

Wally Swist: Nature detailed in haiku with a hint of human

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I am surprised how well I enjoy Swist's haiku. I say this because I am not much of an outdoors person, and Swist's haiku shares details of nature and the outdoors more often than not. The simple moments in nature are highlighted in Swist's haiku. Swist shares, "Haiku for me has been a path, a way of life, a vehicle through which I see the world anew daily and newly many times during the day" (Swist, TSBU, 15). This quote rings true in Swist's Haiku. The simple is made exceptional when Swist writes about it. He does sprinkle the human element into his haiku on occasion.

dewy morning
the logging truck's load
sweating sap

Swist, TSBU, 38

Swist does a marvelous job with the descriptive words he uses in this haiku. I can picture this haiku taking place in Seattle, Washington. The "dewy morning" (Swist, TSBU,38) gives you a feeling of everything being a little damp early in the day. "The logging truck's load sweating sap" (Swist, TSBU, 38). The logs are damp from the dew and the sweating sap. I can imagine the truck slipping slightly on the ground as it pulls out of the lot from the dampness. I can hear the sounds of the truck creaking as it moves with a load of logs, most of them clinging together from the sap just as the dew is still clinging to everything in sight.

the flatbed of baled hay
rocks with the tractor's pull
Indian summer

Swist, TSBU, 66

This haiku is an example of the simplest of things made fascinating by Swist's writing. This haiku evokes the desire for me to be in this setting. It is a fall day and unseasonably warm. The farmer and his farmhands spent the day bailing hay. They watch as the farmer pulls away with a "flatbed full of hay" (Swist, TSBU, 66). "Rocks" (Swist, TSBU, 66) also lends itself to the movement in the weather. It is warmer than it usually is in the autumn. Swist's use of words in this haiku paints this picture so well you can see it clear as day.

Waking up—
my cuffs still wet
from a walk in new snow

Swist, TSBU, 114 for Bob Arnold

This haiku is an example of when Swist sprinkles in the human element. I picture a child coming inside from an afternoon walk in the snow, and they get out of their snowsuit and immediately collapse on the couch from exhaustion. The hyphen after the first line leads me to believe the child woke up slowly. They wake up to their "cuffs still wet" (Swist, *The Silence Between Us*, 2005) brings a smile to my face. Some time has gone by, and the remnants of the time in the snow remain. Almost as if time stood still, still as the newly fallen untouched snow.

new age bookstore
guessing at
people's past lives

Swist, TSBU, 84

This haiku is a little off the beaten path for Swist; he takes us inside. Inside the bookstore, he sees people. The mention of "new age bookstore" (Swist, TSBU, 84) leads you to believe it was an eclectic crowd with different backgrounds. The person looks at them "guessing" (Swist, TSBU, 84). I think this person is a people watcher. They are taking them in and wondering what their past entails. Their clothing may give a hint, the tattoo on their arm, or the keychains hanging out of their pocket. In addition, maybe it goes deeper than that, and it is the gray hairs, the wrinkles, or the visible scars.

mountain trail . . .
the fragrance of horses
mingling with pine

Swist, TSBU, 92

I like the use of the ellipses in this haiku. It leaves you wondering how long the mountain trail is; it feels like it has no end. I see a group of people out riding horses along the mountain trail. There are pine trees along the path but not so thick that you can't see beyond them. I believe the ellipses also give the feeling of airiness along the "mountain trail" (Swist, TSBU, 92). It is an enjoyable ride among with scent of horses and pine trees. You can almost imagine what it smells like as you read the haiku.

the farther into it,
the farther it moves away—
spring mist

Swist, TSBU, 53

In this haiku, I believe Swist is speaking about more than nature in this haiku. It feels as if something is slipping away, a relationship maybe. It feels the closer someone feels they are getting, "the farther it moves away—" (Swist, TSBU, 53). The relationship does not have a definitive end; the hyphens accentuate that. The distance in this relationship happens so slowly that the two people do not notice until it has happened, slowly like the "spring mist" (Swist, TSBU, 53).

