



Haiku

Richard Wright , Yoshinobu Hakutani (Editor) , Robert L. Tener (Editor) , Julia Wright (Introduction)

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"As good a haiku poet as this country has ever produced."--*Seattle Weekly*

Like all great writers, Richard Wright never failed to create works of breathtaking originality, depth, and beauty. With **Native Son** he gave us Bigger Thomas, still one of the most provocative and controversial characters in fiction. With **Black Boy** he offered a candid and searing depiction of racism and poverty in America. And now, forty years after his death, he has bestowed us with one of the finest collections of haiku in American literature.

Wright became enamored of haiku at the end of his life, and in this strict, seventeen-syllable form he discovered another way of looking at the world. He rendered images of nature and humanity that raised questions and revealed strikingly fresh perspectives. The publication of this collection is not only one of the greatest posthumous triumphs of American letters but also a final testament to the noble spirit and enduring artistry of Richard Wright.

Haiku Details

Date : Published April 4th 2000 by Anchor (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780385720243

Author : Richard Wright , Yoshinobu Hakutani (Editor) , Robert L. Tener (Editor) , Julia Wright (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Poetry, Fiction, American, African American Literature, Environment, Nature, Literature, Asian Literature

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From Reader Review Haiku for online ebook

Elizabeth says

What a fantastic collection. A real breath of fresh air. I had never read any Richard Wright before, and I'm not sure if/when I'll pick up other books by him, but these haiku are really, really nice. Some obviously more so than others, but they frequently exemplify the traditional characteristics of haiku (the split, the seasonal reference) and give a fresh perspective on the mundane. I haven't been reading this book in order, so I don't think I've actually read all of the poems, but I've read a number of them more than once. I don't think I'll ever "finish" this book, so I finally decided to mark it as "read" anyway, and I'll continue to read it, and return to it in later years I'm sure.

Lori says

This was written during the last months of Richard Wright's life. The haiku is meaningful and adheres to the strict 5-7-5 pattern. I highly recommend this book; I usually peruse this collection once a year.

Vicky says

Two passages from the afterward to Haiku: This Other World by Richard Wright.

"The intent of all haiku and the discipline of the form is to render the haiku moment, to express the 'ah-ness.' In linking directness and paradox, the essential aspects of haiku indicate that the poet needs to look straight at things and to transform the perception into words that do not depend upon metaphors or symbols. Rather, the poet should present the event or object nude, so as to form a doorway for the mind. The paradox results simultaneously of two different things being perceived as one through the response of the poet, an effect that cannot be expressed solely through individual words."

*

"Despite the large number of haiku that he wrote [4,000+], it was difficult for Wright to master in such a short time—a year perhaps—the complexities of haiku. Many of these haiku [817] represent his best poetry, but he never totally learned to eliminate his political and personal attitudes in them. Clearly he was experimenting with his own African-American approach to the haiku form. Constance Webb is correct in saying that to this uniquely Japanese form of poetry Wright was trying 'to bring the life and consciousness of a black American.' He was not only writing out of the themes and desires that filled his earlier work, he was writing out of his loneliness. He explained to his friend Margrit de Sablonière: 'I'd like to be alone, as much alone as possible. Have you taken up solitude for your friend? I have. When I'm alone and wake up in the morning, with my world of dreams close by me, I write without effort. By noon, I've done a day's work. All else, after that, is gravy, as the Americans say.' Wright never tired of trying to fuse his two dreams—of black union with white and of his personal symbolical union with nature."

1

I am nobody

A red sinking autumn sun

Took my name away.

4

Sweep away the clouds

And let a dome of blue sky

Give this sea a name!

7

Make up your mind, snail!

You are half inside your house,

And halfway out!

37

Past the window pane

A solitary snowflake

Spins furiously.

56

The cool green melon

Made me trace my forefinger

Along its whole length.

137

A pregnant black cat

Poking in a paper bag

In a purple dawn.

140

A spring pond as calm

As the lips of the dead girl

Under its water.

164

I slept so long and sound

But I did not know why until

I saw the snow outside.

183

All the city's bells

Clang deafeningly this midnight,

Frightening the New Year!

