

## GETTING INTO POETRY by Barb Miller

In each of this series of four poetry workshops we are going to focus on one of the four aspects of storytelling: setting, plot, theme and character. Samples of poems are given in the text, but please feel free to search for your own favorite samples of the different kinds of poetry.

### Poetry Workshop 1: Haiku Word Pictures

#### Setting

Haiku poetry frequently takes nature as the focus, so let's explore using nature as setting in poetry. Here is a list of ten things in nature you might write about:

**clouds, ocean, sunrise, sunset, flower, bird, tree, waterfall, snow, fog.** Or you can make up your own list. Chose one as the subject of your haiku. Think of a concise word picture about the theme.

A haiku is 3 lines with 5 or fewer syllables in the first line, 7 or fewer in the second and 5 or fewer in the third. The total syllables must be 17. Some Haiku writers observe only the 17 syllable rule and break the poem into three lines wherever needed.

There is no rhyme in a haiku. It is written in present tense, it is happening now. Count the syllables in this haiku. Are there 5, 7 and 5?

The full moon skims dark  
Treetop islands in the fog,  
Sinks in the grey sea.

*- by B. Miller, 2006*

What visual image from nature comes to mind when you read this?

The author makes a comparison. What does she compare?

As you think about comparing things, read the next haiku.

The fog waves ripple  
On the shore of woods and fields  
Restless to be gone.

*- by B. Miller, 2006*

What visual image comes to mind when you read this?

The author makes a comparison. What does she compare?

A comparison between two things that does not use "like" or "as" is a **metaphor**. If the author had said the moon alone "is like a ship," it would have been called a **simile**.

Metaphors are harder to write than similes since the comparison is more subtle, but every syllable counts in a haiku, and by using a metaphor the author can often save two syllables.

Think of something to compare your favorite nature thing to. For example: Tree to life, baby bird to spring, butterfly to a wanderer, brook to time. Save it with your list of nature words.

Haikus often put a little joke or present some irony in the last line. Example:

Horse looks over fence  
From pink tea rose to yellow  
Eats the pink one first.

*– by B. Miller, 2003*

There is no metaphor here, just a description of two things in nature, meeting.

Is the last line funny? Why?

### **Haiku History**

According to Miriam Sagan in her October 2003 article in Writer's Digest, "A Chain of Poets," haikus started out as the leftovers from Japanese renga or renku poems which were written in round robin fashion during parties.

First author writes the first stanza (first three lines) of a haiku.

Second author writes the second stanza (next two lines).

Third author writes the third stanza (three lines).

The renga can go up to 36 stanzas.

If you go back and read the haiku on the moon and the fog, they could have been the first two stanzas of a renga. If you can get a few friends together, try this exercise.

Choose a season of the year. Take your favorite nature thing and the thing you are comparing it to and write three lines in haiku format. Pass your paper to the left.

On the paper you received add two lines, continuing with that theme or introducing your own. Pass again and add three lines as before.

Continue until your own paper comes back to you and write the last stanza. Read from your page to the group.

Are there any metaphors on this renga?

Are there any similes?

What visual images does it call up?

Look for comparisons in each renga that is read.

You can keep these lines or just save your own or change them. You can ask for a copy of all the rengas.