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EN 335 – Global Haiku
Dr. Brooks
8 April 2021

The Haiku Work of John Parsons

The writing style of haiku is one of the most beautiful art forms because it is so versatile. It can be about nature, love, memories, and/or the events of everyday life. While I love all topics of haiku, nature haiku is the most beautiful, in my opinion, which is why I chose John Parsons as my author. John Parsons is an English haiku writer as well as an avid art lover and creator. He studied at The Latymer School and has read and travelled widely. He is influenced by Arthur Koestler and Carl Jung, as well as tantric Buddhism, Hinduism, and tribal art. His interest in Japanese and Buddhist haiku is another reason I chose him because I also have an interest in cultural haiku. He is recognized for his awards, which include the Kikakuza Haibun Contest (2009); Klostar Ivanic Festival (2012), the Yamadera Basho Memorial Museum (2012), the Kumamoto City Festival (2012). I like John Parsons' work because he has a similar, yet different approach to nature haiku. Compared to someone like George Swede, Parsons' haiku is very specific and unique to his experiences. It provides the reader the opportunity to imagine what he is describing and what it would look like. While his haiku are very specific, I think there are ways people can relate to them because while they may not have experienced his haiku physically, they can relate to the emotion they bring up.

There are moments when nature/love/memory haiku can become one and that's the case for the following John Parsons haiku:

her love of tulips
how they still grow
in the vase

John Parsons, In a New Garden

This haiku means a lot to me because, as I've brought up so many times before, my grandmother's recent passing has been hard on me and my family. As we struggle to navigate life without her, it has recently occurred to me that our lives can't just stop because she's no longer here. She actually is all around me, in the trees, in music, in my everyday life. I like that Parsons chooses tulips to illustrate the continued growth and ability to move on after a loved one's passing. I also like that the tulips are this woman's favorite flower and that they continue to live on. The structure of this haiku is pleasing to the eye and fits very well with the tone and message Parsons wants to get across.

The majority of Parsons' nature haiku give off the vibe that he wrote them right there in nature and wrote exactly what he felt and saw. This makes sense because he loves travel and he's seen, I'm sure, some beautiful things. An example of this is the following haiku:

old padlock
for years rusted to a seaside
safety rail

John Parsons, World Haiku Series 2019 (80)

This haiku is interesting to me because I thought of this scene in two different ways. I initially thought of a place similar to the Pont des Arts, also known as the Lock Bridge in Paris, which is a bridge where people can put a padlock on the bridge for either themselves or, usually, couples attach one to represent their love. I wondered which situation this padlock in this haiku represents. However, the seaside and safety rail lines made me second guess my original story. Often times on the seaside, there's one random padlock on the metal bars that have no purpose being there. Whichever the case, as the reader, I can choose which story I want, and I personally chose the love story. I think this is an interesting topic for a haiku on Parsons' part. I usually don't notice those padlocks, but something about this one inspired a lovely little haiku.

The previous two haiku are a little unique for Parsons because his haiku often have a more forest tone to them. By that, I mean he writes about things that could lead the reader to think of a beautiful, big, green forest. For example:

river's bend
the merest swirl a sign
of deep currents

John Parsons, World Haiku Series 2019 (80)

For me, this creates a very clear image in my head. In movies and television, sometimes, there are flowing rivers in forests scenes. I can see the swirling water travel down the river to a big waterfall. This haiku has a very calm tone to it. I can almost hear the water and current as it flows. This haiku is a great example of nature haiku and how the beauty of nature can inspire such a simple and powerful haiku. The great thing about nature is that there are so many components. It's not just the beauty of water, but also the living creatures in the wild. Parsons captures the gorgeous moment of a bird's song in this haiku:

somewhere
lost in mist the robin
finds a song

John Parsons, In a New Garden

One of the most breathtaking moments a person can experience is walking through a park or forest, taking in the trees with the wind or sun in the air, and hearing the song of a bird high up in the trees. Birds sing for many reasons, but I like to think they're singing to me. These last two haiku go very well together because, while I can see the river in my mind, I also hear the bird calling. These haiku appeal to two senses and heighten the experience with word choice. I think Parsons describes the scene in such a beautiful way that can take you to a whole different place.

The birds share the forest with other animals that also fly, as well as animals that walk on all fours. I think Parsons also captures the life of these animals in a short and sweet way, for example:

hour of the fox
tracks cross, he briefly stares
then steps into shadows

John Parsons, World Haiku Series 2019 (80)

The everyday life of most animals is pretty simple. For the fox, they spend their days hunting and exploring. They're such a majestic animal and are very smart. When reading this haiku, I can clearly see a red fox slowly walking through the forest, constantly looking around and checking his surroundings. I can't help but wonder if this is another scene Parsons saw with his own two eyes.

John Parsons has such a beautiful view of nature and his real life experiences allow him to write specific and unique haiku. When comparing his work to other authors, his haiku has a deeper, almost darker tone. To illustrate this, the following haiku are by Parsons and by George Swede:

day of reflection
we stare through windows
at winter rain

John Parsons, World Haiku Series 2019 (80)

first warm spring day
I take my shadow
for a walk

Swede, AU, page 17

Both haiku offer a sense of reflection. In Parsons' haiku, it's cold, rainy winter day and the rain droplets provide answers and thoughts. We're getting the darker tone of a winter day and a deep reflection. In Swede's haiku, it's a warm spring day and a walk gives the opportunity for reflection. The warmth of the day provides a lighter tone and the use of the shadow as a friend and confidant is so good. Both haiku are beautiful and thought-provoking in their own ways.

I think John Parsons' haiku is important and influential because it comes from a more serious and descriptive place. He's unique because his nature haiku is different from other authors, but his writing creates a beautiful picture, which isn't a huge surprise because his writing and his artwork go hand in hand for him. I think Parsons lends a huge hand in nature haiku for having a diverse angle about it. His work in haiku has been very rewarding to research and explore.

Works Cited

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