

WITHOUT, HAIKU



Poems | Leigh Herrick

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*Without conscience—
Gypsophila blossoms—
Haiku—one breath.*

For All. Within. Without.

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INTRODUCTION

In June, 2005 I began writing a Zen poem each night before going to sleep. I'd finished editing my *Home Front* manuscript, and had released my *Just War* CD the year before. I was in the midst of a follow-up manuscript to *Home Front*, as America was two years into the war in Iraq, and I had been putting forth great effort in protest. I found myself becoming exhausted and disheartened. I was much in need of rejuvenation. I followed my instinct to let myself rest for a time, returning to the teachings of Zen-Buddhism.

There are a few things in literature I find myself reading over and again; Zen writing and lessons is one of them. I was relieved to draw anew from the simple richness of the lessons, the philosophy of silence, of *being* quiet as means of knowing. A great weight began to ease as I revisited the teachings and the bare beauty of the observed, natural world so intrinsic to Zen poems.

Though I had written a few "Americanized" haiku in my late teens, I had never written Zen poetry. I couldn't imagine what lay in store for me as I entered the real world of haiku when expressed as a Zen poem. In my thirties I began reading the "standards," Basho, Issa; but it wasn't until I discovered the Zen monk and master Ryōkan that I discovered the deeper possibility for Zen Mind as manifested in a haiku poem.

For the poems in this book I have rejected the old, syllabic 5-7-5 English form; a form, I have read, that is not analogous to the phonetic sounds of Japanese haiku. I have otherwise retained the traditional (English) three-lined stanza, written horizontally.

I wrote these poems over three seasons, beginning in June and ending in late October, as hard frost overcame any remaining plant life in the garden and strong, north winds blew the last leaves from most deciduous trees. Reading the poems again in preparation for this book, I realize how personal they are, more than I have ever shared in any of my poetry, little windows into those moments of my actual daily life.

My hope is that you will find some beauty here, as I found it, and that it will serve you in some way, perhaps bringing you peace-of-mind, should you need it, whatever your troubles and joys.

Leigh Herrick

July 14, 2013

SPRING POEMS

So many days
burned by drivers—
Outside the butterfly bush.

I look at my dirty knees—
Laying garden plans—
46! Timeless!

Her missing uterus—
Miracle of morning medicine—
Half-moon grief.

Clouds over a half-moon—
Wind through chimes in the center garden's tree—
A newly-born rabbit sniffs all day.

God's face?
Life in this world—
Everyone's robe!

Opening the door—
I sing to the rabbit who listens—
I bend, pulling weeds.

Green grass! Solstice half-moon!
Jupiter on the horizon still—
Approaching silence.

June rain—
Half-moon rabbit sleeps to cricket chirr—
Morning I'll wake.

One line—
June bug on the screen
—Ten thousand dreams.

New bed in late spring—
Setting moon through rain-thriving ash—
Standing sunrise breaks a spell.

A gibbous moon—
What's distance? Jupiter, one finger's length to the left—
Baby rabbit runs beneath the shed.

One haiku accomplished?
Is there sugar in your mouth?
What do you swallow?

Bed is open—
Dawn you come—
I go.

Swollen ankles! Sore feet!
Near-full moon swelling night's light—
Woman's blood.

Cat shit in the grass—
Beneath a cloud-covered moon—
Your face my echo.

Knock at the door—
Chimes ring from the tree limb—
Many faces among leaves.

Creative life—
Boiled water and seeping tea bags—
Alone, the green caterpillar.

An ant
masters its load across the sidewalk—
The city crumbles.

No petty poem—
No lace-stitched line—
The circling hawk tells all.

Without conscience—
Gypsophila blossoms—
Haiku—one breath.

Contemplating the egret—
Sitting alone—
The trunk of a fallen tree.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Herrick is a poet, writer, and recording artist. Her widely published poetry has won numerous awards, and she is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. In addition to poetry, Herrick writes fiction, non-fiction, and children's books, and is in the process of producing her third CD. For additional information please visit: www.LeighHerrick.com