Abstract

Heejung Kim, Ph.D., May 2018

THE OTHER AMERICAN POETRY AND MODERNIST POETICS: RICHARD WRIGHT, JACK KEROUAC, SONIA SANCHEZ, JAMES EMANUEL, AND LENARD MOORE (212 PP.)

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The purpose of this dissertation is to study Richard Wright, Jack Kerouac, Sonia Sanchez, James Emanuel, and Lenard Moore as haiku poets in their efforts to create their own genres. Only a few published critical essays exist on how American writers composed haiku and applied the philosophical and aesthetical principles of haiku. The genuine identity of the American haiku, however, has not been determined to date. The American haiku seems innovative since it is a hybrid genre whose inspirations are derived from Eastern culture and American culture. This dissertation explores each poet’s haiku and investigates whether it is just an escape from the traditional style of American poetry or if the American haiku is truly a different poetic genre with its own distinct identity. This study examines each poet’s characteristics, as well as his or her limitations as a haiku poet.
THE OTHER AMERICAN POETRY AND MODERNIST POETICS: RICHARD WRIGHT, JACK KEROUAC, SONIA SANCHEZ, JAMES EMANUEL, AND LENARD MOORE

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by

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine Richard Wright, Jack Kerouac, Sonia Sanchez, James Emanuel, and Lenard Moore’s haiku in terms of the poets’ efforts to open their own genres. This kind of research has not been done before except for a few published critical essays in regard to the haiku itself and the way in which American poets composed haiku based on the techniques and the aesthetics of Japanese haiku. Akira Kawano in “Haiku and American Poetry: The Influence of Haiku upon American Poetry” notes that American haiku poets had written haiku under the influence of classic haiku and stresses an association between nature and human nature in haiku. Kawano further explains: “Haiku is an unrhymed short Japanese poem regarding the essence of a moment keenly perceived, in which Nature is linked to human nature, and usually consists of seventeen syllables (5-7-5 syllables)” (Kawano 122). Despite American poets publishing their haiku, the discussion over the significance of the genuine identity of the American haiku with the five poets has thus far not taken place. Ian Marshall and Megan Simpson in “Deconstructing Haiku: A Dialogue” mention that “... haiku is a poetic form that generally concerns itself with the world outside the self, the world of nature, and the possibility of experiencing oneness with all that” (Marshall and Simpson 117). Still, American poets’ attempts to compose haiku has to be reconsidered in regard to the American poets’ intention to create their own innovate genre.

Much of the existing criticism merely focuses on how the poets applied the philosophical and aesthetical principles of haiku to Western poetics. This dissertation, however,
investigates how the poets rely on the philosophical backgrounds and aesthetical principles as well as evaluates each of the poets critically in regard to whether the poets successfully created their own genre as American haiku.

Yoshinobu Hakutani in *Haiku and Modernist Poetics* (2009) observes that Wright closely looked at the relationship between human beings and nature: “In African life, Wright saw a closer relationship between human beings and nature than that between human beings and their social and political environment . . .” (Hakutani 115). Wright studied R. H. Blyth’s theory and practice of classic haiku in the four volumes of *Haiku* and found that haiku poets wanted to be a part of nature. Kerouac also studied Blyth’s works as did Wright. Kerouac notes in *The Dharma Bums* (1958) that he studied the same book: “We also had a perfect little bathroom with a tub and hot water . . . and books, books, hundreds of books everything from Catullus to Pound to Blyth . . .” (Kerouac 17).

In this context, the fact that Wright and Kerouac studied Blyth’s theory suggests that both the poetics of American haiku poets and Eastern poetics share a common philosophical background. Moreover, both Wright and Kerouac acquired knowledge of Zen from Daisetz Suzuki.

Toru Kiuchi in “Zen Buddhism In Richard Wright’s Haiku” notes that “Wright tried to have a full understanding of the practice of Zen, in the light of Daisetz Suzuki’s theoretical explanation of Zen: . . .” (Kiuchi 23). Sarah Haynes in “An Exploration of Jack Kerouac’s Buddhism: Text and Life” notes that “From this respect and interest in Suzuki, Kerouac came to be influenced by the Zen tradition of haiku poetry” (Haynes 164).
Haiku began to develop as an art, during the middle of the seventeenth century; it originated from the \textit{waka} \textsuperscript{1} (Japanese song). Haiku consists of seventeen syllables written vertically in three parts of five, seven, and five syllables. Haiku is thus identical to the first three parts of the \textit{waka}. Traditional Japanese haiku poets were interested in nature such as the elements of nature and seasonal change. The ancient Japanese people lived on the islands, but their origins are unknown. They had to adapt their lives to nature and live in harmony even though they confronted nature’s hazards. Buddhism and Shintoism, the philosophical and religious backgrounds of the Japanese, emphasize that the soul exists in nature, animals and plants. Traditional haiku poets did not use the negative aspect of nature such as earthquakes or floods. Similarly, they were not interested in illnesses and eroticism, themes in which some American haiku poets are interested in. Instead, the traditional haiku poets were rather interested in beautiful aspects of nature such as flowers, trees, the sunset, the moon, animals, and genuine love rather than erotic love. Artists, writers, priests, and noblemen could spare the time to appreciate nature and found beauty inside nature while people who earned their living by labor often suffered from the negative aspects and consequences of nature.

Haiku became popular among Japanese poets in the early sixteenth century. There were four most-celebrated haiku poets: Matsuo Basho (1644-1695), Yosa Buson (1716-1783), Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828), and Masaoka Shiki (1869-1902). Basho was an essayist and a poet of life. He was concerned with God as he saw himself in the mind of the poet rather than just observing flowers and fields. He realized that the art of haiku comes from human beings’ affinity

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Waka} is the oldest verse form written vertically in five parts (5-7-5-7-7).
with nature. He considered the creation of things that already exist in nature. Haiku writing, however, requires the artistic sensibility of a poet as this famous haiku by Basho shows:

The old pond;
A frog jumped into,--
The sound of the water.²

(Blyth 277)

Basho expresses the significance that underlies images such as a jumping frog, a barking dog, or a chirping cicada rather than finding beauty in waka.

Buson, on the contrary, worked as an artist who dealt with things as they exist by and for themselves, as the following haiku by Buson demonstrates:

Snow-break also
Can be heard,
This dark night

(Blyth 249)

He re-joins two apparently unrelated things like the darkness and the sound of the bamboos breaking things. The point is that this kind of re-joining intensifies noises outside and humanizes the snow and the bamboos.

Issa was so called a poet of destiny. He was a humanist concerned with man, and in particular, man the weak angel, but also with birds and beasts as they struggle like humans to make a living and keep their heads above water. Basho and Issa abided by the classical principles of haiku, and they both were devout Buddhists. Basho’s followers simply relied on an

artificiality reminiscent of the comic *renga.*³ In contrast, Issa did not have any disciples when he died.

Unlike the other poets, Shiki was an atheist. A modernist poet, Shiki, criticized the work of Basho, while affirming the superiority of Buson. At the end of the nineteenth century, Shiki revolted against the traditional haiku established in the seventeenth century that produced remarkable poets like Buson and Issa. He was strongly realistic though he took haiku back to Buson’s style and viewed things beautiful as an artist. In 1868, the Meiji restoration changed all aspects of Japanese culture, and Shiki became a leader in literature. He emphasized writing to please himself. Shiki understood that traditional haiku lacked direct and spontaneous expressions. Traditional haiku followed old rules of grammar and used *kireji* (cutting words) and continued to twist words and phrases. Shiki, however, kept such aesthetic principles as *yugen* and *sabi* that traditional haiku poets had applied.

On the surface, *Yugen* appears similar in its catharsis, but it is not the type that relates to the emotional stress derived from tragedy. Instead, *yugen* is concerned with understanding the course of nature. It also seems to hold a sense of resignation, but that is not all that *yugen* conveys. *Yugen* can either express sorrow or happiness.

*Sabi* originated from the verb *sabiru* (to rust) implying “aged,” and it is related to loneliness. In fact, *sabi* stands for grace rather than splendor, which suggests quiet beauty in *sabi* in contrast to robust beauty. Basho’s “A Crow” exemplifies *sabi:*

* A crow
  
  Perched on a withered tree

³ *Renga* is a waka written by two or more people. *Renga* consists of at least two stanzas.
In the autumn evening.

(qtd. in Hakutani 12)

The sense of loneliness is suggested from the crow sitting on an old tree, and this lonely scene is emphasized by the autumn evening. In this haiku, the scenery does not have much detail, and the image is created with a graceful description of the elements. The image depicted in this haiku is dark: the crow is black; the branch is dark brown; and the evening is also dusky.

Wabi is also closely related to sabi. Wabi is antithetical to the folk or plebeian saying, “Hana yori dango” (Rice dumplings are preferred to flowers). Some poets thought that humans pursue beauty more than food; this is only available to human beings, for this kind of pursuit is impossible in animals or other nonhuman beings. Thus, wabi refers to beauty that stemmed from poverty. Similarly, Basho also pursued wabi, although his family was not rich and he lived a life as an artist.

It is important to go back to the historical and philosophical backgrounds to compare and contrast Eastern and Western aesthetics. Buddhism, Zen, and Confucianism influence the Eastern aesthetics of ideology and philosophy. Confucianism, a philosophy of culture and humanity, underlies traditional Japanese haiku. This philosophy accounts for poetic expressions of sobriety, reserve, and lack of extravagance and hyperbole. The classic haiku influenced by Confucianism aims at a life of perfection at the same time it aims at presence of mind.

Zen philosophy can also be regarded as the state of mind for classic haiku. Zen aims at a state of nothingness, mu. Mu is free of human subjectivity. This state of mind is entirely free of any thought or emotion, and the consciousness is identical to the state of nature itself. Nevertheless, an exception exists in that haiku conveys the poet’s feeling, which is aroused by
nature. Above all, self does not exist in classic haiku. There is a conversion between loneliness and pleasure. In other words, loneliness can be converted to pleasure. Classic Japanese haiku is short and reluctant to use many words in composition. This principle has its roots in Zen philosophy, which aims at brevity, and brevity usually accompanies omission of personal pronouns that eventually leads to oppression of egotism.

Wright applied the concept of *mu* in his haiku. This is away from egotism and self-centeredness. He also applied the Buddhist theory of transmigration. Wright actually grew up in Christianity, regarded nonhuman beings as simply nonhuman. However, nonhuman beings are considered as equal to human beings in Buddhism. Wright learned that not only must human beings treat their fellow human beings with compassion, but that they must also treat nonhuman beings as their equals, due to the inspiration of Buddhist theory and practice. Classic haiku paved the way for the viewpoint of the world to Wright that human beings are not at the center of the universe.

The most useful aesthetic principles involved in haiku composition are *yugen*, *sabi*, and *wabi*, as shown in R. H. Blyth’s *Haiku: Eastern Culture* (1981). Furthermore, the philosophy and aesthetics of Zen influenced Wright’s haiku. Buddhism, conversely, influenced Kerouac’s haiku. Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*, which is an autobiography, expresses the concepts of not only Zen philosophy but also Buddhism. Buddhism aims to heal human suffering. In Buddhist belief, there is transmigration of soul and the soul exists not only in human beings but also in animals, plants, and so on. There is no distinction between human and nonhuman.

In addition, life is regarded as suffering in Buddhism. However, Kerouac’s haiku do not depict human suffering even though Kerouac completely follows the aesthetic principles of
haiku. Kerouac also could not escape from a Western mindset when it came to approaching Buddhism even though he was known as a serious and devout Buddhist. As such, Kerouac could not overcome this limitation to deliver the genuine philosophy of the East in his writing.

Aside from Kerouac, Sanchez also follows the form and aesthetics of traditional Japanese haiku. In many of her haiku, Sanchez applied the aesthetics as well as ideological principles of American blues. There is a common notion that the females have some weakness and vulnerability in both Sanchez and traditional haiku. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that Sanchez insists that the women should raise their voice with confidence. In traditional haiku, it is a virtue to conceal the female body seeing that women should remain modest and obedient. In other words, traditional haiku seldom depicts the female body. Sanchez, however, did not follow her contemporary writers in the end and instead synthesized her feministic voice with blues lyrics on the subjects of love, loss, and self-sufficiency. Eventually, she emphasized her role as a female writer.

Whereas Sanchez applied blues element in her haiku, Emanuel put jazz elements into his haiku. Emanuel’s jazz haiku conveys elements of both jazz and haiku, which in turn created a new genre, “jazz haiku.” He expressed the reality of the African Americans, reflecting poverty, adversity, suffering, and loneliness by using the philosophical and aesthetic principles of mu, wabi, and sabi. The importance of Emanuel’s jazz haiku is that he educates and inspires African Americans to change their attitudes without any certain force or insistence.

Moore, in contrast, had an interest in recording African American culture. He used the haiku form to describe African American culture. Like Sanchez, Moore believed that the African American poets were obligated to give the community their voice so that it could be educated
and capable of initiating much-needed societal reform.

Historically, Yone Noguchi played an important role in spreading haiku and the Japanese poetics to the West in the twentieth century. In 1903, Noguchi met William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) in London and Noguchi also encountered Ezra Pound in 1911. Pound was the pioneer of American haiku. Fascinated with haiku and its imagery in particular, Pound wrote “In a Station of the Metro.” He acknowledged his indebtedness to Japanese poetics and the art of haiku in his essay, “Vorticism,” which was published in *The Fortnightly Review*. This essay introduced Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” and quoted Moritake’s haiku, “The fallen blossoms flies to its branch: A butterfly,” just before discussions of his “In a Station of the Metro.” Pound created an image that can be developed into another organism rather than just a simple decorative emblem or symbol. Additionally, Pound aimed at directness and clarity of expression in imagism. He did not like the Victorian poetic style, which he considered verbose. Likewise, Pound is frequently mentioned in discussions of American haiku. The poets discussed in this dissertation should be also discussed in depth.

The Western world’s interest in haiku was sidetracked temporarily due to the Second World War. British writers in Tokyo started to renew the West’s interest in haiku. Among them, Harold G. Henderson and R. H. Blyth were the most important scholars. In 1952, Gary Snyder’s haiku written in his diary was published, *Earth House Hold* (1969). Then, Allen Ginsberg read Blyth’s work and began to compose haiku. In fact, Ginsberg wrote a haiku while he was reading R.H. Blyth’s 4 volumes of *Haiku* in 1955. In 1958, Henderson revised his original work from 1930 and retitled it *An Introduction to Haiku* before it fired more interest in haiku in America. Another remarkable work in 1958 was Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*. The narrator of *The
*Dharma Bums*, Ray Smith [Jack Kerouac], writes haiku after reading the four volumes of haiku. This implies Blyth’s 4 volumes of *Haiku*. William J. Higginson in *The Haiku Handbook* (1985) mentions Wright. He explains, “The Afro-American novelist Richard Wright had studied R. H. Blyth’s books, and wrote several hundred haiku during the last year and a half or so of his life” (Higginson 65). Wright, in fact, wrote four thousand haiku in his last eighteen months of life.

Although the American poets composed American haiku based on traditional haiku aesthetics and techniques, the genuine identity of this American haiku should be reconsidered. The American poets’ skills of composing haiku should be investigated, as how the American poets invented his or her own haiku. Then, the position of this American haiku should be reconsidered to find out whether the American poets truly made their own style of haiku or merely imitated the haiku form as another colonial reminiscence. American haiku appears innovative on the surface since the American poets came up with a new style derived from the Eastern world. Even so, it remains important to find out whether it is only an escape from the traditional style of American poetry or if American haiku is truly a different one conveying its own genuine identity.
Chapter One

Richard Wright’s Haiku as His Spiritual Quest

I. History of Richard Wright’s Haiku

Richard Wright did not have much understanding of Japan until 1941, when he requested a passport to visit Russia, Japan, and China as an African American foreign correspondent. At first, Wright thought Japan as a country to criticize and condemn. However, his attitude toward Japan soon changed. To Wright, who would author four thousand haiku in the last eighteen months of his life, Japan was an important country to visit. This chapter explores the history and the philosophical backgrounds of Wright’s haiku by comparing it with classic haiku. By doing so, this chapter will see how Wright’s haiku relates to modernism. Kiuchi in “Zen Buddhism in Richard Wright’s Haiku” notes:

Richard Wright had little understanding of haiku as well as Zen in 1937 when he wrote articles “Harlem Party to Protest Japan’s Action,” “Picket Lines Win Withdrawal of All Goods Made in Japan,” and “Pickets Force Stores to Ban Japan Goods” . . . . These articles were written to protest against the Japanese invasion of China. . . . Japan seemed quite different to Wright four years later. . . . For him, Japan was no longer a country to criticize and condemn but an important place to visit. (Kiuchi 19)

Although Wright’s request to travel was rejected by the United States Department of State, it was highly significant in view of his interest in classic Japanese haiku that Wright met Sinclair Beiles in Paris in 1959. Beiles, a British African, was born in Uganda in 1930 and died in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. He was one of the Beat poets living in Paris and shared the idea of Zen
Buddhism with Wright. The Beat poets, such as Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Kerouac, were all fascinated with Zen. Wright also borrowed from Beiles the four volumes of *Haiku* by R. H. Blyth, who was the eminent Japanologist and the most influential haiku scholar and critic. After reading Blyth’s volumes, Wright learned that Zen was a spiritual aesthetics and that there are thirteen characteristics of the Zen state of mind: selflessness, loneliness, grateful acceptance, humor, freedom, wordlessness, non-intellectuality, contradictoriness, non-morality, simplicity, materiality, love, and courage. Among them, selflessness is one of the most important characteristics of the philosophy.

The loneliness in haiku is the same as *mu*, nothingness, in Zen. Wright related Zen to loneliness and the concept of nothingness. Wright had Zen Buddhism in mind in the first place and started composing haiku, such as the following:

444

When the letter came,

The autumn sea sounded sad

And the clouds stood still.

(*HTOW* 111)¹

The word “still” makes the atmosphere extremely quiet and lonely because there is a sense of expectation when the letter comes. However, everything is too calm and motionless that leads to nothingness. Nothingness is a joyful state of mind. The sound of the sea, especially when combined with the “autumn” and being “sad,” conveys that there is nothing to celebrate. The

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12
phrase “sounded sad” suggests that the atmosphere is sad because it is up to how the listener accepts the sound of the sea. This reflects Wright’s state of emotion, but his emotion is expressed indirectly. On the contrary, he uses objects such as “autumn sea” and “clouds” and this is also linked with the characteristics of haiku. Haiku essentially portrays natural phenomena, suppressing human subjectivity. Here, the elements of nature such as “autumn sea” and “clouds” convey his sentiment, which resembles T. S. Eliot’s objective correlative.5

The mid-nineteenth century was a starting point of Japonisme.6 Japan began to open its ports to foreign countries in 1865, when woodblock prints, potteries, and paintings of Japan went into the markets of Europe. This caused a fever for Japan and its culture. In this period, there was a Japan boom in publishing. Writers began to have interest in Japanese literary forms such as tanka and haiku. In 1905, Ezra Pound adopted the haiku form into his poetry. Sachi Nakachi in “From Japonisme to Modernism: Richard Wright’s African American Haiku” observes that African Americans also made an effort on turning Japonisme into another stage in this period. Starting with the musicals The Swing Mikado and The Hot Mikado, the performers were African Americans. Moreover, African American writers first started to visit Japan. For instance, Langston Hughes visited Japan in 1933 and W.E.B. Du Bois traveled to Japan three years after

5 T. S. Eliot in his essay “Hamlet,” published in 1919, meant by the phrase “objective correlative” a real object, situation, or scene in life and nature that expresses the poet’s emotion. For example, in the opening lines of Eliot’s poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” (“Let us go then you and I / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon the table” [Anthology xxx]), Prufrock, the poet-speaker, feels numb like a patient etherized on the table in a hospital. Eliot wants to evoke Prufrock’s emotion in the reader.

6 Sachi Nakachi, in “From Japonisme to Modernism: Richard Wright's African American Haiku,” defines Japonisme is an aesthetic movement that started in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century.
Hughes’ visit. The interest in Japan to African Americans differed from that of Euro-Americans. The African Americans were in search of their own identity through their interest in Japan. They are trying to find something new and something different in order to establish their own identity. In literature, some well-known African American writers began to focus on Japanese haiku. Through haiku, they tried to create their own genre.

Further, Wright mentions that African Americans had sympathy for Japan when Anglo-Americans grew antagonistic toward Japan. In “Zen Buddhism in Richard Wright’s Haiku,” Kiuchi considers the relationship between Wright’s ancestor’s Asian heritage and his enthusiasm for Asian and Japanese culture:

He was partly of Native American descent as on his father’s side, his grandmother, Laura Calvin, was partly Choctaw Indian (qtd. Rowley 4). Native Americans are believed to have originally come from the Eurasian Continent after crossing the Bering Strait tens of thousands of years ago. It would be interesting to think that Wright’s ancestor’s Asian blood was what aroused his enthusiasm for Asian and Japanese culture and what eventually led him to reach haiku and Zen. (Kiuchi 31)

African Americans believed Japan could be their model as a colored brother. The 1920s and 1930s were the age of modernism. Writers such as Eliot and Pound were representative of modernism but also included not only minority writers but also foreign and immigrant writers. The modernist movement coincided with the emergence of Asian modernity.

The so-called new Buddhism movement started in Japan in the late nineteenth century, when Buddhism began to revive and spread worldwide. Daisetz Suzuki, born in Japan in 1870,
attended Zen practices in a temple at Kamakura while a student of Tokyo University, and met Shoen Shaku. Shaku travelled to the United States with Suzuki as an interpreter because Shaku was invited to speak at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. From then on, Suzuki worked as an interpreter and a translator, and he even published his own book, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1927). Thereafter, he published several books on Zen in English, which made a significant impact on the Western intellectuals. Carl Jung also read his books, noting that Suzuki’s books were popular because they were written in the Western rhetoric. Suzuki used the terms “Man” and “Nature,” borrowed from the nineteenth century American movement of Transcendentalism, to explain Zen philosophy. Also, the term “simplicity” in Zen bears a similarity to William Wordsworth. Blyth, a friend of Suzuki and a translator of haiku, was influenced by Suzuki, but his translation of haiku differed from Suzuki’s. Blyth acted more like those who wanted to keep Japan away from modernism due to their own feelings of nostalgia. Moreover, Blyth compared haiku to English Romantic poetry, and his reading of Japanese haiku eventually led to the late-modernist writers as well as the American haiku movement.

Going back to the history of Western poets’ writing of haiku, Julien Vocance, Paul-Louis Couchoud, and others in France began to write haiku in French. In 1910, Michael Revon completed a translation of a Japanese anthology of literature. Five years later, Cocance Vocance wrote a group of haiku, *Cent Visons de Guerre*. By 1920, at least a dozen poets were writing haiku for *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Around the same time, American poets began to compose haiku, the most famous of which was Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

      Petals on a wet, black bough.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

(Anthology 1274)

The following haiku by Wright is reminiscent of Pound’s discussion of Moritake’s haiku, “The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: / A butterfly”:

626

Off the cherry tree,

(Anthology 1297)\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{7} For the text, Ferguson, Margaret et al. The Norton Anthology of Poetry. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004 is used. Hereafter, as Anthology.
One twig and its red blossom

Flies into the sun.

*(HTOW 157)*

This haiku portrays a scene where a twig with its red blossom flies into the sun as if a bird flew of the cherry tree. The use of “blossom” is common in both haiku, and the element of nature is a common subject in haiku both in the traditional Japanese haiku and in the haiku written by Western poets. Further, the images in haiku do not stand alone. The following example by Wright depicts a natural scene as an illusion:

669

A leaf chases wind

Across an autumn river

And shakes a pine tree.

*(HTOW 168)*

687

Each moment or two

A long tongue of autumn wind

Licks the river white.

*(HTOW 172)*

In these two haiku, the “leaf” and “autumn wind” images transform into another image. The image of a “leaf” chasing wind moves onto shaking “pine tree,” which refers to a bird. Moreover, the “long tongue” is transformed from “autumn wind.” The image of wind is referred to as one that “licks the river.” As a result, Wright’s image in haiku does not remain as a symbol itself.
Rather, it moves and transforms into another image, such as in Pound’s imagistic poem.

II. Wright and Nature

Wright wrote in his autobiography *Black Boy* (1945) about how much he disliked the countryside because it reminded him of the hunger he had gone through as a poor African American child in one of the world’s most fertile lands. This experience, however, motivated him to write haiku. In 1953, Wright traveled to Africa and then published *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* in 1954. The following year, he attended the Bandung Conference of the Third World. Two years later, in 1956, he became a member of the First Congress of Negro Artists and Writers and presented a paper while attending. At that time, he loved to work in his garden on his Normandy farm, which provided many themes for his haiku. In the 1950s, Wright had rich possibilities due to the emergence of the Third World. But Wright had financial and personal problems. His works failed to bring in much money and he was sick and had to stay in bed frequently. Under these circumstances, Wright became mentally and emotionally receptive to the ideas, beauty, and form of haiku.

During this period, he wrote such a haiku as the following:

459

I am paying rent

For the lice in my cold room

And the moonlight too.

(*HTOW* 115)

The point in this haiku is the beauty of moonlight. It is difficult to feel in a common sense the
beauty of nature under such circumstances. In this context, Wright shows a good example of wabi, the aesthetic principle of poverty, by observing the beauty of the moon despite his economic scarcity. He was also suffering as an African American, and this haiku reflects his plight.

31

In the falling snow
A laughing boy holds out his palms
Until they are white.

(HTOW 8)

This haiku is quite controversial, for the theme implies a contrast between white and black. It can be interpreted that the boy is assumed to be a black boy and that he is highly conscious of being black. He feels as if he became a white boy when he holds out his palms until they became white. This might reflect how white people viewed the African American life. In actuality, this haiku unites the image of the black and white with nature. In other haiku, such as the following, he expresses his feelings of isolation and loneliness.

243

Leaving the doctor,
The whole world looks different
This autumn morning.

(HTOW 61)

Here, the speaker appreciates the beauty of nature even though he is ill. This haiku expresses a different point of view. Nature lightens the worries about his illness, just as his concerns about
the color of skin are less agonizing. The boy in Haiku 31 above is paradoxically “laughing” in the situation where his palms look white. Wright’s haiku transcends all the illnesses and adversities whereas his prose work, *Black Boy*, does not.

By March 1960, Wright became so captivated by the beauty of haiku that he wrote many haiku himself. In fact, Wright focused on the exact form of the poem rather than the popular European and American forms. Wright tried to fully understand the practice of Zen in view of Suzuki. There is no God in Zen, and it is very practical that one should take natural and spontaneous action. One’s action is not calculated or planned. Zen is objective and suprarational, meaning that human subjectivity should be suppressed. One must, therefore, achieve the state of mind called *mu*, the state of nothingness.

Suzuki mentions that Zen monks ate only rice, gruel, and pickled vegetables. Like Thoreau, they were vegetarians. They used quilts bedding not exceeding one large five square feet whether in cold winter or summer. Their basic rules consisted of poverty and simplicity. Suzuki notes that the main idea is that the monks’ life is to make the best possible use of things and not to waste anything. Though their lives proved austere and meager, such experience is spiritually rich and rewarding. Wright must have been impressed with the life of Zen monks as well as Zen-inspired haiku poets like Basho. Such a poet sought to suppress one’s individuality and achieve the state of Zen.

Wright’s haiku differed from his novels in that his haiku expressed a love of nature. Most of his novels dealt with protesting and addressed social and racial issues, but his haiku appreciates nature. In the autobiographical prose work, *Black Boy*, the speaker depicts the American South as “southern swamp of despair and violence” (*Black Boy* 228):
With Aunt Maggie gone, my mother could not earn enough to feed us and my stomach kept so consistently empty that my head ached most of the day. One afternoon hunger haunted me so acutely that I decided to try to sell my dog Betsy and buy some food. (*Black Boy* 60)

The speaker suffered from severe hunger and even had to sell his dog. The speaker reflects the young Wright’s life since *Black Boy* is composed in autobiographical prose. A similar situation is also observed in Wright’s haiku.

453

The sound of a rat
Gnawing in the winter wall
Of a rented room.

(`HTOW 114`)

The coldness is intensified by the “sound of a rat” in the room. This room is a rented room, which makes it more pitiful. In this instance, Wright combines the situation of the speaker of the haiku and the seasonal reference, as done in classic haiku.

This haiku also shows that Japanese haiku aim at the unity and harmony between humanity and nature. Wright expresses the idea that all life belongs to nature, which is an idea found in Zen:

483

Does the snail know that
The green leaf on which it sleeps
Is obeying the wind?
This is a typical haiku that all the living beings are a part of nature. Wright also views the world in unity. He sees that nature and humanity are all connected:

455

The green cockleburs
Caught in the thick wooly hair
Of the black boy’s head.

The words “cockleburs” and “black boy” relate to things that differ in shape, size, and color. But Wright puts those two together and presents in a direct statement the paradox of union. This haiku reflects a person’s desire to be a part of nature, at the same time maintaining one’s separate identity.

Wright’s haiku combines nature and human-made objects in a haiku. Wright, who rather follows the classical style of haiku, views the world as one. His living condition was hard throughout his early life, but in it, he found its meaningfulness and the beauty of life. He emphasized the unity and harmony of all things. Most of all, it is remarkable that he opened a way for other poets in America to write haiku, such as Sanchez.

