

Comments on the Winners

By Susan Antolin

It has been a delight and an honor to read through all of the entries to this inaugural English-language haiku contest at Kagawa University. Through these haiku I encountered vividly described moments of everyday life, the changing of the seasons, and of students living far from home. While I based my selections on the overall quality of the haiku rather than the poets' facility with the English language, I have offered suggestions for making the English flow more naturally where I felt it might be instructive. To write poetry in a foreign language is never easy and certainly requires courage. I applaud everyone for their participation and am deeply impressed by the overall quality and beauty of their haiku!

First Place

Cotton candy

And a child who is running around

in autumn festival

--Yuto Takahashi (3rd year, Medicine)

The juxtaposition of cotton candy and a child running around at a festival is wonderful and makes this (for me) the most memorable of all the contest entries. The spinning and lightness of both the cotton candy and the child go perfectly together. The cotton candy is a temporary treat – it will likely not last longer than the afternoon. Similarly, the child's burst of energy and excitement at the festival will probably be temporary. The cotton candy will either be eaten or thrown away, and the child will return home tired and ready for sleep. The brief time when the cotton candy is fresh and the atmosphere of the festival is magical is wonderfully depicted in this poem. A slightly more concise version might be:

cotton candy

a child running around

at the autumn festival

Second Place

The wind was breezing

a girl in the shade

caught her hat

--Atsumi Miyazaki (3rd year, Medicine)

This haiku captures a lovely and fleeting moment. The poet recognizes that it can be the smaller moments of the day that make for stronger haiku. Only the relevant details are included, and the effect is beautiful. To make the poem flow in slightly more natural English and to bring the haiku into the present tense, I would suggest the following small revision:

breezy wind
a girl in the shade
catches her hat

Third Place

tomato soup
an autumn evening
feels like home

Alim Bican Çoban (International Office)

The ordinariness of tomato soup, particularly when the poet may be far from home and perhaps feeling out of place, brings the sense of home and of belonging. The physical warmth of the soup is juxtaposed with the emotional warmth of feeling at home, which is an effective and lovely combination. As with other strong haiku, this one succeeds by focusing on an otherwise ordinary moment.

Honorable Mentions (in no particular order)

1.

chilling nights
round the fire place
folktales

Chilamba Moyenda Moses (Teacher trainee)

The phrase "chilling nights" is not incorrect, but I find "chilly night" more natural. Changing the opening phrase from plural (chilly nights) to singular (chilly night) would strengthen the haiku as it would narrow the focus to a single moment rather than a general statement. Otherwise, a very nice haiku. The atmosphere of people gathered around the fire on a chilly night is perfect for sharing folktales. The words "fire place" should be combined into one.

chilly night

round the fireplace

folktales

2.

In the morning

A cat got into my bed

The beginning of winter

--Kiriko Fujioka (3rd year, Medicine)

A clearly described moment that captures the changing of the season. The cat probably doesn't get into bed unless the temperature drops near the beginning of winter. So, just as leaves turning red signifies the change of season to autumn, the cat getting into bed signifies the beginning of winter. A very appropriate topic for haiku. The poet succeeds by focusing on a small, everyday moment that might otherwise seem insignificant.

3.

Futon

Covered in sunlight

Reminds me of mother

--Sana Kawai (1st year, Medicine)

There is a wonderful feeling of authenticity in this haiku. I imagine an adult child living far from his/her mother, and this unexpected image of the futon bathed in sunlight making his/her mother feel momentarily closer. Is it the mother in me that loves this? I like that it is an ordinary, everyday moment and the way the sunlight happens to fall on the futon that brings his/her mother to mind. Sometimes the best haiku come from small moments that could easily be overlooked by those who don't pay close attention. Well done!

4.

crescent

secret exit from dark sky

to another world

-- Erika Moriyasu (3rd year, Medicine)

This is a mysterious and interesting haiku! The night sky is just the right setting for this surreal poem. While it may seem redundant, we generally say "crescent moon" rather than just "crescent." I would suggest the following slight revision:

crescent moon

a secret exit

to another world

5.

