

Reflection on Aubrie Cox and Her Co-Creativeness with The Reader

by
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In my opinion, reading haiku by Aubrie Cox is like reading a “choose your own adventure” book -- you decide what happens at the end. After careful reflection of Aubrie Cox’s *tea’s aftertaste*, I’ve come to appreciate her ambiguous haiku that force the reader to create their own story. In her introduction to *tea’s aftertaste*, she states, “haiku is the genre I’ve spent my life looking for —a literary art that engages the reader as an equal contributor.” I think this the most eloquent way of describing what haiku is, and she exemplifies this definition in each of her haiku. As I read, I found myself connecting to almost all of her haiku, and I didn’t understand how that was possible. Then I realized that the way Aubrie writes, she encourages me to paint my own picture of what is happening in the haiku. I’m contributing to the story, and that is why I connect to it. As an actress, I have a wild imagination. Aubrie’s haiku allow it to roam free.

confessional
alcohol breath
from his side of the grate

Cox, *Tea’s Aftertaste*, 21

This haiku is a perfect example of how Cox leaves the story and interpretation of haiku up to the reader. Starting off with the word “confessional” puts the reader in a very specific mood. Then, when paired with having alcohol breath, I automatically assumed that the person confessing had the alcohol breath. However, the last line “from his side of the grate” makes you wonder whose side of the grate the author is talking about. Is it the confessor’s side or the priest’s side? Because it says “his side,” the story I created from this haiku is that it’s the priest who has alcohol on his breath because priests have to be male. But ultimately, the reader gets to choose whose perspective they think this haiku is coming from, and I love that about Cox’s haiku.

churchyard shadows
the priest confesses
to an empty room

Cox, *Tea’s Aftertaste*, 36

This haiku is thematically comparable to the last one, and similarly allows the reader to create a story. The idea of churchyard shadows gave me a sort of eerie feeling. I started to imagine what light is creating the shadows. Is it the moon? Or outside lights shining from the church? What are the shadows of? People or gravestones? These two things are kind of ironic as gravestones are used to symbolize people. Stuck in the story of the last haiku, I imagine that the priest is confessing that he is an alcoholic. However, does the confession count if he’s only confessing to an empty room? He could be confessing to God, and as a priest, that’s probably his most important confession. This haiku makes me imagine a priest up on the pulpit, admitting his issues, while nobody is in the pews. But the reader could create so many different images with this haiku, and that’s why Cox’s haiku are intriguing.

autumn leaves
new neighbors
take down the treehouse

Cox, Tea's Aftertaste, 30

This haiku is yet another example of how Cox writes haiku that allow her readers to mold their own story from her writing. I love how she sets the scene with the first line, "autumn leaves." It gives the readers a very distinct image. Then the idea of new neighbors could either be exciting or upsetting - depending on if you liked the old neighbors. And lastly, the line "take down the treehouse," gives a nostalgic feeling. As kids, so many memories come with the treehouse. The way this haiku reads is very similar to the last one, as the last line is unexpected. The story I created with this haiku is that a new family moved into the suburban house next door, where someone's best friend used to live. That someone and their best friend played in the treehouse every day after school and even slept up there. When the new neighbors start taking down that treehouse, the child is crushed.

pink petals
she chooses
a lighter lip gloss

Cox, Tea's Aftertaste, 15

I wanted to showcase a lighter themed haiku by Cox. This haiku is pleasant and leaves the reader wondering what the story behind it is. I imagined a girl putting on lip gloss for a high school dance. She is giddy and nervous, which is why she is indecisive about what color lip gloss to wear. While she's putting on the first lip gloss, she notices the bouquet of pink roses that her date asked her to the dance with. She decides that her first lip gloss is too dark and serious, and she doesn't want to scare her date off by getting too serious too fast.