In fact, the nature in Wright’s haiku is unlike Japanese haiku. Traditional Japanese haiku do not depict cruelty of nature while Wright remained concerned with the cruelty of nature and dead bodies of small animals. Wright’s haiku attempt to transcend all social and racial differences. Eventually, his haiku embrace and unite humanity with nature, as the following haiku expresses:
From a green hilltop,
One tolling cathedral bell
Tints the spring sky blue.

(_HTOW 107_

The “tolling cathedral bell” turns into “spring sky blue,” which is a transference between sound and color. This makes the harmony between the tolling bell and the blue sky.

Putting out the light,
The sound of the sleet hums sharper
Upon the tin roof.

(_HTOW 135_

Further, the transference of “light” and “sound” of the sleet is haiku technique that emphasizes natural phenomena.

III. Wright and Race

Wright tried to find a genre that is race-free and finally realized that haiku was the one. The problem, however, is that the haiku that conveys the tension of race can be unsuccessful because it intrudes upon the natural scene by representing a racial tension. Richard Iadonisi in “‘I Am Nobody’: The Haiku of Richard Wright” regards Wright as an anti-colonialist and an anti-imperialist. Similarly, Eugene Miller and Yoshinobu Hakutani observe that one of the functions of haiku is to fight against racism. In Miller’s view, Wright aimed to become one with nature and
eventually wanted to integrate himself into society by expressing that he wanted to become one with nature. Conversely, Hakutani asserts that haiku to Wright was a vision, the vision that makes nonwhite people gain freedom and democracy and escape from the inhumane elements of capitalism, greed, and materialism. It is questionable, though, if Wright’s perspective of haiku is solely focused on the aesthetic value. Iadonisi thus explores the social and psychological consciousness that underlies Wright’s haiku:

What I have shown in this article is that Wright’s haiku do not transcend race and materiality, but instead bring to the poems a dialogic consciousness that plays with the transcendence generally associated with Japanese haiku. . . . Any desire for escape or transcendence is tempered by the world we live in, and that world forces upon African Americans what W.E.B Du Bois terms “double-consciousness.” (Iadonisi 195)

Iadonisi argues that the aesthetic value such as wabi does not transcend the issues of race or materiality. In fact, traditional Japanese haiku does not draw on human-centeredness while Wright’s view of human subjectivity is a little different at times. Consider the following haiku:

423

Settling on the screen

Of the crowded movie house,

A white butterfly.

(HTOW 106)

The words “screen” and “movie house” relate to the human world while “a white butterfly” is a part of nature. Here, the “white butterfly” settles on the “screen,” which means that the animal
dominates the human world. Here, the human subjectivity is overwhelmed by the natural world and creates a sense of unity between the human world and nature.

Wright’s haiku serves as a refuge from his economic, physical, and racial concerns. There are continuously repeated interests in Wright’s haiku. In essence, poverty and racial hatred affected his vision:

174

Merciful autumn

Tones down the shabby curtains

Of my rented room.

(HTOW 44)

The atmosphere of this haiku has a sense of wabi by using “shabby” at the same time the speaker also praises the beauty of nature by depicting autumn as “merciful.” The next haiku also expresses a sense of wabi:

412

In this rented room

One more winter stands outside

My dirty window pane.

(HTOW 103)

This haiku emphasizes the beauty of winter as opposed to the poverty of human life as depicted in Black Boy. The use of “rented room” implies that the speaker does not own a house and should pay monthly for a “rented room” with a “dirty window pane,” making the situation even worse.

Wright disliked the countryside, as noted earlier, because it reminded him of the physical
hunger he had to endure as a child. He had to suffer from hunger in one of the most fertile lands in the world:

577

Scarecrow, who starved you,

Set you in that icy wind,

And then forgot you?

(HTOW 145)

Wright’s haiku also expresses a sense of isolation and loneliness by using the aesthetic principle of sabi, as the following haiku shows:

574

Standing in the crowd

In a cold drizzling rain, —

How lonely it is.

(HTOW 144)

The cold rain intensifies loneliness in this haiku; however, this haiku looks at the beauty of loneliness rather than only focusing on loneliness itself.

657

Under the first snow

Yellow leaves are surrendering

With faint dry whispers.

(HTOW 165)

This haiku expresses change and regress by using the words “yellow leaves” and “faint dry
whispers.” This regress, however, is expressed by *yugen*, an aesthetic principle of depth and mysteriousness. In the following haiku,

671

A pale winter moon,

Pitying a lonely doll,

Lent it a shadow.

*(HTOW 168)*

the second line, “pitying a lonely doll,” projects loneliness into a doll, a sense of *sabi*, or an aesthetic principle of loneliness. Wright indirectly expresses his empathy for the doll. Creating the image of “A pale winter moon” with *yugen*, Wright intensifies the beauty of the scene:

695

My decrepit barn

Sags full of self-consciousness

In this autumn sun.

*(HTOW 174)*

Here, the “decrepit barn” indicates a sense of *wabi*. Images such as “this autumn sun” depict something not too bright and not too dark, is associated with the sensibility of *yugen*.

The traditional Japanese haiku poet like Issa expressed the sympathetic treatment of small creatures when dealing with the loneliness of his life as a homeless orphan driven away by a wicked stepmother in his haiku. In addition, Wright himself was an exile and a member of a minority race, and his haiku express sympathy for people whose lives are like his. The people had to endure the vulnerability of chance and circumstances beyond their control. Unlike classic
haiku, some of Wright’s haiku depict the plight of black people with subtlety and poignancy.

IV. The Philosophical Backgrounds of Wright’s Haiku

Wright believed that traditional haiku master Basho could express the paradox of a union with nature when Wright studied Blyth’s four volumes of haiku. Wright held that Basho could use the mixture of a poet’s identity and a part of nature at the same time. Classic haiku poets sought to demonstrate in haiku, as well as in senryu, that nature and humanity are united and that humans and nonhumans belong to the earth as equals. As noted, the state of nothingness, *mu*, is one of the most important principles of classic haiku. Blyth explained this state regarding selflessness, being free from human subjectivity and egotism. Humans have no right to impose their subjectivity on other living beings on earth. This emptying out poet’s subjectivity relates to a generalized melancholy or loneliness that underlies the rhythm. This relates to the state of Zen, as Blyth emphasizes, “a state of absolute spiritual poverty in which, having nothing, we possess all” (Blyth, *Haiku* 162).

The origin of Wright’s poetics can be traced to “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” An African American writer’s perspective, Wright asserts, “… is that part of a poem, novel, or play which a writer never puts directly on paper. It is that fixed point in intellectual space where a writer stands to view the struggle, hopes, and sufferings of his people” (“Blueprint” 45). Wright establishes this view in *Black Boy*; nonetheless, he intently expresses a poetic vision of nature that runs against the reality of racial conflict.

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8 The term *senryu* was originated from the pen name of Karai Senryu (1718-1790). It became a genre of poetry and is considered an intellectual entertainment rather than serious poetry.
Blyth’s definition of haiku as an ascetic art means that haiku primarily concerns itself with objects and phenomena in nature. Wright thus followed the tradition of Moritake, Basho, Kikaku, Buson and Issa. He learned from the classic haiku poets that a poet should observe an object or phenomenon in nature in the first place and stay away from one’s thoughts and feelings. Then the poet can achieve his or her vision with nature. But Wright had to make drastic adjustments when he identified and developed his perspective in his haiku since he was originally from Western culture and tradition.

One of Wright’s haiku, “In the Silent Forest,” resembles Basho’s “How Quiet It Is!”

316

In the silent forest
A woodpecker hammers at
The sound of silence.

(*HTOW 79*)

How quiet it is!
Piercing into the rocks
The cicada’s voice.

(Basho)⁹

Basho expressed reverence in the quietness whereas Wright combined “silent forest” and hammering of a “woodpecker.”

Similarly, Wright's “A Thin Waterfall” is akin to Basho’s “A Crow”:

569

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⁹ The original of the haiku is in Henderson 39. The translation is by Yoshinobu Hakutani.
A thin waterfall
Dribbles the whole autumn night, —
How lonely it is

*(HTOW* 143)

A crow
Perched on a withered tree
In the autumn evening.

*(Basho)*

Basho focuses on a single crow perching on a branch of an old tree, as does Wright on a thin waterfall. In both haiku, the scene is drawn with little detail and the mood is provided by a simple, reserved description of fact, a phenomenon in nature. In both haiku, parts of the scene are painted in dark colors, as is the background. Both haiku create the kind of beauty associated with the aesthetic sensibility of *sabi* that suggests loneliness and quietude, the salient characteristics of nature, as opposed to overexcitement and loudness, those of society. As Basho expresses *sabi* with the image of autumn evening, so does Wright with the line, “How lonely it is.”

When expressing and depicting nature in Wright’s haiku, Wright wrote from the viewpoint of Buddhism. In Buddhist belief, there is a transmigration of the soul and it stresses

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10 The original of the haiku is in Henderson 18. The translation is from Blyth, *History* 2: xxix.

11 The word *sabi*, a noun, derives from the verb *sabiru*, to rust, implying that what is described is aged. *Sabij* is traditionally associated with loneliness. Aesthetically, however, this mode of sensibility intimates of grace rather than splendor; it suggests quiet beauty as opposed to robust beauty. Many of Wright’s haiku thrive on the use of the word “lonely.” For further discussion of *sabi* and of other aesthetic principles, see Hakutani, *Wright and Racial Discourse* 275-82.
the soul in animals just like human beings. In this vein, Wright’s haiku conveys the affection and love of the nonhuman beings. Issa also had this viewpoint that he had love and compassion for nonhuman beings.

Do not ever strike!

The fly moves as if to pray

With his hands and feet.

(Issa)\textsuperscript{12}

Wright’s two haiku echo Issa’s:

\textbf{295}

A fly crawls slowly

Over a sticky paper, —

How chilly the dawn!

\textit{(HTOW 74)}

\textbf{486}

Two flies locked in love

Were hit by a newspaper

And died together.

\textit{(HTOW 122)}

Wright also learned how to express loneliness from Issa. For example, Issa wrote a haiku such as this one:

For you fleas too,

\textsuperscript{12} The translation of Issa’s haiku is by Yoshinobu Hakutani.
The night must be long,
It must be lonely.

(Issa)\(^{13}\)

Wright composed the following:

2

For you, O gulls,
I order slaty waters
And this leaden sky!

\(HTOW\ 1\)

While Issa depicts the image of flee to express human loneliness, Wright describes “gulls,” “slaty waters,” and “leaden sky” to create a visual effect of loneliness.

V. Wright’s Haiku and the Classic Haiku Tradition

It is true that most of the haiku published in English do not follow its traditional Japanese 5-7-5 syllabic form but rather focus on its internal structure. Haiku consists of two parts with a pause and the pause between two parts compares two images between the two. Two or more images juxtapose with the internal comparison, which make the reader have an imaginative space. The significance of haiku that makes it different from other genres of poetry is its use of images. Poets do not create images as overtly figurative language, but the images are interpreted figuratively. Still, this aspect is most often misunderstood in the West. Furthermore, it has fostered much tension between poets in the academic/poetic mainstream and American haiku

\[^{13}\text{This haiku is quoted from Blyth, } Haiku \text{ 318. The translation is by Blyth.}\]
poets. This conflict arose over an alleged failure to appreciate haiku’s basic yet essential characteristics. Figurative language such as simile, metaphor, and personification are usually limited in the range of haiku while it is usually expanded in the poetry in general. The finest Japanese haiku employ literal images even though figurative expressions are often used. The juxtaposition of literal images takes a role of figurative language in haiku. Basho depicts “a crow” and “autumn evening” with “a withered bough” to express mortality, but he does not directly tell the reader that “a crow” is the “Grim Reaper” in the poem:

On a withered bough
a crow has settled—
autumn nightfall.

(Henderson 18)

Basho juxtaposes “autumn evening,” “withered bough,” and “crow” to express the idea of the waning of our lives rather than using literary tropes. The use of images in Basho’s haiku is also related with imagism. Imagism is originated from Pound. He differentiated between image and symbol. According to Pound, image is active and dynamic while symbol is passive and “dead.” Hakutani in Richard Wright and Haiku (2014), referring to Pound, notes that an image is not “a decorative symbol”: “As Pound explained in his essay, the image is not a static, rational idea. . . . Pound thought of an image not as a decorative emblem or symbol but as a seed capable of germinating and developing into another organism” (Wright and Haiku 60). Both Basho from the East and Pound from the West shared common ideas regarding imagism. Further, haiku contain a

variety of seasonal references and Basho noticed that a seasonal reference renders more powerful element. The seasonal reference becomes a most powerful tool by which to engage the reader because it connects the experience of a moment to the universal forces of change and renewal. It makes the poet think of the entirety of the natural world with an image. Finally, it enables the reader to think of something infinite with the finite.

Wright’s haiku form uses three lines with five, seven, and five syllables based upon the understanding of traditional Japanese haiku, which has seventeen syllables. This syllabic measure worked mostly well in *Haiku: This Other World* (1998), although a few pieces depart from this standard. Wright, unaware of the internal structure of haiku and most of them are composed of single images. Among the many images, Wright often used nature as one of the images. Haiku 542, 569, and 580 have typical nature imagery:

542

The dazzling spring sun
Dwindles the glittering sea
And shrinks the ships.

(*HTOW* 136)

569

A thin waterfall
Dribbles the whole autumn night, —
How lonely it is.

(*HTOW* 143)
My cold and damp feet
Feel as distant as the moon
On this autumn night.

(HTOW 145)

The words, “dazzling spring sun” and “glittering sea” refer to the season, spring, and the image of nature in Haiku 542. Many of Wright’s haiku have references to the seasons. The next haiku creates a sense of loneliness, sabi, by using “a thin waterfall” and intensifies the loneliness by using “autumn night.” The last haiku also expresses a sense of loneliness by using “autumn night,” and Wright enhances the feeling of loneliness by depicting “My cold and damp feet.”

In this respect, Wright is more keeping with classical Japanese haiku than are Kerouac or Sanchez. What is more, Wright used the present tense in most of his haiku rather than the past tense. Using the present tense means that he was aware of the importance of haiku aesthetics. Haiku is usually written in the present tense, the so-called “haiku moment.” Wright’s haiku numbers 39 and 50 are good examples to compare the difference between the uses of tense.

39

A soft wind at dawn
Lifts one dry leaf and lays it
Upon another.

(HTOW 10)

The word “lifts” emphasizes its meaning that the “leaf” is going to lift with lightness, and the
ending of the poem creates unresolved tension. The unresolved tension makes the reader question whether or not the leaf lifts again. This lack of finality comprises one of the beauties of haiku. On the contrary, Wright’s haiku number 50 is expressed in the past tense.

50

One magnolia
Landed upon another
In the dew-wet grass.

(HTOW 13)

The word, “landed,” creates the closure of the poem in contrast to haiku number 39. This phenomenon stresses that a “magnolia” landed in the wet grass and that there is no question of any further action. Similarly, in the following haiku,

268

No star and no moon:
A dog is barking whitely
In the winter night.

(HTOW 67)

there is a pause after “no moon.” This kind of pause of cutting word lacks the internal comparison. This cutting word kireji\(^\text{15}\) is a device used to cut or divide a whole part into each part. In this haiku, Wright substituted kireji with a colon. Furthermore, Wright’s uses personification, overt metaphor, and simile, commonly employed characteristics of Western

\(^{15}\) This is because haiku is formed to create in seventeen syllables in three lines wherein the idea and vision are parted and united when developing the haiku.
poetry. In the following haiku,

236

The dusty petals
Of ferocious sunflowers
Hold the rain at bay.

*(HTOW 59)*

the sunflowers do no such thing like the word, “ferocious.” It is only an image that is inside the poet’s conceptual mind. A unique technique of haiku is finding a hidden place where the spiritual world is embedded in the material world. In fact, Robert Bly in “Richard Wright’s Place in American Haiku” mentioned that the best haiku is called “news of the universe” (Qtd. in Lee Gurga’s “Richard Wright’s Place in American Haiku” 40). Wright’s haiku contains the news of the poet’s mind and fancy in Wright’s *Haiku: This Other World*. As a result, it becomes questionable whether Wright’s poems are haiku or Western poems written in haiku form. It is also questionable whether Wright’s haiku can be a canon of American haiku. In fact, *Haiku: This Other World* has seasonal reference, present tense, caesura, and *kireji*. Even so, the form itself can be a successful haiku form. The accessibility and simplicity of Wright’s *Haiku: This Other World* enables many people to experience American haiku. The range of audiences for Wright’s haiku is thus wide since his haiku, which deal with human problems of loneliness and exile, inspire the audience to have hope.

VI. Wright’s Haiku and Modernism

What distinguishes Wright from other traditional haiku poets is that Wright uses
elements that are avoided in the traditional haiku. For instance:

431

Eating a red apple,
A little girl stares dreamily
At the autumn sea.

(*HTOW* 108)

The word “eating” suggests that this haiku is modernistic because “eating” is not used in classical haiku. The phrase “red apple” is often employed whereas the act of eating might be avoided in classic haiku. This is because nature itself should be considered an important being in Eastern philosophy and because nature has its own soul:

483

Does the snail know that
The green leaf on which it sleeps
Is obeying the wind?

(*HTOW* 121)

This haiku follows the rule of the typical classical haiku that all life belongs to nature.

One of the distinguishing characteristics is that women’s sexuality and the depiction of body parts are also avoided in the traditional haiku, but Wright depicts female sexuality and body in his haiku:

198

The first day of spring:
A servant’s hips shake as she
Wipes a mirror clean.

\[(HTOW \ 50)\]

Here, depicting the “hips” of a servant is strikingly realistic to the reader. This kind of expression is forbidden in traditional haiku, but in this example, Wright accentuates the act of cleaning a mirror. He also makes use of a sensual word without any hesitation:

\[
\begin{align*}
436 \\
A \text{ nude fat woman} \\
\text{Stands over a kitchen stove,} \\
\text{Tasting applesauce.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[(HTOW \ 109)\]

The words “nude fat woman,” along with “hips” from the prior haiku, show the body of a female. Overtly using these words is one of the characteristics of modern haiku rather than hiding it.

Wright is an expert at identifying nature without humanizing it or sentimentalizing over it. However, the speaker’s intrusion on the natural scene is considered poetically unsuccessful. Because of this, haiku that reflect racial tension intrudes on the natural scene.

Despite this, Robert Tener, in “The Where, the When, the What: A Study of Richard Wright’s Haiku,” asserts that Wright failed in mastering the form of haiku and separating his political ideas from “the sensitive lyricism of this intimate poetry” (Qtd. in Iadonisi’s “I Am Nobody’: The Haiku of Richard Wright” 181). Wright, however, succeeded in accepting the classical principles of haiku and applying them to his haiku even though he could not completely separate politics from his haiku. Instead, he only succeeded in emulating the classical principles
of haiku and applied some of the classical traditions to his modernist haiku.

VII. Wright’s Haiku and Humor

One of the notable features of Wright’s haiku is that some contain humor while Sanchez, Emanuel, and Moore’s haiku do not. The sense of humor in Wright’s haiku derives from senryu. The borderline of haiku and senryu is not clear, yet senryu is considered humorous as haiku is regarded as serious and less humorous. Senryu is even cynical at times. Wright learned senryu from R. H. Blyth. One of the Blyth’s books, humor is discussed in terms of its spiritual aspect rather than the technical aspect. Among classical haiku poets, Basho and Shiki proved less humorous than Buson and Issa. Buson and Issa both lived in what can be considered the most humorous age in Japanese history. Buson’s humor was very much like senryu. One of Buson’s haiku below is a senryu:

The archbishop
Evacuates the honorable bowels
On the withered moor.

(Blyth, History of Haiku 1: 278)

The expression of “evacuates the honorable bowels” by “archbishop” makes the atmosphere humorous and awkward rather than serious and dignified.

Wright’s haiku likewise has a sense of humor:

7

Make up your mind, Snail!

You are half inside your house,
And halfway out.

*(HTOW 2)*

The description of snail in this haiku is humorous because the snail is in the house as well as outside. The poet-speaker is telling the snail that it should make a decision. Wright used animals as a subject in *senryu*, and this is also like Issa’s haiku. Issa was known for his compassion for animals and depicted nonhumans like a fly or a cat. Wright depicted animals such as a horse, dog, cow, and cat.

25

A horse is pissing
In the snow-covered courtyard
In the morning sun.

*(HTOW 7)*

The urination of the horse in the snow makes some readers laugh. Both the actions of animals and their situations create humor. In addition, Wright deals with the sexuality of animals, as does Issa. Wright depicted the sexual activity of a cow in this haiku:

332

While mounting a cow,
A bull ejaculates sperm
On apple blossoms.

*(HTOW 83)*

To the cow, ejaculating sperm and spreading it over apple blossoms is natural but to humans the phenomenon could appear hilariously humorous. The ejaculation of sperm of a cow is
reminiscent of Issa’s haiku:

Having slept, the cat gets up,
And with great yawns,
Goes out love-making.

(Blyth, *Haiku: Eastern Culture*: 197)

The significance of using animals as a subject in haiku is to show that all these acts including sexual activities are not different from those of human beings. Hakutani in *Richard Wright and Haiku* notes that the haiku and the *senryu* describing nature and humanity express that nature and humanity are both connected in one:

The humor in this *senryu* is tempered with Wright’s Buddhist philosophy. In studying R. H. Blyth’s volumes of Japanese haiku, Wright was deeply impressed with the Buddhist theory of transmigration of the soul and reincarnation. Many of his haiku and *senryu* that describe nature and humanity are united and that human beings must have affinity and compassion for all things on earth. (*Wright and Haiku* 150)

It is remarkable that only Wright’s haiku are humorous whereas most of the haiku by other American writers are not. Moreover, Wright applied his own style of haiku to the principles of classic haiku; the significance of Wright’s haiku including *senryu* is that Wright’s haiku aims at the unity of nature and humanity.

Not only was Wright influenced by the Buddhist ontology and Zen philosophy, which underlie many of the classic haiku, but he consciously emulated the technique of classic haiku. Simplicity is fundamental to classic haiku. When the simplicity of expression is accompanied by
humor, the haiku becomes a poignant expression of poetic vision. The expression of humor hardly seems a technique of haiku, but as Blyth observed, humor reflects “some poise of the mind, some balance of conflicting elements from which arises that pleasure” (Haiku 313). A classic haiku with humor thrives on the brevity of expression as the saying, “Brevity is the soul of wit,” implies. Some of Wright’s haiku with humor are composed with the poise of the mind. Not only do Wright’s haiku adhere to the syllabic count of 5, 7, 5, but many of his haiku with humor come alive with terse, compressed expressions and images.
Chapter Two

Jack Kerouac and “American Haikus”\textsuperscript{16}

I. Jack Kerouac as a Prose Writer

Widely known as a prose writer, Jack Kerouac (1922-69) became famous with publication of \textit{On the Road} (1957). The novel greatly influenced the Beat Generation. He gave inspiration to the readers of the misguided and confused youth of the post-World War II era. The Beat writers were in search of new life in America. This chapter will focus on how Kerouac created an American haiku movement, how haiku and its philosophical background as well as Zen Buddhism attracted him, and how the religion played a crucial role in his haiku. \textit{On the Road}, in particular, reflects a sympathetic attitude toward minorities and the marginalized social groups of the post-war in the United States. This kind of reflection also led to the rejection by some publishers. These publishers grew uncomfortable with the theme that the story was sympathetic with marginalized social groups, especially in portraying their use of drugs and engaging in homosexuality. In 1957, however, Viking Press finally decided to publish the book after some adjustment of the problematic issues.

The journey described in \textit{On the Road} can be viewed as a travelogue, and it could be accepted as a commodification of culture. With economic growth and urbanization, many Americans left countryside and moved to cities, leaving their values, beliefs, and attitudes behind

\textsuperscript{16} Kerouac called his haiku “American haikus” with quotation marks.
as well. Kerouac was sick of the world full of anomie, despair, and spiritual poverty, and he
reflects this in the novel. What Kerouac tries to avoid is the misuse of science or technology. The
characters get drunk, travel, act promiscuously, and finally try to seclude themselves from
society. In the end, Kerouac finally created “countersystem” models instead of creating a utopia.
Kerouac created a “countersystem” to mention the weaknesses of the social culture in *On the
Road*. *On the Road* also reflects Kerouac’s hatred of women and neoimperialistic framework. To
Kerouac, American people’s attitudes toward the 1960s counterculture were weak, feminine, and
egalitarian. The Beat writers lent their voice to revitalize the identity of Americans. Moreover,
the journey in *On the Road* goes back and forth between the East and the West, but the
protagonist could not find a paradise. This repeated cycle is like the concept of transmigration in
Buddhism. Finally, this narrative structure can also relate to Transcendentalism and the
Transcendentalism affected when he writes about Dean in part three of *On the Road*:

> Just as flat as that. It was the saddest night. I felt as if I was with strange
brothers and sisters in a pitiful dream. Then a complete silence fell over
everybody; where once Dean would have talked his way out, he now fell
silent himself, but standing in front of everybody, ragged and broken and
idiotic, right under the lightbulbs, his bony mad face covered with seat and
throbbing veins, saying, ‘Yes, yes, yes’ as though tremendous revelations
were pouring into him all the time now, and I am convinced they were, and
the others suspected as much and were frightened. He was BEAT – the root, the soul of Beatific. \((OTR \ ^{17}177)\)

In fact, this scene well summarizes Dean Moriarty, modeled after Neal Cassady, saying “‘Yes, yes, yes’” and reflects Americans’ attitude toward life.

The “countersystem” could be the hybrid of Buddhism and Romanticism while the function of Buddhism is to lose the mask of individual identity. Kerouac believed that one can become ready to live in a society through the meditation alone in nature. Despite this, it proves more difficult for Western individuals to bear genuine solitude than those in Eastern cultures. For this reason, solitude is embraced closely in the Eastern social system. In the East, the opposite must exist together to become a well-balanced whole.

The second prose work discussed in this chapter is \textit{The Dharma Bums}, which is autobiographical in search of the true meaning in life from the fall of 1955 to the summer of 1956. Kerouac met Gary Snyder through Allen Ginsberg (1926-97) in 1955 in San Francisco. Kerouac together with William Burroughs (1914-97) and Ginsberg were the pioneers of the Beat Generation, the name Kerouac bestowed upon it. The character Japhy is modeled after Gary Snyder, and Ray Smith, the narrator, is modeled after Jack Kerouac. The title \textit{The Dharma Bums} has a conflict in its title itself. The word “Dharma” refers to a doll representing the monk Dharma and Kerouac refers to Beatniks as “bums,” those who are serious Buddhists. Still, these two conflicting words do well to represent the story of \textit{The Dharma Bums} although these two words, “Dharma” and “bums,” do not seem to match well. Japhy is interested in Zen Buddhism

\footnote{For the text, Kerouac, Jack. \textit{On the Road}. New York: Penguin, 2000 is used. Hereafter, I will refer to this as \textit{OTR}.}
while Ray is just interested in Buddhism itself and describes himself as “a serious Buddhist” 
(*The Dharma Bums*)\(^{18}\) 13. The emptiness of all things is the core of Mahayana Buddhism, and 
R. H. Blyth points out that Mahayana Buddhism is a doctrine searching for universal salvation 
through faith alone:

(b) The Mahayana doctrine of the identity of difference or indifference of 
opposites, is one that sets apart Buddhism and Christianity as nothing else 
does. . . . Again, the Mahayana teaching of the equivalence of the phenomenal 
and the noumenal worlds offers to the Oriental mind that strange fusion of 
spirituality and practicality which is the most striking characteristic of Chinese 
art and Japanese haiku. (Blyth, *Eastern Culture* 19-21)

*The Dharma Bums* is considered the book that gave rise to the American boom of Zen in 
America and people’s interest in Zen as well as Buddhism. The journey of Kerouac, as Ray 
Smith, aims to get away from the dualistic world. Ray is a hitchhiker and a mountaineer. He 
aspires and is eager to have a deeper understanding of Buddha. He enjoys the simple pleasures of 
creating spontaneous haiku and hiking to new locations with good friends. He resides alone at a 
mountaintop and struggles to get away physically and spiritually from the material world. He is 
critical of Christianity and Christians in mistreating animals. Kerouac is famous for his love of 
animals and at the same time he hated the cruelty to animals. He did not even harm small insects 
and treated them with love and care. In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac describes his experience 
with mosquitoes, which are usually a nuisance to humans:

One night I was meditating in such perfect stillness that two mosquitoes

came and sat on each of my cheekbones and stayed there a long time without biting and then went away without biting. (*The Dharma Bums* 188)

Animals are regarded as subhuman in the perspective of Christians. Conversely, animals enjoy are treated as equal to other living beings like human in Buddhism. Jeanne Conn in “Kerouac and the Animals” notes, “Kerouac’s attitude towards insects and rodents is based on the compassion of Buddha for, Catholic though he was, the teaching of Buddha made a powerful impression on him” (Conn 23). Animals are regarded as having souls just like human beings do. Not only Kerouac but also some American writers were also conscious of sympathy with the environment, such as Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Another idea in *The Dharma Bums* is transcendence in the Buddhist perspective. Ray also mentions what the East and West are not separate world, but that they will meet eventually: “East’ll meet West anyway. Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it’ll be guys like us that can start the thing” (*The Dharma Bums* 203). Hakutani in *Haiku and Modernist Poetics* notes that Kerouac’s view on life is to transcend all things:

> Kerouac realized that Buddhism, rather than denying suffering and death, confronted both. For him, Buddhism taught one to transcend the origin of suffering and death: desire and ignorance. Most impressively, Buddhism taught Kerouac that the phenomenal world was like a dream and an illusion and that happiness consisted in achieving that strange vision in the mind—enlightenment. (Hakutani 90)

Zen aims for spontaneous and realistic action. Ray preferred Mahayana Buddhism above the others and was eager to achieve the core of Buddhahood by accepting all forms of life; Ray thus
became a serious Buddhist. Mahayana Buddhism eventually led the Beat movement to represent the acceptance of all forms of life with joy:

He claimed at once that I was a great “Bodhisattava,” meaning “great wise being” or “great wise angel,” and that I was ornamenting this world with my sincerity. We had the same favorite Buddhist saint, too: Avalokitesvara, or in Japanese, Kwanon the Eleven-Headed. He knew all the details of Tibetan, Chinese, Mahayana, Hinayana, Japanese and even Burmese Buddhism but I warned him at once I didn’t give a goddamn about the mythology and all the names and national flavors of Buddhism, but was just interested in the first Sakyamuni’s four noble truths, *All life is suffering*. And to an extent interested in the third, *The suppression of suffering can be achieved*, which I didn’t quite believe was possible then. . . “He’s a great mysterious Bodhisattva I think maybe a reincarnation of Asagna the great Mahayana scholar of the old centuries.” … “I’d say that was a lot of silly Zen Buddhism.” This took Japhy back a bit. “Lissen Japhy,” I said, “I’m not a Zen Buddhist, I’m a serious Buddhist, I’m an oldfashioned dreamy Hinayana coward of later Mahayanism,” and so forth into the night, my contention being that Zen Buddhism didn’t concentrate on kindness so much as on confusing the intellect to make it perceive the illusion of all sources of things. *(The Dharma Bums 12-13)*

Kerouac, who also lived closely with nature, practiced Buddhist meditation in open fields and on high mountains. He stayed at home only when he had to write. According to Mahayana Buddhism, all things including those that do not have life possess the Buddha nature.
In addition, the notion of animistic thought leads to the theory of transmigration. It is remarkable and distinguished from Confucianism and Christianity that the idea that all things in the world contains Buddha nature. When Japhy and Ray were climbing the mountain with Henry Morley, they met a deer as well as its hunters. Ray shows his sympathetic attitude toward the deer.

