

Lee Nash Selections: An Idol of Haiku

by
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The poetic works of Lee Nash are truly inspiring, and she is a perfect example of how to format and execute haiku effectively. Nash has been the first author I have read from that I have genuinely felt drawn towards their work. I think she has a natural way with words, as many poets tend to do, but I also think she writes about things that are interesting. She has a natural way of spelling out a metaphor or analogy just enough for you to really get a sense of its presence, but not enough where you don't have to work. Her pieces make you stop and think for a second to make sure you understand the message she's trying to get across. And when you do, you get to go back and reread the haiku in a whole new light. Nash is one of those artists that are brilliant because they make their art look easy, even when it's not. I think Nash is a great example for beginners in Haiku to look towards when figuring out the most effective way of telling a story or formatting your imagery.

blue wildflowers
the map that won't
refold

Lee Nash, *The Heron's Nest*, June 2018

This haiku interests me because I think there are layers to it yet that even I can't see. I can see the comparison that wildflowers spread similar to how a map (which already represents travel and distance) can unfold for what feels like forever, but may not be able to refold as easily. I also love the small detail in using the color blue, which doesn't feel like a common color for wildflowers, but ties in well with the imagery of a map which is mostly blue. I think it's especially interesting in this haiku, the specific word choice of "won't refold" as opposed to "can't refold." The map could, but it doesn't want to. It's free. I think maps are often a symbol of freedom, along with travel and journeys. And the same goes for the wildflowers; they don't want to return to their origin or stay confined in one garden. They spread and cover the earth, which is, again, another connection between maps and wildflowers: nature. Overall, ...

thrown clay
a new planet starts
to spin

Lee Nash, *Stardust*, In the Starlight, April 2018

I really enjoy this haiku because of both the word choice but also the unique perspective offered. I like that the first line opens with "thrown clay" because I think thrown adds so much more texture to the image. I can very clearly feel the mushy consistency and conflicting shapes of a pound of clay that's been thrown around a little. I also took a lot of pottery camps as a kid so the feeling of wet clay waiting to be molded into something beautiful is all too familiar to me.

The first line sets the image up nicely, and I can clearly see someone sitting at a potter's wheel with a mound of wet, brown clay. Then, the perspective shifts. Calling this clay "a new planet" adds a whole new level of importance to it. Not only can you transform it into anything, you can mold this clay to be everything, to be a celestial body, a giant life force. And just as planets spin, so too does a potter's wheel. It's truly a brilliant analogy.

night bus home
the idle counterweights
of cranes

Lee Nash, *The Heron's Nest*, March 2018

This is another haiku of Nash's that really makes me stop to think about the weight of each individual word and how best to interpret the story being told. So, I break it up into workable sections. When I envision the first line, "night bus home", I feel an idle stillness. There's a sense of fatigue as everyone is returning home after a long day. I also don't particularly see a lot of people. Just a few strangers who each have lives and stories of their own, which are all momentarily on pause as they share this silent bus ride together. The next line, "the idle counterweights", enhances this feeling of stillness and honestly gives me a very clear image of a balance or scale, frozen between the weight of both sides. And the final line, "of cranes", first gave me the image of cranes as in the species of bird, posed idly on a pond. However, looking at the haiku as a whole again then made me picture cranes as in the construction vehicle. I think the line about the bus gave me the image that this is set in a busy city, where I believe it is fairly easy to find a crane amongst skyscrapers and fairly difficult to find one currently in motion or use. They tend to sit idle, which again ties back to the feeling of stillness on a bus ride home.

truce peaches
gently I wash out
their bruises

Lee Nash, *Akitsu Quarterly*, winter 2017

This haiku continues the theme nicely that highlights Nash's strategy of setting the tone, mood, and setting of the haiku in the first line, and using the middle and last line to connect it to a larger feeling or another circumstance. This haiku starts with the line "truce peaches" which I think is incredibly interesting. I can only imagine that this means peaches that were offered like an olive branch to symbolize peace or, in this case, a truce. I have never heard of this before, but I can imagine it. Fruit in general is always a sweet gift, it feels more thoughtful. It also instantly sets up the relationship between the author and the other person: they are coming to a truce, despite past differences, which is never easy. They might still have hurt or angry feelings that they are trying to bury and overcome. Then the next two lines: "gently I wash out / their bruises" which reemphasizes this relationship. The bruises are there, both on the peaches and on their relationship, but they are genuinely trying to wash them out and start over. I also like what this haiku does for the senses because you can very clearly feel the distinct fuzzy surface of a peach and running it under cool water. I can smell the peaches in my hands and can picture the slight bruising. I can hear the running water. It's a very well-done haiku.

twice a widow
laundry stiff from ice
brought in to thaw

Lee Nash, *Presence*, Issue 59, 2017

Yet again, this haiku further emphasizes the pattern Nash uses of using two images (usually one in the first line and one among the second and third lines) that go hand in hand to tell a story or contrast each other to impart a specific feeling or emotion on the reader. And they usually relate enough to make an interesting and unique comparison for the reader. Opening with "twice a widow" instantly sets the tone that this haiku isn't a happy one. At best, it will be bittersweet and at worst it is devastating. To have to live through the death of a partner once is enough, but twice is incredibly saddening. Then the line "laundry stiff from ice" draws the easy comparison of this widow, in her grief, is likely cold and frozen from grief. Not meant to be

out in the harsh weather but left out there anyway and now: frozen. And finally, the last line “brought in to thaw” implies that this widow is maybe starting to heal. Someone is bringing her inside to console her in her grief. But grief, and frozen laundry thawing, is a process and takes time.

