



Book of Haikus

Jack Kerouac , Regina Weinreich (Editor and Introduction)

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Renowned for his groundbreaking Beat Generation novel *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac was also a master of the haiku, the three-line, seventeen-syllable Japanese poetic form. Following in the tradition of Basho, Buson, Shiki, Issa, and other poets, Kerouac experimented with this centuries-old genre, taking it beyond strict syllable counts into what he believed was the form's essence. He incorporated his 'American' haiku in novels and in his correspondence, notebooks, journals, sketchbooks, and recordings. In this beautifully packaged volume, Kerouac scholar Regina Weinreich has supplemented a core haiku manuscript from Kerouac's archives with a generous selection of the rest of his haikus, from both published and unpublished sources. The result is a compact collection of more than five hundred poems that reveal a lesser known but important side of Jack Kerouac's literary legacy.

Book of Haikus Details

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Author : Jack Kerouac , Regina Weinreich (Editor and Introduction)

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Robert Hobkirk says

Collection of short poems Kerouac wrote over several years. Most of them are three lines, a few are two liners. He doesn't build the poem on the 17 syllable construction, so I would call them micro poems rather than haiku. They were written at a time when he was taking a look at Buddhism. Most of them have the flavor of traditional Japanese haiku with reference to nature with reference to the moon and all that, but my favorites are a little more unique. The one about the fly in the medicine cabinet who died of old age and the one about the rain puddle cleaning the soles of his shoes were memorable. Kerouac was a hard core artist, who else would write little poems?

If you're interested in learning more about Kerouac, this little book is worth checking out of the library.

Dane Cobain says

Most people only know of Jack Kerouac as the author of On the Road, but this book demonstrates that he has skills in other areas too. Kerouac's haiku often stick to the traditional form of 5-7-5, but he does sometimes experiment too, and often with eastern forms that he discovered through his forays into Buddhism and other eastern religions.

I only have one real gripe with this book – the writing itself is pretty epic, and I really enjoy the way that Kerouac invokes nature and natural themes in to his writing, in the fine traditions of the oldest of the old haiku writers. That said, I'm pretty sure that the plural of 'haiku' is 'haiku', and so I do get kind of annoyed by that.

Overall, though, it's a delightful little book, and one that you could fit in to your pocket fairly easily. What's more, it's the sort of book that you can dip in and out of, although I have to admit that I read it from cover to cover because that's the kind of reader I am.

vi macdonald says

...and in an unexpected move, a collection of haikus ends up being one of the best things to ever come from Jack Kerouac...

Thom Gibney says

Beat Generation great Jack Kerouac takes on the traditional Japanese 17 syllable poem in his own version of the haiku in which he calls the 'American Haiku'. Though not subjected to the limits of strict syllable length, Kerouac sets out inspired by his buddhist learnings and personal solitude to meditate on the traditional form and create these beautiful haikus that capture the American spirit in short verse. It is a must-read for the large following of Jack Kerouac's writing.

Greta says

*"Hitch hiked a thousand
miles and brought
You wine"*

+

*"Holding up my
purring cat to the moon
I sighed"*

= my new definition of Kerouac.

A remarkable and thought-provoking collection.

*"You'd be surprised
how little I knew
Even up to yesterday"*

*"Take a cup of water
from the ocean
And there I am"*

David Schaafsma says

Eh, Kerouac as a poet. . . If you are interested in haiku, or in the ways Eastern poetic forms and sensibilities have been imported to the west, if I were you, I would read Gary Snyder, who helped import haiku to the beats and that generation in this country. Snyder is a serious poet and serious Buddhist, who inspired Kerouac and other beats, but none of them did work to match what Snyder did. Book of Haikus compiler and introducer Weinrich makes a case for this book as both serious poetry and irreverent (Kerouac called his American haiku "pops"), but I'm not convinced. There are some decent haiku in this large collection, collected attractively in a small book format, and if you are a Kerouac completist, (as I kinda am) you will want to own this, but for most readers interested in Kerouac and/or haiku, I would just read Kerouac's fiction.

Khashayar Mohammadi says

Never been a big fan of Kerouac, but this was one of the best Haiku collections I have ever read.

Judith says

HAHAHA KEROUAC IS SO FUNNY I THOUGHT THIS WAS GONNA BE A SERIOUS BOOK BUT NOOOOOPE. although towards the end they do get more sombre after he succumbs to alcoholism. here r

some of my favorites:

some are really pretty "the top of jack / mountain - done in / by golden clouds"
and some are terribly lonely "racing westward through / the clouds in the howling/ wind, the moon"
some are weird and entertaining "the cow, taking a big / dreamy crap, turning / to look at me"
some are so sassy "train tunnel, too dark/for me to write: that/ men are ignorant"
some are endearingly quirky "i made raspberry fruit jello/ the color of rubies / in the setting sun"
some are just endearing "if i go out now, / my paws / will get wet" (which is frm the pov of his cat!)
and some are funny af "here comes / my dragon /- goodbye!"

k.wing says

The introduction alone in this book is worth the read. It's a great little book (that fits in your back pocket. Yes, your back pocket.) that is fun to pick up anytime you are bored/in chapel.

