



**Haiku and Haibun
with Alan Summers - World Poetry Day 2026**



Sponsor

Writers' Morning Out presents: **Haiku and Haibun with Alan Summers**

Saturday March 21st 2026 @ 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

NC Writers' Network ***Writers' Morning Out*** is proud to be affiliated with the NC Writers' Network, North Carolina's oldest and largest statewide nonprofit literary organization.

What and why is haiku:

ORIGIN: JAPAN

THINK: Medieval/Feudal times

No cafés, bars, cinema, smart devices, just a fude (筆) brush made from animal hair, and a bamboo handle, all highly versatile, plus paper, and a big enough room, provided by a patron, for a party. A party of poets to create a single ensemble poem out of tiny stanzas provided in turn by each poet and never linear in theme.

The most important one was the one that started the whole thing rolling and was called ***the hokku verse***.

Then came the looming 20th century which made many people fearful that the national poetic literature of Japan would vanish under the onslaught of Western free verse poetry. Hokku had only just started becoming an entire poem in its own right would it now completely disappear.

The little-used term 'haiku' was adopted, by a journalist-poet for the next century, and even he only expected this new evolved or reformed poem now called 'haiku' to survive for a couple of decades or so.

What wasn't fully anticipated was the fiercely rapid industrialisation of Japan, and its huge shifts in society and migration from agricultural culture to factories, and emergence of not only towns but cities. Then sadly it was a world war conflagration that really started haiku becoming even more special for both good and for bad reasons, at first.



Fast forward, as a week-long 8 hour days schedule of talking about haiku would barely cover a small part of the early haikuscape!

Three core aspects:

Let's suggest we mentally add '**Usually**' to the beginning of each!

- 1) A two-part structure** that can be called juxtaposition, or even disjunctive, in which a tiny verse expands beyond two micro-phrases (1-line/2-line or 2-line/1-line)
- 2) Sketching from Nature** quite possibly the Western art technique supported by the invention of small portable tubes of paint! To paint outdoors what can be seen gained great popularity in Japan and was a logical choice to add, incorporate, and partner the new reformed verse haiku from out of the classic era hokku.
- 3) A seasonal note** (natural seasonal changes, man-made secular, religious, urban, special days and festivals etc... added a useful time and date stamp so made sense in both earlier agrarian times with its hokku-verse, and equally so into the metropolitan era.

Note: classical hokku and modern/contemporary haiku are not nature poems, rather poems that may regularly feature seasonal markings whether natural history, or city life through commemorative days, other special days, holidays etc...

Percentages:

Masaoka Shiki (1867 – 1902) called for hokku to become haiku, though we are still highly influenced by feudal age **Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694)** who championed the standalone hokku, as well as led many linking verse parties, and said of great poetry:

*"The haiku that reveals 60-80% of its subject is good.
Those that reveal 50-60% percent, we never tire of."*
source: Kenneth Yasuda. *Haiku*. Tuttle, 1957. p7

"Always think less, not more words."
Alan Summers, Spring 2016



From the Classic Agrarian era to the fast switch of a new modern time.

First a classic hokku commemorative of a battle:

なつくさやつはものどもがゆめのあと
natsukusa ya tsuwamonodomo ga yume no ato

summer grasses:
the remains of warriors
with their dreams

Haikai verse by Matsuo Bashō
English version by Alan Summers

Source: Bashō's travel journal (haibun), *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (*Oku no Hosomichi*) published posthumously in 1702.

It's now often seen or used as an anti-war or at least a peace poem.

A 20th Century haiku poet:

夏草に汽缶車の車輪来て止まる
natsukusa ni kikansha no sharin kite tomaru

summer grasses—
the wheels of a locomotive
come to a stop

Yamaguchi Seishi (1901-1994)
English version by Alan Summers

Out of the last World War Two battle a poet who served at Truk Island, and became a peace poet, often writing slogans for protests. He was Japan's favourite television haiku expert as well.

air raid
the single well-sharpened pencil

kūshū
yoku togatta enpitsu ga ippon

Kaneko Tohta (1919-2018)
Selected Haiku, Part 1 (1937-1960)
The Kon Nichi Translation Group (Japan)



Fay Aoyagi

The immigrant poet

Born in Tokyo and immigrated to the U.S. in 1984.
She writes haiku in English and Japanese.

A former President of the Haiku Society of America,
she is also the curator of modern and contemporary Japanese-
language in Japanese; Romanised Japanese, and in English:

<https://fayaoyagi.wordpress.com>

It makes for vital reading and understanding of how haiku
ticks.

Fay is one of my greatest influences, and great company if you
get to meet her in person. She blends classic seasonal phrases
with modern life. She was a renga partner in a global Japan
Times sponsored event, and is my editor when I send work
occasionally to The Heron's Nest online journal.

tadpoles with legs
I assure him there's no need
to leave his wife

Fay Aoyagi (Japan/USA)
late spring or early summer kigo (season word/reference/marker)

a hole in my sweater
I ask him one more time
what he meant

Fay Aoyagi (Japan/USA)
"a hole in my sweater" tells us it is cold outside and probably winter.



You may or may not have started counting syllables.