Autumn starry sky

after driving

I'm lost in thought

--Junichiro Hirano (3rd year, Medicine)

Most appealing about this haiku is the play on the word "lost" -- one could be lost after (or while) driving or as here, lost in thought. The first line adds to the contemplative atmosphere of the poem. The autumn sky full of stars invites us to become lost in thought.

6.

A strong wind

now I want to eat

kimuchi nabe

--Kota Tsunemori (3rd year, Medicine)

The wording is slightly awkward, but I like this one. I would suggest a slight revision to something like:

strong wind
my urge to eat
kimchi nabe

A strong wind bringing with it a sudden urge to eat a particular food that would warm the poet is a very relatable moment. I also wonder whether perhaps the poet has an emotional connection to Korean culture, so that the strong wind (or other difficult circumstances) would make him/her crave the familiarity of this particular dish. Warmth and emotional safety are sought in this comforting food, which makes for a lovely haiku moment.

7.

glacial wind
my fishing line
don't move

--Ryo Okamoto (3rd year, Medicine)

The poet makes an excellent word choice with the word "glacial" because it not only conveys the coldness of the wind, but it also adds a feeling of everything being frozen and unmoving. Line 3 should be "doesn't move".

8.

sound of snowing
but warm my heart
because I'm in Kotatsu!

--Keigo Nagano (3rd year, Medicine)

This haiku is awkwardly worded, but appealing. While it is a challenge to capture this moment in natural sounding English, the feeling conveyed is easily understandable. I can relate to the feeling of being warm in the kotatsu and not minding that snow has begun to fall. The feeling of being safe and warm inside is even enhanced by the snowfall outside. This haiku brought back memories for me of a year I spent in Sapporo many years ago! I do wonder, though, whether snow really does make much of a sound. Two possibilities for revised versions of this haiku would be:

the quiet of snowfall
I feel even warmer
in the kotatsu

sitting at the kotatsu
I don't mind at all
the sound of snow

9

a single red leaf left
shivering and shaking
lonely autumn

--Ririka Tanikawa (3rd year, Medicine)

This haiku needs no revision. Line 2 acts as a pivot so that we might wonder if not only the leaf, but perhaps the poet too is shivering and shaking. The shivering and shaking leaf, presumably all alone on the branch, effectively conveys the feeling of loneliness.

10.

Winter morning
my comforter tells me
Don't push yourself

--Yoshiko Sato (2nd year, Nursing)

The word "comforter" in the context of a winter morning would normally mean a thick blanket, but in light of line three, it might also mean a person who gives comfort. This double meaning gives the haiku more interest, as we can imagine the speaker still in bed beneath a warm comforter feeling an emotional lift from the security of that space, or we can imagine the speaker beginning his/her day with a trusted partner reminding him/her to take care not to become overstressed or take on too much work.

General Comments

By Ian Willey

I would like to thank all the students—130 in total!—who entered our first English Haiku Contest. The haiku we received were a pleasant surprise. I feel I have seen a new side of my students, who tend to sit quietly in class and keep their thoughts to themselves. That they were able to do this without much exposure to English-language haiku is an amazing accomplishment. *Well done!*

Having spoken to many students about this contest, I know some were both excited and daunted by the relative freedom allowed by English haiku, which unlike Japanese haiku do not usually follow a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. As Susan describes above, writing in English poses difficulties, but for the most part we overlooked minor problems in grammar and wording. In haiku, what really matters is *capturing the moment*, and the best haiku we received were able to do that.

Some students sent in clever haiku, but a haiku doesn't need to be clever. It doesn't need a moral. A haiku should come from the writer's heart. Some students wrote haiku that were nice but did not feel authentic—that is, they seemed to be trying to write about something that they didn't experience personally. As the winners above show, the best haiku emerge from personal experience. They capture the ocean of the moment in plain and simple language. It's very hard to do this!

We look forward to seeing how your haiku grow in next year's contest!