



HAIBUN: POETIC JOURNEY

by Dawn Lesley Stewart

The form of Japanese poetry known as haibun first developed from a Japanese writer taking a journey and composing a diary of his travels in a mix of brief prose, haiku and sketches. Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) is perhaps the master of haibun. During the last years of his life, he traveled by foot throughout Japan, writing of his five journeys in terse combinations of prose and haiku. Basho's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* relates his five-month journey of 1,500 miles north of Edo in 1689 where he wrote of the wilds.

WHAT IS HAIBUN?

Haibun is a combination of prose strong in imagery and at least one haiku. The prose in a haibun is trimmed to its essence just as a haiku is composed of few words chosen for their particular meaning. A haibun relates a journey, whether the travels are a physical exploration of the world or an internal journey of discovery. Often haibun contain a revelation or epiphany obtained through experience. The prose can reflect fragmented thoughts or complete sentences, but the sentences are tight with all the words serving a purpose. It is important to note that a haibun is not a short story.

HOW MANY HAIKU?

Some traditionalists believe that haibun should be written with the prose portion first, ending with only one haiku. As more writers discover this form, the boundaries of style and format have grown to include more than one haiku interwoven with prose. The writer can arrange and intersperse the prose and haiku in whatever format suits the piece; however, the haiku is separated from the prose and written in haiku format. There is no set length to a haibun.

The haiku in a haibun does not have to relate directly to the subject matter. It is the reader who must decipher the link between the prose and the haiku — no explanation is necessary. The haiku connected to a haibun might be considered a microburst of detail.

HAIBUN ESSENTIALS

Haibun relates a journey
Is a combination of prose and haiku
The writing is sparse, tight
With strong imagery
It imparts a revelation

POSSIBILITIES – A HAIBUN BY DAWN LESLEY STEWART

Rain-swelled waters carve new twists in the once mild-mannered creek. White-capped water breeches muddied bank. Not even the mallard ducks dare swim amid mini whirlpools. Another branch shoots the rapids, and I wonder if I were that twisting twig, where would the waters carry me?

storms test weak structures
prune tree rot, scour earth air
nature's housecleaning

Waters recede after saturating the ground until it can hold no more liquid. Like a wick, the cement foundation drinks water from the too-full earth. Streams snake across the cellar floor. A pond is born. If I were a frog, would I choose to live in an indoor cement pond instead of resting on wild lily pads?

fireflies flicker
dancing joy to cricket song
electric display

Daffodil and crocus lift rain-drenched blossoms to catch warmth. Sun worshipers, daffodil trumpets herald sol's sky transit, twisting to follow its path. A bee hovers to sip nectar, zooming from flower to flower. Like Icarus, with wings to soar, how close to the sun dare I fly without burning?

adventure beckons
tantalizing unknown path
enter the abyss

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