Kerouac basically gave birth to the Western Haiku. Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry, typically plotted by the seasons. While Kerouac adheres to the seasonal content occasionally, he focuses on everyday happenstance. In addition, as Japanese Haiku is writ in 5-7-5 (syllable count per line), Kerouac's invintion of the Western Haiku has no fixed syllable count, but is condensed to 3 line stanzas with compacted lines. Here are some favorites:

A raindrop from
the roof
Fell in my beer

I said a joke
under the stars
-no laughter

When the moon sinks
down to the power line,
I'll go in

Dusk - boy
smashing dandelions
with a stick

The cow taking a big
dreamy crap, turning
To look at me

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Amazing - how I wish he could have stayed with us longer for purely selfish reasons.

Mat says

Fantastic.

Kerouac displays true mastership of this form of poetry. Intelligently avoiding the restricting rules of traditional, conventional Japanese haiku, Kerouac invents the form here which he calls 'pops' - short, concise three-line poems which are very effective. Where Kerouac does not follow the 'rules' syllabically, he does in terms of including seasonal words - the moon, the sun, leaves, noon - all symbolic of the season in which the haiku was written, even the 'winter fly' which ingeniously refers to the END of winter, i.e. the advent of Spring.

Out of all of Kerouac's poetry, I believe that this has to be some of his strongest work, right up there with the ingenious, the timeless *Mexico City Blues*. Many people wrote Jack off because of his beliefs about spontaneous prose and Truman Capote's old hack that he was just "typing" not "writing" - well, time has shown, with increasing evidence, that he was a significant writer in American society, who in the later half of the twentieth century was apparently told by God to "go moan for Man" and someone whose quality of writing has consistently shown that he deserves more attention and acclaim.

Axolotl says

The beauty of haiku--I suppose the beauty particularly of the haiku found in this volume, coming as it does from a prosaic Western perspective and being transmitted to a prosaic Western mind/reader--is that there is simultaneously a degree of specificity and universality to the images (or, if you like, symbols) evoked. I have observed images so similar to some described in this book, that it is almost as though Kerouac's shade were what I'd mistaken for that cast by the tall birch in a park once sat beneath--him with with a ghostly notebook, scribbling my unconsciously dharmic doings unbeknownst to me.

Attention is love,

and

love and hate are

almost one

--mostly in

choosing

their object

and that

(object of)

one can

so easily

become the other

--contingency

Susan Budd says

Remember the old Reese's Peanut Butter Cup commercial where two people collide? "You got peanut butter on my chocolate!" "You got chocolate in my peanut butter!" And the rest is delicious magic? Well, that was me picking up Jack Kerouac's *Book of Haikus*. I love haiku. And I love Kerouac. But I was skeptical about the combination. Fortunately, I ended up as pleasantly surprised as the clumsy snackers.

This volume includes the poems Kerouac selected for his *Book of Haikus* as well as poems gathered from his novels and notebooks. The poems from *Book of Haikus* are superior to the others, yet they make up less than half of the volume.

I have mixed feelings about the inclusion of so many poems from Kerouac's novels and notebooks. On the one hand, I can see how they would be of interest to those studying the development of Kerouac's art, but on the other hand, they lower the quality of the volume as a whole. Although I appreciate editor Regina Weinreich's dedication to her project, I think she does Kerouac a disservice by padding the book with weaker poems.

That said, the poems Kerouac selected for *Book of Haikus* are impressive. I think Basho would be proud. Here are a few of my favorites.

"*Quiet moonlit night—
Neighbor boy studying
By telescope; —'Ooo!'*" (16)

"*In back of the supermarket
in the parking lot weeds,
Purple flowers*" (18)

"*Glow worm sleeping
on this flower,
Your light's on!*" (27)

Kerouac's three-line poems are not composed of seventeen syllables, but they are faithful to the spirit of Japanese haiku. A haiku has two elements: an observation of nature and a sudden perception. Moreover, Basho identified the aesthetic of haiku as one of Karumi, or lightness. I think Kerouac's poems succeed in achieving both the form and the aesthetic of haiku.

Among the notebook poems, I found one that seems to be an earlier version of another one of my favorites. Here is the poem in *Book of Haikus*.

"*Bee, why are you
staring at me?
I'm not a flower!*" (15)

Here is the poem from the notebooks.

"*Am I a flower
bee, that you*

Stare at me?" (155)

Weinreich says that Kerouac revised his poems. This is not something that Kerouac did with his other writings. It seems likely to me that the poem from the notebook was revised into the poem included in *Book of Haikus*.

"Am I a flower" is moved from the first line to the third line where it becomes an exclamation instead of a question. The whole poem builds up to it. *"I'm not a flower!"*

The address to the bee is moved from the second line to the first line. This is simpler and more direct. In the earlier poem the address to the bee occurs in the middle of the question. This dilutes the effect of the question. The reader of the revised poem knows right from the start that the question is addressed to the bee.