Christmas eve
leaning against the chain-link fence
the trees no one wanted

Swist, TSBU, 69

The Boy Scouts have gone home for the evening. It is "Christmas Eve" (Swist, TSBU, 69), and everyone should have their trees by now. The leftover trees are "leaning against the chain-link fence" (Swist, TSBU, 69) as if no one wants them. I can imagine some families would have loved to have one of those Christmas trees but did not have the funds. Christmas is just hours away, and the opportunity has passed. For me, this is a sad haiku, and it is very open to interpretation. I can imagine hundreds of different perspectives when reading this haiku, based on the readers' life experiences.

the sound of sleet
a mouse gnaws
inside the closet wall

Swist, TSBU, 69

Swist does an exceptional job with word usage in this haiku. The word "gnaws" (Swist, TSBU, 69) gets me; you can hear the gnawing. I have lived in a farmhouse the "mouse gnawing inside the closet wall" (Swist, TSBU, 69) is a real thing. It happens, and "gnaw" (Swist, TSBU, 69) eludes to the sound you hear. I enjoy juxtaposing the haiku between "the sound of sleet" (Swist, TSBU, 69) and gnawing. The "sound of sleet" (Swist, TSBU, 69) is not typically soothing, but it has got to better gnawing. I also enjoy the contrast between inside and outside.

new buds
the ferris wheel
takes another turn

Swist, TSBU, 56

When I read this haiku, I do not automatically think of Swist as the author. This haiku seems a little more whimsical than the majority of Swist's haiku. "New buds" (Swist, TSBU, 56) has me picturing two new friends riding "the Ferris wheel" (Swist, TSBU, 56) together. They are enjoying the ferris wheel going round and round. I can see the lights of the rides at the county fair. The friends enjoy the view of the fair as it goes around and around.

redemption center squabble
a homeless man recounts
his stack of cans

Swist, TSBU, 83

"Redemption center squabble" (Swist, TSBU, 83); the first line of this haiku gives you the setting to emphasize the importance of the following two lines of this haiku. Masterful touch by Swist by giving us the place first. The "homeless man" (Swist, TSBU, 83) is doing his best not to be homeless anymore. He "recounts" (Swist, TSBU, 83) the cans just as he has recounted the choices that led him to this moment. The cans are symbolic of the steps he is taking to get to a better place. I believe "the squabble" (Swist, TSBU, 83) and his losing count is symbolic of the times he has faced barriers as he longs to be in a better place

dusk—
the rumble of a farm wagon
piled high with pumpkins

Swist, TSBU, 88

This haiku has a lighter feel to it. I can picture the pumpkin farmer filling up his wagon for the weekend crowd. It is "dusk" (Swist, TSBU, 88), and he is finishing up his day. I am tired from a long day's work and excited at the same time for the excitement that one of his harvested pumpkins will bring to so many. "The rumble of a farm wagon" (Swist, TSBU, 88) is a pleasant sound; it makes me think of the sound you hear when you take off on a hayride. A perfect ending to a fall day.

clear creek water
flowing over smooth stones
how young she looks

Swede, AU, 62

stifling heat—
the pond caked
with green scum

Swist, TSBU, 86

I am fond of the contrast between these two haiku. In Swede's haiku, the "clear creek water" (Swede, AU, 62) gives you this feeling of transparency, and "the pond caked with green scum" (Swist, TSBU, 86) leaves you feeling like there is something under the water. Swede's haiku does not directly mention the weather but leaves you feeling like it is an enjoyable day out where "stifling heat" (Swist TSBU,86) leaves you feeling like you are ready to find some air conditioning. Let us not forget about "how young she looks" (Swede, AU, 62") in Swede's haiku, nothing to hide her flawlessness, unlike the "green scum" (Swist, TSBU, 86). Unless you are someone who enjoys the heat, I am not one of those people. I believe both author's haiku are enjoyable but evoke contrasting feelings.

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Works Cited

Swede, George, *Almost Unseen: Selected Haiku from George Swede*, Brooks Books, 2000

Swist, Wally, *The Silence Between Us: Selected Haiku of Wally Swist*, Brooks Books, 2005