



Haiku



Moon On Wild Grasses

KEITH GAREBIAN



Haiku
with illustrations by the author



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For Don Mills

*for his friendship
and faithful support of writers*



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Author's Preface

A blue heron spearing little fish, icy wind blowing over nervous rose beds, a tick-tick bird riding a giraffe's long neck, a Samurai archer, horse on a mountain, moon over wild grasses, a storyteller rattling his red tambourine, boy staring at his torn feet, raw-kneed faithful, lovers tumbling out of bed, a finger pointing at the moon from an empty cave: these are snapshots from real life, and all appropriate subjects for haiku, that form of poetry which is probably the shortest and simplest type of lyric. As Patricia Donegan puts it in *Haiku Mind*, "haiku presents a crystalline moment of heightened awareness in simple imagery," and this moment makes us "mindful of the ordinary moments of our lives." (Donegan 2008: xi)

Some critics object that haiku is only a small image cluster rather than a compressed elegance of language. This is a



mistake. The sophistication of traditional Japanese haiku—as seen in the work of Matsuo Basho (1644–94), Yosa Buson (1716–83), Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827), and Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902)—often eludes poets writing haiku in English. It is difficult for English haiku to have *kireji* (cutting words), small but powerful linguistic units that indicate a pause or caesura. In English, the poet resorts to actual punctuation. English is not a language that lends itself to compression as easily as does Japanese. Few haiku in English can be uttered in a single short breath. Moreover, traditional Japanese haiku includes a *kigo* (seasonal word) or a *kidai* (seasonal topic) to generate allusions that lose a lot in translation. (Higginson 1996: 26) Finally, there is a crucial difference in viewpoint or philosophy between East and West. Where Japanese haiku emphasizes the emotional relation of the Self to Nature, English haiku asserts the primacy of Mind often at the expense of Nature. Of course, the ideal



haiku is (as Patricia Donegan expresses) that which “includes both mind and heart in a non-dualistic whole, as in the Chinese character for ‘mind-heart’ where there is no separation.” (xv)

My haiku attempts to break free of traditional Japanese exercises of the form without abandoning the conventional 5-7-5-syllable count in three lines. It implicitly accepts the Imagist practice of straightforward articulation of subjects, which means that it generates images either from objective or subjective sources or causes. I believe that there need not be a disjunction between the pictorial and the passionate or between reality and reflection. My subjects encompass nature, empirical experience, the self, love, death, and grief. In effect, my haiku keeps faith with lyric poetry’s urge to render experience imaginatively and succinctly, even when the experience is vicarious. In some instances, the haiku have been inspired by images or situations found in the course of my



reading Chinese prose and poetry in English translation. The illustrations—some originally in colour and many inspired by other artists—are not meant to compete with the poems. Sometimes they are literal representations of reality; sometimes they mirror themes; sometimes they comment on them. In all instances, they attempt to create or sustain a mood or texture, but they are always kept in their place by the haiku, which is the primary motive for this book.



References

Patricia Donegan, *Haiku Mind (108 Poems to Cultivate Awareness & Open Your Heart)*. Boston & London: Shambala, 2008.

William J. Higginson, *Haiku World (An International Poetry Almanac)*. Tokyo & New York & London: Kodansha International, 1996.

Part One
Time Shines





Dewdrops at morning
refresh the resting rosebuds—
nature's ablutions

Incense in dusk's hush—
sandalled feet and scripts of smoke,
temple bells and chants

Solitary swan
alights on quiet water,
breaking liquid glass





The blue heron comes
quietly on dark stilt legs
spearing little fish







A long low mooing—
she calls to her missing calf
at the setting sun

The blue dragonfly—
a humming wire makes you see
the air vibrating

A thin snake slithers
under a damp, mottled log
till my shadow goes





A barren pear tree
refusing to die in spring,
flowers at its feet

The tall pines of June
overlook the flowing stream—
ceaseless green voyeurs

A floppy mushroom
sprouts alone between old cracks
of a stone staircase







Wild geese on the lake
sadden us each lonely day.
Warm tears and cold rain

Leaves blown in numbers,
shimmering reds, yellows, browns—
the wind's counting song

My body's smallness
against the tall *agave*,
its wide open sky





The ivory moon
hurries through forest branches,
leafless with winter

Shivering bamboo
lends you its slender shadow,
O tender tendril

Stars across the night
drip rich pollen on us,
loving in our loins





About The Book

*M*oon on Wild Grasses, with illustrations by the author, shows the unsuspected scope of a very concise, precise poetic form. Keith Garebian's haiku encompass a wide range of themes in a vividly elegant style that combines the pictorial with the passionate, erotic or reflective. Nature, empirical experience, the self, love, death, and grief are captured with a perceptive, sensitive eye.



His images, our moments. They're like smoke from a stove. Garebian scoops them into his hands, holds them just long enough to show them clearly to us, then lets them go — giving us the chance to rediscover them again and again.

—*Robert Stallworthy*

Keith Garebian's *Moon on Wild Grasses* is comprised of a delightful calligraphy of

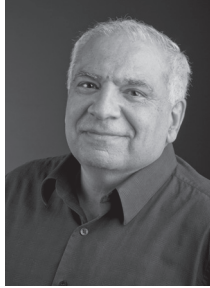


image-clusters evoking the ephemera of nature in all its melancholy transience. These precise haiku range from traditional subject matter to the contemporary, from the stylized to the erotic. Each of Garebian's vibrant images is laid one against another, their meanings and visual associations colliding to create an arresting tableau.

—*Su Croll*



About The Author



Keith Garebian is a widely published, award-winning freelance literary, theatre, and dance critic, biographer, and poet. Among his many awards are the Scarborough Arts Council Poetry Award (2010), the Canadian Authors Association (Niagara Branch) Poetry Award (2009), the Mississauga Arts Award (2000 and 2008), a Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Award (2006), the Lakeshore Arts/Scarborough Arts Council Award for Poetry (2003), and an Ontario Poetry Society Award for Haiku (2003). This is his fifth book of poetry and his first with *Guernica*.