She decides on the lighter lip gloss because she knows it is noncommittal and flirty. As a girl, I have definitely been in this moment. Cox's haiku allows me to use my own experiences to create a story around her story.

wilted lilacs...
your hand
slips from mine

Cox, Tea's Aftertaste, 15

In contrast, this haiku is darker and more serious. The relationship behind this haiku is longer, as the flowers are no longer fresh, but wilting. This makes me infer that whoever is writing this hasn't gotten flowers in a long time, and their relationship is decaying. The next two lines follow this theme of growing apart as their hands slip from each other. Another story that could be created from this haiku is at a funeral. Lilacs are often flowers used on a casket. I picture the writer walking up to the casket, grabbing the deceased person's hand, and saying their final goodbyes. I also love the way this haiku reads. Cox does not commonly use punctuation in her haiku, but the use of the ellipses supports the feeling of this haiku. The pause that it gives readers allows them to understand the somberness that this haiku portrays.

calling for the dog
at 2am
wind chimes

Cox, *Tea's Aftertaste*, 17

This haiku is an example of how Cox can put you in the moment with just three lines. The first line is a simple task, "calling for the dog." But the second line creates a sense of panic. It's 2am and you still haven't found the dog. I'd also like to note that Cox chooses not to punctuate the time. I think she does this because this haiku is frantic. When you are panicked, you don't punctuate sentences or use proper grammar -- you just need to get your point across. The third line, "wind chimes," adds another layer of panic. They are loud, alarming, and sound with strong gusts of wind. This could mean that a storm is coming, and they still have not found their dog who could now be in danger. Cox is great at evoking emotions from reader's without telling them what to feel.

folding laundry
a sock
I don't know

Cox, *Tea's Aftertaste*, 22

This haiku represents Cox's simplicity. Cox's haiku don't commonly use unfamiliar language or themes, therefore allowing her haiku to be relatable to readers. This is a great example, as each line is extremely elementary. However, I can so easily relate to this haiku. We've all had the experience of folding laundry, getting down to the socks, and finding that you don't have a matched pair. You can't possibly believe that you lost another sock, but then you start to wonder where this one came from - hence the "I don't know." I like that you can hear the voice in this haiku as well. You can almost hear the frustration of the author as they realize they have a sock that doesn't match the others.

Cox's ability to co-create stories with the reader from her haiku is truly unique. Among the many haiku poets we've read this semester, the only poet I can relate Cox to is Peggy Lyles. Lyles' author preface in *To Hear the Rain* states, "I think of them [haiku] as open-ended and open-handed poems, capable of receiving, being, and giving all at once. Expressed in simple language, they invite the reader to participate as co-creator." Her mindset is very similar to Cox's and you can see that as I compare the two authors below:

school desk
one name carved
deeper than the rest

Cox, *Tea's Aftertaste*, 40

lingering heat
the third-grade classroom
one desk short

Lyles, *To Hear the Rain*, 30

The first haiku is yet another example of how Cox writes haiku that allow her readers to mold their own story from her writing. This haiku reminded me of elementary school, where you were bounced around from class to class, and never really had your "own" desk. Kids would doodle on them with markers, put gum underneath, and even carve things into the wood with pencil. Whenever I sat in a new desk, I often found

myself wondering who the artists behind these doodles were. In this haiku, the last line, “deeper than the rest,” makes me assume that whoever carved this name wanted someone to see it. Maybe it was carved and not just written on the wood because the writer was angry? Maybe this carving was the writer’s cry for help? Readers can imagine multiple different story lines for why the name was carved in the wood deeper than the rest.

Similarly, the second haiku by Lyles demonstrates how the reader is a co-creator to the story of the haiku. I love how she sets the scene with the first line. Then the specificity of the third-grade classroom, so the reader is able to create a specific image - maybe to their old third grade classroom. Lastly, the third line offers a spin on the story. Why is there a desk missing? What student used to sit there? Where is that student now? Based on Lyles' hints about the weather, I would assume it's the beginning of the school year when there is still summer heat. The story I created leaves a desk missing because that student has passed away. You can see as you compare both haiku, that the last line dares the readers to discover their own story, making it relatable to each and every reader.

It is clear that Cox has a love for ambiguity, as she writes haiku almost as if to ask the reader, “What do you think happened?” This is why I love Cox’s haiku. They evoke emotional responses that allow me to use my own experiences to create a wonderful story. In Cox’s *Tea’s Aftertaste*, she challenges her readers to “enter the moment and uncover it for yourself, using your own memories and experiences.” Reading her haiku is accepting the challenge and boy do I love a challenge.

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Works Cited

Cox, Aubrie. *Tea’s Aftertaste*. Decatur, IL: Bronze Man Books, 2011. Print.

Lyles, Peggy. *To Hear The Rain: Selected Haiku of Peggy Lyles*. Decatur, IL: Brooks Books, 2002. Print.