189

Does the willow know

That the tip of its drooping branch

Is touching the ice?

216

The trilling sparrows

Sound as if they too had got

A letter today!

221

Even the horse looks

At the duck and her ducklings

Following in line.

223

A highway of black ants

Diagonally bisecting

A sun-hot white wall.

231

At the dying sun,

Glaring with greedy black eyes,

Tiger-lilies.

312

How melancholy

That these sweet magnolias

Cannot smell themselves.

368

While she undresses,

A spring moon touches her breasts

For seven seconds.

436

A nude fat woman

Stands over a kitchen stove,

Tasting applesauce.

508

It is September,

The month in which I was born;

And I have no thoughts.

519

Even my old friends

Seem like newly met strangers

In this first snowfall.

529

Fire-fly, why play here?

The boys and girls are in the backyard,

Waiting for you.

599

She has departed:

All the globes of golden pears

Are pointed in pain.

602

A slow creeping snail;

Moments later I could not

See it anywhere.

648

I am positive

That this is the same spring wind

That I felt yesterday.

650

How could this rose die?

This rich red color perish?

This sweet odor fade?

662

I wonder how long
Was that violet dancing
Before I saw it?

781

There is nobody
To watch the kitten playing
With the willow tip.

783

I cannot find it,
That very first violet
Seen from my window.

C.B. Wentworth says

A beautiful collection of haiku that straddles the line between traditional haiku and senryu. Overall I enjoyed Wright's imagery and subtle humor as he explored the natural world and the human psyche.

Eric says

Richard Wright used haiku to grapple with a string of tragic human personal loss and his own illness.

Richard Wright's daughter, Julia Wright described her father's work as "self-developed antidotes against illness, and that "breaking down words into syllables matched the shortness of his breath." They also offered her father "a new form of expression and a new vision, with the threat of death constantly before him, he found inspiration, beauty, and insights in and through the haiku form. The discovery and writing of haiku also helped him come to terms with nature and the earth, which in his early years he had viewed as hostile and equated with suffering and physical hunger.

Howard says

Richard Wright's style of haiku may not be one for the purist, but if you can appreciate poetry without the need for neat little categories, you might just enjoy it. Wright uses the familiar 5-7-5 style bemoaned by many experts, but styles, like book covers, are hardly worthy of judgment.

If you're looking for something other than the same traditional haiku that have existed for centuries, this is a nice departure. Wright's moments are simple and straightforward. I have found myself rereading this book dozens of times since I first stumbled upon it a few years ago, and I expect any reader not bound by traditional haiku limitations will enjoy it as well.

Jo says

One of my favorite poetry books, this is *Native Son* and *Black Boy* author Richard Wright's posthumously-published volume of haiku written during the last 18 months of his life in what his daughter calls "his French exile". He would hang newly written haiku on sheets of paper in his Paris apartment like laundry, and count syllables sitting in cafes. This is life closely observed through Wright's eyes and heart and crafted with a Japanese, Zen-like precision. These are wonderful.

Crystal says

I had read a review of this book when it was first published, but I didn't get around to buying it until I came back to Japan and joined an English haiku circle.

Now I'm a huge fan. The images are beautiful and Richard (as we call him in my haiku circle) strictly follows the 5-7-5 form. I reread this book whenever I need to recharge.

Nothing like an African-American in France writing haiku in English to help put everything in perspective.

Will says

That Richard Wright spent the last years of his life writing hundreds of haiku is one of my favorite literary facts. This is worth checking out even just for curiosity's sake, but many of the 800 poems in here are excellent, and a good introduction to serious haiku.

Paul says

From the gourd of the purest waters which can reflect the bottomless abyss of the sky, at times, but where often the moon looms, luring & longing as a mysterious lover for whom memories ache to be carved.

