



Cover Front View



Cover Back View

# POETRY FOR SALE

## Haikai No Renga



**Keith Kumasen Abbott  
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*Renkushi Pat Nolan and Keith Kumasen Abbott have practiced haikai no renga for over thirty years. They are founding members, along with Michael Sowl and Maureen Owen, of the Miner School of Haikai Poets. The Miner School's haikai have been published in numerous magazine including Hanging Loose, Exquisite Corpse, Jack's Magazine, and Simply Haiku as well as limited edition chapbooks and broadsides from Empty Head Press, Bamboo Leaf Studio, and Tangram Press. Their renku, All Ears, was included in the anthology celebrating collaboration, Saints Of Hysteria, from Soft Skull Press (2007).*

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Mortality not debt  
leads me to hoist another  
poetry for sale  
    *after Kikaku*

mortality not debt  
leads me to hoist another  
poetry for sale  
yellow dingy spotted leaves –  
our late bloomers saved July

yellow dingy spotted leaves –  
our late bloomers saved July  
    lightning skips across  
black ledges – thunderheads –  
white puffs perch on one's edge

lightning skips across  
black ledges – thunderheads –  
    white puffs perch on one's edge  
uneasy in midnight's heat  
he coughs blinking in the dark

“Mortality not debt”

I had been reading Earl Miner's *The Monkey's Straw Raincoat* for some clarification on an aspect of haikai and by chance reread his translation of the delightfully quirky haikai, *Poetry Is What I Sell*, written by Basho and Kikaku. Miner speculated that the haikai might have even been used as a prospectus to garner new students. I streamlined Miner's version of the hokku and sent it off to my long time haikai partner Keith Abbott with the idea of replicating the spirit of this haikai; he would be Basho and I would be Kikaku. After some initial confusion, we followed the sequence that Miner set out in his introduction to this oddly hilarious renga. PN

“yellow dingy spotted leaves”

Even a planned rotation of flowering plants sometimes doesn't guarantee summer long flowers. This July there was a gap when the only colors were dying leaves. Reminder that we older writers also wax and wane. KA

“lightning skips across”

Links to late summer imagery: white thunderhead clouds as puffy flowers. Panning up over the garden and opening the renku to late afternoon or evening thunderstorms. KA

“uneasy in midnight's heat”

Linking to the summer thunderstorm and how even after the sun goes down the heat lingers and makes it impossible to sleep. PN

uneasy in midnight's heat  
he coughs blinking in the dark  
    where the fire burned out  
the once green hillside the moon  
    casts autumn shadows

    where the fire burned out  
the once green hillside the moon  
    casts autumn shadows  
day or night that plastic great  
horned owl on the gate post fools me

day or night that plastic great  
horned owl on the gate post fools me  
    the near bare walnut  
now just a flounce of yellow  
    along the bottom

    the near bare walnut  
now just a flounce of yellow  
    along the bottom  
their old mattress leans on that tree —  
so where is it going?

“where the fire burned out”

A connection to the heat of the previous stanza with fire, and since it is a moon stanza and ostensibly autumn, the illusion of leafless trees. PN

“day or night that plastic great”

My drive home passes a ranch with chicken coops that posted this very realistic owl on its gate to drive away raptors. Relates to mortality and optical illusions of “autumn shadows”. “Day or night” opens the moon link for other times. KA

“the near bare walnut”

The transition from summer to autumn was hinted at earlier and skipped over Keith's seasonally ambiguous stanza. PN

“their old mattress leans on that tree”

This syntactically links to Pat's last line, “along the bottom”. The question puts a curious observer into the scene. KA

their old mattress leans on that tree —  
so where is it going?

rusty spring sprung through  
sunset's amber glaze highlights  
the junk littered yard

rusty spring sprung through  
sunset's amber glaze highlights  
the junk littered yard  
new lover or old friend. . .  
stray wine glass on her hall book case —

new lover or old friend. . .  
stray wine glass on my hall book case —  
in perfect balance  
there is neither me or you  
lost remembering

in perfect balance  
there is neither me or you  
lost remembering  
one spear of grass slides an inch  
of shadow across two stems

"rusty spring sprung through"

Keith wasn't going to let me off easy, especially with his question. A close link was appropriate in this situation, and perhaps the old mattress wasn't the only thing lying about. I think "amber" retains the impression of autumn. PN

"new lover or old friend"

