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Carol Raisfeld: Bits and Pieces of Haiku

After reading quite a lot of haiku from Carol Raisfeld, I have found out that I enjoy more simplistic haiku about nature and peaceful opportunities. I really loved how Carol mostly writes about nature or even peaceful moments that present themselves in her life. In her biography from Haiku Buds, the website where she publishes her work, she mentions that both poetry and photography are integral parts of her life. She holds quite a few memberships to many poetry foundations dedicated to haiku and the sister styles of haiku. Both her photography and poetry have been published in many books and on quite a few websites. Her simplicity is something I look for in most of the haiku I read, so it is quite nice to be able to read her works.

sleepless --
a sliver of moon
between us

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 1

To me, this haiku radiates homeliness and comfort. It beautifully illustrates a moment in time where perhaps Raisfeld could not find her sleep in the middle of the night and decided to look over to her partner. She sees them sleeping peacefully but notices the distance between them. I do not know the season in which it was written, but I imagine that it is late summer or early fall, chilly enough to keep the window open at night to cool the house. Due to the window being open, there is a sliver of moonlight, perhaps a full moon, that peeks through the windowpanes and illuminates that small gap between them. I also imagine that they maybe had a fight, and that is why she cannot sleep, and why there is a distance between them on the bed.

city heat-
rainbow ices
in white paper cups

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 2

This is another one of those haiku that Raisfeld took the opportunity to immortalize into writing and another great example of her simplicity. There is a sense of childishness to this haiku that she wanted to remember. It is late afternoon on a hot summer's day, and she and her spouse decided to go get snow cones to cool off. I can see them walking side-by-side, hands sticky with melted

snow cone syrup and their paper cups soiled. Yet, neither care because they are with one another and that is all that matters to them. To me, this haiku speaks to enjoying the little things in life.

lazy afternoon --
his hand grazes the grass
from the hammock

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 5

Once again, Raisfeld captures a peaceful moment in time with this haiku. Reading this haiku, I can easily imagine a scene. She is walking out into the backyard with a drink in her hand, perhaps lemonade. There is condensation on the glass already with the heat of the lowering sun. Between two shaded trees, she sees her husband relaxing in the hammock. As she nears, she notices that he is asleep and that his hand has fallen off the side of it. It is a silly but serene moment in time she knew she had to write into a haiku. It is moments like that that truly capture the essence of the domesticity of a relationship. There is nothing like walking into a room - or outside - to see your partner asleep. Even driving a car and looking at the passenger seat to see them asleep, there really is nothing like it. This haiku does a really nice job alluding to that; it is simple but there is a lot that can be said about it.

smiling back
we share the old photo
of us

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 6

This haiku again captures the way Raisfeld writes by immortalizing moments in time that I believe she deems important. Here, she and her husband are looking through old photos and come across an old photo of them that makes them smile. I would like to imagine, much like my parents' own photo album, it is an image of one fashion trend or another that they followed that would look completely silly nowadays. Or there is a picture in the album that is from a family get-together that had great memories...or ended in a complete disaster that they can look back on and laugh about in the present time. There are endless possibilities on what type of photo they are looking at, but that just adds to the secrecy and intimacy of this haiku. We as readers do not know the whole story of the picture but we are able to relate because we have a picture that we can look at and smile at. We do not need the full story to completely understand what is happening.

september 2001
a small voice trembles
"where's daddy?"

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 8

This haiku breaks my heart and definitely breaks the mold of Raisfeld's simple and domestic haikus. This is obviously a haiku that refers to the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers. According to her biography at Haiku Buds, Raisfeld was living in Atlantic Beach, New York when the attacks occurred, placing her in the state during that time. I can see a young child looking up at their mother, little hands gripped in their pant leg, asking where their father was with tears in their eyes.

Other than that, there is not much to be said about this haiku other than the fact that not all immortalized moments in time are happy. In fact, many are devastatingly sad and pull at the heartstrings more often than not.