It was real country we were in, Morley said about three thousand feet now. We could hear creeks rushing coldly below on cold starlit rocks without seeing them. “Hey little dear,” I’d yelled to the animal, “don’t worry, we won’t shoot you.” “…though I hate these damn hunters, all they wanna do is level a gun at a helpless sentient being and murder it, for every sentient being or living creature these actual pricks kill they will be reborn a thousand times to suffer the horrors of samsara and damn good for ‘em too.”

(The Dharma Bums 44-46)

Kerouac’s treatment of animals reflects the idea of Buddhism. Buddhism emphasizes the value of life even if it is the life of a mere creature. Moreover, Buddhists believe that all things in the world are reborn after their deaths. This shows the concept of transmigration and that people should not disregard the animals for the sake of their own greed, let alone killing and eating them.

Kerouac found compassion for all beings as well. Ray said, “Compassion is the heart of Buddhism” (The Dharma Bums 132) and the importance of compassion in Buddhism, “‘Compassion is the guide star,’ said Buddha.” (The Dharma Bums 186). Kerouac was influenced by not only Buddhist texts but also by practicing North American Buddhists including Snyder. When studying Buddhism, Kerouac transcended and admitted suffering and death.
instead of denying it. Japhy had an interest of “Sakyamuni’s four noble truths, All life is suffering.” (The Dharma Bums 12) when explaining Japhy especially about religion and added “The suppression of suffering can be achieved” (The Dharma Bums 12). Buddhism has taught him the phenomenal world was just like a dream and an illusion and sought happiness in achieving the enlightenment. The difference between Snyder and Kerouac in The Dharma Bums is that Kerouac was more interested in Mahayana Buddhism whereas Snyder showed interest in Zen. Moreover, a difference appears between Kerouac and Snyder regarding writing haiku. Kerouac not only wrote On the Road in a short period of time, but also did not take long to compose a haiku. About the approaches Kerouac and Snyder took to writing haiku, their mutual friend Ginsberg commented:

Kerouac has the one sign of being a great poet, which is he’s the only one in the United States who knows how to write haikus. The only one who’s written any good haikus. And everybody’s been writing haikus. There are all these dreary haikus written by people who think for weeks trying to write a haiku, and finally come up with some dull little thing or something. Whereas Kerouac thinks in haikus, every time he writes anything—talks that way and thinks that way. So it’s just natural for him. It’s something Snyder noticed. Snyder has to labor for years in a Zen monastery to produce one haiku about shitting off a log! And actually does get one or two good ones. Snyder was always astounded by Kerouac’s facility.

(Lynch 123-24)

Ray and Japhy share their thoughts about haiku while climbing the mountain. This reflects their thoughts about haiku.
“A real haiku’s gotta be as simple as porridge and yet make you see the real thing, like the greatest haiku of them all probably is the one that goes ‘The sparrow hops along the veranda, with set feet.’ By Shiki. You see the wet footprints like a vision in your mind and yet in those few words you also see all the rain that’s been falling that day and almost smell the wet pine needles.” . . .

“How about making them up real fast as you go along, spontaneously?”

(The Dharma Bums 59)

Kerouac composed haiku spontaneously. As he wrote spontaneously and composed numerous haiku, he not only applied the Eastern philosophical background but also the aesthetic principle of Zen. In fact, Ginsberg praised Kerouac in that he was the only one who knew haiku, but today, it remains questionable whether Kerouac fully understood haiku and applied it to his own haiku.

II. Kerouac as a Beat Writer

The popularity of Beat Studies has increased and then decreased with the passage of time. Moreover, American culture is led by rebellion. As indicated, the beat generation started to express the views of American society after World War II. The counterculture is one of the keywords during this time. Even so, the Beat Generation lacked confidence. They did not actually transform or strictly express what they wanted. In the end, the Beat culture could not flourish due to its lack of theoretical and social support.

Kerouac, as a representative of the Beat generation, explored what real America is through his work. John Tytell in Naked Angels: The Lives & Literature of the Beat Generation (1976)
notes that “JACK KEROUAC—even now our most misunderstood and underestimated writer—is still seen in the narrow category of chronicler of the Beat Generation” (Tytell 140). He introduced what real American life was and reflected on American history. In the Gold Rush period, many people moved to the West but in the end everything and their dream became disillusioned. Eventually, they could not achieve anything. In On the Road, people travel between the east and west of America repeatedly, but in all, they cannot find anything that they have dreamed of. For example, when Sal meets a Mexican and they dream of the west:

And this I did. ‘Where going?’

‘LA.’ I loved the way she said ‘LA’; I love the way everybody says ‘LA’ on the Coast; it’s their one and only golden town when all is said and done.

(OTR 73-74)

Hassan Melehy in “Jack Kerouac and the Nomadic Cartographies of Exile” reminds that the characters are in search of America at the border of the two countries and also adds that the word “beat” becomes nomadism as well:

Kerouac brings these ambiguities to the narrative of On the Road, which is a search for America through its many contact zones. These occur around borders between regions, such as Mexico and the United States or different geographic divisions of the latter—. . . . They have to do with the mixing of immigrant and other culturally distinct communities, and frequently with signs of the U.S. legacy of slavery. . . . The notion of “beat” becomes one of nomadism, a drumbeat motion bringing ecstasy that traverses the limitations imposed by a sedentary, stratified culture. (Melehy 40-41)
But it turns out that LA is no longer a paradise. There is nothing special in LA, either:

LA is the loneliest and most brutal of American cities; New York gets god-awful cold in the winter but there’s a feeling of wacky comradeship somewhere in some streets. LA is a jungle. (OTR 77)

In fact, the birthplace of the Beat movement was Columbia University in the early 1940s with Kerouac and Ginsberg, who shared their thoughts with Burroughs. Actually, the notion of “Beat” is rooted in the word “beatitude”; it is not about politics but rather it is about spirituality and art. Kerouac meant beatitude to live “in a state of joy.” In this period, Kerouac was deeply interested in American Transcendentalism and this is also reflected in On the Road as well. On the Road, however, was not comprehensible at that time because of a continuous prose style without any breaks between paragraphs. What’s more, the characters in the story are eccentric. They appear as either psychopaths or neurotics. Here, Kerouac learned Buddhism from Thoreau and led him to write The Dharma Bums.

Additionally, haiku was introduced to West Coast poets through Snyder, who was inspired by Suzuki’s Essays in Zen Buddhism (1927). Snyder spent the early 1950s traveling to Japan where he studied Zen Buddhism. Ginsberg, Philip Whalen, and Snyder as well as Kerouac spent time together frequently in Berkeley in 1955, sharing R. H. Blyth’s ideas and observations of Japanese haiku. In particular, Kerouac became impressed with Blyth’s translations and his explanation of Zen philosophy, which underlies classic haiku; despite this realization, Kerouac was a Mahayana Buddhist rather than a Zen Buddhist. He accepted pains to see things as they are.

In fact, Kerouac did not like the term “beatnik” much, and he stated that to be in a state
of beatitude is to put an effort to love all life, be sincere with people, endure in all circumstances, be kind to others, and be in a joyful state. Armand Morrissette in “A Catholic’s View of Kerouac” states that he was different from what we think of the “beatnik”:

Kerouac hated to be called the creator of the beatniks, because he never approved of long, dirty hair or parasitic existence. I never saw him, even when drunk, with long, unruly hair and sloppy clothing. He was a brilliant, worldly, well-versed guy—far from being a punk or a pink. (Morrissette 8)

The question of being in a state of beatitude in a world of chaos follows in the text. Kerouac’s answer for this question is to practice in a state of solitude. Further, Kerouac’s well-portrayed America of his generation deserves praise. The Beat Generation started to question then-contemporary American religious consciousness and eventually led to rejecting institutional religion and rethinking existing Christian values. Finally, the Beat Generation asserted that fresh spiritual insights could be found through mystical experience, use of drugs that causes hallucination, and most importantly Eastern religion. In contrast, previous generations relied on European sources, while this conflicts with what Ralph Waldo Emerson stated in “The American Scholar.” Emerson insisted that the Americans should establish their own cultural identity. He emphasized the importance of creative thinking rather than relying on books. This occurs through intuition and investigating nature. Finally, the Beat Generation turned their eyes to the Eastern religion, Buddhism.

The Beat poets introduced Buddhism to Americans in a different manner, and this is rooted in the culture of rebellion in America. Henrikus Joko Yulianto in “Beatnik Spontaneity in the American Beat Poetry as the Image of Culture Rebels: Fostering and Transmitting a Vision of
Socio-Ecological Wisdoms” relates the rebel to society:

The emergence of social activists or rebels in a particular area (country) is not apart from any tumultuous socio-political situation that prevails in the country. The rebels’ critique, voice, and protest against the disharmony of the civil life should not always become a physical revolution but that they could articulate their rebellious voice more intellectually with their writings to disobey and revolutionize the banality of the conventional rules. The beatniks or the Beat Generation have epitomized a noteworthy and phenomenal cosmopolites in the history of American bohemianism as the socio-cultural rebels. (Yulianto 61)

Rebellion is not always linked to physical conflicts. It can also be expressed through writings, and the Beat Generation realized that Asian religions were the key to enriching their genuinely human consciousness.

III. Kerouac’s Haiku and Christianity

Kerouac was born in 1922 and baptized a Catholic at St. Louis de France Church. He was quite concerned with religion throughout his life. In particular, he had strong faith in Christianity. His devotion to Christianity is expressed in these lines of his haiku: “The Holy Ghost wanted it” (Book of Haikus19 70) and “---the saints/ Are still meditating” (Book of Haikus 71). From time to time, Kerouac makes a reference to Christianity in his haiku, although it remains questionable whether his haiku is successful in its use of Christianity. Both of the

following haiku make references to Christianity is their use of “Jerusalem,” “saints,” “Christ,” and “Cross”:

Ah Jerusalem --- how many

   Autumn saints slaughtered

Thee with Christ?

    (Book of Haikus 173)

Christ on the Cross crying

—his mother missed

Her October porridge

    (Book of Haikus 173)

At the same time, these haiku have seasonal references, which is one of the characteristics of haiku. Sometimes he directly expresses the concept of Zen in his haiku, which reflects his interest in other religions:

The carpenter of spring

   the Zen

of hammer and nail

    (Book of Haikus 175)

Grown up in a devout Catholic family and also affected by Eastern religion, he mixed those two influences into such a haiku as this one:

Wild to sit on a haypile,

    Writing Haikus,
Drinkin wine

(Book of Haikus 70)

This haiku reflects two conflicting objects. In fact, “Haikus” have nothing to do with “wine”; however, this haiku mixes two images. The “wine” can be interpreted as the reflection of the Christian ritual, which is far from Japanese haiku. But it seemed that Kerouac created an “Easternized” Christianity. One of the remarkable aspects of Kerouac is that he drew influence from Catholicism as well as Buddhism. Kerouac grew up in a devout Catholic family, which later caused confusion and stress when he studied Buddhism. Still, this contributed to Kerouac’s own significant viewpoint. Kerouac tried to stress on the coexistence of nature and human-made object:

Churchbells ringing in town

—The caterpillar

In the grass

(Book of Haikus 40)

This haiku contrasts religion and nature by using “churchbells” and “caterpillar,” respectively. Kerouac not only implies a human-made object, “churchbells,” but also at the same time implies “caterpillar,” which is “in the grass,” a dominant image and signifier of nature. Another haiku by Kerouac also directly expresses the element of Christianity:

Gull sailing

in the saffron sky—

The Holy Ghost wanted it

(Book of Haikus 70)
The word “The Holy Ghost” certainly denotes Christianity, and here, the element of nature is also implied with “Gull sailing” and “saffron sky.” Kerouac’s haiku does not limit to one side. Kerouac strives to find the balance between the two different sides, resulting in harmony in his haiku. Many of his haiku reflect the elements of the East as well as those of the West:

Ah, Genghiz Khan

weeping—where
did Autumn go?

(Book of Haikus 173)

Along these lines, Armand Morrissette in “A Catholic’s View of Kerouac” notes that Kerouac differed from others in terms of religion:

Kerouac was profoundly religious. He was truly exalted by his visions. He did not want to be boxed in. He was searching for liberation, total liberation. He longed to fly out into everlasting space, like an aviator, a bird, or an angel. He confided in me that he thought that Roman Catholic Church had much to offer, but that some practices of his faith at home seemed to be foolish—that certain laws of the Church were enslaving people, giving them a sense of guilt. He would be quite relieved today by the changes that have come about.

(Morrissette 7)

Kerouac not only confined himself to the theory of the religion itself; he tried to decide the action he should take. Although devout in his practice of Catholicism, he dispensed with some practices that are inappropriate for people. The significance of Kerouac’s haiku and religion is that Kerouac not only fully confluences of two different religions and occasionally a harmony

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between them.

IV. Kerouac’s Haiku and Buddhism

Kerouac’s interest in Buddhism grew from early 1954 to 1957. He first became interested in Buddhism before his acquaintance with Snyder in late 1953. From that time until 1960, Kerouac remained deeply immersed in Buddhism. Kerouac concentrated on Buddhist study and practice after 1956. According to Barry Miles in *Jack Kerouac King of the Beats* (1998), Kerouac could not sit still to meditate for a long time and did not have teacher-studentship in order to acquire Buddhism:

> Jack’s reading on Buddhism was very thorough but, though he meditated, he was unable to sit in the lotus position or to sit still for very long. . . . Also, his Buddhism was academic rather than a dynamic part of his life. Unlike other Beats who got involved with Buddhism, Jack never had the teacher-student relationship that is regarded central to a proper understanding of Buddhism. He was never a part of a school and did not receive the oral tradition. His understanding was entirely autodidactic; it all came from books. Without a teacher, it is hard to imagine that he was able to meditate correctly, according to the Buddhist traditions. (Miles 196-197)

Kerouac’s understanding of Buddhism consists of two different positions. According to Ginsberg, Kerouac is the one who had fully understood Buddhism while Snyder as well as Whalen thought that Kerouac had little understanding of Buddhism. Kerouac at times thought that Christianity was problematic, but he changed his attitude toward the two religions, and he
did have a certain balance between the Buddhist practice and his Catholic upbringing. He changed the direction by mixing the ideas of Catholicism and Buddhism.

Kerouac viewed haiku as the manner by which to get away from the repetitive cycle of birth and death. Despite this, only few of the literati knew that Kerouac also worked on sonnets, odes, and psalms as well as blues. He based blues on blues and jazz idioms. Kerouac’s poetic style is free-flowing, free prose, containing the elements of jazz and Buddhism. Kerouac, though, concluded that English haiku is impossible to compose in seventeen syllables as in Japanese. He pointed out that “Western languages” are not able to go with the fluid syllabic Japanese. Eventually, Kerouac created the stepping stones for an American haiku movement. More specifically, Kerouac adapted haiku into English, and he called it, “American haikus.” He proposed that Western languages cannot exactly follow the tradition of the Japanese haiku form. Instead, he sought his own way of composing a haiku by following three-line form, as shown in Blyth’s translations. He composed more than hundreds of haiku from 1956 to 1966. His Book of Haikus (2003) triggered a change in interest. Although his book proved seminal in the use of haiku, Kerouac was not the first writer to deal with haiku: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell, and Wallace Stevens had already composed haiku several decades prior.

With regard to music, the Beat movement is influenced by jazz, especially Bebop. After that, Kerouac used an idea of Buddhism that he had first learned from Snyder. According to Daniel Ross Chandler in “The Beat Generation and Buddhist Religion,” the philosophy and the religion of the East provided the spiritual root of the Beat generation:

20 Interestingly, Richard Wright also followed Blyth’s three-line form. As pointed out earlier, Kerouac and Wright both studied Blyth’s book on haiku before trying their hands at composing haiku.
Eastern literature and spirituality provided an irresistible incentive for the Beats’ creative writing. . . . This prominent Beat poet described writing as a form of meditation or introspective yoga; Allen concluded that poetry, particularly Haiku, offers a method for reaching ultimate truth. Through their writings, the Beat poets constructed an all-encompassing universalism composed from gnosticism, mysticism, Native American lore, Buddhist texts and painting, and Persian sources. . . . Beats regarded Asian religions as an essential resource for transforming western civilizations institutional and psychological impediments that inhibit expanding consciousness. Eastern spirituality they felt, provides a pathway leading toward ecstasy rather than spiritual stagnation and suffocation. 

(Chandler 315-316)

The East influenced Kerouac and in turn the Beat generation. To Kerouac, the East functioned as a useful device to him. Benedict Giamo in “Enlightened Attachment: Kerouac’s Impermanent Buddhist Trek” notes that Buddhism not only functioned as Kerouac’s quest for inspiration but also functioned as a very protective device:

Of the seven books written during this time, Buddhism plays a dominant role in five (“Wake Up”—the biography of the Buddha—the poems collected in Mexico City Blues, The Scripture of the Golden Eternity, Book One of Desolation Angels, and The Dharma Bums) and a more or less balanced role in the remaining two (Visions of Gerard and Tristessa). This is an impressive creative outpour of work for any writer. In fact it was the most productive period of Kerouac’s career, surpassing in sheer volume the five novels he had written
between 1951-1953, demonstrating that the discovery of Buddhism was both an inspiration for the ongoing spiritual-literary-artistic quest and, for a time, a very useful protective device. (Giamo 180)

Kerouac fully understood the Four Noble Truths of suffering in Buddhism. The First Noble Truth of suffering includes the pain of growing old, come down with a disease, and finally dying. Each of these associate with the lapse of the time and can be interpreted as impermanent and insubstantial. The Second Noble Truth of suffering is about the origin of suffering and that it is all rooted in our desire for sense pleasures, as demonstrated in classic haiku, which suppresses physical sexual desire and emphasizes spiritual aspiration. The Third Noble Truth consists of keeping a distance with all things, and attaining wisdom in order to get rid of all desire, and it is related with the ending of suffering. The Fourth Noble Truth is concerned with self-indulgence and self-mortification; its practice is done by ethical conduct, mental discipline, and attaining wisdom.

The primary goal in Kerouac’s studies of Buddhism was his achievement of Buddhahood. With Blyth as a guide, Kerouac tried to situate the concept of Buddhahood, what he called “the Buddha nature,” in the Buddhist doctrine. “The scale of beings in the Buddhist universe,” Blyth observed, “puts man midway. The primitive animistic ideas of Japanese fall in with Buddhist system, and all are united by the theory of transmigration. The result is (or is it the cause?) that our sympathies are widened in both directions” (Blyth, *Eastern Culture* 19).

Because humans find themselves between the animate and the inanimate, Buddhism teaches its followers to have compassion on the animate as well as on the inanimate. In several of his haiku, he directly expressed his achievement of Buddhahood:
I close my eyes—
I hear & see
Mandala

*(Book of Haikus 85)*

“I Close My Eyes” envisions the self in an image of Mandala, a Buddhist divinity figure.

Another piece on Buddha,

The mountains
are mighty patient,
Buddha-man

*(Book of Haikus 86)*

depicts an image of Buddha in terms of nature rather than a figure. In the following piece,

While meditating
I am Buddha—
Who else?

*(Book of Haikus 97)*

Buddha is defined as a concept; a meditation yields such a concept. Kerouac is illustrating the Buddhist enlightenment by which to reach a state of mind in which one has effaced subjectivity and attained *satori*.\(^{21}\)

The Buddha nature, buttressed by Buddhist ontology, was what Kerouac tried to achieve.

\[^{21}\text{Blyth in *Oriental Humor* (1959) defines *satori*: “According to Buddha, the object of life is *satori*, enlightenment, and this continued and continuous state is Nirvana, but since sin is only the illusion that sin is sin, since enlightenment is illusion and illusion is enlightenment, all this business of salvation and the endeavour to be enlightened is the most blithering nonsense” (Oriental Humor 266).}^*\]
Midway through *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac asserts: “I know I’m empty, awake, and that there’s no difference between me and anything else. In other words, it means that I’ve become the same as everything else. It means I’ve become a Buddha.” Then he adds, “I felt great compassion for the trees because we were the same thing; I petted the dogs who didn’t argue with me ever. All dogs love God. They’re wiser than their masters. I told that to the dogs, too, they listened to me perking up their ears and licking my face. They didn’t care one way or the other as long as I was there” (*The Dharma Bums* 145).

Unlike Snyder, Kerouac was drawn to Mahayana Buddhism, which puts more emphasis on the doctrine of compassion and love. In *Haiku: Eastern Culture* (1981), the first volume of the seminal book on haiku, mentioned above, Blyth takes the pains to explain the history of Eastern religions and philosophies and especially the hybridization of Buddhism and Confucianism in Japanese Buddhism. Kerouac realized in his studies of Buddhism and haiku that Confucianism, a philosophy, is concerned with the relationship between humans and the universe whereas Buddhism, a religion, concerns itself with that relationship between humans and the world.

In the beginning of his study of Buddhism, Kerouac did not have concern for Buddhist mythology or all the names and national flavors of Buddhism, such as the hybridization of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism in Japanese history. He was deeply impressed with “the first of Sakyamuni’s four noble truths, *All life is suffering.*” Upon further thoughts, he pondered: “I hadn’t yet digested the Lankavatara Scripture which eventually shows you that there’s nothing in the world but the mind itself, and therefore all’s possible including the suppression of suffering” (*The Dharma Bums* 12).
While Kerouac considered himself an optimistic, joyful pilgrim, he was worried about his fellow pilgrims. Midway in their pilgrimage, Kerouac was struck one day with Snyder’s looking depressed and suffering in his shack. Trying to console Snyder, Kerouac heard him say “I’m depressed and everything you’re saying just depresses me further” (*The Dharma Bums* 170). But moments later, he witnessed Snyder chanting Buddhist prayers in high spirits: “At seven in the morning the sun was out and the butterflies were in the roses by my head and a hummingbird did a jet dive right down at me, whistling, and darted away happily” (*The Dharma Bums* 171). Kerouac realized that his perception of Snyder’s depression was wrong and that springtime lifted Snyder’s spirits: “It was one of the greatest mornings in our lives. There he was standing in the doorway of the shack with a big frying pan in his hand banging on it and chanting ‘Buddham saranam gocchami . . . Dhammam saranam gocchami . . . Sangham saranam gocchami’ and yelling ‘Come on, boy, your pancakes are ready! Come and get it! Bang’ and the orange sun was pouring in through the pines and everything was fine again, in fact Japhy had contemplated that night and decided I was right about hewing to the good old Dharma.” Kerouac concluded this episode by saying that Snyder in fact “had contemplated that night and decided I was right about hewing to the good old Dharma” (*The Dharma Bums* 171).

Later in a discussion with Kerouac on the Buddhist doctrine of compassion and mercy, Snyder posed a question: “But supposing you’re reborn in the lower hells and have hot redhot balls of iron shoved down your throat by devils.” Snyder responded: “Life’s already shoved an iron foot down my mouth. But I don’t think that’s anything but a dream cooked up by some hysterical monks who didn’t understand Buddha’s peace under the Bo Tree or for that matter Christ’s peace looking down on the heads of his tormentors and forgiving them.” About Christ
and on compassion and love, Kerouac said to Snyder, “And after all, a lot of people say he is Maitreya, the Buddha prophesied to appear after Sakyamuni, you know, Maitreya means ‘Love’ in Sanskrit and all Christ talked about was love” (The Dharma Bums 202).

In the following haiku, Kerouac demonstrates the Buddhist doctrine of mercy and compassion in contrast to Christianity:

Shall I say no?
—fly rubbing
its back legs

(Book of Haikus 78)

This piece suggests that Kerouac composed it in praise of Issa’s famous haiku on a fly, as noted earlier:

You dare not strike him!
The fly is praying with hands
And with legs.23

(Issa)

In this haiku by Kerouac,

Shall I break God’s commandment?

Little fly

---

22 Maitreya: “in Buddhist tradition, the future Buddha, presently a bodhisattva residing in the Tushita heaven, who will descend to earth to preach anew the dharma (‘law’) when the teachings of Gautama Buddha have completely decayed. Maitreya is the earliest bodhisattva around whom a cult developed and is mentioned in scriptures from the 3rd century CE. He was accepted by all schools of Buddhism and is still the only bodhisattva generally honoured by the Theravada tradition.” (Encyclopædia Britannica)

23 The translation of Issa’s haiku is by Hakutani.
Rubbing its back legs

(Book of Haikus 109)

he is conflating the Christian doctrine with the Buddhist doctrine of mercy by invoking God’s Commandment, which the first haiku “Shall I Say No?” expresses. The following piece on the same subject,

Woke up groaning

with a dream of a priest

Eating chicken necks

(Book of Haikus 31)

portrays a nightmare a Christian converted Buddhist like Kerouac would have. This haiku suggests Kerouac’s view of Christians’ cruelty to animals in contrast to Buddhists’ belief in the existence of soul in animals.

Furthermore, Kerouac introduced a meditation on emptiness and form as well as a stress for the golden eternity. The golden eternity is gained from one’s enlightenment. The form of Buddha sutra was used when Kerouac presented this golden eternity. At the same time, he also used the Zen practice of Koans. Koan is originally Kung-an in Chinese and is pronounced in Japanese as kō-an. It means “a public document.” There are 1700 koans to be solved by a Zen student before the student becomes a fully-qualified master. It is also accepted that one understood half of Zen when one understands the importance of koan. The most important thing in studying Zen is to know the universe itself.

Kerouac later started to have interest in Mahayana Buddhism. He regarded the Indian Mahayana Buddhism as purer. After Kerouac was deep into Mahayana Buddhism, he had respect
for D.T. Suzuki. The interest in Suzuki influenced him in terms of the Zen tradition of haiku poetry. Kerouac was afraid that he might fall into temptations and peer pressure since Zen Buddhism was a popular tradition. The first teaching gained from the enlightenment is a realization of Buddha-nature type. He did not have the actual answer for life’s big question, but he had an idea of golden eternity. The second teaching derives from the concept of emptiness, nothingness, and arbitrary conceptions. In sum, only the arbitrary conceptions of the mind and senses exist.

Kerouac was also conscious of natural elements; he tried to express them by contrasting them with mechanical objects. Many haiku have contrasts between mechanical objects and elements of nature.

> No telegram today
> —Only more
> Leaves fell

*(Book of Haikus 5)*

The “telegram” is a mechanical, human object while “leaves” refers to an element of nature. This haiku tells us the increment in the falling leaves when there is no telegram. This contrast emphasizes the nature based upon the idea to avoid the misuse of science or technology. Moreover, Kerouac was good at combining two different kinds of words in haiku:

> Grain elevators, waiting
> for the road
> To approach them

*(Book of Haikus 7)*
He combines human and natural objects that reflect the modern world by expressing them as “grain elevators.” The words such as “grain” and “elevators” stand in contrast, but Kerouac combined the two words into haiku to show the relationship between nature and the modern world.

One of the remarkable aspects of Kerouac’s haiku is that his haiku does not focus on the depiction of seasons as does the traditional haiku. He uses plants and animals to create a mood for haiku and uses place names or the names of people.

Empty baseball field

—A robin,

Hops along the bench

(Book of Haikus 27)

The “robin” is placed in an “empty baseball field.” It is significant that Kerouac’s haiku differs from the traditional haiku. The “robin” should be placed in a certain place in nature if Kerouac strictly followed traditional haiku. Kerouac often put two contrasting images in a haiku.