"Amber glaze" brought to my mind autumnal romances serviced with drinks. This interior monologue suggests an old friend wondering about clues for a woman's recent visitors. KA

"in perfect balance"

Somehow I felt the need to balance the "old" and the "new" in Keith's stanza, and having personalized his stanza, there was a certain kind of ambiguity in remembering. PN

"one spear of grass slides and inch"

From a contemplation of ambiguous past events the speaker moves to what is occurring right now: this close-up may signify a minutely particular and/or eternally cosmic process. KA

one spear of grass slides an inch  
of shadow across two stems  
    breathe into hands tight  
with cold morning paper comes  
    later and later

    breathe into hands tight  
with cold morning paper comes  
    later and later  
dirty snow path bow before  
Buddha – who raises his head

dirty snow path bow before  
Buddha – who raises his head  
    midday sun melts  
the frozen guy a tear or two  
    from his coal black eyes

    midday sun melts  
the frozen guy a tear or two  
    from his coal black eyes  
a raven on the blue post  
office box silent – still silent –

“breathe into hands tight “

The particular precision of Keith’s vision seemed to me to be something that would accompany a cold morning waiting. “Later and later” indicates the shortening of the days of late autumn. PN

“dirty snow path bow before”

Previous cold hands do a different task. During an outdoor walking meditation: a bow before a statue led to a perfectly blank moment. Between host and guest no difference. Traditionally, during anyone’s bow, all Buddhas past and present bow, too. KA

“midday sun melts”

I turned Keith’s Buddha into a snowman, an indication that the gloves had been taken off. PN

“a raven on the blue post”

Pat’s snowman seemed so mute, a potentially noisy onlooker fit perfectly. But the raven remained tranquil and I ran out of syllables, so Pat got the bird. KA

a raven on the blue post  
office box silent – still silent –  
all their beauty gone  
the mud rut of a bike tire  
through pale confetti

all their beauty gone  
the mud rut of a bike tire  
through pale confetti  
ice islands in thawed lawn –  
shiny dribble melts a spilled moon –

ice islands in thawed lawn –  
shiny dribble melts a spilled moon –  
she woke with leg cramps  
to see the ghost of his footsteps  
across the clean floor

she woke with leg cramps  
to see the ghost of his footsteps  
across the clean floor  
a mystery gone at cock's crow  
whose shoes were outside the door

“all their beauty gone”  
My flower stanza, after the fact. PN

“ice islands in thawed lawn—”  
Party leftovers undergo frost and spring thaw. In *Poetry Is What I Sell*,  
Kikaku missed a 14th stanza moon, as I did. So, I pretended to  
imitate even our progenitors' mistakes; like Kikaku I put in “a spilled  
moon” – a technical term for inserting a tardy moon stanza. KA.

“she woke with leg cramps”  
With spring's capricious weather outside I imagined a lover's cooling  
body awakening her to her partner's very recent absence, his warm  
feet leaving imprints across cool floorboards. KA

“a mystery gone at cock's crow”  
Keith's footsteps reminded me of a book we both had read entitled  
*The Shoes Outside The Door*, a tell-all about certain goings-on at the San  
Francisco Zen Center under Roshi Baker. PN

a mystery gone at cock's crow  
whose shoes were outside the door  
    smell of bleached laundry  
hidden on the other side  
    of a neighbor's fence

    smell of bleached laundry  
hidden on the other side  
    of a neighbor's fence  
sadly unroll sleeping bag  
the missing sliver of brie

sadly unroll sleeping bag  
the missing sliver of brie  
    so those cucumber vines  
now entwined on raspberry canes  
    no going back

    so those cucumber vines  
now entwined on raspberry canes  
    no going back  
mosquito killing remorse  
"it was either him or me"

"smell of bleach laundry"

Freshly washed sheets suggest a summer's presence and here a lover's absence. Overnight visitor's shoes next to this sheet image create so many innuendoes: suggestive because smell is involuntary whereas social distinctions may be a highly refined habit, like using "hidden." KA

"sadly unroll sleeping bag"

You might ask yourself "where's that smell coming from?" Aged cheese leftover from a camping trip, a reminder not to eat in bed. Also a reworking of a stanza from one of Philip Whalen's poems whose second line is "the missing lid to teapot". PN

"so those cucumber vines"

