the last line. Someone is alone walking by themselves in the cold winter snow. I see the tracks in the snow, like the traveling paths I write down when staging a dance. It is all too purposeful that the tracks are so fresh that all can be seen clearly. If I were to do research and present inspiration for a dance piece to Alanis Morissette's song, "Ironic," this haiku would be in my presentation.

illuminating
the silence between us...
firefly

Wally Swist, *The Silence Between Us*, 103

a long drive
the silence between us
passes from shade to light

Natalia L. Rudychev, *Simple Gifts*, 47

I wanted to compare these haiku because Natalia Rudychev writes about “the silence between us” so often and it is the title of Wally Swist’s collection. (The phrase “silence between us” can be found in *Simple Gifts* on pages 13, 34, 37, 40, 47, 65 and the phrase “stars between us” can be found on page 59, as well as the haiku “approaching silence” on page 64). Both Swist and Rudychev use light and dark to describe the silence. They use both the sense of sight and the sense of hearing for juxtaposition. The moments described are so different, yet so similar and crafted in very similar ways. Swist’s haiku starts out with the light juxtaposing the silence, and the dark. The firefly sets the time to night. It gives me the image of either a graveyard or the end of an outdoor wedding. Rudychev’s haiku starts with confinement in a pretty small space. The second line introduces another person and the third line reiterates how much time has passed with the shadows changing. The third line of this haiku is really interesting because the shade and light could be night and day, or simply going from a shaded area, mountains or forest, to an open area where it is light. The last line emphasizes the distance and the length of the silence. The last line could also be the silence developing from gloomy and dark, to pleasant and light. The use of the phrase “the silence between us” in both haiku drives a relationship and a moment in that relationship that is important enough to feel the silence. There is a significance to that phrase that might be the reason for Rudychev’s consistent use of it.

The expression of specific moments in Natalia L. Rudychev’s haiku is truly magical. They are elegant and so satisfying in their structure. The moments are painted and choreographed for their audience with her word choice and formatting. The more I read her poetry, the more I see the fine craftsmanship that goes into her haiku. Her background in other art forms make her haiku so special and specific. Her art is magic.

Works Cited

Rudychev, Natalia L. *Simple Gifts*. Red Moon Press, 2018.

Swist, Wally, et al. *The Silence between Us: Selected Haiku of Wally Swist*. Brooks Books, 2005.