The sleeping moth—

he doesn’t know

The lamps turned up again

(Book of Haikus 41)

The “sleeping moth” and “lamps turned up” create a contrasting image as well as since the two subjects have different characteristics. The “moth” is a part of nature whereas the “lamp” is human-made object. Kerouac’s haiku definitely uses the element in nature such as birds, insects, plants, and so on but at the same time uses human-made objects as the following haiku
illustrates:

Reading my notes—

The fly stepping from

The page to the finger

(Book of Haikus 41)

This haiku suggests the idea that nature and a human-made object coexist. Here, the “fly” does not run away from the note but rather moves onto the “finger.” This haiku expresses Kerouac’s deeply held observation that human life thrives on the coexistence of nature and humanity.

V. Kerouac’s Haiku and Zen

Not only was Kerouac influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, especially its doctrine of Buddhahood and mercy, he also became interested in Zen Buddhism as he discussed its philosophy and practice with Snyder, who had studied Zen in Japanese monasteries. What distinguishes Zen from the rest of the sects is Zen’s emphasis on the aforementioned state of mind called “mu,” nothingness. In Nozarashi Kiko (A Travel Account of My Exposure in the Fields), Basho, the eminent Japanese haiku poet as well as Zen Buddhist, wrote: “When I set out on my journey of a thousand leagues I packed no provisions for the road. I clung to the staff of that pilgrim of old who, it is said, ‘entered the realm of nothingness under the moon after midnight.’”24 Several of Kerouac’s haiku depict the state of nothingness:

(17)

Everywhere beyond

24 Quoted by Donald Keene in World within Walls, 81.
the Truth,

Empty space blue

(Book of Haikus 86)

“Everywhere Beyond” is reminiscent of the empty space the whiteness of the whale symbolizes in Melville’s *Moby-Dick.* Another piece on the Zen state of mind,

Spring day—

in my mind

Nothing

(Book of Haikus 124)

bears a resemblance to Wright’s haiku:

It is September,

The month in which I was born;

And I have no thoughts.

(Wright, *Haiku: This Other World* 127)

To enter the state of nothingness, one must annihilate oneself. The undisciplined self is often misguided by egotism. In Zen, one’s self-reliance precludes the attainment of *satori* because one’s consciousness of self means that one is not completely free of one’s thoughts and feelings and has not identified self with the absolute. Whereas Mahayana Buddhism, which is

25 In the chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” in *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes: “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless all-color of atheism from which we shrink?” (169).
practiced in the Jodo sect in Japan, wherein one can achieve one’s salvation by praying to the Buddha, Zen Buddhism, as practiced in the Rinzai sect, urges its followers even to “kill the Buddha” to attain their enlightenment. Some of Kerouac’s haiku convey Rinzai’s admonition:

There’s no Buddha
because
There’s no me

(Book of Haikus 75)

(59)
I called Hanshan
in the mountains
—there was no answer

(Book of Haikus 93)

All these haiku express the Zen discipline of mind that the ultimate truth lies not in self or another person, or even a divine figure such as Buddha or Christ. The ultimate truth emerges in the state of nothingness—nature itself. Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), the well-known Japanese modernist haiku poet, expressed a similar point of view in this haiku:

The wind in autumn
As for me, there are no gods,
There are no Buddhas.26

(Shiki)

As the following haiku by Kerouac shows, effacing the subject, the suppression of

26 The translation of Shiki’s haiku is by Hakutani.
egotism, is expressed indirectly:

The trees are putting on

Noh plays—

Booming, roaring

*(Book of Haikus 125)*

“The Trees Are Putting On” is a portrayal of nature that has nothing to do with the subject who is watching the trees. At the same time the trees are likened to noh plays, which enact the Zen doctrine that one must suppress egotism and subjectivity. Another piece on the Zen discipline of mind,

The train speeding

thru emptiness

—I was a trainman

*(Book of Haikus 125)*

describes the subject, a train speeding through emptiness, a space that constitutes the realm of nothingness. The subject, which is infinitesimal and is pitted against a vast space, cannot claim its place in it. Another haiku on the absence of human subjectivity,

Lay the pencil

away—no more

thoughts, no lead

*(Book of Haikus 139)*

concerns the state of nothingness, where human thoughts cannot enter.

Still some other haiku intimate that human subjectivity is irrelevant and suspect:
I said a joke
under the stars
—No laughter

(Book of Haikus 39)

You’d be surprised
how little I knew
Even up to yesterday

(Book of Haikus 65)

These pieces each illustrate that the human mind, subjectivity, is negligible when compared with nature, objectivity. The second haiku, “You’d Be Surprised,” suggests that knowledge originates in nature. In the following haiku,

Take up a cup of water
from the ocean
And there I am

(Book of Haikus 66)

Kerouac tries to prove how small and irrelevant an individual is in the midst of an ocean.

Another haiku on the same subject,

Or, walking the same or different
paths
The moon follows each

(Book of Haikus 66)
not only demonstrates the primacy of nature over humanity, but describes how human action is
dictated by universal law: as human existence is ephemeral as nature is ubiquitous.

One summer in June 1956, after he finished writing On the Road but the book was
actually published later in 1957, Kerouac stayed in Desolation Peak for sixty-three days. He
isolated himself there, reflected on nature, and finally wrote in the spirit of Zen Buddhism. His
initial interest in Zen went back earlier to when Kerouac, living in Berkeley with Ginsberg at the
time of the Gallery Six poetry reading. Kerouac first met Snyder, who was living in a shack
nearby. Kerouac was immediately impressed by Snyder and especially with his knowledge of
Chinese and Japanese. He saw Snyder living with numerous books, including the famous books
by Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki and R. H. Blyth’s four volumes of Japanese haiku. He saw Snyder
immersed in his studies of Zen Buddhism and in his translation of “Cold Mountain” by Medieval
Chinese Zen poet Han Shan. While walking together, Snyder was not only a delightful
companion but also appeared a blissful individual: “But Japhy had on his fine big boots and his
little green Swiss cap with feather, and looked elfin but rugged. . . . his eyes shine with joy, he’s
on his way, his heroes are John Muir and Han Shan and Shih-te and Li Po and John Burroughs
and Paul Bunyan and Kropotkin. . . .” (The Dharma Bums 54).

Later in their walk with rucksacks on their backs like struggling infantrymen, Kerouac
said, “Isn’t this a hell of a lot greater than The Place? Getting drunk in there on a fresh Saturday
morning like this, all bleary and sick, and here we are by the fresh pure lake walking along in
this good air, by God it’s a haiku in itself” (The Dharma Bums 55). Snyder responded:
“‘Comparisons are odious, Smith,’ he sent sailing back to me, quoting Cervantes and making a
Zen Buddhist observation to boot. ‘It don’t make a damn frigging difference whether you’re in
The Place or hiking up Matterhorn, it’s all the same old void, boy’’” (The Dharma Bums 55). By “the same old void” Snyder meant the Zen doctrine of *mu*, the state of nothingness. To Kerouac, Snyder was an epitome of Zen philosophy.

In a later discussion of Zen philosophy with Kerouac, Snyder observed: “The mind is nothing but the world, goddammit. Then Horse Ancestor said ‘this mind is Buddha.’ He also said ‘No mind is Buddha.’ Then finally talking about Great Plum his boy, ‘The plum is ripe’” (The Dharma Bums 96). Snyder’s definition of Buddha as a mind as well as no mind means that Buddha represents a point of view that excludes human subjectivity. To Snyder, Buddha is *mu*, the void, the emptiness, the state of nothingness, all equated to the state of nature. From that domain, human subjectivity is barred from its entry.

After Snyder left for Japan to live in a Zen monastery in Kyoto, Kerouac accomplished his search for Buddahood on Mount Hozomeen as he heard thunder. All of a sudden he saw “a green and rose rainbow shafted right down into Starvation Ridge not three hundred yards away from my door, like a bolt, like a pillar: it came among steaming clouds and orange sun turmoiling.

What is a rainbow, Lord?

A hoop

For the lowly.” (The Dharma Bums 241)

The rain, as he described, “hooped right into Lightning Creek, rain and snow fell simultaneous, the lake was milkwhite a mile below, it was just too crazy.” (The Dharma Bums 241) At dusk he “... meditated in the yellow half moon of August. Whenever I heard thunder in the mountains it was like the iron of my mother’s love” (The Dharma Bums 242). As he descended Mount
Hozomeen, he saw “on the lake rosy reflections of celestial vapor,” and said, “‘God, I love you’... ‘I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other’” (The Dharma Bums 244).

Kerouac’s achievement of Buddhahood was strengthened by the two doctrines of Buddhism: Buddhist ontology and mu, the Zen concept of the state of nothingness. Blyth shows with classic haiku that the Buddhist ontology reinforcements what he calls “the theory of transmigration.” Buddhists, unlike Christians, believe that both humans and nonhumans possess a soul and that the soul transmigrates between humans and nonhumans. As such, Buddhists believe in reincarnation. Buddhist ontology inspired Kerouac to practice the doctrine of compassion for all living beings. The Buddhist concept of mu had rid him of egotism. If humans can treat nonhumans as their equals, then they will not be egotists. Kerouac realized that the Christian concept of righteousness is antithetical to the Buddhist concept of mu. He said, “I was very rich now, a super myriad trillionaire in Sampatti transcendental graces, because of good humble karma, maybe because I had pitied the dog and forgiven men. But I knew now that I was a bliss heir, and that the final sin, the worst, is righteousness” (The Dharma Bums 149).

In fact, The Dharma Bums was dedicated to Han Shan, the legendary Medieval Chinese poet. Kerouac was first introduced to Han Shan by Snyder. From time to time, whenever they discussed Zen, the discussion was highlighted by Han Shan’s vision of the world. That The Dharma Bums opens with the dedication to Han Shan at the suggestion of Snyder and closes with a vision of Han Shan suggests that Han Shan’s vision was what had inspired Kerouac to achieve and emulate in his studies of Buddhism. Their dialogue began as Snyder told Kerouac that Snyder was in the midst of translating Han Shan’s famous poem “Cold Mountain.” “Han Shan,” Snyder
told Kerouac, “you see was a Chinese scholar who got sick of the big city and the world and took off to hide in the mountains” (*The Dharma Bums* 20). Kerouac wondered why Han Shan was Snyder’s hero. Snyder said, “Because . . . he was a poet, a mountain man, a Buddhist dedicated to the principle of meditation on the essence of all things, a vegetarian too by the way though I haven’t got on that kick from figuring maybe in this modern world to be a vegetarian is to split hairs a little since all sentient beings eat what they can. And he was a man of solitude who could take off by himself and live purely and true to himself” (*The Dharma Bums* 22). Later in the book Snyder read to Kerouac Snyder’s translation of the key stanza of “Cold Mountain.” The last six lines (“I’ve got no use for the kulak / With his big barn and pasture— / He just sets up a prison for himself. / Once in he can’t get out. / Think it over— / You know it might happen to you”)\(^\text{27}\) is reminiscent of Thoreau’s satire in *Walden* (1884) on a rich farmer’s desire to own a mansion that would ironically

\[^{27}\text{The following is Snyder’s translation of “Cold Mountain,” published in 1958, the same year \textit{The Dharma Bums} appeared:}\]

\begin{verbatim}
Cold Mountain is a house
Without beams or walls.
The six doors left and right are open
The hall is blue sky.
The rooms all vacant and vague
The east wall beats on the west wall
At the center nothing.

Borrowers don’t bother me
In the cold I build a little fire
When I’m hungry I boil up some greens.
I’ve got no use for the kulak
With his big barn and pasture—
He just sets up a prison for himself.
Once in he can’t get out.
Think it over—
You know it might happen to you.
\end{verbatim}

imprison its owner in it.

Kerouac and Snyder were both struck, on the one hand, with Han Shan’s dedication to the discipline of meditation on the cold mountain and, on the other, with the vision he attained by meditation. When they went out camping one day, Snyder showed Kerouac the manner of Zazen [kneeling] meditation.28 As Kerouac spread out his sleeping bag and took off his shoes, sighing happily, slipping his stockinged feet into his sleeping bag, and “looking around gladly at the beautiful fall trees thinking ‘Ah what a night of true sweet sleep this will be, what meditations I can get into in this intense silence of Nowhere’” (The Dharma Bums 47-48). While Snyder was in search of Buddhist nirvana through Zazen meditation, Kerouac was determined to reach the state of nothingness, nowhere, and silence. While Snyder often concentrated on chanting of Gocham, the Buddhist prayer of mu, nothingness, Snyder tried to attain mu through silence. “I knew,” Kerouac told himself “that the sound of silence was everywhere and therefore everything everywhere was silence” (The Dharma Bums 199).

Kerouac attempted to demonstrate that everything on earth, including himself, is empty and awake. He further argued that no difference exists between him and anything else on earth. This concept was based on the concept of mu, as well as Buddhist ontology, in which all living beings have equal existence on earth. What is happening in them, whether in the animate or the inanimate, has nothing to do with human thoughts and actions. These living beings, representing mu, are autonomous and beyond human control or human subjectivity. Kerouac came to envision

28 Zazen is a practice of meditation by which a follower of Zen doctrine kneels on the hard floor to achieve mu, the state of nothingness. The practice enables one to rid one’s mind of human subjectivity and egotism and reach the state of open-mindedness and unconsciousness akin to the state of nature.
that everything on earth was nothing, empty: “I am emptiness, I am not different from emptiness, neither is emptiness different from me; indeed, emptiness is me.” (The Dharma Bums 138)

Once he was able to envision the state of nothingness through meditation, he said, “I almost heard the words said: ‘Everything is all right forever and forever and forever.’ . . . I felt like yelling it to the stars. I clasped my hands and prayed, ‘O wise and serene spirit of Awakenhood, everything’s all right forever and forever and forever and thank you thank you thank you amen’” (The Dharma Bums 137).

Ever since the beginning of his journey, when he encountered on a freight train in California a little old bum with a slip of paper containing Saint Teresa’s prayer, Kerouac had been obsessed with the infinitesimal human existence on earth. While lying on the beach at night he contemplated the infinity of the universe by wondering how many grains of sand on the beach as there are stars in the sky. Extending his speculation to human existence, he wondered,

. . . “How many human beings have there been, in fact how many living creatures have there been, since before the less part of beginningless time? Why, oy, I reckon you would have to calculate the number of grains of sand on this beach and on every star in the sky, in every one of the ten thousand great chilicosms, which would be a number of sand grains uncomputable by IBM and Burroughs too, why boy I don’t rightly know” . . .

(The Dharma Bums 8).

Kerouac’s speculation about infinity in the universe is reminiscent of Huck and Jim’s speculation in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) about how the countless stars came into being. Kerouac, as are Huck and Jim, was convinced of the infinitesimal, negligible existence of human
beings. Pitted against the infinity of the universe, the existence of human subjectivity is erased.

Kerouac and Snyder both came to share the same vision of human existence, the Zen concept of the state of nothingness. Shortly before Snyder left for Japan to study Zen, Kerouac, before attaining the final vision of the world, even wondered how human beings’ ancestors, the Neanderthal, viewed the world. Kerouac posed a rhetorical question, “Can’t you just see all those enlightened monkey men sitting around a roaring woodfire around their Buddha saying nothing and knowing everything?” “The stars,” Snyder responded, “were the same then as they are tonight” (*The Dharma Bums* 214). Both agreed that the world had not changed since time immemorial and that the state of nature was permanent.

At the end of his journey, Kerouac witnessed that the void, the hole in the ground, never changed. The truth of nature in this world remained the same. As did Thoreau in *Walden*, Kerouac realized that while the world never changed, he had changed: he thought that he had achieved Buddhist enlightenment. Kerouac wrote, “Morning, the definite feel of autumn coming, the end of my job coming, wild windy cloud-crazed days now, a definite golden look in the high noon haze. Night, made hot cocoa and sang by the woodfire. I called Han Shan in the mountains: there was no answer. I called Han Shan in the morning fog: silence, it said. I called: Dipankara instructed me by saying nothing. Mists blew by, I closed my eyes, the stove did the talking. “Woo!” I yelled, and the bird of perfect balance on the fir point just moved his tail; then he was gone and distance grew immensely white” (*The Dharma Bums* 242).

As a Beat writer, Kerouac drew inspiration from the Zen doctrine that to attain enlightenment is to reach the state of nothingness. Not only is this state of mind free of human subjectivity and egotism, it is even free of religious conception. Rinzai Zen, as noted earlier,
teaches its followers that if they see Buddha in their meditations, they must “kill” him. At the same time, Kerouac was deeply influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches that one can achieve Buddahood in life or death and that the human soul, bolstered by the virtues of mercy and compassion, transmigrate from one living being to another.

Kerouac’s haiku during this time is prosaic, secular and Western-like style:

(9)

Me, my pipe,
my folded legs –
Far from Buddha

*(Book of Haikus 85)*

Here, the word, “pipe,” is far from Buddhism and reflects the secular world. In fact, the haiku also mentions that it is “far from Buddha.” Further, “Harry Truman,” the 33rd president of the United States, is mentioned in the haiku:

(23)

Gee last night –
dreamed
Of Harry Truman

*(Book of Haikus 87)*

During this period, Kerouac’s haiku differed from the traditional style of haiku.

In a conversation about death between himself and Snyder, Kerouac said that death is a reward, and that we reach into the stage of nirvana Heaven. Kerouac also suggested that the Beat poetics should celebrate the life of the beatific rather than the beaten life and this beatific life is
either in our life or death. The idea of life and death is well represented in his haiku:

Listen to the birds sing!

All the little birds

Will die!

*(Book of Haikus 7)*

This haiku starts with a joyful scene where birds are singing then all of a sudden this haiku ends with “Will die!” This implies that there is not much difference between life and death. In other words, death is inevitable when there is a life.

*The Dharma Bums*, like *On the Road*, can be read as a quest taken by Kerouac in search of individual freedom, with an idealism that reinforces the American dream. The Zen concept of *mu* Kerouac acquired in his study and practice of Buddhism yielded his concept of individual freedom. Midway through his journey, lying on his bag and smoking, he thought, “Everything is possible. I am God, I am Buddha, I am imperfect Ray Smith, all at the same time, I am empty space, I all things. I have all the time in the world from life to life to do what is to do, to do what is done, to do the timeless doing, infinitely perfect within, why cry, why worry, perfect like mind essence and the minds of banana peels” (*The Dharma Bums* 122). He was at the same time laughing and remembering his poetic Zen Lunatic Dharma Bum friends of San Francisco whom he dearly missed. On another occasion, he sat in his Buddha-arbor, *colyalcolor* “wall of flowers pink and red and ivory white, among aviaries of magic transcendent birds recognizing my awakening mind with sweet weird cries (the pathless lark), in the ethereal perfume, mysteriously ancient, the bliss of the Buddha-fields.” He then saw that his “life was a vast glowing empty page and I could do anything I wanted” (*The Dharma Bums* 147-48).
“After a while,” Kerouac realized, “my meditations and studies began to bear fruit.” One cold night in the woods in absolute silence, it seemed that he heard the words: “Everything is all right forever and forever and forever.” He repeated his prayer, “O wise and serene spirit of Awakenerhood, everything’s all right forever and forever and forever and thank you thank you thank you amen.” Praying with the words “Awakenerhood” and “amen” suggests that Kerouac was indeed conflating Buddhism and Christianity in his search for the truths of life. He often referred to Gautama Buddha’s enlightenment under the Bo Tree as well as Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Contemplating death and eternity, he said, “I realized that this was the truth Rosie knew now, and all the dead, my dead father and dead brother and dead uncles and cousins and aunts, the truth that is realizable in a dead man’s bones and is beyond the Tree of Buddha as well as the Cross of Jesus. Believe that the world is an ethereal flower, and ye live.” (The Dharma Bums 137). Kerouac’s argument is that the truth of life lies beyond Buddha’s enlightenment and Christ’s death. For Kerouac, the truth of life means the Zen concept of the state of nothingness, and the state of nothingness is his nirvana.

As he went around the country as a Buddhist bum, he was also traveling as if he were a roaming bard like Basho. Meditations in the fields and woods and studies of Buddhism at home and in the library led to his composing numerous haiku in his mind. He often talked with Snyder with the theory and technique of haiku composition. As mentioned in The Dharma Bums, Kerouac, while reading a number of books on Buddhism, also consulted the four volume book on Japanese haiku by R. H. Blyth, especially the first volume, subtitled “Eastern Culture.” “Kerouac’s pocket notebooks,” as Regina Weinreich notes, contained “haiku entries written in New York City, Tangier, Aix-en-Provence, London, New York City again, Berkeley, Mexico, and
Orlando. As the notebooks and letters of this period show, Kerouac exhorted himself to write haiku, mindful of the traditional methods” (*Book of Haikus* 106).

Kerouac, while hiking in the mountains with Snyder, said: “Walking in this country you could understand the perfect gems of haikus the Oriental poets had written, never getting drunk in the mountains or anything but just going along as fresh as children writing down what they saw without literary devices of fanciness of expression. We made up haikus as we climbed, winding up and up now on the slopes of brush” (*The Dharma Bums* 59). Snyder responded: “A real haiku’s gotta be as simple as porridge and yet make you see the real thing, like the greatest haiku of them all probably is the one that goes ‘The sparrow hops along the veranda, with wet feet.’ By Shiki. You see the wet footprints like a vision in your mind and yet in those few words you also see all the rain that’s been falling that day and almost smell the wet pine needles’” (*The Dharma Bums* 59).

Kerouac and Snyder both underscored that haiku must be simple, the principle that Blyth considers a salient characteristic of haiku. As an example, Blyth quotes a haiku Basho composed on his travels:

The Rose of Sharon

By the roadside,

Was eaten by the horse.29

“What Bashō means,” Blyth remarks, “is something that belongs to Zen, namely, that we must not wish to do something clever, write a fine poem, but do it as naturally, as freely, as

unselfconsciously as a child does everything.” Blyth further quotes another haiku by Basho and a haiku by Issa to illustrate the simplicity of haiku:

You light the fire;
I’ll show you something nice,—
A great ball of snow!

(Basho)

I could eat it!—
This snow that falls
So softly, so softly.

(Issa)

Both haiku are depictions of simple, natural phenomena in nature, but Basho’s haiku expresses some subjectivity of aesthetics, just as Issa reflects subjectivity of desire.

Following the principle of simplicity and naturalness, Kerouac wrote numerous haiku such as:

(71)

Chipmunk went in
—butterfly
Came out

(Book of Haikus 95)

__________________________

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. The translation of Basho’s and Issa’s haiku is by Blyth.
Sunday—

the sky is blue,

The flowers are red

(Book of Haikus 103)

The little white cat

Walks in the grass

With his tail up in the air

(Book of Haikus 115)

Birds chirp

fog

Bugs the gate

(Book of Haikus 122)

April mist—

under the pine

At midnight

(Book of Haikus 123)

Wet fog

shining
In lamplit leaves

(Book of Haikus 124)

Mist falling

— Purple flowers
Growing

(Book of Haikus 125)

The wind sent

a leaf on
The robin’s back

(Book of Haikus 175)

Each of these haiku focuses on the depiction of a natural phenomenon or the action of living beings. In “Sunday,” the poet depicts the sky and the flowers blue and red, respectively. “April mist” describes April mist that rises under the pine tree at midnight. “Wet fog” depicts the fog that shines in lamplit leaves. “Mist falling” describes the mist coming down while purple flowers grow. “The wind sent” describes the wind that sent a leaf on the robin’s back. In “Chipmunk went in,” the poet captures a scene where as the chipmunk went in, a butterfly came out. “The little white cat” features the action of the cat: he walks in the grass with his tail up in the air. “Birds chirp” portrays birds chirping in a foggy background.

Kerouac’s love and compassion was extended to nonhuman beings, as shown in some of his best haiku:
In my medicine cabinet
the winter fly
Has died of old age

(Book of Haikus 12)

A bird on
the branch out there
—I waved

(Book of Haikus 33)

In the first piece, “In My Medicine Cabinet,” humanity is pitted against nature. Moreover, Kerouac emphasizes the importance of staying away from the material aid, as shown in such a haiku as this. It is ironic that as medicine helps humans, it does not help flies. Not to withhold material aid comes from Zen Buddhism. “The winter fly” has died due to his age, even though the fly could have survived because the fly was in the “medicine cabinet.” The fly could have survived if the fly withheld the help of the medicine; however, this haiku stresses not to withhold material aid by ending the haiku that the fly has died. Not only does this haiku express sympathy for the fly’s death, which people would not like to see in their home, it suggests that the fly would have died peacefully outdoors. “A Bird on,” on the contrary, not only expresses the feeling of love and friendship a person has for a bird, but also captures a moment of affinity between the two living beings, the unity of humanity and nature. Kerouac’s vision of the unity of humanity and nature reflects his utmost endeavor to achieve *mu* in his life, the ultimate goal of a Zen Buddhist.
VI. Kerouac’s Haiku with Humor

One of the remarkable characteristics of Kerouac is that some of his haiku thrive on humor. Kerouac’s intention to make his haiku not only serious and philosophical but lighthearted and humorous suggests that Kerouac adapted the style of Senryu. Senryu basically deals with nature, human nature and human relationships and is often humorous. The following haiku expresses humor:

August moon—oh
I got a boil
On my thigh

(Book of Haikus 27)

This haiku uses “moon” as a reference to nature as does a traditional haiku, but it is rather humorous that a sudden appearance of a boil on the speaker’s thigh ends the poem. Another poem has a reference to the moon, an eminent image of nature:

The moon had
a cat’s mustache,
For a second

(Book of Haikus 34)

Combining “the moon” and “a cat’s mustache” creates a humorous scene. The difference between Senryu and haiku is that Senryu does not include a seasonal reference while a classic haiku includes an image or scene referring to one of the seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, and New Year (January).

One might assert that Kerouac succeeded in using the subjects of nature such as
“blizzard” and “cats.” Classic haiku do not depict human sexuality but occasionally portray animal sexuality to make such haiku humorous. Kerouac follows this tradition as the following haiku shows:

In enormous blizzard
burying everything
My cat’s out mating

(Book of Haikus 164)

While the subject of this haiku is a snowstorm, Kerouac explicitly portrays the sexuality of an animal. Zen not only avoids sexuality but also avoids condemning others and praising oneself. But, Kerouac is critical of others in the haiku below:

A quiet Autumn night
and these fools
Are starting to argue

(Book of Haikus 177)

The atmosphere of this haiku is peaceful, but the speaker is insisting that the “fools” should be quiet like nature. The reference to the human nature of foolishness also evokes a sense of humor. By doing so, he satirizes humanity rather than conveying his philosophical views of the world as some traditional haiku poets do.

The most important principle in Zen is the state of nothingness, mu, as discussed earlier. Some of Kerouac’s haiku express Zen philosophy by directly creating an image of mu. His application of the state of nothingness, however, is unique in that he does not completely take out his subjectivity. Consider the following haiku:
Men and women  
Yakking beneath  
the eternal Void  

*(Book of Haikus 154)*

The word “Void” reflects the state of nothingness but “Men and women / Yakking beneath” is problematic. The haiku focuses on a loud scene where people are talking, perhaps even arguing with one another, whereas the natural environment is eternally quiet and peaceful. Kerouac makes fun of the negative nature of human beings with the subtlety, as the following haiku illustrates. Not only is this haiku a satire, but it also expresses bitter humor. The juxtaposition of the arguing people and the peaceful environment expresses satire and humor. This human conduct is not acceptable in the principle of Zen, and it aims not to cause conflicts among people. This haiku, on the contrary, contains two conflicting images.

Moreover, individual subjectivity should be suppressed according to Zen. But Kerouac’s haiku sometimes does not suppress the subjectivity of the individual. The following haiku, discussed earlier, expresses the Zen point of view with satire:

There’s no Buddha  
because  
There’s no me  

*(Book of Haikus 75)*

This haiku, being subjective, says “There’s no Buddha,” the reason being that “There’s no me,” an expression of self-deprecation that sounds satirical. This means that the self should exist first and then comes the Buddha. However, it would make sense if he stated, “There’s no me/
because/ There’s no Buddha.” In this vein, Kerouac’s haiku does not completely follow the traditional haiku.
Chapter Three

Sonia Sanchez and Her Struggle as a Female Writer

I. Sonia Sanchez as a Poet

Sonia Sanchez, known as a contemporary postmodern, postcolonial African American poet, has published two collections of haiku: *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums* (1998) and *Morning Haiku* (2010). Her poems published before the haiku collections depict racism in American society and the sufferings of African Americans. In “the final solution /” Sanchez emphasizes the following lines:

```
let them fight

in vietnam

defending america’s honor.

we will make responsible
citi /
zens out of them or
kill them trying. . .
```

(McMichael 1878)

Sanchez is accusing the United States government of sending black American men to Vietnam as sacrifice for the benefit of white Americans.

