

George Swede Reflection: The Psychological Look of Haiku

by  
Kaitlyn McIntyre

June 9, 2022

After reading many of George Swede's haiku, he has become one of my favorite. I first read his haiku before I ever looked at his background. After reading his, About the Author Section from Almost Unseen: Selected Haiku of George Swede, I understood why I had such a close connection to his haiku. In my career, I am hoping to be a behavioral or psych nurse so finding out Swede was a psychologist. I found why he had such depth in looking at the mental health patient and the behaviors of a person. When I read his haiku I am so intrigued as you can put such a complex behavior of a person into a small one to three-line poem. I was never much of a poetry or creative art person but after reading George Swede's haiku I was able to understand how to put my favorite hobby of evaluating human behavior into something more creative and less formal.

mental hospital  
my shadow  
stays outside

Swede, AU, page 77

in one corner  
of the mental patient's eye  
I exist

Swede, AU, page 82

These two haiku truly show how someone with a psychological background can use this to their advantage. Being able to see a mental health patient in the ways Swede can is very different from the average person. Looking at the age of these haiku also has some significance as we do not have full mental hospitals anymore because mental health is now considered a normal part of the medical field and not a diagnosis that isolates you. Noting that in the second haiku we can see improvement as the haiku describes how mental health patients are not what society has made them out to be, but deserve to be listened to, their disease process is different and affects the brain thus affecting behavior such as eye contact. So while reading this haiku you can see the moment that they make eye contact and see the patient is listening and wants to be helped as they co-exist at that moment. After reflection on these two haiku, I can see the beauty Swede puts in haiku from his background.

city park  
the stone hero's dark side  
hides a drug deal

Swede, AU, page 24

in the town dump  
I find a still-  
beating heart

Swede, AU, page 31

When I read these haiku, I thought of how substance abuse can control the behavior of people. Following the theme of George Swede's observation of human behavior to write wonderful haiku. Addiction is a real disease and can have very devastating effects on the people it consumes. I believe these haiku go together because of how it talks of the destruction of a town whether it was hidden behind a statue meant to stand for good or a town turned upside down by whatever you may concur from Swede's second haiku, pairing the two together can be intertwined the themes of the first into the second, making the second haiku even more serious and heart wrenching for some as they may think of overdose or just a good person not overcome by disease. Once again, Swede does a wonderful job displaying behaviors and well-written haiku that can have a different reflection on others with different reads.

first warm spring day  
I take my shadow  
for a walk

Swede, AU, page 17

one by one  
to the floor     all  
of her shadows

Swede, AU, page 42

passport check  
my shadow waits  
across the border

Swede, AU, page 57

Reading these haiku, I noticed a recurring theme of the use of the word shadow. While all being separate haiku, they all speak of shadows as being a part of a person that is connected sometimes but not always. In the first haiku, we see the shadow is attached but Swede is saying the shadow is taken for a walk but not himself. In the second haiku, we see he mentions that she has multiple shadows, and in the third haiku we see the mention of the haiku not even being connected to the person. I put these three together to show how Swede uses shadows to show we have different parts of us. Certain shadows we tend to such as taking a

walk whether it's to relax or exercise. Some shadows come together in times of hardship to overcome a battle within and our other shadows could actually be a person you love which some can concur from the third haiku that the reader is awaiting them their shadow or lover. Seeing the many parts of yourself from Swede's haiku is why I find them so enjoyable and able to help self reflect on my own emotions.

still pond  
expectant father  
skips stones

Swede, AU, page 42

after the abortion  
she weeds  
the garden

Swede, AU, page 54

I put these two haiku together because I believe Swede did a wonderful job of displaying the different ways of coping with the process of reproducing. It can be a very hard battle with highs and lows. In the first haiku depending on your reading and interpretation the father could be trying to clear his mind of anxiety or excitement which is totally up to the reader while I imagine the anxiety and the father is wanting to clear his head of the life changes he will have ahead. In the second haiku, we can see the sadness and see how the once expecting mother is coping with the loss. These haiku can be seen as a comparison and contrast of one another to see different coping strategies for similar but different life events. Another way to tie Swede's background to his haiku and another way we see how he beautifully makes these haiku that test the reader's idea of human behavior.

sunrise  
I forget  
my side of the argument

Swede, AU, page 44

silence after our argument  
crumpled cigarette pack  
uncurling

Swist, TSBU, page 29

After reading these haiku I instantly saw a connection. They both talk about an argument and give different reactions. In Swist's Haiku, the cycle of the season touches the cycle of our lives and both are altered by interaction. These interactions help to imagine what could have happened to cause these upsets. Swede's haiku could mean it was a simple argument and Swist's argument could also mean a simple argument but he chose to display the heightened version that also calms with the third line that can be connected to Swede's by using those mechanisms Swede's been sleeping it off and Swist's being an outlet of anger with the crumbling of the cigarette's. These two haiku writers are similar in their writings of feelings between partners

whether divorce or disagreements and both develop them off human interaction whether Swede's may be from observation and Swist's from experience.

Swede's work complements not only his work in poetry but also his work in psychology. Reading his haiku you can see they come from a place of observation of the human. Having a background in psychology I think puts Swede in a wonderful place of uniqueness in his haiku. That is what drew his haiku to me because I felt an outlet had opened up for me from his haiku. I found enjoyment in reading his haiku and seeing deeper meaning to the behaviors I saw in people just by a few words. A lot better than a textbook to me. That is why I think Swede is a wonderful author and deserves praise for bringing a different approach to his haiku.

Works Cited:

*Almost Unseen: Selected Haiku of George Swede*, Brooks Books, 2000

*The Silence Between Us: Selected Haiku of Wally Swist*, Brooks Books 2005