Most regular haiku poets go free verse, though here are two syllabic pattern haiku by me, can you tell what they are:

night of small colour
a part of the underworld
becomes one heron

Alan Summers

First publication:

Modern Haiku (USA) vol. 45.2 Summer 2014 ed. Paul Miller

Anthology:

Haiku 21.2 : an anthology of contemporary English-language haiku
ed. Lee Gurga and Scott Metz (Modern Haiku Press, 2025)

lullaby of rain
another pinch of saffron
in the pumpkin soup

Alan Summers

Editors' Choices,

The Heron's Nest (Volume XIV, Number 4: Dec. 2012)

Anthology credits:

1. DOUBLE HORIZON
an international haiku anthology / une anthologie internationale de haïku
(November 2025)
2. Another Trip Around the Sun: 365 Days of Haiku for Children Young and Old
(Brooks Books 2019)
3. The Wonder Code ed. Scott Mason (Girasole Press 2017)
4. naad anunaad: an anthology of contemporary international haiku
(Vishwakarma Publications 2016)



And as it's been traditional for Japanese poets to compose haiku as one-line poems, here are a couple from my latest collection:

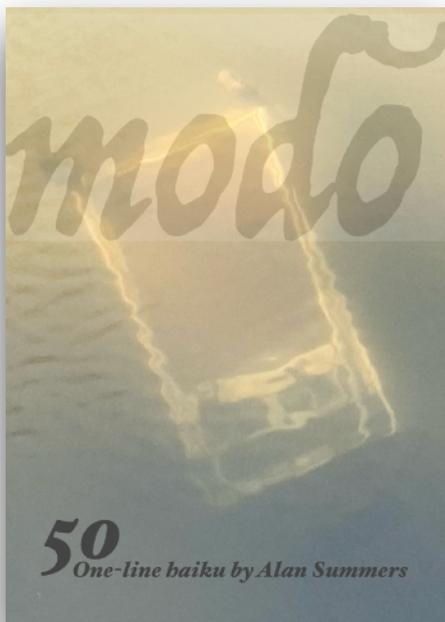
foxhole how the snow forgives and takes

Alan Summers

feathers caught in the post-Christmas mistletoe one regret

Alan Summers

modō 50+ *new & selected*
1-line haiku by Alan Summers
(CoTP Production March 2026)





Haiku and Haibun
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*Margaret Walker follows in Japanese footsteps
as well as her Southern roots.*

*Here is just one famous example of a haiku that echoes
a classic Japanese haiku.*

alone tonight a single malt

Margaret Walker

The Blōō Outlier Journal Winter Issue 2020 (Issue #1)
ed. Alan Summers (Touchstone nominated)

This reminded me of Hosai Ozaki's deeply poignant haiku, again, topically relevant, for various reasons.

even if you cough, alone

Hosai Ozaki (1885-1926)

English version by Alan Summers



**Haiku and Haibun
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Groundbreaking book exploding the misconceptions
of Japanese haiku:

Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Basho

Haruo Shirane (Editor)

Publisher: Stanford University Press (January 1, 1998)

ISBN-10: 0804730997 ISBN-13: 978-0804730990

A must have for everyone who thought they knew what haiku was in Japan
and elsewhere should be!

Far Beyond the Field: Haiku by Japanese Women

(Translations from the Asian Classics)

Makoto Ueda (Editor)

Publisher: Columbia University Press (4 April 2003)

ISBN-10: 0231128630 ISBN-13: 978-0231128636

A must have for everyone, showing the power of women writers from
Classic times right into the contemporary world of haiku.

Haiku: The British Museum (English/Japanese)

Classic Japanese haiku collated and translated by

David Cobb & Emiko Miyashita

Publisher: British Museum Press (2002)

ISBN-10: 9780714124018 ISBN-13: 978-0714124018 ASIN: 071412401X



What and why is haibun

So if we now have at least some inkling about haiku, and its sheer tiny size and larger resonance, but what if we combine it with prose and make it a hybrid type of literature?!

Haibun is a fascinating writing method, combining prose with haiku poetry, and often in a startling almost uncomfortable manner.

"The haibun enables me to write what I'd call 'para-biography' using straight up facts, while utilising fictional elements to tell my life slant, plus faction, when, as in 'reality' and 'memory,' we fuse imagined events, and details, with our historic selves and experiences."



HAIBUN EXAMPLE:

Are you Mother-of-pearl?

I have a large hole in a lower molar tooth,
it has a direct link to my soul;
my life is falling apart and I keep this private
except for you, except for you.

I remember a rose bush in a concrete garden tended by my mother,
that mother version is dead now, many versions ago,
and each version of my mother marks me like a ring in a bath
that won't quite scrub away. The first ring was four years old,
I hear other people can remember earlier.

behind each eye
another Greek myth
difficult sun

Alan Summers

Publication credit:

Contemporary Haibun Online December 2024 ed. Terri French

The prose with haibun used to be only that of a travelogue, and now we write
prose, prose poetry, free verse, and hybrids of each other.



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So why haibun, why combine prose and poetry together, ask the Italians, it's not only a Japanese genre.

A prosimetrum (plural prosimetra) is a poetic composition which exploits a combination of prose (prosa) and verse (metrum); in particular, it is a text composed in alternating segments of prose and verse.

The term prosimetrum is first attested in the *Rationes dictandi* of Hugh of Bologna, in the early 12th century.

Sources differ on the date, one suggesting around 1119.

If you can write haiku, and you can write haibun, it's entirely possible you can now combine and write haibun!

Useful haibun reading, including gonzo journalism:

See Comparative Essay: Two Favorite Haibun: Unsettling Clashes

Contemporary Haibun Online issue 20.3 (December 2024)

<https://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/table-of-contents-20-3/articles-reviews-20-3/alan-summers-two-favorite-haibun/>

Thank you!



Alan Summers
www.callofthepage.org