Conceptually, Raisfeld writes her haiku similarly to quite a few other haiku authors. After getting the chance to read many of her haiku, I noticed that her ideals and style are very similar to an author we read earlier in class this semester, Wally Swist. He also seems to have a “point and shoot” way of writing his haiku that can be seen in several of his haiku.

midnight pleasure
viewing Orion with
the naked eye

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, Page 9

Here is another haiku that Raisfeld wrote that captures a moment in time that cannot be recreated. Well, perhaps this one can, but there is a reason she wrote this one. To me, it was a late night with her husband as they laid on a blanket in their backyard or somewhere that they could clearly see the stars. Looking up at the night sky, she points out all these constellations and tells the history of how it came to be named. Then, she gets to Orion and tells the story of Artemis and Apollo, and how Orion became one with the stars. It is a peaceful night, it is just them, and that is all that matters to the two of them. I also have a personal connection with this haiku. I love nighttime, especially when I am in the country where the stars are visible. My granddad taught me lots of constellations, but the only one I can always remember and see is Orion. When he passed, I swear the belt of Orion was shining just a little bit brighter than normal. Every time I go out at night, I look for this constellation to remind myself that I always have him with me, if only in memory.

leaving the pub—
the moon in a barrel
half frozen

Carol Raisfeld, Haiku Buds, 13

Finally, a winter haiku! Winter is one of my favorite seasons by far because of the holiday spirit it brings and the unity people find themselves with. There are moments like this haiku that stay with a person forever, and sometimes it is just because of the uniqueness of that specific memory. I love the image of some sort of liquid, probably water, being partly frozen in a barrel just outside the pub they were in, and seeing the moon reflect back at them. It is almost in immortalization of the moon itself, capturing the white glow that shines back. I also love that it is a barrel that has the moon in its hold. Barrels to me are rustic and old-timey, even if they are still used today in various ways. Using a barrel to describe where the moon is being reflected makes me want to think of the history behind how that barrel ended up where it is, what its history is. History is immortalized in time by those who write about it for everyone to remember. I may be reading too much into this haiku, but I love everything to do about it in the way I interpreted it.

night train--
distant fireflies
bounce and blink

Carol Raisfeld, *Haiku Buds*, 7

illuminating
the silence between us . . .
firefly

Wally Swist, *The Silence Between Us*, 103

When I read Raisfeld's haiku, I was immediately reminded of Wally Swist's poem from his haiku book *The Silence Between Us*. There is something in both of these poems that makes me feel at peace. The use of the word "firefly" is used similarly, yet so different. In Raisfeld's haiku, the fireflies are distant, as though a memory. In Swist's haiku, they are right in front of the pair. Stylistically, both haikus have a pause the line before introducing the firefly into the haiku, as though waiting for a breathe before the firefly lights up.

Raisfeld's haiku echoes moments of distant memory. Reading it, I feel as though time is flowing differently, even if it is not. Almost like going to a Denny's Diner after midnight, or a 7/11 gas station store. Consciously, time moves just the same as it does anywhere else, but the atmosphere feels time-altering. When I read this haiku, that is exactly what I feel. I can imagine sitting on a late-night train, heading home, or on a trip somewhere. I am staring out the window, seeing the fireflies blinking in and out of existence in the distance. It is very peaceful but, as I said, time-altering.

In Swist's haiku, there is a certain melancholy to it. The two people in the "us" seemed to have had a fight, or some sort of argument, which is why there is a silence between them. They were probably outside, which is why there is a firefly that comes between them. I like the imagery of the firefly being almost like a lightbulb between them. When they are looking at each other, the firefly is a lightbulb moment, like being an "oh yeah, that is why I fell in love with them" sort of moment. The firefly serves as a remembrance of the good times that they have had together as a couple, and to not let this one argument come between them. They fell in love with one another and promised to love through the good and the bad. That is why I love this haiku so much. The firefly is a reminder of the time and dedication that the couple has devoted to the other.

Works Cited

- Raisfeld, Carol, Web Editor. *Haiku Buds: Haiku, Haibun, Haiga by Carol Raisfeld*. (2011). Web. 4 April 2021
- Swist, Wally, "The Silence Between Us," *The Haiku Foundation Digital Library*, (2005) Web. 6 April 2021