95
Sanchez’s works offer a strong message to readers as an activist and an African-American writer. Sanchez’s interests lie in the issues of politics, race, class and gender. She is known as a poet, a scholar and an activist. There are many gender issues discussed by both men and women. However, Sanchez believes that men, indeed, do not listen or feel empathy for women. In its place, she believes that men just pretend to listen to women. Seeing this, she believes that women should give themselves voice. In “WOMANHOOD,” she urges African American women to achieve individualism and self-reliance:

\[
\text{i became like Māāt,}\\
\text{unalterable in my}\\
\text{love of Black self and}\\
\text{righteousness.}\\
\text{and i heard the}\\
\text{trumpets of a new age}\\
\text{and i fell down}\\
\text{upon the earth}\\
\text{and became myself.}
\]

(McMichael 1884)

In fact, Sanchez was the first college professor to offer a seminar on literature by African American women, when she taught at the University of Pittsburgh in 1969. This career choice was significant because it prompts others to think about African American women writers in addition to marginalized literature. Minority literature consists of three characteristics: the use of
minority language, a political agenda, and a collective value. Among her numerous poems, Sanchez’s blues haiku effectively characterize her identity. She believes that the poet is a creator of social values and that poetry functions as a subconscious conversation.

Above all, Sanchez highlights the importance of choosing the right words when composing poetry. In an interview with D. H. Melhem in “Sonia Sanchez: Will and Spirit,” Sanchez said that she teaches haiku in the beginning intentionally because teaching haiku trains the students for the choice of words.

Interviewer: All right. What is your attitude toward the study and use of conventional forms?
Sanchez: . . . I teach form on purpose. . . . but I use the haiku and tanka form for discipline and for what I call “word choice.” (Melhem 89)

After training with the form such as seventeen syllables or thirty-one syllables, she moves on teaching ballads, blues, and so on.

II. Sanchez and Haiku

Sanchez’s aforementioned haiku collections, Like the Singing Coming off the Drums and Morning Haiku, express both happiness and sorrow. In depicting such sentiments, she has conflated the aesthetic principles underlying classic haiku, such as yugen, sabi, and wabi with those of the blues. Whereas yugen is characterized by reservation and modesty, the blues tradition calls for worldly excitement and love. Sorrow and suffering, nonetheless, underlie the blues. Unlike yugen, the blues confines its attention solely to the immediate and celebrates the bodily expression. Some of the haiku in Morning Haiku convey direct, unreserved sexual
manifestations. In particular, Sanchez tries to link the blues message with sexually-charged language so as to liberate black bodies from the distorted images inflicted by slavery. This chapter will view Sanchez as a haiku poet, compare and contrast the characteristics of traditional haiku and Sanchez’s haiku, discuss the significance of Sanchez’s blues haiku, and, finally, investigate how Sanchez expresses the plight of the African Americans by applying the aesthetics of haiku in *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums* and *Morning Haiku*.

The characteristics of classic haiku, as well as *yugen*, *wabi*, and *sabi*, underlie some of Sanchez’s haiku. Hakutani notes, “Not only do many of Sanchez’s haiku follow Zen doctrine; they also share the aesthetic principles that underlie classic haiku” (*Cross-Cultural Visions* 187). One of Basho’s haiku deals with a season, autumn.

This autumn,

How old I am getting:

Ah, the clouds, the birds!

(Blyth, *Haiku: Summer-Autumn* 334)

Here, Basho expresses ideas on aging and death. Still, he does not dwell on getting old and approaching death. He instead observes the beauty of nature, “the clouds” and “the birds,” which compensates for his feeling of sorrow and fear.

Sanchez likewise depicts the plight of African Americans by selecting appropriate words that best describe the situation, as the following haiku demonstrates:

*memory haiku*

1.

i was born
a three-legged
black child.

(MH 87)\textsuperscript{32}

Here, Sanchez depicts the situation of a “black child” with deficiency by saying “three-legged” rather than “four-legged.” This “four-legged” could express a baby crawling, but the omission of one leg reflects the absence of an important element. Haki Madhubuti in “Sonia Sanchez: The Bringer of Memories” mentions that her blues haiku expresses both the black soul and the beauty of nature:

Sonia Sanchez respects the power of Black language. More than any other poet, she has been responsible for legitimatizing the use of urban Black English in written form. Her use of language is spontaneous and thoughtful Her language is culturally legitimate and genuinely reflects the hard bottom and complicated spectrum of the entire Black community.

(Madhubuti 421)

Sanchez is remarkable because she combined the aesthetics of both haiku and the blues. In the end, she created new style of haiku, blues haiku. By doing so, she at least escaped from the existing form of poetry. She tried to create her own unique style as an African American woman.

III. Sanchez and the History of the Blues

The early 1890s was a difficult time for the African Americans in the South. Mississippi

\textsuperscript{32} For the text, \textit{Morning Haiku}. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010. is used. Hereafter abbreviated as \textit{MH}.
suffered from the three consecutive years of flooding and worldwide depression negatively affected locals. Further, occurrences lynching began to increase and finally it was changed into a spectator sport by many Southern whites. The purpose of these kinds of mobs hanging, shooting, burning, or drowning innocent victims was to terrorize black male southerners. This atrocity eventually led to the racial segregation and exploitation in agricultural labor. In the 1890s, blues music emerged as a folk form to express a painful, restless, and even euphoric subjectivity. During this period, African American male blues singers expressed their fears, hopes, sexual hungers, romantic losses, financial setbacks, and aching bodies. The singers were anxious about their experiences in the towns that they dream of and the towns that they want to escape from. In addition, the African American female blues singers expressed their desire for sexual love, lost lovers, haunted houses, and even their fantasies of revenge against a cold and heartless world. These black female sentiments can relate to those of Sanchez. As a female haiku poet, she selects sexual love, lost love, and dreary houses as poetic themes.

The first appearance of the blues is usually dated after the Emancipation Proclamation, which took effect on January 1, 1863 during the American Civil War. The origin of the blues, therefore, overlaps post-emancipation between 1870 and 1900. This period saw the transition from slavery to sharecropping and small-scale agricultural production took place, as well as the expansion of railroads in the South. It is said that the development of the blues is related with the newly-acquired freedom of the formerly enslaved people. However, no African musical form can be designated as a single direct ancestor of the blues. It is only clear that the call-and-response format existed in the African music.

In 1908, Antonio Maggio’s “I Got the Blues,” the first publication of blues sheet music,
was introduced. But the social and economic reasons for the appearance of the blues are unknown. The post-Reconstruction period (1890-1920) was a hard time for black southerners due to the violence inflicted on them such as lynching and the institution of Jim Crow laws. Nevertheless, it was regarded as a taboo for the people at that time to use lynching as a subject for the blues. The word, blues, was defined as music played by rural African Americans and regarded as the secular counterpart of the spirituals, or religious compositions. In 1912, the American sheet music publishing industry prospered and produced a host of ragtime music and published three popular blues-like compositions. In the 1920s, the blues became the key element of both African American and American popular music. It was spread to the white audiences and the classic female blues performers. During this period, the blues developed from informal performances in bars to be recorded by several record companies. As the scale of the recording industry became larger with the advent and the widespread availability of the phonograph, the recordings of blues music became characterized as urban blues.

The blues became a separate genre in the 1920s. This was the period when African Americans migrated from the countryside to urban areas to look for work as the recording industry was developing at the same time. Further, the blues emerged as a record designed to be sold to African American listeners. The African American style started to establish itself during the Harlem Renaissance after World War I. As indicated, the origins of the blues have a close relationship with the African Americans’ religious music, the Negro Spirituals. The spirituals date back to the mid-18th century. This was the time when the slaves were Christianized and they started to sing and play Christian hymns.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, many of the blues musicians based in Memphis moved
to Chicago, making this the starting point of urban blues movement. In the 1940s, African American writers were advised to avoid dealing with the topic of racial inequality because publishers and the reviewers preferred African American writers’ raceless writings to writings on racial issues. In fact, the 1940s was turbulent when it comes to the racial issues. African Americans boycotted the New York City bus system and riots took place in North Carolina and Detroit. This social movement continued until President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination against African Americans. In the 1940s and the 1950s, blues music provided an inspiration to African Americans. However, the real situation of African American song writers was worse in the 1940s, for booking agents remained reluctant to hire African American bands. This is because the booking agents were likely to involve in a lawsuit if the bands performed at the place where white audiences usually attended to watch live music. In the 1950s, the situation gradually changed. A massive migration of the African American population after the World War II and in the 1950s allowed a new style of electric blues music became popular.

Rock and roll and soul music were a main part of popular music in the early 1960s. White people brought African American music to new audiences. Also, the music of Civil Rights and Free Speech movements in the United States stimulated a revival of interest in early African American music. In fact, B. B. King was a key figure in embracing white audience with the blues. King was born in Mississippi in 1925, and he worked as a sharecropper and tractor driver. In 1948, he started to work as a radio disc jockey in Memphis. There he got his nickname, “B.B.,” originally “Beale Street Blues Boy.” The 1950s was a successful time for King whereas the following next decade was a hard time for him. However, in 1968, King’s performance at the
Fillmore in New York City was an important time in his career. His audience used to be African Americans, but the Northern white audience started to appear at his performances. He began to perform with the rock ‘n’ roll stars, with whom King did not feel comfortable performing.

In the 1960s, King started to express both disappointment and at the same time understanding of African Americans. Then, he moved his interest from blues to soul music in this period. King believed that the blues is an expression of anger toward shame or humiliation. Still, white people began to listen to King’s music when the white hippies looked for purity and authenticity. In fact, African Americans did not actually listen to his music in great numbers when compared to the white people. Then in the next decade, a new style of the blues was introduced.

In the beginning of 1970s, Texas rock-blues style appeared. These artists, however, did not gain international success during this period. Blues kept the traditional forms and added new ones. In addition, in the 1990s, the blues spread in the form of blues societies and outdoor blues festivals. The blues began to emerge all over the places. Finally, in the 2000s and the 2010s, blues rock became more accessible due to its popularity and the widespread use of the Internet. The artists created YouTube channels and Facebook pages.

Sanchez, in a conversation with Cheo Tyehimba in “Sonia Sanchez Speaks,” insists that African Americans need to sing the blues in order to deliver the real pain of the African American experience:

Anytime we’ve had anything going on for us, especially in music and the arts you’ve always had the co-optation of it. The Beatles did it. Elvis did it. But they could bring you [only] the surface pain of the blues, you know? We
make them icons and they make a lot of money and yet they can’t feel the real pain of these people who have been living the blues forever in this place called America. (Tyehimba 115)

Sanchez believes that white people do not fully understand the real pain of the African Americans. The pain of their lives is used as a subject in the blues; however, she stressed that the poets must actually educate people as she does. In this sense, she strives to be innovative in her form of poetry, blues haiku.

IV. Sanchez’s Like the Singing Coming off the Drums

Sanchez’s Like the Singing Coming off the Drums shows how blues elements as well as classic haiku poetics underlie many of her poems. The background of Sanchez’s poem has sorrow and Sanchez’s blues haiku resembles yugen in classic haiku. The blues implies sadness, pain, and the sufferings of slavery. Hakutani in Haiku and Modernist Poetics notes that yugen expresses sorrow: “The style of yugen can express either happiness or sorrow. Cherry blossoms, however beautiful they may be, must fade away; love between man and woman is inevitably followed by sorrow” (Hakutani 12).

Sanchez’s haiku is a blues haiku because she deals with her pain. There is a difference between jazz and the blues. Jazz does not deal with pain whereas blues does, though both jazz and the blues deal with suffering and death. Sanchez’s blues haiku characterize her identity most effectively among her numerous poems. Sanchez believes that the poet is a creator of social values at the same time poetry that is a subconscious conversation. In fact, the blues goes back to the history of slavery. It is assumed that the blues was established at the end of the nineteenth
century. The slaves would say to themselves “I wanna die” because of their tough and wretched lives, and they sang the blues by call and response when they worked in order to reduce their pain.

One of the well-known pieces by an African American, Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” reflects how they worked in the field and this kind of song was part of their lives. Hughes, the eminent African American poet, first heard the blues in Kansas City when he was a teenager. In 1920s and ‘30s, Kansas City was an active railroad hub and the Texas bluesmen traveled frequently through Kansas City. Further, Hughes’s interest with the blues expanded into jazz. Hughes viewed blues and jazz as a meaning for the black experience in America. Kevin Rabas in “Langston Hughes’s Blues: Key African-American Musical Movements and Styles” mentions that Hughes used blues to express the struggles of race and class. In essence, “Through the blues, Hughes worked to voice larger American struggles of race and class” (Rabas 57). Hughes thought that the black soul originated from the rivers, the Nile, the Congo, the Euphrates, and the Mississippi:

I’ve known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human
blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

(Hughes, *Selected Poems* 4)

The Mississippi serves in this poem as a symbol of freedom. For African Americans, “the Mississippi” signifies its “singing . . . when Abe Lincoln / sent down to New Orleans”; not only does it signify “its muddy bosom,” but its signified in turn signifies a beautiful image, the golden river under sunset. Sanchez in an interview with Kadija Sesay in “Sonia Sanchez: The Joy of Writing Poetry” indicates Hughes as an influential figure. “SS: Some of the writers who originally influenced me were Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks—I read them all in the anthology that a librarian had given me when I was in high school” (Sesay 144).

Many of the haiku and *tanka* presented in the first section of Sanchez’s collection, entitled “Naked in the Streets,” reflect the poetic tradition in which human action emulates nature. As the section title suggests, Sanchez creates an image of nature out of a scene of streets. Today, the poet as well as most of her readers live in urban communities in close contract with the streets, just as classic haiku poets and their readers lived and worked closely with nature. The first haiku in *Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums* conveys a delightful sensation one feels in
contact with nature:

HAIKU

you ask me to run
naked in the streets with you
i am holding your pulse.

(LSCD 4)\textsuperscript{33}

Much in the same spirit, Walt Whitman writes in “Song of Myself”:

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (Whitman, Complete Poetry 25)

While immersing herself in nature, Sanchez from time to time subtly expresses her aversion to artificiality and domesticity. The first song in “Naked in the Streets” reads:

SONG

i cannot stay home
on this sweet morning
i must run singing laughing
through the streets of Philadelphia.
i don't need food or sleep or drink
on this wild scented day

\textsuperscript{33} For the text, Sanchez, Sonia. Like the Singing Coming off the Drums. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. is used. Abbreviated as LSCD throughout the text.
i am bathing in the waves of your breath.

(LSCD 5)

Invigorated by fresh air, inhaling the hot breath of her lover, she keeps singing her song. The urge Sanchez feels to cleanse herself of the unnatural and the artificial also echoes in Whitman’s “Song of Myself”:

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

(Whitman, Complete Poetry 25)

Both Sanchez and classic Japanese haiku poets always draw inspiration from the visual beauty in which nature presents itself. Buson was well known in his time as a professional painter, and many of his haiku reflect his singular attention to color and its intensification. One of Sanchez’s haiku included in the middle section, “Shake Loose My Skin,” and one of the longer poems entitled “A Poem for Ella Fitzgerald” both thrive on colorful imagery. The haiku reads:

HAIKU

i am you loving
my own shadow watching
this noontime butterfly.

(LSCD 61)

“A Poem for Ella Fitzgerald,” the longest poem in this collection, focuses on these lines:
A POEM FOR ELLA FITZGERALD

the moon turned red in the sky,
nightingales in her throat

an apollo stage amid high-stepping
yellow legs

i remember it was april
and the flowers ran yellow
the sun downpoured yellow butterflies

(\textit{LSCD} 104-7)

Both poems are reminiscent of Buson’s “Also Stepping on”:

\begin{quote}
Also stepping on
The mountain pheasant’s tail is
The spring setting sun.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

For a seasonal reference to spring, Buson links an image of the bird with spring sunset, because both are highly colored. As a painter, he is also fascinated by an ambiguous impression the scene he has drawn gives him; it remains unclear whether the setting sun is treading on the pheasant’s

\textsuperscript{34} The original in Japanese reads “Yama-dori-no / o / wo / fumu / haru no / iri-hi / kana.” The English translation is by Hakutani.
tail or the tail on the setting sun. In any event, Buson has made both pictures beautiful to look at. Sanchez’s haiku “I Am You Loving” is ambivalent as to whether the focus is on “my own shadow” or “this noontime butterfly”; both constitute beautiful images of nature. Likewise, “A Poem for Ella Fitzgerald” juxtaposes the image of the red moon with that of nightingales. Sanchez in these poems creates, as does Buson in his, a pair of counter images, themselves highly colorful and bright, which in turn intensify each other.

In portraying nature, Sanchez is at times puzzled by its spontaneous imagery. Two of the poems in the collection—“I Collect” (sonku) and “In This Wet Season” (haiku)—have a thematic affinity with the famous haiku by Moritake (1472-1549):

\[
\begin{align*}
Rake\ eda\ ni & \quad \text{Fallen petals} \\
Kaeru\ to\ mireba & \quad \text{Seemed to return to the branch,--} \\
Kocho\ kana & \quad \text{A butterfly!}^{35}
\end{align*}
\]

Both of Sanchez’s poems, “I Collect” and “In This Wet Season,” create an illusion similar to that in Moritake's poem. “I Collect” begins with a query:

\[
\begin{align*}
SONKU \\
i\ collect \\
wings\ what\ are \\
you\ bird\ or \\
\text{animal?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[^{35}\text{The original and the translation are quoted from Blyth, History of Haiku 2: 56. A literal translation of Moritake's first two lines would be, “A fallen flower appears to come back to its branch.”}\]
In the other poem,

HAIKU [for Sophie and Val]

in this wet season

of children raining hands

we catch birds in flight.

Sanchez is reluctant to draw a distinction between children and birds, hands and rain.

In emulating the spirit of nature, Japanese poets are often struck with awe and respect. A score of American poets like Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Pound, and Wright viewed nature from a similar vantage point. And Sanchez seems to have followed the same tradition. In keeping with this tradition, the haiku poet may not only aim at expressing sensation but also at generalizing and hence depersonalizing it. This characteristic can be shown even by one of Basho’s lesser-known haiku:

Hiya hiya to How cool it is,
Kabe wo fumaete Putting the feet on the wall:
Hirune kana36 An afternoon nap.

Basho was interested in expressing how his feet, or anyone’s feet, for that matter, would feel when placed on the wall in the house on a warm summer afternoon. His subject was none other than this direct sensation. Similarly, Sanchez expresses, in two of the haiku included in “Naked in the Streets,” the pure sensation nature offers for human perception:

36 The original of Basho’s haiku is quoted from Henderson 46. The translation is by Hakutani.
HAIKU

i count the morning
stars the air so sweet i turn
riverdark with sound.

(LSDC 8)

HAIKU

i come from the same
place i am going to my
body speaks in tongues.

(LSDC 9)

The predilection to portray human life in close association with nature means that the poet is more interested in genuinely natural sentiments than in moral, ethical, or political problems. Looking at the wind as a primal signifier of nature, Sanchez produced two poems for “Naked in the Streets,” one entitled “Haiku” and other other “Blues Haiku”:

HAIKU

how fast is the wind
sailing? how fast did i go
to become slow?

(LSDC 38)
BLUES HAIKU

let me be yo wil
derness let me be yo wind
blowing you all day.

(LSDC 39)

Traditionally, another singular, awe-inspiring signifier of nature in haiku is silence. Besides “The Old Pond,” Basho is also known for another haiku that concerns nature's silence, “How Quiet It Is!”:

How quiet it is!
Piercing into the rocks
The cicada’s voice.37

In the middle section “Shake Loose My Skin,” Sanchez wrote this haiku:

HAIKU

how still the morning sea
how still this morning skin
anointing the day.

(LSCD50)

As Basho was awed by the silence pervading the backdrop of the scene in contrast to “the shrill

37 The original of this haiku by Basho is in Henderson 39. The translation is by Hakutani.
of cicada,” Sanchez is struck by the equation between the stillness of “the morning sea” and that of “this morning skin.” The commonality of the haiku by the two poets is that the scene is drawn with little detail and the mood is provided by a simple, reserved description of facts. These haiku create the kind of beauty associated with the aesthetic sensibility of sabi, which suggests loneliness and quietude as opposed to overexcitement and loudness, as noted earlier.

Although most of the short poems collected in Like the Singing Coming off the Drums are stylistically influenced by the poetics of haiku as well as by the aesthetics of modernist poetry, much of Sanchez’s ideological concern deals with postmodern, postcolonial, and African American topics. Many of her poems aim to teach African Americans to achieve individualism and value their heritage. Even such a haiku as

HAIKU

mixed with day and sun
i crouched in the earth carry
you like a dark river.

(LSCD 36)


Blues, then, offer ancestrally legitimate instances of an African spirit of work; they are everywhere infused with quotidian rituals of Afro-American life on New World shores. . . . Hence the blues singer is “not an alienated artist
moaning songs of self-pity and defeat to an infidel mob. He is the voice of the
community, its historian, and one of the shapers of its morality.”

(Baker 158)

The struggle of African Americans also relates to poverty. The poverty reflected in Sanchez’s
haiku reveal the situation of African Americans’ isolation from society. The chances to afford
education were lower than those of white Americans. Since whites had greater chances to afford
education, they had more chances to choose their jobs. Conversely, African Americans had few
choices in getting jobs because they could not always afford education. This kind of environment
is rooted in early childhood and led to a bleak future. They had to suffer just because of their
status as African Americans.

Poverty is prevalent in Sanchez’s works, and it overlaps with wabi, an esthetic principle
derived from poverty. Poverty can be overcome with the beauty of nature. Hakutani notes that
wabi is beauty that is inspired from poverty: “Wabi refers to the uniquely human perception of
beauty stemmed from poverty. Wabi is often regarded as religious as the saying ‘Blessed are the
poor’ suggests, but the spiritual aspect of wabi is based on the aesthetic rather than the moral
sensibility” (Haiku and Modernist Poetics 15).

In all, the blues is not a simple song of oneself but a song that represents African
American society. Regina B. Jennings in “The Blue/Black Poetics of Sonia Sanchez” provides
that the blues characterizes the African American soul:

To the redefinition of “black” as aesthetically and mythically good, Sanchez
adds the color blues. The blue motif changes meaning in different poems, but
it consistently demonstrates itself as a literary engagement issuing specific
denotations to expression. . . . Being both black and blue is an American duality that symbolizes the tragic institution of European slavery and the vital energizer that reformed the tragedy. (Jennings 127)

If Jennings finds Sanchez to conflate the colors black and blue, one might also consider the technique of transference of the senses in classic haiku. Many of the haiku in *Morning Haiku* thrive on this technique.

Basho, for instance, used this technique to create unity in expressing the senses. One of his best-known haiku, “Sunset on the Sea,” shows the unity and relatedness of the senses:

\[
\begin{align*}
Umi kurete & \quad \text{Sunset on the sea:} \\
Kamo no koe & \quad \text{The voices of the ducks} \\
Honoka ni shiroshi}^{38} & \quad \text{Are faintly white.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Translation by Hakutani)

The voices of the ducks under the darkened sky are delineated as white as well as faint. The chilled wind after dark evokes the whiteness associated with coldness. The voices of the ducks and the whiteness of the waves refer to two entirely different senses, but both senses, reinforcing the other, create a unified sensation. In the following haiku, “Sinking into the body” similarly unifies the senses of color and temperature:

\[
\begin{align*}
mi ni shimite & \quad \text{Sinking into the body} \\
daikon karashi & \quad \text{The bitterness of the daikon} \\
aki no kaze}^{39} & \quad \text{The wind of autumn.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

38 See Imoto 117.

39 See Shirane 95.
The bitterness of the daikon, which depicts the senses of taste and color, associates with the coldness of autumn wind. The association of the senses is, in turn, relate to the poet’s feeling, “Sinking into the Body.”

Because haiku is limited in its length, it must achieve its effect through the sense of unity and harmony within. Feelings of unity and harmony, both indicative of Zen philosophy, are motivated by a desire to perceive every instant in nature and life: an intuition that nothing is alone, and that nothing is out of the ordinary. The unity of sentiment in haiku is further intensified by the poet’s expression of the senses. The transference of the senses can occur between color and mood, as shown in a haiku by Usuda Aro, a contemporary Japanese poet:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tsuma araba} & \quad \text{Were my wife alive,} \\
\text{Tozomou asagao} & \quad \text{I thought, and saw a morning-glory:} \\
\text{Akaki saku} & \quad \text{It has blossomed red.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Translation by Hakutani)

The first line conveys a feeling of loneliness, but the red morning-glory reminds him of a happy life that they spent when she was living. The redness rather than the whiteness or blue color of the flower is transferred to the feeling of happiness and love. The transference of the senses in turn arouses a sense of balance and harmony. His recollection of their happy marriage, a feeling aroused by the red flower, compensates for the death of his wife, a reality.

Indeed, is the blues has no specific form, and it is improvisational. Moreover, it also has syncopation. Most of the blues has three lines in “AAB” form. There is a repetition of words in

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40 The original of “Were My Wife Alive” is quoted from Akimoto 200.
Sanchez’s blues haiku, and it creates a certain rhythm: “even though you came in december be my january man/ . . . but you know i’ll take you any month i can./ . . . woke up this morning, waiting for you to call/ . . . fortune teller, fortune teller, what you forecast for me today” (LSCD 37). This segment expresses the spiritual aspect of the speaker. In other words, it articulates the soul of African Americans. Sanchez emphasizes the form of poetry and enjoys the fun rooted in the form of poetry, the layout of words, and the rhythm. Eventually, she uses repetition as a device. Cecil Conteen Gray in “To Change the World, to Change the Self: Social Transformation, Love and More Love, and Subterranean Spiritual Threads within the Work of Sonia Sanchez” notes that the repetition of words is related to the drumming of African people: “Taking our analysis through African reality, repetition can/should be understood as a form of drumming—and drumming has been used for millennia by African people” (Gray 17).

It seems to casual observers that jazz and the blues are almost the same. However, jazz does not actually convey pain while the blues does. In fact, a conversation with Sonia Sanchez by Annie Finch in “Form and Spirit: A Conversation with Sonia Sanchez” clarifies that her blues haiku was played by some musicians in France and that she recognized that it could become a form of music.

AF: Have they been set to music formally, by other people?
SS: Yes. There’s a man and woman team in Paris, France, who have set some of my blues and, interestingly enough, the haiku, to music. I always thought the haiku should be done; I could hear the music for the haiku. . . . (Finch 35)

Sanchez believes that blues haiku can be an innovative form, especially for African Americans. Actually, the form of Sanchez’s blues is similar to e.e. cummings, whose form of poems was
unique. Blues is similar to the Negro Spiritual, but the blues is more secular and typically deals with the man and woman relationship. Also, the blues shows irrationalities of society. It is said that being black is kind of blues music.

The characteristic of blues resembles yugen in haiku as well. Blues conveys sadness, pain, and slavery. Hakutani in *Haiku and Modernist Poetics* notes that yugen derives itself from tragedy: “Yugen functions in art as a means by which human beings can comprehend the course of nature. Although yugen seems allied with a sense of resignation, it has a far different effect on the human psyche. . . . The style of yugen can express either happiness or sorrow” (Hakutani 11-12). Sanchez’s haiku below reflects that love seems to be very calm and mysterious, which reflects yugen:

HAIKU  [for you]

love between us is
speech and breath. loving you is
a long river running.

(*LSCD* 11)

To differentiate yugen and the blues, yugen emphasizes reservation and modesty while the blues expresses excitement as well as love. Still, the blues is quite private and personal. Sanchez synthesizes the characteristics of yugen and the blues in her blues haiku:

BLUES HAIKU

when we say good-bye
i want yo tongue inside my
mouth dancing hello.

(LSCD 16)
This blues haiku expresses the speaker’s sadness. The speaker prefers a quiet separation rather than shedding tears. Despite this, the speaker wants the partner, “yo,” to kiss her. Here, the kiss is not heartbreaking. Instead, Sanchez describes it as a “dancing hello.” This can be comparable to the atmosphere of the blues. The underlying situation has painful separation, but it is expressed joyfully with a rhythm. Moreover, Sanchez also explicitly writes the atmosphere of the situation in a sensual way, even in a sorrowful and bitter situation:

BLUES HAIKU

you too slippery
for me. can’t hold you long or
hard. not enough nites.

(LSCD 17)
The atmosphere of the poems is sad, and Sanchez tries to express the speaker’s pain with the appropriate use of words. She implies that the speaker wants to hold the other, but the speaker cannot hold the other by using the word, “slippery.” This kind of expression is significantly different from the traditional haiku. Sanchez not only applies the traditional aesthetics of haiku but also uses the form of tanka (short song), as the following poem indicates:

TANKA
i thought about you
the pain of not having
you cruising my bones.
no morning saliva smiles this
frantic fugue about no you.

*(LSCD 18)*

Sanchez’s *tanka* above is very traditional in regards to its form. It has a five-seven-five-seven syllabic form. At the same time, it expresses sorrow by using the word “pain” directly in the *tanka*.

In Sanchez’s haiku, she also tries to express her thought, beauty, and love. Then, she connects them with nature. She uses the connection of nature itself but also something that goes beyond nature. Henderson in *An Introduction to Haiku: An Anthology of Poems and Poets from Basho to Shiki* (1958) noted that nature expresses human emotions: “Haiku are more concerned with human emotions than with human acts, and natural phenomena are used to reflect human emotions, but that is all” (Henderson 5). Readers can conjure up many visual images when reading Sanchez’s haiku. Sanchez, in regard to the fact that she is a haiku poet, follows the characteristics of classical haiku. For instance, she often refers to season as well as weather such as a rainy day and autumn, which reflect the loneliness of the speaker, as the following haiku-like stanza of a poem shows:

FOR TUPAC AMARU SHAKUR

..................

it is autumn now
in me autumn grieves

in this carved gold of shifting faces

my eyes confess to the fatigue of living.