Once you've cut the cheese in a sleeping bag, only a good wash and airing will do. Pat's implied syntax by juxtaposition inspired me to employ our wonderfully multi-faceted American usages of "so" to arrive at the final word, so to speak. Continues the summer camping trip when one returns to an overgrown garden and pruning dilemmas. KA

"mosquito killing remorse"

And while we're on the subject of Buddhism. . . . PN

mosquito killing remorse  
“it was either him or me”  
evening whirlwind  
kite dragging its owner across  
a football field

evening whirlwind  
kite dragging its owner across  
a football field  
the pampas grass colored with  
age bows in constant greeting

the pampas grass colored with  
age bows in constant greeting  
his new teeth changed how  
he talks – now he sounds  
like his rich brother

his new teeth changed how  
he talks – now he sounds  
like his rich brother  
I was about to cross that  
bridge until the tiger roared

“evening whirlwind”

Early autumn. The necessity of killing nature’s creatures for our survival is often paid back by nature. This kite guy wouldn’t let go; neither he nor the kite receive happy landings. KA

“the pampas grass colored with”

The wind has a tendency to animate and personify certain aspects of nature. PN

“his new teeth changed how”

Shifts age and change to human experience. After I complimented a colleague on the new bounce in her walk and talk, she remarked on her husband’s transformation. Variety is the spice of life. KA

“I was about to cross that”

Haikai self-indulgence at its most egregious. I adapted Kikaku’s 17-syllable stanza, which appears in almost this exact position in the original sequence. The allusion is to the ancient recluse who had shunned the world but upon seeing off his visitors almost crossed the bridge with them back into the world. Until he heard the tiger roar, that is, and was reminded of his vow. The linking is with “teeth” (tiger) and “bridge”. Unfortunately, I crossed the bridge of puns. PN

I was about to cross that  
bridge until the tiger roared  
    through dull gray clouds  
masking moonlight –  
    more of my poetic mutterings

    through dull gray clouds  
masking moonlight –  
    more of my poetic mutterings  
Buson served on a banana leaf  
“that’s my cup of tea”

    Buson served on a banana leaf  
“that’s my cup of tea”  
    under the almond’s  
partial shade I have come to  
    sip and be alone

    under the almond’s  
partial shade I have come to  
    sip and be alone  
for pleasant sweeps of hot wind  
leaves calm down – a back door shuts –

“through dull gray clouds”

I imagined a self-involved poet addicted to puns and other distractions trying out new lines under his breath and a hazy moon, then awakened by a cautionary snarl. KA

“Buson served on a banana leaf”

This line is of course in homage to the haikai greats, Buson and Basho, and something I had written in my notebook. The cup of tea line is also related to Buson, and from the wonderful bio of Buson, *The Path Of The Flowering Thorn*, but going back to the book, I couldn’t find the reference. PN

“under the almond’s”

I linked rather directly to the previous stanza’s cup of tea. And since we were into the ‘fast close’ section, I didn’t want to waste any time. PN

“for pleasant sweeps of hot wind”

Our contented drinker indulges in a pathetic fallacy. He imagines the leaves love to get petted by a summer wind until his solitary fantasy is disturbed by a loud noise. KA

for pleasant sweeps of hot wind  
leaves calm down — a back door shuts —  
rough gravel of path  
a harsh reminder right thought  
right act wrong person

rough gravel of path  
a harsh reminder right thought  
right act wrong person  
backyard pond morning dark ripples —  
fish feed on the new born

backyard pond morning dark ripples —  
fish feed on the new born  
seeing the guest out  
his flashlight pierces  
clouds of wisteria

seeing the guest out  
my flashlight pierces  
clouds of wisteria  
the shimmering edge doesn't  
just happen only in dreams

“rough gravel of path”

More pop Buddhism. How often have you done everything right only to find out that you're the wrong person to be doing them? PN

“backyard pond morning dark ripples”

Everyday events can possess the power to disturb, especially if right and wrong are on the mind. “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” Hamlet. KA

“seeing the guest out”

Close connection with the fishpond stanza as the summer flower stanza is delivered in its correct place. Social needs, summer abundance and final acts return from the first stanzas. KA

“the shimmering edge doesn't”

I imagined what a flashlight would do to a thicket of wisteria much like the one taking over my yard and realized that I would only be seeing a portion of it, the edges being indistinct. And I had recently read about lucid dreaming and how you know you're dreaming if the edges of things appear to be shimmering. This also plays to Basho's favorite Chuang-tsu story of the man who dreamed he was a butterfly, and vice versa. PN