



Pavel Soukeník

Raindrops
of Haiku

INTRODUCTION

Why I write haiku

I have always been attracted to simplicity and perfection in form. You can appreciate these qualities in many areas ranging from the clean architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, through the simplicity of Zen Buddhism, careful calligraphy, well-prepared sushi, meticulously shaped bonsai, all the way to – of course – haiku.

I imagine these art forms were gradually stripped of all that is unnecessary or superfluous, until the results were objects distilled to their essence. This does not equal straightforward simplification: in graphic design, music, cooking, literature and possibly everything else, if something is too simple, it becomes uninteresting.

Haiku often spring up spontaneously and strive to show things simply as they are. But in doing this, they offer us precious glimpses into life's complexity in a minimalist form.

There are many barriers that separate various forms of English haiku from the authentic Japanese genre but I find the point of haiku to be in expressing something genuine, and such goal is not compromised by any differences.

Japanese haiku

Haiku is a very good example of beauty in simplicity. I am going to outline the structure of this poetic form here but to learn about its history and characteristics you will be better served by consulting an authoritative source.

Discussing and composing haiku in English is difficult because of the linguistic differences. 'English haiku' is best considered a separate form – and even that has many variants it can take (as do Japanese haiku), to the point where deciding whether a poem is a haiku is a matter of personal taste.

One of the core aspects of Japanese haiku is its length – 17 syllables. Actually, not really syllables but it is the closest term to apply when using English language. It should be noted that a syllable can pack a lot of sounds and meaning in English (compare the one-syllable *closed* to the Japanese pronunciation of *Tōkyō* which is counted as four 'syllables').

Another hallmark of Japanese haiku are the so-called 'cutting words' (*kireji*) that do not translate into English but serve to separate the poem into two parts or to emphasize what has come before. Apart from this logical division, the words of the poem fall into segments of 5, 7 and 5 syllables.

*a raindrop:
away from ocean
far from land*

Flying alone over the Atlantic Ocean made me feel very lonely. Away from the people I was temporarily leaving behind, and still a long distance from the ones I was going to visit.

Watching the clouds gave me the inspiration to voice that feeling in terms of the water cycle.

*drinking deep,
the tree shields two men:
“Awful rain!”*

I wrote this after a particularly long stretch of rain – even by Seattle standards. Obviously, this haiku is contrasting two perspectives on the prevailing weather pattern: that of trees and of men.

I like the possibility that the men seeking refuge under the tree might be drinking too if the first line gets applied to them.

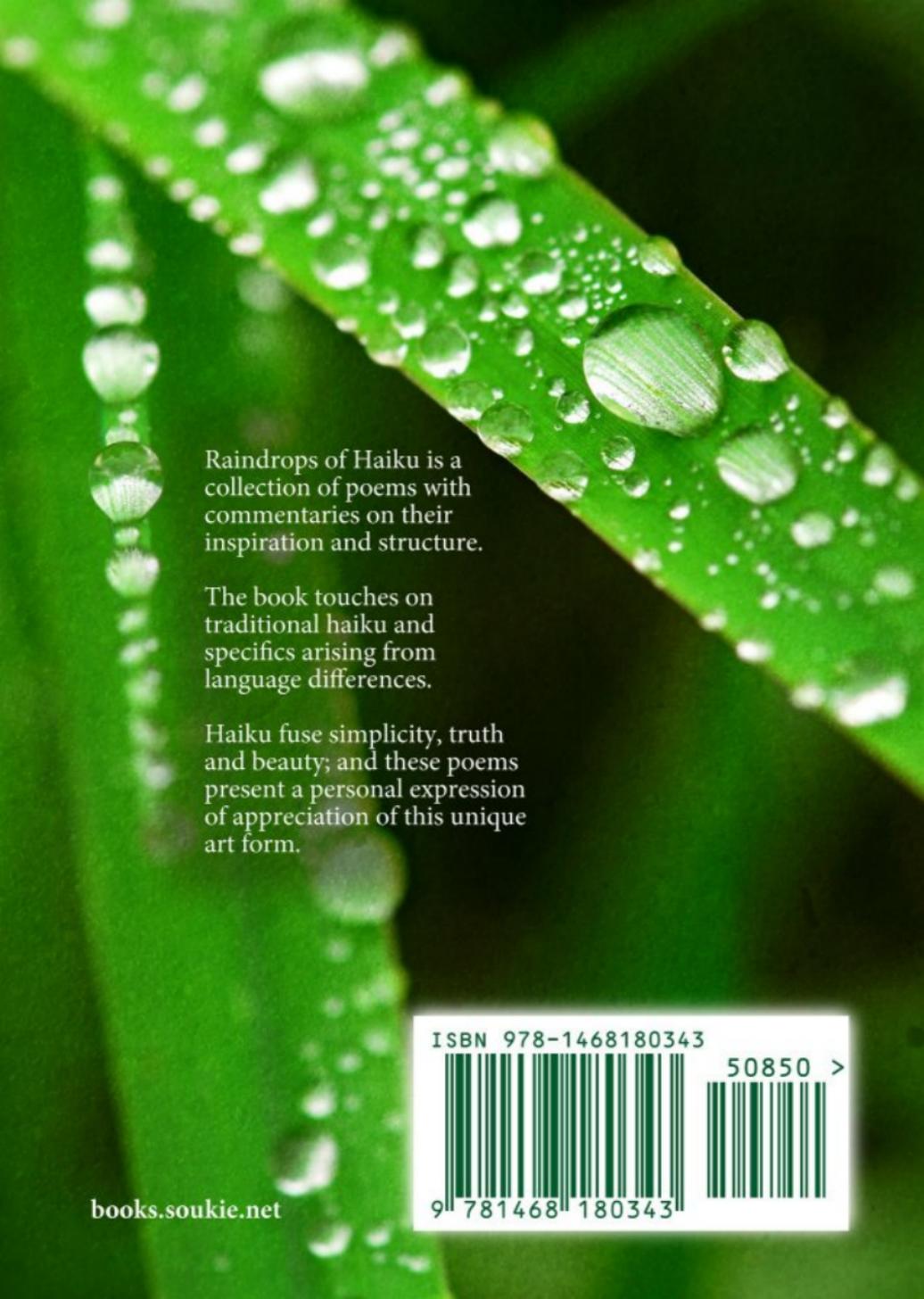
There are also unintentional similarities with the poem printed on the previous page: Both are written from the perspective of a tree, both offer a rather unflattering look at humans, and both deal with ungratefulness.

*drops of rain
replenish basins—
leaky roof*

Many haiku present readers with twists and turns, as is the case here.

The difficult part was selecting words that would support the interpretation of “rainfall irrigating valleys in the countryside” equally well as “water dripping into bowls that someone has to keep emptying,” which is the surprise interpretation.





Raindrops of Haiku is a collection of poems with commentaries on their inspiration and structure.

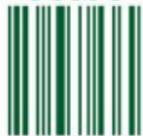
The book touches on traditional haiku and specifics arising from language differences.

Haiku fuse simplicity, truth and beauty; and these poems present a personal expression of appreciation of this unique art form.

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