(LSCD 118)

The reference to weather and season is made in this haiku just as in classical haiku. She uses the setting of “autumn” and expresses the loneliness that reflects the aesthetics of sabi. Sanchez depicts the loneliness in combination with the “autumn” and at the same time she observes the beauty in the loneliness.

Sanchez’s blues haiku reflects her own identity as an African American woman. She also creates a unique form of poem, sonku (song haiku). The writer wants to make her own style of poem, and she also desires to have her students do the same. Gabbin in “Sonia Sanchez” mentions that Sanchez’s selection of words effectively derives the meaning:

In Like the Singing Coming off the Drums (1998), Sanchez trains her own tongue to curl around the many sounds of love. Whether they are elegiac, bluesy, romantic, sisterly, or sensual, the notes she strikes vibrate with her essence—compassion, concern, humanity, hunger for justice, vulnerability, and strength. In this volume she returns to the haiku and the tanka, which appeared earlier in Love Poems and I’ve Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems, and adds the blues haiku, and the sonku, an invented form.

(Gabbin 539)

She attempts to create her own style of poem instead of following the poetry styles that non
African Americans have created. Therefore, she combines the characteristics of haiku as well as the blues. Sanchez follows the form of haiku and the tanka as well as an invented form, sonku, poignantly express the emotion.

Even so, the difference between classical haiku and Sanchez’s haiku is that Sanchez deals with love explicitly and that her haiku are quite personal. Whereas classic haiku suppresses the self, Sanchez emphasizes self frequently in her poems. Sanchez’s *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums* makes the love poems very personal. She uses the words such as “me” or “I” frequently in her haiku:

**BLUES HAIKU**

```
let me be yo wolderness
let me be yo wind
blowing you all day.
```

*(LSCD 39)*

Sanchez’s haiku expresses strong subjectivity by using “me” in this haiku. This contrasts the classical haiku, which completely avoids human subjectivity. By doing so, Sanchez creates her own significant style:

**BLUES HAIKU**

```
this is not a fire
sale but i am in heat
each time i see ya.
```
In fact, avoiding human subjectivity is one characteristic of Zen philosophy in haiku. Haiku aims at selflessness. In terms of love-making as well as sensuality, Sanchez expresses it directly in her haiku:

**BLUES HAIKU**

legs wrapped around you
camera. action. tightshot.
this is not a rerun.

The first stanza of this haiku is extremely erotic and directly expressed; to the contrary, eroticism cannot be depicted in traditional haiku. The way Sanchez expresses love is also related to the blues since the blues expresses love straightforwardly:

**BLUES HAIKU**

is there a fo rent
sign on my butt? you got no
territorial rights here.

As noted previously, erotic scenes in traditional haiku replace humans with animals. Moreover, animals are also respected in haiku since the philosophy of haiku considers that both humans and animals have soul. In this respect, animals should be treated as equal to the humans. Moreover,
haiku, influenced by Buddhist ontology, sees the connection between life and death. Buddhists believe in the transmigration between humans and nonhumans, as well as in reincarnation. Because of this, world exists after this life ends. The use of words like “butt” or “asses” are explicitly expressed in Sanchez’s haiku. She directly describes the human body:

BLUES HAIKU

his face like chiseled
china his eyes clotting
around rubber asses.

(LSCD 81)

Though Sanchez applies the aesthetics of haiku, yugen, sabi, and wabi, she strives to create her own style by applying the characteristics of the blues to her writing.

V. Sanchez’s Morning Haiku

In Morning Haiku, Sanchez reveals her consciousness of her black body and speaks out for the sufferings of other African Americans. She bases her poems on the segregations she had to endure, and the suffering of the African Americans are the reasons for her writing. Sanchez’s Morning Haiku displays how the features of blues haiku and classic haiku poetics underlie her poems. Sanchez’s poems express the hardships of African Americans by applying the aesthetics of haiku to her poems. Sanchez furthermore expresses sorrow by using the techniques of haiku. For example, Sanchez’s blues haiku have an affinity with classic haiku with the sensibility of yugen, and the blues implies sadness, pain, and the sufferings of slavery. Quite similarly, both
American poetics and Eastern poetics for haiku composition share common aesthetics as well as techniques.

Common techniques appear in Sanchez’s haiku and the traditional haiku. Sanchez stresses the choice of words when composing poems. Sanchez’s haiku follows the traditional form of Japanese haiku. Sanchez’s haiku thrives on brevity, as does classic haiku; it often creates a certain rhythm, a new style. She repeats words to create a rhythm. For example, there are elements that overlap with traditional haiku. In this vein, both American poets and the Eastern poetics share aesthetics as well as techniques in common. In *Morning Haiku*, there are also seasonal words, or *kigo*. In fact, many objects appear in relation to season in haiku. In a linked verse, *renku*, the seasonal word is always in the first or starting verse, called *hokku*. However, the classification of season in haiku differs from how we normally classify the seasons. In classic haiku, there are five seasons: New Year; Spring; Summer; Autumn; and Winter. The subdivision of the season except for New Year are the season, the sky and elements, fields and mountains, temples and shrines, human affairs, birds and beasts, trees and flowers. For example, “rain” expresses loneliness, loss, and sadness indirectly as the following haiku by Sanchez shows:

*2 haiku*

*(for Ras Baraka)*

2.  
your poems  
the smell of  
morning rain
In traditional Japanese haiku, *sabi* is employed to express sadness and loneliness. At times, words such as “rain” create the atmosphere more dramatically. The use of words in nature also follows the tradition of Japanese haiku as the following haiku demonstrates:

3 *haiku*

2.

(for Tanabata festival)

star filled poem
shall I hang you
on pine trees?

In composing this haiku, Sanchez addresses the poem as though it were her love. She is asking her love if she shall hang the person on pine trees, a robust, beautiful image in nature. Her love is star-filled, reflecting celestial beauty. Sanchez wrote this haiku on the occasion of the Tanabata festival. In Japan, the Tanabata festival, or the Star Festival, is held on the evening of July 7, the 7th day of the 7th month. According to Ju Brown and John Brown, in *China, Japan, Korea Culture and Customs*, “It is also known as the star festival, which takes place on the 7th day of the 7th month of the year, when the two stars Hikoboshi (Altair) and Orihime (Vega), which are usually separated from each other by the Milky Way, are able to meet once a year.” (Brown et al. 75) For this festival, children and adults alike scribble their secret wishes on strips of colorful
paper and hang them on bamboo branches in the backyard or front entrance of their home. They pray so that their wishes will come true. In her haiku, Sanchez, feeling lonely, prays hard that her lover will be reunited with her. The elements in nature are also frequently used in the traditional haiku. The use of “grape” and “pine trees” reflects that Sanchez’s haiku follows the characteristics of traditional haiku.

What is more, many of the haiku in Morning Haiku are expressed with transference of the senses as a technique, as the following show:

10 haiku

(for Max Roach)

4.
the morning sky
so lovely imitates
your laughter

(MH 2)

duende

3.
my feet
are crying
blues

(MH 5)
14 haiku
(for Emmett Louis Till)

10.

blue midnite
breaths sailing on
smiling tongues

(MH 12)

In Haiku 4, “the morning sky” depicts the scene by the transference of color and sound. The morning sky, representing the color blue, transfers the sense to “your laughter,” a pleasant, lovely sound. In Haiku 3, with “my feet,” a transference of sound and color takes place. The sound of crying is expressed with the color blue. Sanchez feels pain in her feet as her feet are singing the blues. While “the morning sky” depicts a happy experience, “my feet” expresses a painful one. Haiku 10, “blue midnite,” describes the transference of color and sound, “blue midnite” and “breaths sailing on / smiling tongues.” Unlike “my feet,” “blue midnite” portrays a sorrowful experience rather in an opposite way. The blues as a poetic technique makes Sanchez express pleasant as well as painful experiences just as yugen depicts happiness as well as sorrow.

In the following pair of haiku, Sanchez denotes human actions with the transference of sound and color:

7 haiku
(for Ray Brown)
3.
walking
our eyes on
water

(MH 33)

4.
hands
violining us into
blue black waves

(MH 34)

In Haiku 3, the sound of “walking” is transferred to the color of blue water. This haiku depicts a pleasant experience as humanity and nature are united. In the other haiku, Haiku 4, Sanchez creates art out of human action since hands are playing the violin. The sound of the violin is transferred to the color of “blue black waves.” Not only are the sound and color beautiful, but they also express the strength of the hands and waves. The third line underscores the color as “blue black,” not merely blue, but incredibly dark blue.

While Sanchez conveys with her blues haiku the sorrow and happiness of black people, she is at the same time deeply concerned about racial conflicts in American society. Instead of merely lamenting the tragic history of black people, she strives to find the unity and reconciliation of the races. The following haiku depict the seemingly unsolvable racial divide:

14 haiku
(for Emmett Louis Till)

14.

your death

a blues, I could not

drink away.

(MH 13)

13.

in the beginning

there was a conspiracy of blue eyes

to iron eyes;

(MH 55)

The first haiku, “your death,” is depicted with the transference of color and concept, “a blues” and “your death.” Sanchez never forgives such an atrocity as lynching. Lamenting the death of your friend will not solve the problem. In the other haiku, “in the beginning,” Sanchez also transfers color and concept, “blue eyes” and “a conspiracy.” The blue eyes, signifying white people, were oppressors as the iron eyes, signifying black people, were victims. It is utterly ironic that the blues as color and concept represents white people.

The predominantly pessimistic views Sanchez expresses in such a blues haiku above are somewhat mitigated by some later haiku in the collection:

6 haiku

(for Oprah Winfrey)
6.
in your eyes
we breathe each other’s
dreams.

(MH 66)

5 haiku

(for Sarah Vaughan)

2.
we don’t stare
we don’t seem to care
are we a pair?

(MH 67)

In the first haiku, Sanchez seek reconciliation with white people, as did Martin Luther King, Jr. She declares that “we,” black people, live and die and have common dreams with white people. The other haiku, “we don’t stare,” describes the fact of life in America. She is wondering if black and white people are destined to be united as if they were a couple. As she relates in the first haiku that black and white people have the same dreams, she envisions in the other haiku that they live together and need each other.

It is significant that Sanchez shows different qualities than other black writers. She emphasizes the role of the female to speak out to the world. The position and the role of women
in the past were not guaranteed, and women often used to be neglected. Building on this, the position of black women was even worse. In this context, women are depicted as passive and suffer from gendered hierarchies. Further, Sanchez is not only interested in the liberation of black females but also concerned with the liberation of white females as well. Sebastian Clarke in “Black Magic Women: Sonia Sanchez and Her Work” notes that Sanchez was aware of the struggle for white women’s liberation.

Sonia is also very much concerned with the (white) woman liberation movement and its subversive relationship to Black women. Recently she said to me: One of the things a (black) woman can without is trying to be liberated white woman like they trying to do with this liberation thing. Black women have always had talents and Black people have always accepted the talents. Black men didn’t think it emasculated them. (Clarke 260)

However, the woman is regarded as quiet and conservative, especially in Japanese traditional haiku. For Buson, the Japanese haiku poet’s “butterfly” differs from the women appearing in Sanchez’s poems:

On the hanging bell
Has perched and is fast asleep,
It’s a butterfly.

(Buson)

The “butterfly” in Buson’s haiku is passive and quiet rather than active. This “butterfly” can represent womanhood if one considers the fact that “butterfly” is widely considered feminine. However, Sanchez’s woman is different from the traditional notion of womanhood. Consider the
following haiku by Sanchez:

7 haiku

(for Ray Brown)

7.

your sound

sweet perfume

on my thighs.

(MH 35)

This haiku, unlike the others quoted earlier, is depicted with the transference of voice and smell, two of the human senses. The first line, “your sound,” is transferred to the smell of “sweet perfume / on my thighs.” In classic haiku, while human sexuality was not depicted, Basho, for example, wrote this haiku, which eludes to human sexuality:

The love of the cats;

When it was over, the hazy moon

Over the bed-chamber.

(Blyth, Haiku: Eastern Culture 264)

In this haiku, Basho initially focused on the loud, intense love-making of the cats. This image was juxtaposed to the quiet image of the hazy moon over his bedroom. As the collision of thoughts and images stimulated the poet’s thought, his mind was encouraged to make the effort to overcome the difficulty of uniting nature and humanity. Sanchez’s haiku, to the converse, thrives on the unity of human actions, least concerned with the difficulty of uniting humans and
nature. Unlike a classic haiku poet, Sanchez, a modernist, strives to depict human sexuality. The use of body is sensual, but in classic Japanese haiku, the use of body is restricted. It is understood that a woman should not reveal her body and instead should hide it. Sanchez, on the contrary, depicts the female body freely and frequently in her poem, as well as underwear:

*sister haiku*

*(for Pat)*

1.

How many

secrets you carried

in your panties

*(MH 45)*

Sanchez uses words such as “thighs” and “panties” directly. This use reflects the striking characteristics of Sanchez. She opposes the notion that the female body should be veiled. She uses words of body confidently to express what she wants to say in the poem. Both Sanchez and traditional haiku poets have the common idea that females have some weakness and vulnerability. Still, the difference in traditional haiku is that the female body is rarely used and that it is a virtue to conceal female body. Females are considered to be lower in the hierarchy compared to males. It is also desirable for women to display and exercise modesty and obedience.

In fact, Sanchez did not focus on the blues theme until after the mid-1970s. Until that time, the belief among the Black Art writers was that the blues teaches resignation. Resignation
meant accepting the reality of African American life. It is, however, notable that Sanchez did not agree with this belief and that her blues themes stress the view of feminists as to inequality and racial issues. Regina B. Jennings in “The Blue/Black Poetics of Sonia Sanchez” notes that her unique form of poem characterizes her own style.

Unlike black poets of previous decades such as Countee Cullen and Claude McKay, Sanchez finds victory in being black. . . . Form is another difference in Sanchez’s poetry. She does not write poems in traditional taxonomy, imitating and revising established meter, versification, and rhyme. Her poetic patterns are avant-garde. (Jennings 123-124)

Sanchez’s blues, furthermore, expands from traditional blues subjects to contemporary social injustice. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she followed the Black Power movement and her works contained uncritical popular ideology. Then, in the later 1970s, she gained respect as a Black Artist and her works contrasted that of her contemporaries in terms of form and theme. In the end, she rejected the elitist ethic that was common among male leaders of the Black Power movement, and she grounded feminism in the traditional blues lyrics with the subject of love, loss, and self-sufficiency. Her poetics reflects her role as an African American female writer that she had to go through from the 1980s.

Sanchez wrote many Black Arts poems by using blues lyrics, especially from the works of female blues singers, to establish political agendas. After that, these social agendas extended into the collective female experience and protest. Sanchez tried to express compressed feminist agendas, which were inspired by blues subjects and attitudes by using the haiku form through blues haiku. Jennifer Ryan in Post-Jazz Poetics (2010) mentions Sanchez: “Her work not only
participates in the literary tradition of filtering human emotion through the natural world but also complicates the views of love already established by the blues tradition” (Ryan 68).
Chapter Four

James A. Emanuel as a Postmodernist and Postcolonialist Poet

1. James Emanuel: A Neglected Poet

American academia has largely neglected James A. Emanuel (1921-2013), a prolific poet in the postmodern and postcolonial periods of American poetry. He published more than 300 poems, 13 books, and other publications. He was also a talented musician, playing the saxophone, and he enchanted his audiences at home and abroad. Because of his enviable gifts in music and poetry, he singlehandedly invented the genre of jazz haiku. His greatest achievement was *JAZZ from the Haiku King* (1999), a collection of numerous jazz haiku, published by Broadside, one of the non-mainstream publishing houses, in Detroit, home of the famous Motown movement. Detroit, then and now, was one of the most influential hubs of American jazz alongside Chicago. Emanuel was born in Nebraska in 1921 but suffered from racism in the United States. He went to Europe in the late 1960s, as did Wright, his mentor, two decades earlier. He gained teaching positions there and decided that he would never return to the United States, as Wright never did. Emanuel died in Paris, as did Wright. The fact that he stayed in Europe was one of the primary factors as to why the American academia neglect Emanuel as a poet in the United States.

To live as an African American writer in the United States is like playing a revolutionary role in the twentieth century. Emanuel’s jazz haiku tries to show musical rhythms like jazz. Jazz
Jazz impulse, according to Ralph Ellison, is defined as a constant process of redefinition. The jazz artist constantly works again with one’s identity on three levels. The three levels are as an individual, as a member of a community and as a link in the chain of tradition. Emanuel is regarded as a revolutionary figure. Marvin Holdt in “James A. Emanuel: Black Man Abroad” notes that “To call him a revolutionary, then is to state the obvious, as well as pay deserved tribute to his convictions and to his championing of them in poetry; to leave it at that is to limit him as a poet” (Holdt 79).

This chapter examines Emanuel’s *JAZZ from the Haiku King*. Emanuel’s compositions in *JAZZ from the Haiku King*, influenced by Japanese haiku, are also influenced by jazz. Emanuel not only used the form and the aesthetics of Japanese haiku but also interjected the elements of jazz. Emanuel solidly combined the characteristics of haiku and jazz when formulating his jazz haiku. In addition, Emanuel tried to express social issues as an African American writer. Emanuel insists that the truths do not need to be shouted; they could be told as they are softly. Then, the truths will speak for themselves. Emanuel in “A Note on the Future of Negro Poetry” mentions that African American poets can be advantaged:

> The open-eyed exploration of Negro poetry may be one of the last cultural frontiers to challenge the American mind as we know it. It will be the privilege of Negro scholars in particular to bring their professional and racial sensitivities to bear in the examination of techniques used by Negro poets to express their unique fusions of the human, the American, and the individual. (Emanuel 2)

In this sense, the genre of poetry can be an effective way to express the thoughts of African Americans. Emanuel’s significance is that his writings reflect racial injustice without hesitation.
and portrayals the difficulties of African Americans through the aethetical principles of classic haiku. Finally, he made a significant contribution to the history of haiku by inventing jazz haiku.

II. Racial Sensitivity and the Individualism of Emanuel

The poetry of African Americans often expresses their racial sensitivities. Their poetry may be the last barrier against the American mind. Sanchez, discussed in the previous chapter, and Emanuel were influenced by Wright. In fact, Wright was originally influenced by classic Japanese haiku poets, such as Basho, Buson, and Issa. Wright applied the elements of jazz and the blues to classic Japanese haiku. As for jazz, Wright put an emphasis on “hatred.” Sanchez and Emanuel both employ jazz in their haiku. Haiku aims for an expression of the unity and harmony of all things. Both jazz and haiku rely on improvisation on the surface, and both jazz and haiku share philosophically grounded as well. Moreover, haiku, when combined with jazz, powerfully express human sentiments.

Haiku draws images of nature without relying on the use of metaphors or similes. One of the salient characteristics of haiku is selflessness. The poet’s emotion or self does not exist in haiku. This selflessness is a result of suppression of egotism and self-centeredness. Nonetheless, Emanuel’s concept of selflessness is somewhat different in his jazz haiku from that of classic haiku. Although there is no word like “I” in the following haiku, Emanuel expresses the deeply-felt conviction of his mind:

**B.B. King**
Memories (stirred, juiced)

spill sweat through his face.   Calmed, loosed,

they sing,    leave no trace.

Arms open, B.B.

Kiss him, Lucille.    Blues?    Bedtime?

Whichever you feel.

(Emanuel \cite{41} 26)

This haiku stresses how you feel now, and the expression is enhanced with improvisation.

Marvin Holdt in “James A. Emanuel: The Perilous Stairs” asserts that Emanuel is regarded as highly individualistic in his works:

In short, the name James Emanuel calls to mind the varied aspects of a highly individual, many-faceted poetic personality.

We sense that James Emanuel believes, above all, in the individual and in the unlimited possibilities of the individual, in the individual talent, in individual sensibility, the worth of the individual, the right of the individual to be completely himself, the individual’s need to realize himself according to the dictates of his own personality and a self-imposed discipline, independent of

\footnote{41 For the text, Emanuel, James A. JAZZ from the Haiku King, Detroit: Broadside Press, 1999. Hereafter, referred to as JAZZ.}
schemas, systems, theories or ideologies imposed from without.

(Holdt 144)

Emanuel highlights the individual’s emotion by saying “whichever you feel.” We can see that Emanuel is highly concerned with the individual’s feelings. However, this concern with the individual does not mean that his haiku is solely aimed at one’s ego. He is at the same time concerned with social issues. The first part of the haiku under “B. B. King” expresses the singer B. B. King’s individualistic feelings, represented by “sweat through his face.” His feelings, “stirred, juiced” by his memories, are now “calmed, loosed.” In the second part of the haiku, his feelings are poured onto another individual, Lucille, and still others whom B. B. King’s song will inspire.

One of the significant features of Emanuel’s poetry is that he was concerned with institutional racism. According to some writers, institutional racism remains prevalent in the United States now and then:

Machine it seemed said

“kill black, kill black”

till flashing brains went dead

yanked out with secret plugs jerked slyly

from some wall so quick

that holstered schoolroom words instead

seemed circling out like rosewood
…

kept on saying it—

“BLACK kill, BLACK kill”

Machine

said

so.

(qtd. in Emanuel’s “Black Poetry for A New Century” 161-62)

This poem reflects the prevalent institutional racism in America. The fact that the “machine” said to kill the black implies the institution. According to Emanuel, this poem attempts to show the “racial duality in police training and practice” (Emanuel 161).

Continuing the rookie cop’s meandering imaginations of death in the Black ghetto merged with perceptions of ordinary instruction and sidewalk duties, the poem moves to emphasis on the racist drives that force cops in riot-prone cities to hear only the “machine” voicing approval of their urge to brutalize Black people. (Emanuel 161)

Other African American poets focused on racism itself. Emanuel, however, pointed out the injustice of the institutional system. Institutional racism reflects the severity of racism. Further, Emanuel endeavored to express the collective goal of African Americans.

In expressing the poverty as well as the racial issues through haiku, haiku has more compression than any other forms of poetry. Despite this, Emanuel’s haiku portrayed poverty and
racial issues without hesitation.

The Poor Man Blues

Knocked on the door of The Poor Man’s Club
‘cause I had the poor man blues;

kept knockin’ on the door (it was The Poor Man’s

Club,

where they was bound to sing the blues).

The man tol’ me “You can’t come in this club
‘less you paid your dues.”

. . .

“You know, I wraps my legs in garbage bags

before December count to three;

I binds wires around my wrinkled shoes;

ain’t no socks there for me to see.

All my toes is Eskimos

and my fingers ain’t no kin to me.

. . .

(JAZZ 108)
The speaker is not allowed to enter “The Poor Man’s Club” if the speaker does not pay the dues. The speaker is surprised by the word, “dues” because it was “The Poor Man’s Club,” which then adds the speaker’s situation that “binds wires around my wrinkled shoes” and the speaker does not even have socks and the speaker’s toes are like Eskimos, referring to his “poor” situation. Emanuel bolsters the speaker’s poverty by showing how poorly he lives. Emanuel also effectively portrays African Americans with the element in nature and the weather

**Schoolboy**

Black schoolboy Jazz. Rain

mudpuddles him home. Blue Note,

his dog, tugs his coat.

(JAZZ 62)

The “Black schoolboy” is in the “Rain” and comes back home with “muddlepuddles.” Moore refers to “Black schoolboy” directly and mentions the unstable trek back home. Emanuel’s haiku does not connote the racial issues or poverty indirectly, but rather alludes to it directly.

III. Emanuel’s New Form, Jazz Haiku

Emanuel composed jazz haiku, which differs significantly from traditional haiku. In jazz haiku, no references to seasons as they do in traditional haiku with *kigo* (seasonal word), or elements in nature or animals compared to classic haiku. The significance of jazz is that the music reflects the life of the African Americans since jazz is rooted in African American music. Both haiku and jazz are well known for expressing human sentiments in a powerful and
innovative manner. Just as haiku thrives on striking images that had not appeared in waka, Japanese romantic poetry, jazz created new sounds and rhythms unheard in traditional music.

It is known that Langston Hughes served as a mentor to Emanuel. According to Hughes, the blues was a tool to resist unjust racial discrimination toward African Americans. While Wright held a different view on the blues, he regarded the blues as an indigenous aesthetical form for African Americans. Wright as well as Emanuel overcame poverty. In this vein, Emanuel’s haiku implies that adversity, suffering, and loneliness are compensated by the beauty of nature.

V

BOTH out? Moon AND sun?
I’m both-out too: luck AND job.
Guess I’m DOUBLE blue.

(JAZZ 100)

In this haiku, the speaker has neither luck nor job, comparing his plight to the “Moon” and “sun.” The gloomy situation is overcome by using the elements in nature. Emanuel does not just appeal the poverty, but reflects on the beauty of nature. He believes that nature has the power of healing one’s wounds.

The blues emphasizes individuality and personality. Distinctively, jazz aims at anonymity and impersonality. As for anonymity, it bears a relation to the noh dramatists. W. B. Yeats, for instance, was inspired by noh drama. The device that is used to anonymity is a mask as the Roman theater used masks rather than makeup on the face. Thus, Emanuel’s jazz haiku followed the tradition of noh drama. Emanuel expresses one’s emotion, but the reader cannot
find out who it is when Emanuel refers to one’s emotion itself.

Emanuel also used the haiku form as a stanza in a longer poem. In the end, Emanuel tries to show that all the different nations are together as one by using multilingual texts or delivering of the same haiku in various languages.

(“John Coltrane”)

“Love Supreme”: ça file
et JA-A-Z éclair, mais
sans bruler d’arrêt. (JM)

“Love Supreme” poezd
Khot’ I express classa “lux,”
stantsii vsiudu (AM)

Top. Prompter Licht-Express, doch
hielt an allen Stopps. (SB)

¡Ay amor! YAZZ tren.
Fulgores de express; ven,
sin saltar anden. (EM)

“Love Supreme,” JAZZ che
come un diretto scocca

eppur ti blocca.  (RD)

(JAZZ 25)

This long poem goes beyond a simple long poem. Each of the stanzas completely follows the rule of haiku in 3 lines. The stanzas also adhere to the rhythm Emanuel originally tried to keep, although all of the stanzas are written in different languages. Emanuel attempted to show that people belong to different countries but the people are all in the same world by using multilingual texts.

Some of Emanuel’s jazz haiku convey the concept of the state of nothingness, mu, from Zen philosophy. A few examples reflect Emanuel’s idea of the state of nothingness in the chapter with four foldout engravings with haiku. One of them is on a newborn baby.

No meaning at birth:

just screams, squirms, frowns without sight,

fists clenched against light.

(JAZZ 88)

This haiku is about a newborn baby; however, the newborn baby does not have any meaning. The newborn baby just cries and holds its fist tightly. In this instance, the newborn baby emphasizes the state of nothingness, mu. Further, the baby’s “screaming,” “frowns,” and “fist clenched” refers to the upcoming hardship of the human being. This likewise applies to Buddhist philosophy. According to Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, human suffering claims that all life is suffering. The next haiku also stresses the innocence of the first being, and it relates closely with the state of nothingness.
No dust, rust, no guilt
in home JAZZ built; it cheers, STANDS,
charms guests from ALL lands.

(JAZZ 93)

This haiku emphasizes that there is “no guilt” by mentioning that there is “no dust” and “no rust.” Emanuel penned similar haiku aiming at the state of nothingness. In them, he aims for a higher state when it comes to the state of nothingness.

In addition, when it comes to individualism, Emanuel advised African Americans to become more individualistic and to keep in mind that they should remember Zen doctrine. Zen contains the doctrine of satori, which is a higher stage than the state of nothingness, mu. The self should not exist at this stage. The goal of satori is to annihilate the self to achieve the state of nothingness.

Ammunition

Weapons ready-y-y. JAZZ!
People fall, rise hypnotized,
maybe civilized.

(JAZZ 70)

Emanuel does not state that the people are hurt by the weapons. Emanuel instead mentions that the people are “hypnotized” or “maybe civilized” by “JAZZ.” This “JAZZ” implies that ammunition can become civilized. As a result, Emanuel evokes and attains satori when employing the word “JAZZ.” Another example appears in “Impressionist”:

Impressionist
Impressionist pipe
puffs JAZZ where pigments solo,
brightsoapbubbling air.

(JAZZ 70)

The “brightsoapbubbling air” is the result of “impressionist pipe” and “puff JAZZ”. This “brightsoapbubbling air” implies a brand-new world. The “puff JAZZ” is free from everything and this state brings a different world. Both “Ammunities” and “Impressionists” aims at liberation, and this leads to satori.

Emanuel also composed gospels. In “Mahalia Jackson,” Emanuel refers to “the LORD’S songs” and praises the “Lord”:

**Mahalia Jackson**

“I sing the LORD’S songs”
(palms once tough to stay alive,
alarm clock on five).

Cinnamon cheeks, Lord,
cornbread smile. SONGS feed your ribs
when you’re hungry, chile.

Washboard certainties,
soldierly grace, text and style
in her brimming face.
Your hand on your heart,
her voice in your ear:  pilgrim,
rest easy.  Sit here.

(JAZZ 50)

Emanuel not only revealed his interest in and invented the jazz haiku form, but he advanced his interest in gospel. He portrayed a famous figure, Mahalia Jackson, as a subject. Gospels have been popular among African Americans; interestingly, neither Wright nor Sanchez composed gospels, let alone sought to fuse this style with haiku. Emanuel tried to create his own unique style of haiku by using gospel in his writing.