love poetry
back on the shelf
dust in my throat

Lee Nash, *the Aureorean*, fall/winter 2017-18

This haiku tells a very compelling story. Clearly this person wasn’t just reading love poetry, but likely in love themselves and reading poetry to relate to their relationship. But now the poetry is going “back on the shelf.” That love or relationship is over and being put away, or at least that’s how it reads to me. This is also one of the few exceptions to Nash’s usual pattern, Instead of setting the tone in the first line and devising the action or setting up a comparison in the second and third lines, this haiku devises the action in the first two lines and then adds an extra feeling/detail in the last line. The last line “dust in my throat” adds so much to this haiku. It’s really the final touch that takes this poem to the next level because it adds a sense of fatigue, or exhaustion. For dust to settle somewhere, it has to be void of movement or empty. It makes the person in the poem seem voiceless, like they’ve been silenced in this relationship, which in turn gives them more power by taking the action to put the love poetry back on the shelf. I also think it's funny, just the fact that its a poem about poetry.

sunflowers
facing in all directions
Decisions

Lee Nash, *The Mainichi*, 17 October 2017

I really like this haiku. I’ve always found it a really charming idea that sunflowers grow facing the sun. It makes perfect sense, but the symbolism and deeper meaning is so obvious, just sitting there waiting to be interpreted artistically. So I especially love this haiku that uses that imagery in a unique way to tell a story. This is another exception to Nash’s usual pattern in the sense that this haiku uses the first two lines to establish a setting and action and the last line to draw a conclusion/comparison to a larger concept. The opening for this haiku is just “sunflowers.” Much more simple than truce peaches or thrown clay. Just sunflowers. I think there’s a pretty universal understanding to the image and symbolism of sunflowers, so it doesn’t need much else elaboration. Then it gets interesting in the second line with “facing in all directions.” This is a break from the norm as sunflowers are infamous for all facing the same direction in unison. It begs the question why, as they should all face the sun. But this question is vaguely answered in the last line, with a simple “decisions.” I think this haiku is beautiful in its simplicity. It leaves it up to the fact that these sunflowers are literally torn in so many different directions, but also torn over decisions that must be made.

hurricane season
a journalist flies
against the flow

Lee Nash, *The New Verse News*, 11 September 2017

I love this haiku because it brings focus and perspective to something that isn’t talked about much but absolutely should be. It follows the usual pattern Nash likes, of establishing a setting in the first line and drawing connections and deriving action in the second and third lines. This haiku opens with “hurricane season” which instantly sets the tone and puts us into the mindset that the rest of the haiku might be stressful, dangerous, or anxiety-inducing. Then, the next two lines “a journalist flies / against the flow” creates both the conflict and central narrative of this haiku. This is a real scenario that occurs disturbingly

often. With all of the news coverage of the Gulf hurricane season the past month, I have grown increasingly aware of the occurrences when news stations have sent journalists or cameramen or hosts into the eye of the storm, directly into danger, just for journalism. It feels like it should be illegal to send them directly into what is known to be a dangerous situation, one that most people are, and should be, currently evacuating. It goes against humans' base survival instincts. And I think this haiku captures that feeling really well.

oysters' lips
tremble underwater –
unsure I can conceive

Lee Nash, *Modern Haiku*, N° 47.3, 2016

This haiku is particularly interesting, I think, because I don't entirely understand it. I think there are a lot of layers here available for interpretation, which often makes for the best haiku. This is another exception to the usual pattern because this one uses the first two lines to establish the setting and action, and the final line to draw a connection to a separate idea. Opening with "oyster's lips" is an interesting first line. I honestly didn't even realize oysters have lips, so I'm unsure on an image that isn't ridiculously cartoonish. I think the image that comes to mind is the rim of the opening of an oyster or clam, which could be seen as lips if the hinge was seen as a mouth. Then, "tremble underwater" gives us a distinct feeling of anxiety, or nervousness, and also establishes a location. The third line takes a hard left turn with "unsure I can conceive." I think this pairs well with the word choice "tremble" as that implies feeling unsure. But I personally am lost on the connection between oysters and conception. I think the dichotomous images make an incredibly interesting pair.

a bride at sixteen green apples

Lee Nash, *A Hundred Gourds*, June 2016

This is one of the few Lee Nash poems that are not written in a three-line format. I like this haiku because it can be read two different ways. You can associate sixteen with the amount of apples or with the age of the bride and both make sense. This haiku brings an air of youth, freshness, maybe even naivety. I can very clearly picture a quaint white wedding with a youthful, eager bride walking down the aisle. I can also clearly see and taste the distinct green apple. Green apples are known for their sourness, so is this wedding a bitter one? I think a lot could be read here below the surface.

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