Addressing the bee in the middle also makes the earlier poem a single complex sentence whereas the revised poem follows the traditional Japanese form of an observation of nature followed by a sudden perception with these two elements divided by a Kireji, or cutting word. In English, the function of the Kireji is often performed by a dash or other punctuation mark.

The first part of the revised poem ~*"Bee, why are you/staring at me?"* ~ is the question addressed to the bee and the second part of the poem ~ *"I'm not a flower!"* ~ is the sudden, surprising, and humorous reaction of the speaker.

This comparison between the notebook poem and the *Book of Haikus* poem is revealing. The poems from *Book of Haikus* ~ like the haiku of Basho ~ have the feeling of spontaneity, but they are instead carefully crafted poems. The appearance of spontaneity is evidence of the talent of the poet.

I am happy to shelve Kerouac's *Book of Haikus* alongside my other volumes of haiku. Unless it better belongs with my Beat Generation books. Perhaps I should find out where the peanut butter cups are shelved in the supermarket—with the peanut butter or with the chocolate. But wherever I put *Book of Haikus*, it has turned out to be a serendipitous discovery for me.

Hasan Makhzoum says

You can listen to a studio recording of Kerouac reciting poems from his series **American Haikus**, backed by the jazz saxophonists Al Cohn and Zoot Sims for their album **Blues and Haikus**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30mXV...>

I don't particularly enjoy reading Haiku, both the Japanese and the so-called Western haiku (*), which Kerouac has re-named "American Pops".(**)

I find this form of poetry dull and dare I say boring (I wrote a long study on Haiku when I reviewed several Haiku collections and anthologies that I have read in Arabic and French).

I enjoyed however reading **Morning Haiku** by **Sonia Sanchez**. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7...>

I wasn't really impressed by Kerouac's poems, they undoubtedly reveal a fertile imagination but some were dry and others felt shallow..

Kerouac's haiku encapsulate an abrupt emotion or a mystical vision , an observation that is oftenly delivered with humour and sarcasm, a brief weird impression or a distillation of a scene or a fading memory.

For Ginsberg his haiku poems are « *the most “uncrafted stuff” in the world. [...] his craft is spontaneity [...] instantaneous recall of the unconscious [...] perfect executive conjunction of archetypal memorial images articulating present observation of detail and childhood epiphany fact.*”

Kerouac is no doubt capable of crafting stunning images. His haiku show the influence of the imagists, mainly Ezra Pound.

We can also perceive in these haiku the major influence of the Zen Buddhism, as a religion and a culture. Dissatisfied with the state of the western culture, Kerouac sought a cure in the Japanese philosophy. He has also embraced it in his life as an alternative to the socialist and secular convictions, to which he was fiercely opposed, adopted by his comrades of the Beat generation..

Ginsberg asserted that the method of spontaneous composition is connected to the practice of Zen Buddhism and the fact that in Japanese calligraphic painting, people are literally able to capture one phrase in one image.

However, according to many critics, Kerouac's approach to Buddhism in these poems indicate a superficial understanding of its philosophy.(***),

Many of the Haiku in this collection tell a wisdom through metaphors. Short and concise, they are moreover similar to ancient Eastern spiritual proverbs :

Walking on water wasn't?

Built in a day

The sound of silence

Is all the instruction

?You'll get

**

What is a rainbow,

Lord? – a hoop

For the lowly

**

The Golden Gate

creaks

With sunset rust

**

(*) the American or the Western Haikus depict Haikus written by western poets and to which the basic rules of the Japanese Haiku don't apply. They even vary in line-length.

This review explores Kerouac's innovative and personalized Haikus.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/13/op...>

(**) He wrote:

Then I'll invent

The American Haiku type:

The simple rhyming triolet:-- Seventeen syllables?

No, as I say, American Pops:-- Simple 3-line poems.

[from Jack Foley's article “Beat Haikus”

<https://terebess.hu/english/haiku/fol...>]

(***)I recommend this helpful and informative brief article: it defines the elements of the Zen haiku, explains its essential techniques and highlights the rules of the haiku crafting
<http://www.mercy-center.org/PDFs/EW/H...>

Noce says

"Calcio mancato
allo sportello del frigo,
ad ogni modo si è chiuso." (Pag.14)

"La Luna nuova
è l'unglia di un dito
del piede di Dio" (Pag.38)

"Sesso-sbattersi per procreare
laddove
la Provvidenza lo permette" (Pag. 67)

"Due nubi si baciano e
si sostengono guardandosi
l'un l'altra." (Pag. 122)

Kerouac mi piace proprio. E' riuscito a manipolare la struttura base dell'haiku classico, lo ha rivoltato e lo ha adeguato al suo tempo e alla sua parlata. E in tutto questo non ha comunque stravolto il senso poetico e intimistico che l'haiku deve conservare per essere definito tale. Bravo, bravo e ancora bravo.