As noted, one of the differences between contemporary American haiku and traditional haiku is that American haiku sometimes depict human sexuality, and such instances become relatively natural and spontaneous expressions. American haiku also resemble jazz as well and Emanuel also does that, too. Aside from Wright, Emanuel dealt with sexuality. Wright only focused on humanity itself and did not avoid sex in his haiku whereas classic haiku strictly avoided human sexuality. Emanuel’s haiku also depict sensual images:

**Bojangles and Jo**

Stairstep music: ups,
donwms, Bill Robinson smiling,

drazazzdancing the rounds.

She raised champagne lips,
danced inside banana hips.
All Paris wooed Jo.

Banana panties,
perfumed belt, JAZZ tattooing
lush ecstasies felt.

Josephine, royal,
jeweling her dance, flushing
the bosom of France.

(JAZZ 8)
This haiku depict sensual images such as “champagne lips” as well as “banana lips.” Also, the words “Banana panties” and “perfumed belt” are expressions that are more sensual than “champagne lips” and “banana lips.” The significance of Emanuel’s haiku is that he conjoins jazz and sensual words in one haiku. Emanuel makes good use of words that describe a part of the human body to maximize the sensual effect:

**Fashion Show**

When you rock those hips
and turn like that, JAZZ, baby!
I know where it’s at.

(JAZZ 32)
The words such as “hips,” “rock those hips,” and “turn like that, JAZZ” demonstrate the
interaction of haiku and jazz. The following haiku does the same:

**Clover Leaf**

Four-leaf clover Jazz
sweetens your lips. Pocket some
for musical hips.

*(JAZZ 36)*

The “clover leaf Jazz” is the subject, and it “sweetens your lips,” which is ultimately “for musical hips.” The existence of “lips” and “hips” are both associated with “Jazz.”

The description of the human body directly expresses sensuality, as does dancing with jazz music. Emanuel’s other haiku also expresses sexuality:

**Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington**

Satchmo’s warm burlap,
Duke’s cool cashmere: fine fabrics
make your love “Come here!”

*(JAZZ 12)*

The phrase “make your love” is different from classic haiku that avoids mentioning love itself explicitly. Though haiku avoids using sensual words, there is nothing wrong with using sensual words in jazz. Going against traditional haiku, Emanuel’s jazz haiku effectively adopts several parts of our bodies as subjects.

IV. Emanuel’s Haiku and Classic Haiku

It is remarkable that Emanuel applies a separatist perspective based on African
American’s exclusive psychology, which is based on their unique heritage. At the same time, Emanuel distinguishes his role in the history of the United States. As mentioned earlier, a poet should include unity and harmony when composing haiku. This could be accomplished when one aims for harmony between nature and human life. A famous haiku by Basho addresses human life in relation to others.

Autumn is deepening:
What does the neighbor do
For a living?

(Basho, Qtd. in Hakutani 154-55)

Hakutani in *Haiku and Modernist Poetics* notes that Basho concerned more with people other than himself; this came from the fact that he grew up in a poor family. He was more interested in the common object and common people rather than a great object or famous people:

On a journey Basho rested in a lodge where he saw another traveler, a stranger, staying overnight. As he was reminded of an autumnal self, he was also concerned about the other person. Because he did not come from a well-to-do family, his life as an artist was that of a wandering bard who was enormously interested in commonplace and the common people.

(Hakutani 155)

Like Basho, Emanuel concerned himself with other human beings. In particular, he involved himself with the African Americans’ hardships involving poverty and racial injustice. Emanuel’s attitude transcends the scope of an individual or even society when expressing the poverty and racial injustice in African American life. Emanuel instead depicted the sentiments focused on the
nature. The aesthetic principle of *wabi* underlies the depiction of poverty. The plight of poverty in haiku is even portrayed beautifully contrary to the hardships.

Some of Emanuel’s haiku express that beauty is rooted in poverty. In fact, this is a concept opposite to “*Hana yori dango*” (Rice dumplings are preferred to flowers). Some people, like artists, in Japan were more attracted to flowers than to foods. Emanuel’s “Jazzanatomy” has a variety of elements surrounding us and expresses the experience of African Americans and the life of people with a lower socioeconomic status.

**Jazzanatomy**

EVERYTHING is jazz:

Snails, jails, rails, tails, males, females,

Snow-white cotton bales.

Knee-bone, thigh, hip-bone.

Jazz slips you percussion bone classified “unknown”.

...

Second-chance rhythms,

don’t-give-up riffs: jazz gets HIGH

off can’ts, buts, and ifs.

(*JAZZ 2*)
Emanuel’s jazz haiku embraces everything in the world, and even “jails” renders a sense of pessimism. This implies the hardship of African Americans’ lives. Emanuel’s jazz haiku relies on everyday life. Virginia Whatley Smith, in her essay “Jean Toomer Revisited in James Emanuel’s Postmodernist Jazz Haiku” from *Cross-Cultural Visions in African American Modernism: West Meets East* (2011), notes that jazz can be applied everywhere and can exist everywhere.

For instance, in the text three poems of “Jazzanatomy,” “Jazzroads,” and “Jazzactions,” Emanuel represents “Jazz” as a personification that is continually mobile and easily adaptable to old or new places. Musicians call these various spatial eruptions of jazz “territories.” And its malleability reflects Jazz’s fluid nature to resist boundaries and to adapt to any geographic site willing to hear it.

(Whatley 91)

The poetic sensibility of *wabi* finds its root in agedness and poverty. Like Wright, Emanuel applied *wabi* in his haiku. Both Wright and Emanuel see the beauty in the sentiments of human beings rather than food. Emanuel expresses the sensibility of *wabi* through blues. The following haiku reflects the racial injustice of African Americans on the basis of the aesthetic principles of *wabi*. This sense of poverty could be seen in his blues-style haiku:

\[ \text{I} \]

Woman’s gone. BLUES knocks
my door, says “Hello, honey.
Who-o-o you waitin’ for?”

(*JAZZ* 98)

This haiku says that “BLUES” comes after “woman’s gone”. This suggests that the absence of
the woman is consoled and compensated for by the “BLUES.”

II

Been ridin’ the rails.

Butt’s dusty. When I last ate?

My mem’ry’s rusty.

(JAZZ 98)

This haiku portrays a speaker who has been riding “rails” so long and he/she even cannot remember the last time that he or she ate something. According to the footnote, “the rails” refers to freight trains and finding works in a distant town. Then, the speaker relates that the speaker’s memory is “rusty.” The words “dusty” and “rusty” maximize the hard-pressed, precarious situation in which the speaker is placed.

Moreover, Emanuel’s “The Middle Passage,” a depiction of the most cruel, inhumane treatment of humans in Colonial American history wherein African slaves underwent transport to British North America, consists of three haiku. The three haiku directly express the agony, pain, and suffering that the crime of slavery perpetrated on innocent human beings, like lynching would later. These poems reverberate the experiences of the victims in the forms of haiku and jazz. “Middle Passage” addresses “Tight-bellied ships, gorged” and the “Chains, whips, ship-to-shore.”

The Middle Passage

Tight-bellied ships, gorged
to the core, JAZZ claiming berths
where breath soured no more.
Chains, whips, ship-to-shore.

JAZZ don’t talk about these things
it can’t do without?

Chainmates, black, vomit
for breath, sang LIFE into JAZZ
while leaping to death.

(JAZZ 74)

Here, the ship is full of slaves. These “Tight-bellied ships” represent the injustice and the brutality of the slave traders, an extremely inhumane event in American history.

Following this line of thinking, Emanuel’s “The Middle Passage Blues” marks the height of the brutality that accompanied slavery and fostered racial prejudice in American.

The Middle Passage Blues

“Middle Passage”: the WORD means blues to me.

Look at it front or backside, it still means BLUES to me.

If I’d a been a sailor on the Seven Seas
I’d sailed the seven ENDS and let the MIDDLES be ….

But if I’d a been a sailor, I’d still been black.

THAT’s why the blues keeps sailin’ back.

The blues keeps sailin’ back.

[...] she had slave-girl mem’ries, and she rocked and hummed
‘em there:
her daddy’s neck and legs in chains, his own vomit in his
hair—

[. . .]

Middle Passage mem’ries … they in a dungeon in my
head.

[. . .]

(JAZZ 110-111)

This “Middle Passage Blues” connects past and present. The horrendous experience of the past
and the resentment and mourning reflect the importance of memory to the minorities in America.
In fact, this process is the quest of their identity and memory and the memory functions as a
discourse of the people who are oppressed. Raphaël Lambert in “The Slave Trade as Memory
and History: James A. Emanuel’s ‘The Middle Passage Blues’ and Robert Hayden’s ‘Middle
Passage’” emphasize the importance of this American memory:

Emanuel voices a primarily racial memory of the middle passage, and while such
a stance makes sense from a postcolonial perspective, one should also consider
that memory can be a catalyst for ethnonationalism or, in this case, racial
essentialism with its negative attribute of a reactionary attitude.

(Lambert 329)

The speaker of “Middle Passage Blues” refers to “blues” when it comes to “Middle Passage,” no
matter that the speaker looks at the back or the front side of the ship. Next, the speaker talks
remembers his or her Grandmother. The grandmother as well as her father had brutal experience
as slaves. They wore have chains that linked together their bodies. This “Middle Passage” experience is left as “dungeon.”

Lambert notes that blues music reverberates for African Americans in their most painful racial nightmare:

Emanuel’s “Middle Passage Blues,” beyond its obvious title, is thus anchored in the blues vernacular through repetitions, African American speech patterns, and its thematic of personal suffering. Blues music, as LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) argued, is exclusively African American. It denotes a racial sense of belonging that befits a poem that has for its theme a historical action with which only people of African descent can develop a visceral connection. (Lambert 336)

In addition, Maria Diedrich et al. in Black Imagination and The Middle Passage note that not only the “tight-bellied ships” but also the conditions within the ships proved unbearable.

… the lack of proper diet, the unhygienic conditions that prevailed aboard the ships, affecting slave and crew alike, as well as the brutalities the Africans suffered at the hands of their white captors, and the inhumanity of the institution of slavery is laid bare. (Diedrich, Maria, et al 6)

Not only was the ship full of slaves, but its condition was also unhygienic. This reveals that the slaves were not even treated as human beings.

The atrocity of treating slaves as nonhumans is reminiscent of Mark Twain’s portrayal of African Americans in Adventures of Huckleberry (1977). In that novel, Aunt Sally responds to Huck Finn, who reports that a steamboat has just blown out a cylinder head down the river:

“Good gracious! Anybody hurt?”
“No’m. Killed a nigger.”

“Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt. . . .”

(Twain 175)

What Twain and Emanuel share is the genuine feeling of an intense individualist: both writers feel their own great powers, yet recognize the hopelessness of trying to reform a corrupted society.

Instead of being pessimists, both Emanuel and Twain resorted to the use of paradox and humor. Emanuel’s perspective in viewing African Americans’ pain, poverty, and lonesomeness considering their compensation creates paradox. Dickinson’s view of failure is paradoxical, for she shows that success is best appreciated by failure:

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne’er succeed.

To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated--dying--
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

(Dickinson, *Complete Poems* 35)

Emanuel’s narrative poem, “The Knockout Blues,” likewise expresses paradox. An African American finds his poverty compensated for by the strength of his character in winning the battle of life: “Willin’ to work for a wage less than fair, / I couldn’t find nothin’ but a knockout stare” (*JAZZ* 104). Despite the racial prejudice rampant in some sectors of American society, the hero of the poem is proud to say:

**The Knockout Blues**

. . .

If my arms and legs is wobbly,
if my neck is leanin’ in,
I been fightin’ what I couldn’t see
in places wasn’t worth bein’ in.

. . .

(*JAZZ* 105)

“The Downhill Blue” also resounds with paradox. The poet-narrator is least afraid of going downhill, because “They say I’m tough with steerin’ wheels / and mighty sharp with brakes” (*JAZZ* 106). “But whatever’s below’s,” he observes, is too deep for a spineless man to fathom. Endowed with character and discipline that have guided his life, he is now prepared to meet the challenge.

With a bit of humor, Emanuel imagines that as he digs deeper he will end up on the other
side of the earth: “when I break through I’ll be a Chinese man. / If the earth be’s round the way they say, / when I come up it’ll be a OPPOSITE day. / Downhill’s a long, long way to go, / but I can dig it if I dig it slow. / I’ll turn up talkin’ in a Chinese way: / servin’ up the blues on a thank-you tray” (JAZZ 107). “The Downhill Blues” also suggests that Emanuel’s poetic experiment is an attempt to assess African American life from a non-western, cross-cultural point of view.

Emanuel’s humorous imagination, in which he is dreaming of digging the earth deeper to reach the other side of the world, is reminiscent of Mark Twain’s. In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1977), Tom Sawyer talks about his outrageous far-fetched imagination, in which Jim, imprisoned in the dungeon of the Castle Deep and given a couple of case-knives, would be able to dig himself out through the earth for thirty-seven years and come out in China (Twain 191-92). Despite Huck’s rebuke of Tom for entertaining such an idea, Twain’s conjuring up visions of Jim’s freedom from slavery to a slaveless society is akin to Emanuel’s wish for jazz to transcend cultural borders in disseminating African American suffering and joy.

Emanuel also poignantly expressed loneliness in his haiku by using the technique of classic haiku. Many of the classic haiku, like Wright’s, are full of loneliness. This loneliness relates with the sensibility of sabi. Sabi, again, describes something that is aged. Hakutani in Haiku and the Modernist Poetics notes that sabi suggests quiet beauty: “Aesthetically, however, this mode of sensibility is characteristic of grace rather than splendor; it suggests quiet beauty as opposed to robust beauty” (Hakutani 12). Even so, the loneliness described can be changed into pleasure. Basho thought of being lonely as very positive.

Along this road

Goes no one,
This autumn eve

(Basho, Qtd. in Blyth 169)

Basho’s haiku implies that loneliness can be converted into pleasure. Loneliness is connected to a state of nothingness, *mu*, in Zen. The main concept of Zen philosophy is *mu*, which proposes complete spiritual poverty. This means we should empty ourselves. Ippen’s *waka*, a genre of Japanese poetry, derived from Buddhism, expresses that self does not exist.

When uttered,

There is no I,

No Budda:

“Namuamidabutsu,
Namuamidabutsu.”

(Ippen, qtd in Blyth 157)

Loneliness is no longer a sad emotion, and for Emanuel, jazz converts sadness into pleasure.

Haiku is quite a condensed form of poetry. Emanuel embeds the rhythm and syncopation of jazz into haiku. Self does not exist in haiku and this characteristic resembles jazz. Jazz has anonymity and impersonality whereas blues stresses individuality and personality. Despite this, there was a time when jazz emphasized individuality. Hakutani in *Haiku and the Modernist Poetics* notes that individuality underlies jazz in the early 1950s.

In practice, however, jazz in the early 1950s emphasized individuality, in technical virtuosity and theoretical knowledge, rather than community and its involvement with jazz. “In response,” Werner notes, “jazz musicians such as Miles Davis, Ornett Coleman, and John Coltrane established the contours of the
multifaceted ‘free jazz’ movement . . .” (Hakutani 144)

Other than employing jazz, Emanuel experimented with the form of haiku. He used the form of haiku in a single poem as well as in a longer poem.

**Ella Fitzgerald**

Pin- La- SCATS:

ball dy

tis- tas- bumps

ket raps ket, back.

yel- bas-

Wins low ket.

_

(JAZZ 16)

This jazz haiku shows the characteristics of jazz. Craig Hansen Werner in *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race & the Soul of America* (2006) mentions Ralph Ellison and notes that jazz impulse is a malleable, continuous process of redefinition:

Ralph Ellison defines the jazz impulse as a constant process of redefinition. The jazz artist constantly reworks her identity on three levels: (1) as an individual; (2) as a member of a community; and (3) as a “link in the chain of tradition.” Nothing is ever a given. Who you are, the people you live with and for; the culture you bear: everything remains open to question, probing reevaluation.

(Werner 132)

Jazz haiku also thrives on brevity, as does traditional haiku. It will be shorter if the words are written with no extra blanks. However, the blanks contribute to making the rhythm of jazz.
Emanuel’s haiku portrays hardship of poverty and racial injustice through his narrative style and rhyme of jazz haiku.

Moreover, many elements of nature and seasonal references appear in haiku. There are elements of nature used in Lenard Moore’s haiku, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Emanuel’s haiku, however, do not feature elements of nature such as seasons or animals.

\[ \text{Summer noon;} \]
\[ \text{the blueberry field divided} \]
\[ \text{by a muddy road} \]

\[ \text{(Moore, qtd. in Van den Heuvel 126)} \]

\[ \text{silent deer the sound of water fall.} \]

\[ \text{(Moore, qtd. in Van den Heuvel 126)} \]

The difference from Emanuel’s haiku is that Moore uses seasonal words, \textit{kigo}, as in traditional haiku. Moore’s haiku bears a seasonal reference, “Summer noon.” Moore used other elements in nature like “blueberry field,” “deer,” and “sound of a waterfall.” Haiku is influenced by Zen philosophy. Zen emphasizes enlightenment to look at humanity and nature. Zen emphasizes on self-reliance; still, it differs from egotism or materialism.

\[ \text{farther and farther} \]
\[ \text{into the mountain trail} \]
\[ \text{autumn dusk deepens} \]

\[ \text{(Moore, qtd. in Van den Heuvel 126)} \]

The words “mountain” and “autumn” as well as the form of the haiku resemble the Japanese
three-line form.

Haiku as well as jazz haiku feature wordlessness. One of the characteristics of haiku is simplicity; this illustrates the original simplicity of Japanese culture and the Japanese people. Emanuel composed a great deal of haiku about jazz singers in *JAZZ from the Haiku King* by using the skills of brevity and rhythm:

**John Coltrane**

“Love Supreme,” JA-A-Z train,  
tops. Prompt lightning-express, but  
made ALL local stops.  

(*JAZZ 24*)

The atmosphere of the jazz haiku in terms of jazz singers is optimistic even though their reality is pessimistic.

**Louis Armstrong**

Jazz-rainbow: skywash  
his trumpet blew, cleansing air,  
his wonderworld there.  

(*JAZZ 56*)

As to the pursuit of utopia – the word “wonderworld” is a kind of a utopia. However, Emanuel’s utopia goes with individualism. Emanuel’s haiku, “Steppin’ Out on the Promise,” mentions each of the individuals like “Step out, Brother. Blow.” (*JAZZ 84*) and “Step out, Sister. Blow.” (*JAZZ 84*):
Steppin’ Out on the Promise

Step out, Brother. Blow.
Just pretend you plantin’ corn,
gold seeds from your horn.

Step out, Sister. Blow.
Must be Lord told you to play,
gifted you that way.

Step out, Daughter. Shine.
Make ‘em switch their lights on, chile.
Make ‘em jazzophile.

Step out, Sonny. Blow.
Tell ‘em all they need to know.
Lay it on ‘em. GO!

(JAZZ 84)

Emanuel refers individually to “Brother” as well as “Sister. Then, he writes “Step out, Daughter. Shine” (JAZZ 84) and “Step out, sonny. Blow” (JAZZ 84). In the end, Emanuel directs his daughter to make the audience become “jazzophile.” Emanuel also mentions that all these things are necessary to know. Here, Emanuel demonstrates the importance of subjectivity and individuality
when performing jazz. In addition, this haiku has a rhyme such as “corn” and “horn” in the first stanza. The second stanza also has rhyme like “play” and “way” as well. In the third stanza, the words “chile” and “jazzophile” are also rhyming words and in the final stanza also has rhyme, “know” and “GO”. Emanuel created rhyme instead of adding the seasonal reference as occurs in classical haiku. This rhyme is an element of jazz. Adding rhyme to haiku is an innovation Emanuel made in the postmodern development of haiku poetry.

Above all, Emanuel’s advice to be individualistic originates from Zen philosophy. Emanuel’s concept of individuality is associated with human subjectivity. To Emanuel, human subjectivity does not mean selfishness or self-centeredness. Its deeper meaning consists of being critical of oneself. In this vein, mu means to stay away from the “habitual way of life” (Hakutani 154).

II

No use cryin’ ‘bout
What she did after she found
Where my heart was hid.

(JAZZ 98)

In this final example, Emanuel accepts reality and feel that crying is useless. This hard reality is confronted with the sensibility of wabi, wherein there are feelings like poverty, agedness, and coldness. Emanuel’s jazz haiku, as do classic haiku, express a grateful acceptance of reality and a feeling of gratitude to the things in our world.

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Chapter Five

Lenard D. Moore’s Haiku: An Innovation

I. Lenard D. Moore’s First Acquaintance with Haiku

In American literary criticism, scholars have primarily discussed novels and poems, although haiku of Kerouac and other few writers had been considered. In fact, many American writers, novelists as well as poets, tried their hand at writing haiku. Consequently, several books and articles assessing these haiku have been published. Well-known American writers, such as Wright, Kerouac, and Sanchez, have published their collections of haiku. Their haiku have been read and commented on with great enthusiasm. On the contrary, Emanuel and Lenard Duane Moore, both lesser-known than Wright, Kerouac, and Sanchez, have nonetheless written numerous haiku and short poems. Their haiku possess something in common as well as stark differences as African American writers.

Lenard Duane Moore (1958-) is originally from Jacksonville, North Carolina. He spent his childhood in nature exploring creeks, ponds, and farm fields in Onslow County until he grew up. What is remarkable about his poetry is that it shows how he has been intimately connected to the land and society in which he has lived. This experience and memory became the background of his haiku as well as his other longer poems. He also composed poems on the state of North Carolina.

Moore served in the U.S. Army from 1978 to 1981, and while in the service, his poetic
writing commenced. Kiuchi in “Creating African American Haiku Form: Lenard D. Moore’s Poetic Artistry” notes that Moore started to write letters to his girlfriend when he was in the army and he had an acquaintance with haiku.

From 1978 to 1981, Moore served in the U.S. Army, where he started writing and sending poetic letters to his girlfriend (Laryea 160). In early 1982 after his military service, still in his early twenties, while he was in bed with the flu, he “noticed some very short translations into English of poems by Japanese poets” (Laryea 168). Some time later in June, he met “an old man,” Hale Kellog, who told him about haiku and the subject of nature (letter by Moore to the author, August 5, 1986). This was the beginning of his love for haiku. (Kiuchi 154)

Moore became interested in haiku after reading translated poems by Japanese writers in 1981. Thereafter, he started to read Harold G. Henderson’s An Introduction to Haiku and R.H. Blyth’s volumes of haiku literature. Interestingly, Wright and Kerouac both studied R. H. Blyth’s 4 volumes of haiku.

In 1982, Moore became acquainted with Hale Kellog, an American poet, at The North Carolina Poetry Festival. Moore learned from Kellog that the subject of haiku is pure nature. Moore was then surprised that haiku could express a great deal in a few words. He started to document whatever he observed in nature, started to compose haiku as much as he could and became better-acquainted with the form of haiku. Moore’s familiarity with Kellog appears in Doris Lucas Laryea’s interview with Moore as follows:

Later, during June of 1982, I attended The North Carolina Poetry Festival at Weymouth Center in Southern Pines, North Carolina. There I met an old man,
Hale Kellog, who talked to me for about an hour or two, telling me about the purity of haiku and nature being the subject of haiku. He read me several of his haiku that were published in Modern Haiku. I was amazed at how much could be said in so few words. So I began my crusade to record whatever I perceived in nature. Since then, I've tried to write haiku as often as possible. I have studied the form too. Dealing with the discipline of image and careful attention to language in haiku, I believe I have strengthened my writing of longer forms of poetry. (Laryea)

Moore’s poetry does not adhere to an African American aesthetic tradition, though he admits that there is an African American aesthetic tradition in the boundary of haiku. Actually, it took a while for Moore to understand the form of haiku and to reach a certain stage in writing it. Moore defines African American aesthetics as art that is always evolving and also adds that his haiku is “contemporary.”

Finally, Moore wants to describe African American culture by using the haiku form. He believes that African American aesthetics is progressing forward, thereby proving that African American art keeps improving. So, Moore thought of a way to make a new poetry. In an interview with Doris Lucas Laryea in “The Open Eye of Lenard Duane Moore: An Interview,” Moore asserts that he is inventing “African American haiku form” and adds that he has written jazz haiku as well as blues haiku, much like Sanchez. However, Moore named it differently, labeling them “jazzku” and “bluesku.”

“Jazzku”

jazzwoman moaning
to the heart / riff I stir in
the almost midnight

(Laryea)

“BluesKu 2”

September sun flares
bald man rubs bass violin
into blooming blues

(Laryea)

This attempt to use different labels could be interpreted as Moore’s attempt to create his own style and come up with his own creative style. Further, Moore at times changes the syllabic number in his haiku rather than complying with the class syllabic rule of haiku. He enjoys what he writes and emphasizes who African Americans are as people. Ultimately, Moore attempts to express the excitement through “jazzku,” like jazz does. In “bluesku,” however, Moore aims at reminding readers of the pain of African Americans through “bluesku” while keeping the seasonal words, kigo.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that describing one’s culture in another culture’s literary form would be ironic, let alone difficult. Moore sought to create a new form of poetry. Moore kept on trying to twist the rules of haiku to make his own haiku form to convey the African American spirit. Interestingly enough, Moore became the first African American president of Haiku Society of America in 2008.

In the interview with Laryea, Moore admitted that he has been deeply influenced by Wright. Neither Wright nor Moore share concern about race in haiku. In addition, Moore drew
influence from Langston Hughes, Wright, Sanchez, and so on. Hughes, for example, uses music in his poetry and this had affected Moore. One of Moore’s poems is listed right before Hughes’s “The Weary Blues” in *In Search of Color Everywhere: A Collection of African-American Poetry* (1994) under the section as Rituals: Music, Dance & Sports:

**A Bluesman’s Blues**

What is not rooted in static
should soothe the ear:

a bluesman’s blues
flaring the air as he fires

notes so exact

....

slows to a deeper essence

and turns inward into the dark.

The thin blues man glisters.
Sweat trembles on his lips
in his too-hot story
when blues notes appear unforced
into a night of song.

....
By using blues twice in the title of the poem, Moore stresses the significance of the “blues.” Most importantly, this “blues” reflects pain. Also, the lines “slows to a deeper essence/ and turns inward into the dark” describe the atmosphere of the poem as slowly going deeper and darker. Moreover, the “sweat,” portrayed as “trembles,” signifies the situation of “the thin blues man” as arduous or dreadful. The link between music or blues and poetry is undeniable. The blues elements and haiku have common grounds. The blues expresses pain with musical elements rather than listing down words with sufferings. In addition, Moore employs the technique that commonly appears in traditional haiku:

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graveyard twilight
shadow of oak branch
in her hand
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(The Open Eye

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open grave –
the autumn moon moves
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42 In Moore’s haiku, he also adapts the technique of traditional haiku such as brevity and seasonal elements. Brevity also has an aspect that it omits the personal pronoun and finally aims to get rid of one’s ego. Moreover, seasonal elements exist in almost haiku and its function is to unify the scattered elements into a whole.

43 For the text, Moore, Lenard D. The Open Eye: Haiku. n.p.: Raleigh: North Carolina Haiku Society Press, c1985 is used.
Moore makes use of the aesthetic principle of *sabi* when using “grave” as a subject in the haiku, just like other haiku poets did. Moore’s haiku, however, does not simply recall the sadness or the darkness. His haiku instead looks for the other aspects such as “twilight” of the “graveyard” and the movement of the “moon.” The “graveyard twilight” implies the afterworld and the movement of the “autumn moon” opens up for the hope in the future.