Wright, in the carriage of haiku, seems a natural, in every sense of the word, as the majority of the writing invokes the bucolic spirit of the art form. The moments are frozen in the strokes of his artistry. Snapshots which would forever chase the path of oblivion if not for these laconic records. As I became familiar with the style of haiku, I realized how devout Wright was to remaining faithful to its origins. For the style is

deceptively simple if one has no prior knowledge to the traditions which characterize the style. I realized how in-tuned one must be. How stripped one must seek to be to attain the mindset of the artist. I gained a healthy respect for the art learning about the purposes behind the rhythms, the subject matter, the religious implications, & the internal search involved to evoke the brilliant chiming in harmony with nature & aspects of Zen Buddhism. Wright cannot resist in making the style all his own & the reader would expect nothing less from such a strong voice but indeed he pays a wonderful homage to those who established the art & to the traditions which continue to beckon forth the soul into the woods of our own psyche & into the chasm of eternal nature which will never leave us alone. I for one am glad that it shall never cease. This call shall lead us into true serenity, I find.

Kathleen Brown says

This book is not to be rushed through. Each haiku (there are 817) is like a small picture in time, yet timeless in the contemplation of it. Richard Wright's heightened observations of the everyday world around him are exquisitely painted in the simple, spare form of haiku. A meditative read.

Terra says

This i was my second time reading this volume. The first in Halifax on vacation and the second a page or so a day in the morning over many months. I know I will read it again in years to come. It inspired me to buy several more books of haiku and now I can't start the day without a few haiku; a morning ritual.

Look, look,look!
These are all the violets
Left by last night's rain!

Jenny says

This is an excellent collection of haiku. I've never read anything by Wright before, but I enjoy his voice, which is lively and melancholic. It's nostalgic and sad but beautiful and evocative. I read most of the haiku rather quickly, but some of them made me pause and linger over the beauty of the words, the ingenuity of the alliteration, and the poignancy of the images. I wrote a few down that stood out to me the most. The introduction by Wright's daughter is well-written and informative. She also has a lovely style. I wasn't too impressed by the Afterword written by the book's editors, however. They wrote about Japanese haiku, the elements necessary to them, and their influence on Western writing. Their tone was condescending, and the actual writing was repetitive. I did learn about Zen Buddhism's heavy influence on and presence within haiku and why haiku was the most appropriate vehicle for Wright's genius during his last days. I recommend this collection to fans of Wright's fiction and nonfiction, to readers who love haiku, and to people who enjoy fleeting images of beauty and loss captured in three lines of verse.

Kate says

I learned that I am incapable of reading large quantities of haiku at one time.

The Black Geek says

This was an excellent group of poems composed by one of the most beloved and skilled 20th century American writers. I appreciated how this work shows us a different side of this writer and his style; Wright never limited his form of expression. If you have enjoyed his fiction, his haiku are definitely worth reading.

Alicia Bernal says

HAIKU by Richard Wright

His is a precise pattern of seventeen syllable, that is- 5-7-5. It has to take the gentlest soul to count every single heartbeat that lived out to share the sublime experience of his poetry.

Imagine then his coming to life in the book speaking of the haiku of nature you longed to hear in order to understand the everyday life far more deeply:

“Dewdrop joins dewdrop
Till a petal holds a pool
Reflecting its rose.”
~Richard Wright

Mark says

I only read the haiku portion of the book, so feel free to think of that how you may. I liked Wright's poetry and found it inspiring for my own practice the first time I looked at this book; I'm glad I went back to finish reading the poetry. I had many I enjoyed, so I'll just share one:

In a quiet forest,
Out of a pool of cold rain,
A rat laps the stars.

Jonathan says

Love this book! Most people are familiar with his books "Native Son" and "Black Boy." Wright was also a poet. This is a nice collection of haiku he wrote over a period of time while he basically lived in French exile. He wrote about four thousand haiku. Wright selected 817 for this collection in 1960 the year he died. There are also copious notes in this book that help put these poems in historical and cultural context

Robert Hobkirk says

Haiku was written not long before Wright's death, and what a treasure it was to be left to his family and the world. All the haiku are in the disciplined seventeen beats, 5/7/5 line construction. He spent over a year writing haiku and nothing else. These haiku show what a sensitive beautiful soul Wright was. While reading them I thought, "Wish mine were as good."

Lynn says

Moving Haiku poems from the beginning of the book until the end. These poems were written at the end of Wright's life as he was in self exile in Paris. When he died, his family found these poems written on scraps of paper, in diaries and other assorted places for writing. They are quite beautiful and a moving tribute to the writing of Richard Wright.
