



OFFICIAL POSITION OF TUMBLEWEED TALES SOCIETY ON HAIKU

According to the old Japanese masters, the essence of haiku, the goal, and the image is always Nature. Any number of lines or syllables can be used so long as it is short. As a rule of thumb, our society uses the suggested eleven to seventeen syllables. Try to keep away from articles as much as possible. Some articles are needed, but once the poem is finished, the author should go back over the work and omit as many articles as possible, keeping only essential ones. Less is better.

Today, in the United States and other western societies, there are organizations, groups, societies, etc. that have for some reason dropped Nature from their haiku. Many are writing about technology, machines, abstract concepts, and topics centered on solely on self. I have written in the introduction that somewhere, somehow even these should acknowledge Nature. However, now after much thought, I have decided that this direction is wrong. Most American and other western haiku I have read lately merely mimics haiku. It misses the primary purpose of haiku - to achieve an “aha” moment brought to human consciousness through Nature itself. Therefore, I urge our Tumbleweed Tales Society members to write pure, traditional Japanese haiku rather than this manipulative mechanical pseudo-haiku.

The two most important principles of haiku are Nature and Change of Season. Change of season does not have to smack you in the face. It can be subtle, artistically inferred without direct statements. In other words you need not say the word “Spring” or “Fall” for instance to implicate its presence. But to keep in the footsteps of the master Basho and others like him, our measuring gauge should be Nature and/or Change of Season.

We at Tumbleweed Tales Society will hold the standards set by the masters whose purpose was to achieve enlightenment by working Buddhist principles of non-attachment, non-ego, and unity with the universe. Their practice with haiku was a kind of meditation harmonious simultaneously between human nature and Nature. Poetry is often permission to break boundaries by its nature and poets writing haiku may be seeking the permissive style of non-traditional haiku but it is therefore just that – non-traditional or perhaps another label to be dubbed in the future.

There is one more item to mention. Many Westerners think haiku is synonymous with short witty statement, clever anecdote, or a sentence broken up into three lines making a clever point. Haiku is not meant to be clever, funny, witty, or a sharply clever statement. And, the 5-7-5 device is often thought of as the definition of what makes haiku. This guide was instituted by western poets in the 1930s to achieve something like an “onjii” count, a guttural sound used in Japanese not present in other languages. Counting syllables was the closest we could come to keeping things short or cutting. Hence, it does not follow that haiku must be exactly 5-7-5 in count of syllables. Counting does not make it haiku. What makes haiku is shortness coupled with primary principles of Nature and Change of Season to reach an “aha.”

On the point of wit that is used alongside haiku is senryu. Senryu was a witty introduction to a longer-style poem brought by guests to a party as a way to gain entrance to festivities. The first few lines (the beginning of the senryu) were produced by a guest on entry as a promise of fun to come. Hence, wit is not haiku, nor is senryu haiku. Senryu is entertainment exercise and will not be considered for our haiku column; the same applies to sharp or clever anecdotes or witty comments even if they use 5-7-5 counts.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, poets and writers of Tumbleweed Tales Society, and all guest contributors, the challenge to you is for us to show the world what we can do. Let us show them all what is real haiku!

Questions? Please refer to my original introductory essay explaining the principles of haiku.

Thanks or as they say in Japanese --- “Arigato!”
George A. Strickland, Founder