“The Weary Blues” by Langston Hughes expresses the sentiments of the blues as well:

```
THE WEARY BLUES

...  
“Ain’t got nobody in all this world,
Ain’t got nobody but ma self.
I’se gwine to quit ma frownin’
And put ma troubles on the shelf.”

...  
“I got the Weary Blues
And I can’t be satisfied.
Got the Weary Blues
And can’t be satisfied –
I ain’t happy no mo’
And I wish that I had died.”
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...
The speaker has “nobody” in his world except for himself. In addition, the speaker is not happy and wishes to die. Despite this, the speaker wants to stay away from his troubles by expressing “put ma troubles on the shelf.” Hughes expresses self-reliance in spite of alienation and loss of peace and harmony, as does Moore, and Hughes tries to overcome his hardships and indirectly find hope in the future.

The charm of haiku is that a haiku never speaks of something directly. Its meanings and emotions are never directly told to the reader. No haiku can be perfect; still, every haiku is a new beginning. A haiku is often compared with a photograph. A photograph is not explained by words, but it captures the scene of the moment. The photograph is true to nature. In this way, a haiku poet is also true to nature so that the poet can deliver nature’s meaning. One of the haiku poets, Buson, known also as a painter, expresses the moment very effectively:

Flowers of the tea-plant,  
Are they white? Are they yellow? 
Who can tell?

(Blyth, History 1:275)

This haiku induces an image of an object by color. The use of colors such as “white” and “yellow” depicts the “flowers of the tea-plant” in detail.

II. Racial Memory and Literary History

Typically, people assume that Hispanics will focus on Hispanic literature, and Asian Americans on literature by Asian Americans. Nonetheless, this assumption is rooted in our
conception or perception that the non-Americans will concentrate on non-American literature.

Stephen Greenblatt in “Racial Memory and Literary History” argues that we should have understanding that these assumptions are inaccurate when we write literary history:

To write literary history, we need more a sharp awareness of accidental judgments than a theory of the organic; more an account of purposes mistook than a narrative of gradual emergence; more a chronicle of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts than a story of inevitable progress from traceable origins. We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unexpected consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces, not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy, that principally shape the history and diffusion of languages. Language is the slipperiest of human creations; like its speakers, it does not respect borders, and, like the imagination, it cannot ultimately be predicted or controlled.

(Greenblatt 62)

Greenblatt claims that language is so unreliable that we should maintain an acute awareness. Our minds and perceptions are malleable from prejudice or “accidental judgments,” and language does likewise. It is therefore important to have accurate standards as well as judgments. What Moore tried to do was to emerge from the old racial memory and create his own innovative genre in English literature away from the so-called “American.”

In fact, English literature used to refer to the literature of England, but the term has changed and expanded with time. The change started with interest in South Africans, Mexicans,
and expanded to other countries. This is the result of global capitalism and critique in ideology. Kiuchi in “Creating African American Haiku Form: Lenard D. Moore’s Poetic Artistry” notes that Moore is not primarily interested in race but is genuinely interested in nature in writing his haiku:

No human being, no laughter, no color of skin are depicted in Moore’s haiku. Nature alone is appreciated through the changes of seasons. His attitude towards nature in his haiku reflects the traditional Japanese haiku method: indeed, an ancient Japanese haiku poet, Basho, teaches us “to learn about pines from the pine, and about bamboos from the bamboo.” (Kiuchi 156)

Moore’s haiku focus on nature itself rather than race or human beings. First and foremost, Moore categorized his haiku into four seasons in The Open Eye (1985), and the depiction of nature is the main subject in Moore’s haiku world.

Spring plowing . . .
how long it lasts
the rooster’s call

(The Open Eye 13)

The ancient farmstead –
riding the rose-scented breeze
two white butterflies

(The Open Eye 22)
Full summer moon;
a thin cat climbing the oak
near the foggy road

(The Open Eye 40)

Moore not only depicts the seasonal elements such as “spring,” but he also combines them with that of an animal such as a “rooster.” These kinds of Moore’s haiku do not suggest anything related to race, social strife, or politics. In fact, many other African American poets express their views on racial issues, social injustice, or political issues. Sanchez, for instance, expresses social injustice as an African American woman through her haiku world. Moore, to the contrary, opts not to express such issues. The subjects such as “butterflies” and “cat” are all part of nature and the setting such as “farmstead” and “foggy road” are also part of nature. This depiction of nature reflects that his focus on the harmony of the world rather than social issues. Further, Moore does well at linking contrasting images harmoniously in his haiku:

    city dump:
    summer moon lightening
    the dog’s skull

(The Open Eye 35)

There is an image of “city dump” and there is at the same time a serene scene, “summer moon lightening.” The “city dump” itself presents a gloomy and abandoned image yet Moore links with the peaceful moonlight. Then, the haiku ends with the “skull” of the “dog.” This haiku does
not just simply praise the beauty of nature, it illustrates the dark side of nature by depicting the skull of an animal.

It remains remarkable that Moore’s *The Open Eye* depicts African American women who freely breastfeed their children. In fact, African American slave women were not allowed to nurse their own children. It is important that his technique in expressing and emphasizing the African American is unique:

- a black woman
- breastfeeding her infant —
- the autumn moon

* (The Open Eye 51)

This haiku portrays the beauty of nursing African American woman by depicting an “autumn moon.” This is a prime example of Moore’s so-called “African American haiku form” (Kiuchi 158). Moore differs from other African American poets because he tries to compose haiku based on African American culture.

In addition to “African American haiku form,” Moore invented one-line haiku as well:

- from one oak to the next a silent owl

* (The Open Eye 50)

- eyes of a cat the fog

* (The Open Eye 53)
beyond autumn hills   a stratus darkens

(The Open Eye 54)

all night snow   cedars in starlight

(The Open Eye 64)

Moore’s one-line haiku proves innovative because haiku usually consists of three lines. Here, the subjects in the one-line haiku are all about nature. Furthermore, these one-line haiku have different punctuation. Extra space between the words functions as kireji.44

In his interest in nature, animals and the seasons are the main subject. This is rooted in the Buddhist ontology. As noted, Buddhist ontology does not have clear distinction between human and nonhuman. Moore accomplishes the same in his haiku. Not only the well-matched seasonal elements in nature, but also human and nonhuman are depicted harmoniously in Moore’s haiku:

Breaking summer day –

mewing on the river bank:

a flock of old gulls

(The Open Eye 33)

44 Hakutani in the note of Wright’s Haiku : This Other World (1998) defines “Above all, adding a kireji is a structural device to “cut” or divide a whole into parts. Since composing a haiku is confined to seventeen syllables in three lines, the parts of a vision or idea must be clearly segmented and united in its development . . . Traditionally, cutting words convey one’s hope, wish, demand, call, question, resignation, awe, wonder, surprise, and the like” (Haiku : This Other World 208).
Moreover, animals and human beings are considered the same living beings in terms of their hierarchy. In line with Buddhist ontology, Moore does not categorize or differentiate between animals and human beings. Moore’s attempt is to show a harmonious world shared by all living things:

Summer sunrise;
the old woman halts her stroll
to the bird’s song

(The Open Eye 37)

The assimilation between animals and human beings appears all over the seasons. Moore matches animals and seasons carefully in his haiku, which complies with the classic haiku in every aspect. Classic haiku, as well as Moore’s, do not personify the elements in nature. While nature poetry personifies the elements in nature, classic haiku do not have personification nor mysticism. Moore also does not personify animals, but just observes the nature carefully:

The following haiku even depicts dead butterflies.

The old country road –
sliding back and forth on it:
two dead butterflies

(The Open Eye 17)

It is common to describe live insects in haiku, but Moore depicts dead insects as a subject. Nor does Moore ignore trivial animals like a tiny bird:

the tiny bird
goes back in its birdhouse –
evening showers

(The Open Eye 23)

Not only does Moore deal with a trivial animal but he also captures a moment that a human’s hand hides the motion of a small animal.

Shadow

of his son’s hand

hides a climbing snail

(The Open Eye 34)

The speaker and nature are one, emphasizing nature. In other words, there is no hierarchy or disparity between nature and human beings. This worldview is based on Buddhist ontology, in which humans and nonhumans share an equal existence. This is not true in Christianity. Moore’s predecessors like Thoreau, Whitman, Wright, and Kerouac were all influenced by Buddhism.

III. Moore’s The Open Eye and the Four Seasons

Moore’s The Open Eye has four parts, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. The association of season is the soul of haiku. This is similar with the life cycle. There are senses such as smell, sight, and sound in Moore’s haiku, and he shows his expertise in effectively expressing the senses. The reader can appreciate the moment and feel as if the reader is at the scene. The seasonal reference signifies the natural change and renewal force, and the seasonal reference can call upon the world of nature in a single image:

sniffing the rosebud:

an old man –
the fading sun

(The Open Eye 14)

The senses of smell and sight overlap with “an old man.” The “old man” feels the smell of the “rosebud,” and the setting intensifies the mood of the sunset. This indicates the unity in sentiment and transference of senses. Moore not only uses the sense of smell but also the sense of sight in a 3-line haiku. According to traditional standards, haiku should be expressed with brevity, so it is done through internal unity and harmony.

Additionally, the intensification of senses poignantly reflects the emotion:

Old deserted farm;
spring whirlwind twirls peach petals
over sunlit hills

(The Open Eye 18)

This haiku bears many expressions of nature. The “old deserted farm” is portrayed beautifully with twirling “peach petals” and “sunlit hills,” all of which make the atmosphere serene and peaceful. It is remarkable that Moore juxtaposes a desolate image with a lively image. These two elements intermingle well in one haiku. Moore suggests hope in the next haiku:

empty hotel lobby:
through the frosty window
the spring sun rises

(The Open Eye 19)

This haiku is quite peaceful. The setting is cold with frost and an empty hotel lobby, but the stream of sunlight evokes hope. Moore also endeavors to become a coherent whole with nature.
These efforts can be interpreted as having a trace of classic haiku. Moore’s haiku refers to a monk as well, and this is rooted in the influence of Buddhism as following haiku shows:

the old monk

singing

in honeysuckle fragrance

(The Open Eye 24)

Here, Moore describes the main character as a “monk” and expresses that the monk is “singing” outdoors. This scene expresses human’s desire to become one with nature. Also, Moore’s viewpoint of nature is that one must adapt to nature. People tend to live in an urban environment; however, Moore, as well as most other people, is eager to have contact with nature, even in this modern world. Haiku is a perfect genre that allows people to remind themselves of nature. Lee Gurga in Haiku: A Poet’s Guide (2003) mentions that “Different seasons give different kinds of energy: spring fever; the dog days of summer. Haiku have the power to reconcile a seasonal consciousness with contemporary life, . . .” (Gurga 32):

Spring noonday river –

an old canoe just twists

in the thunderstorm

(The Open Eye 26)

This haiku depicts “an old canoe” in a river in the springtime. The specific time of the day is afternoon. There is a reversal, “thunderstorm,” in this peaceful scenery. Still, the “old canoe” easily alters its direction by expressing a “just twist.” Here, no one tries to get the canoe restored. The old canoe “just twists” helplessly when the “thunderstorm” arrives. Moore strives to show
adaptation to nature itself and does not try to overcome or change the circumstances:

early thaw;

spring deer circles

base of the mountain

(The Open Eye 25)

This haiku also reflects two different images. The word “thaw” suggests that a frozen season has drawn to a close. Yet this “early thaw” enabled the circling of the “spring deer.” This “early thaw” implies that the spring is coming. Here, the season functions as an energy source to the frozen world.

In another instance, Moore’s haiku not only adapts to nature but accepts degeneration and death humbly without expressing deep sorrow:

Sipping the new tea

his wrinkled face absorbs steam . . .

the smell of roses

(The Open Eye 16)

Here, “wrinkled face” expresses the degeneration, but the image of the “wrinkled face” turns into the “the smell of roses.” Moore offers an optimistic vision through haiku. Eventually, his haiku accepts natural degeneration:

Summer sunset –

old oak’s shadow lengthening

on the sunken grave

(The Open Eye 31)
The “sunken grave” could be gloomy and desolate, but Moore can express it in an opposite way. The haiku rather emphasizes the strength of the sunset expanded to the “sunken grave.”

It is important that the seasonal words do not simply stick to an image nor are the seasonal expressions the subject throughout the haiku:

Summer deepens;
now old tomato plants bloom
in trampled weeds

(The Open Eye 32)

The deepening summer and the blooming tomato all are mingled “in trample weeds.” In this case, the season, summer, and blooming summer make a new flourishing power of summer:
a screech owl turns
away from the moonlight –
autumn leaves fall

(The Open Eye 43)

Here, the “owl” matches well with the “moonlight” and the “autumn leaves.” In the following haiku, “deer” depicted as the subject:

another deer
everywhere deer leaping
through autumn night-fog.

(The Open Eye 45)

The deer and all the antlers harden in the beginning of autumn, and this hardening transpires in preparation for the mating season. Moore acutely depicts a deer in this autumn setting. When
expressing autumn, Moore employs “dusk,” which suggests the border of sunset and the evening. This image reflects the seasonal cycle as well:

farther and farther
into the mountain trail
autumn dusk deepens

(The Open Eye 44)

This haiku is located in the autumn section, and autumn is right before winter. One of the representative images of autumn is the red fallen leaves. Moore depicts the maple leaves as crimson and “floating in a muddy puddle”:

Sunset rain;
crimson maple leaves floating
in a muddy puddle

(The Open Eye 44)

When portraying nature, Moore shows the assimilation of the seasonal aspect and the nature or the motion of the plants:

Frosty sunrise:
the autumn vineyard still bears
these dark grapes.

(The Open Eye 51)

Here, the season is changing into a cold season, but the time of the day is early in the morning, emphasizing that grapes remain on the vine. Animals also appear to maximize the assimilation with the season:
on the moonlit road

sitting autumn out alone;

a stiff old owl

(\textit{The Open Eye} 55)

A fall night closely matches with “a stiff old owl.” Moore depicts animals in the correct place to highlight the assimilation.

Geography and climate play key influential factors in expressing the season. Doing so is comparatively easy in the Japanese language; however, it is quite difficult in the American English because of its wide range of geographic and climatic factors. Lee Gurga in \textit{Haiku: A Poet’s Guide} (2003) notes that the Japanese language has sufficient descriptors of seasonal words where Western writing often do not:

Unlike the Japanese, we in the West lack a strong tradition of seasonal associations in our poetry. As a result, the use of season words in English-language haiku is for the most part simply tied to our individual experience of nature. This presents challenges for those writing haiku in English. For example, seasonal experiences in North America can vary widely because of differences in geography and climate throughout the continent. Tropical and subtropical areas do not experience the four seasons in the same way as more northern, temperate areas. Winter in Florida is quite different from winter in Alaska.

(Gurga 27)

Moore does not merely mention the coldness of winter itself when describing the winter. Moore goes further and shows the assimilation with coldness:
rising
on the winter wind
the duck’s harsh quack

(The Open Eye 59)

Here, “the winter wind” stresses the coldness of winter, and Moore depicts the “harsh quack” of the duck to intensify the coldness of the animals. Moore not only focuses on the seasonal or weather elements but also captures the harsh environment in which the animals live:

Winter chill:
polar bears along the shore
eating scattered fish

(The Open Eye 64)

The “polar bears” in this haiku are eating the “scattered fish,” which emphasizes the insufficiency of the food. He also describes life as a natural phenomenon:

Winter sunset;
how badly he shakes
on the old footbridge

(The Open Eye 59)

Moore uses the word “shakes” to express the movement of sunset. By doing so, he tries to assimilate nature with human beings. Moore does not draw a border between nature and humans:

Winter morning moon –
getting thicker and thicker
snow in the forest

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Normally, there would appear the sun, but the “moon” still in the morning maximizes the coldness of winter. The “snow” in the haiku below also describes the cold weather with intensity:

Which way to go –
the eastward trail, snow
the westward trail, snow

This haiku shows that there is only “snow” wherever one goes. This highlights the chilliness of winter. Moore’s categorization of his haiku into four seasons can be interpreted such that he closely followed the style and form of classic haiku. Moore’s haiku strictly conformed to the seasonal elements of classic haiku compared to other American haiku poets discussed in this dissertation. Further, Moore stressed the symbiosis between humans and nature.

IV. The Significance of Moore’s Haiku

According to Jerry Ward in “THE OPEN EYE by Lenard D. Moore,” Moore’s haiku are “ontologically un-American” (Ward 134). This is because American English cannot easily fit into the seventeen-syllable rule. Also, Moore’s one-line haiku is his endeavor to create his own style as an African American:

a blade of summer grass moving moonlight

The words used in this haiku strictly follow the rule of classic haiku except for the fact that it is one-line. This haiku has selflessness, brevity, and the seasonal elements. The use of “summer”
indicates the seasonal element, and expressing the movement of the “grass” is
similar with other traditional haiku’s depiction of nature. However, this kind of short poem is not
the only one in American poetry. Pound’s “Alba” is short and representative of hokku-like
poems. Pound also composed short poems that are like haiku:

As cool as the pale wet leaves

of lily-of-the-valley

She lay beside me in the dawn.

(Pound 109)

Pound employs the technique of hokku in the poem above. The technique used in the poem is
superposition. The image “pale wet leaves” is set on top of the notion of “dawn”:

sunrise a titmouse perched on a branch

(The Open Eye 31)

Both Pound’s and Moore’s poems are comparatively short, but Pound and Moore each attempt to
capture the image of a moment. As indicated, Pound coined the term “imagism.” He aimed to
create images rather than symbols. To him, symbols are static and flat whereas images, endowed
with energy, are active and dynamic. Furthermore, Pound promoted vorticism, “a literary version
of cubism,” with Wyndham Lewis. Theorists advocating Vorticism believe in a “vigorous
impact” with a single image at its “vortex.” Hakutani in “Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and

Directions, 1926 is used.

46 Vorticism is defined as “a literary version of cubism” in Anthology of American Literature
Imagism” explains that Pound expressed an acknowledgment to Japanese poetry in Pound’s “Vorticism” essay: “In that ‘Vorticism’ essay, Pound acknowledged for the first time in his career his indebtedness to the spirit of Japanese poetry in general and the technique of hokku in particular” (Hakutani 46):

silent deer the sound of a waterfall

(The Open Eye 45)

Fall rain falling in a bucket of crabs

(The Open Eye 49)

The technique of capturing a moment in Pound’s and Moore’s poems bear a striking similarity. All their poems express the powerful feeling of the moment. Moreover, the objects used in one-line haiku are part of nature and they are also used in traditional haiku. The difference between Moore’s one-line verse and classic haiku is that the punctuation of these three haiku differs from classic haiku, making them more like modernist poems. The words, “silentdeer” and “Fallrain” without a space between the two words followed by excessive spaces could not be seen in classic haiku. More specifically, the two words with no spaces between the each word such as “silentdeer” and “Fallrain” without a space emphasizes the state of the subject in the haiku.

Classic haiku, however, uses kireji as a poetical punctuation. Moore actually tried to invent his own style as an African American. Moore not only created his own one-line haiku but also composed his own tanka:

Tanka

month of rain ends –

hoeing tomatoes for my father
this breezeless day
my cousin waves from rank weeds
and an ambulance passes

(Spirit & Flame: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry 162)

Tanka
after church meeting
grandma dumps cornbread batter
in the shiny pan –
the smell of collard greens
lingering on summer air

(Spirit & Flame: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry 162)

Classic tanka appears in 5, 7, 5, 7 syllables on 5 parts, and the form of Moore’s tanka follows classic tanka in terms of 5 lines. Remarkably, Moore’s tanka uses the dash (–) to cut words like kireji. This dash (–) followed by the words “rain ends” and “shiny pan” functions as dividing the poem into two parts. While Moore’s one-line haiku uses excessive spaces as kireji, the use of a dash (–) as kireji in Moore’s tanka as well as the use of excessive spaces in one-line haiku differs from classic haiku. Once again, classic haiku avoids self whereas Moore’s tanka comes across as quite personal. These sorts of attempts are significant, for he wanted to create a form of haiku disparate from prevalent American haiku.

V. Moore’s Haiku and the “Un-American” Haiku Poet
Guy Davenport in *The Hunter Gracchus and Other Papers on Literature and Art* (1997) notes that Moore’s ancestors had a keen relationship with poetry. Further, in his composition of haiku, poetry and music are combined and closely integrated:

> Lenard Moore’s ancestors would have spoken Twi or Ashanti, deeply imbedded locutions of which are still detectable by the linguist (“she be well” is good African grammar, stubbornly remaining). As he notes in a poem, his people sang hymns and imbibed the locutions of the King James Bible as their earliest forms of poetic expression in their new land. Poetry by American blacks has had a slow history, and its ranks have been thin. Music claimed his people’s genius… And two of our indigenous musical styles, the blues and jazz, are known and loved the world over.  

(Davenport 178)

Moore then observes that poetry thrives in expressing emotion and memory. Moore argues in L. Teresa Church’s “On Being and Becoming a Writer: Interview with Lenard D. Moore” that the writer took considerable pains to compose the blues and then overcome the pains. However, Moore does not imply that the pains are only relevant to the African Americans:

> moon  

> in the still sea  

> the winter chill  

*(The Open Eye 57)*

This haiku reflects the chillness of the winter, but the “moon” maximizes darkness and coldness. The coldness could have been alleviated if the moon had gone and the sun came up. Nonetheless,
this “winter chill” is not limited to the African American; is a universal pain in the coldness there that can be overcome when the sun rises, or when spring arrives. The universal pain is an impetus for the creation of “bluesku,” and this “bluesku” is a combination of music and poetry by using language.

Moore’s effort to compose haiku has never been just simple writing. The fact that Moore composed haiku is remarkable. This embodies his effort to get away from or run away from traditional African American writings. First of all, many African Americans have focused on writing about their post-slavery experience through novels and then also dealt with this experience through poetry. Even so, some poets including Moore experienced challenges in composing haiku. Composing haiku is a struggle in writing in an “un-American” genre. Moore’s *The Open Eye: Haiku* follows the rule of classic haiku; that is, the haiku are categorized into four seasons and Moore carefully selects the subjects to observe the steadfast rules of traditional haiku. As a result, Moore’s haiku establish an equal relationship between nature and human beings.
Conclusion

The question of how American poets composed haiku based on the techniques and aesthetics of haiku can be explained by going back to the history of haiku. Religious philosophies such as Buddhism and Zen influenced classic haiku as well as American haiku. But the genuine identity of American haiku has not been discussed thus far.

Wright’s prose works, such as *Black Boy* and *Native Son* (1940), focused on social injustice and racial prejudice. In his exile in Paris, Wright became familiar with haiku and learned how the genre of classic haiku can express the spiritual observations of human life. Inspired by R. H. Blyth’s reading of classic haiku, Wright wrote four thousand haiku shortly before death. Wright learned from the classic haiku poets the two perspectives from which he wrote many of his haiku. An African American writer’s perspective he defined in the “Blueprint for Negro,” mentioned earlier, is “that of a poem . . . which a writer never puts directly on paper” (“Blueprint” 45).

Wright acquired two perspectives from classic haiku. The first concept is the state of nothingness, *mu*. Wright showed the suppression of human subjectivity, and this finally led him to the observation of nature through the state of nothingness. Wright’s attitude toward nature is similar to the classic haiku poets’ attitude. Wright applied to his haiku the Buddhist theory of transmigration that he learned from classic haiku as well. Under transmigration, nonhuman beings are treated as equal to human beings. Further, Buddhist theory is based on the notion that
the soul also exists in both life and death. Seeing this, Wright implies that we should treat human beings and nonhuman beings equally. A Zen-inspired poet suppresses human subjectivity as much as possible, or minimizes it, in depicting an object or a phenomenon in nature. This poetic perspective rids the poet of egotism and self-centeredness. The other perspective he learned from the classic haiku poets was the Buddhist theory of transmigration. Christianity, with which Wright grew up, regarded nonhuman beings as subhuman. In Buddhism, nonhuman beings stand equal to human beings, and both species coexist in life and death with the soul they share. Wright’s haiku, representing his spiritual quest at the time of his grave illness, became his final achievement as a writer. Classic haiku showed Wright the worldview that human beings are not at the center of the universe.

Wright did not merely focus on the relationship between human beings and nonhuman beings; he also dealt with social injustice as well as racial prejudice. Wright endeavored to be free from the notion of race, and he found that haiku would be the perfect genre by which to accomplish this task. Despite this, the problem is that he tried to express and overcome social injustice and racial prejudice through haiku. In fact, he used haiku as a tool to express suffering. But he could not find an innovative and different genre that he could be free from racial issues. Wright instead used haiku to explore his spiritual quest.

In addition, Wright’s significant similarity with other haiku poets is that his haiku has a sense of humor while other haiku poets such as Sanchez, Emanuel, and Moore wrote their haiku devoid of humor. Humor, in fact, is an important aesthetics of classic haiku, and Wright well applied it to his haiku.

The philosophical background of classic haiku lies in Buddhism. Kerouac’s haiku is
influenced by Buddhism; however, one wonders whether or not Kerouac’s interpretation of
Buddhism brought “Buddhism” in North America. There existed an Americanized Buddhism, but
it is still arguable whether it is authentic enough to become a new form of Buddhism. In fact, the
reason Kerouac wrote haiku is that he wanted to break from the cycle of life and death. His
poetic style contains free-flow and free prose. The reason for this is that Kerouac thought that the
Western language has a limitation of representing the same as classic haiku. Due to this
understanding, he tried to compose his own Americanized style of haiku but to follow the three-
line form. Kerouac’s approach to Buddhism related to his struggles with his daily practice. His
study of Buddhism became a stage where his meditation or his daily practice was in the eyes of
the public. He enjoyed his open practice of meditation, but this also brought him a conflict:
Kerouac wished to be a loner hermit. It is ironic that Kerouac aimed at the life of Bhikku but at
the same time could not endure the strict traditional way of monastic life. One might argue
Buddhism is a religion that admonishes one to meditate rather than merely read the text of
Buddha’s teaching. But Kerouac was more interested in the text than the actual practice. What
Kerouac really aimed at was to teach Buddhism, not to get attention from the public. In
composing haiku, he studied the philosophical background of traditional haiku, which is
Buddhism, but his Buddhist impact was not too strong. Instead, he created his own style of haiku
by contrasting the elements of nature with those of humanity. Kerouac even tried to have a sense
of humor in his haiku. He adapted Senryu to his haiku. Senryu applies humor to nature, human
nature, and human relationships.

Furthermore, Ginsberg may have exaggerated that Kerouac as the “only master” of the
haiku because Ginsberg believed that “…[he] talks that way, thinks that way” (Book of Haikus
xvi); still, Kerouac only successfully applied some of the elements from the traditional haiku. His haiku does not deal with human sufferings whereas Buddhism holds the view that life is suffering. His haiku borrowed the form of Japanese haiku but do not completely follow its traditional aesthetic principles. Even though Kerouac was a serious and devout Buddhist, Kerouac approached Buddhism with a Western mindset. He remained aware that he bore a limitation in offering the authentic philosophy of the East.

Sanchez mastered the form as well as aesthetics of traditional Japanese haiku. Sanchez’s *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums* (1998) and *Morning Haiku* (2010) deal with African Americans’ sufferings and resultant emotions. Both classic haiku poets and Sanchez abide by the view that a female is a weak existence when the writers write about the female. Classic haiku regards women’s modesty and obedience as significantly important. Interestingly, Sanchez applied aesthetics and ideological principle of the blues to her haiku. In addition, she added blues lyrics to her haiku to express the subjects of love, loss, and self-sufficiency, and she endeavored to lay stress on her role as a female writer.

Sanchez, however, borrowed the form from haiku and the aesthetics of haiku instead of using minority language. The three characteristics of minority literature consist of the use of minority language, a political agenda, and a collective value. Sanchez borrowed the form and aesthetics of haiku. She then applied them to her own style. Sanchez’s blues haiku, which derive from traditional haiku, effectively maximizes the plight and emotions of African Americans. She succeeds in expressing the collective value of the African Americans through *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums*.

While Sanchez’s haiku collected in *Morning Haiku* applied the aesthetics as well as
ideological principles of the blues, Sanchez and traditional haiku poets both share the notion that females have some weakness and vulnerability. However, in traditional haiku, the female body is seldom depicted. In Eastern culture, it is a virtue to conceal a female’s body, and a woman should keep their modesty and remain obedient. A significant difference appears in Sanchez’s haiku regarding the female. She insists that a woman should speak out to society and be confident. Further, it is significant that in the end, Sanchez did not follow her contemporary writers. Rather, she synthesized her feministic voice with blues lyrics on the topics of love, loss, and self-sufficiency. Finally, she emphasized her role as a female writer.

Classic haiku is full of seasonal elements; however, Emanuel’s JAZZ from the Haiku King does not emphasize the seasonal elements as classic haiku do. Emanuel instead endeavors to seize life. Adversity, suffering, and loneliness are rewarded by the beauty of nature.

Emanuel’s jazz haiku convey both the elements of jazz and haiku, the fusion of which created a new genre, “jazz haiku.” Emanuel expressed the reality of African Americans and showed courage through his jazz haiku. Most significantly, Emanuel’s jazz haiku poignantly reflect the poverty, adversity, suffering, and loneliness of African Americans by using the philosophical and aesthetic principles of mu, wabi, and sabi. Emanuel’s jazz haiku also compensate the reality of human life with the reality of nature. Emanuel’s haiku reflect racial sensitivity as well as individualism. The importance of his jazz haiku is that the poet tries to educate and inspire African Americans to change their attitude. Despite this attempt, the

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47 Cecil Conteen Gray in “To Change the World, to Change the Self: Social Transformation, Love and More Love, and Subterranean Spiritual Threads within the Work of Sonia Sanchez” comments that her works are “multilayered, multivoiced, polyrhythmic—the intricate sophistication—of her work” (Gray 1).
significance of Emanuel is that he leads readers to a certain point, but he does not conclude it by certain force or insistence. Ultimately, Emanuel’s haiku thrive on the interaction of haiku imagery and jazz rhythm. In so doing, they express natural and spontaneous sentiments.

Unlike other American haiku poets, Moore’s attempt to write “un-American” is evident in all his works. However, it remains questionable whether Moore succeeds in making “un-American” works. First, the language is still written in English. This means that one cannot become independent if there is no independence with the language. Written English itself is contrary to “un-American.” Second, the fact that the philosophical background is based upon traditional haiku reveals another problem in constructing his own style. Third, the use of seasonal reference is still an aesthetic principle of classic Japanese haiku. This means that Moore merely derived the aesthetics from classic Japanese haiku and the forms of Japanese haiku rather than making it “un-American.” Last but not the least, the cultural elements in Moore’s haiku still reflect Japanese culture rather than genuine African American culture. That Moore composed haiku means he is not independent in the selection of genre, but he had to borrow the form as well as the other cultural elements in order to write haiku. As a result, a limitation in his “un-American” haiku remains, which warrants further investigation for his haiku to become completely “un-American.”

In conclusion, it can be said that each poet discussed in this dissertation struggled to find out his/her own innovative and independent genre, and the genre each found was haiku. The poets succeed in following the philosophical as well as aesthetical principles of classic haiku. Even so, the American haiku composed by Americans reveal certain limits. They have succeeded in borrowing the form of haiku and projected the spiritual aspect of classic haiku. There should
be more investigation on whether these poets created their own genuine style of writing, as well as whether they applied their own philosophical and aesthetical principles.
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