

The 2025 Heliosparrow Haiku Frontier Awards

The Haiku Frontier Awards seek to present and praise leading-edge poems and poets illuminating inspiring directions in haiku poetics. These annual awards include poems published between March 2024 and May 15, 2025. Our four judges are:

Donna Fleischer (haiku, alterku/various)
Jennifer Hambrick (haibun)
Sabine Miller (haiku)
Richard Gilbert (haiku, alterku/various)

A preliminary comment on our results—

Note that commentaries have been written to accompany many of the works (see below):

In the “haiku” category, top awards go to:

Michelle Tennison ([First Place](#) prize; four haiku selected in total)
Peter Yovu ([First-Place](#) prize; two haiku selected in total).

“Top 10” Winner’s Circle

These winners are:

Shawn Blair, Lee Gurga, Jennifer Hambrick,
Michelle Tennison, Matthew Markworth, Scott Metz,
Victor Ortiz, Rich Schilling, Peter Yovu.

In the haibun category:

Sabine Miller wins [First Place](#), [Third Place](#), and [Fourth Place](#) awards.
Diana Webb wins [Second Place](#) and [Fifth Place](#) awards.

These two poets have swept the category. Haibun Judge Jennifer Hambrick has written extensive commentaries on their poems.

In the “alterku/various” category (works that extend the haiku form):

Sabine Miller wins [First Place](#)
Cherie Hunter Day and Grant Hackett win and share [Second Place](#)
Jennifer Hambrick wins [Third Place](#)

In addition to the ranked judging categories, we have crafted a new Award area:

Special Awards for Innovation. Look for these below. In haiku, we have instituted the “New Sciences” special awards: John Pappas is our outstanding poet here.

Please note that for each category, published poetry by a judge of that category was left out of competition; as well, no works or judging results were shared by judges outside of their judging category. Also note that links to the original online works are provided, and these indicate the date of publication. (Richard Gilbert)

Heliosparrow Haiku Frontier Awards 2025

— Haiku Section —

Judges: Donna Fleischer, Sabine Miller, Richard Gilbert

Top 10 “Winner’s Circle”

First Place: Michelle Tennison

<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/37-5>

bomb shadow of oneness

I experience the generalized bomb-image as a silhouetted miasma in Plato’s Cave, seen through the eyes of the enlightened philosopher.

I imagine the Los Alamos scientists working in the shadow of Brahma splitting the cosmic lotus; this poem finds its ground in an intuited and edified monotheism that understands all phenomena, even bombs, are light-and-shadow expressions of the one breath.

But also: this bomb is the bomb falling today, in June, casting its shadow on dragonflies and gazelle, on bakeries and playgrounds, right next to where I stand on the blue dot.

Ghandi said, “The implication of *ahimsa* is that when all violence subsides in the human heart, the state which remains is love. It is not something we have to acquire; it is always present, and needs only to be uncovered.”

Wake up. —SM

An atomistic haiku, by brevity and image, there is an almost total conversion of matter (word stuff) into energy (boom). Consider how “shadow of oneness” looms, invades, presages, and dooms. The creepy double entendre of oneness—and its shadow—that might unite us at any moment in no dance at all of death. —RG

First Place: Peter Yovu

<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/04/39-5>

honeycomb of time
bees that turn
transparent as they dream

These bees are a swarm of *maya*, the force that the Advaitins say creates the cosmic illusion that our phenomenal world is real. They are also the thousand winged sons of Somnus, Roman God of Sleep. The honeycomb is the mass of frenzied neural cells, Shakespeare’s “seething brains” of “lovers and madmen.”

Or they could be bees and wax, players in the mundane theater of transformation of nectar into honey, a variety of honey transparent enough for this poet’s light to shine through for us, his lucky readers. —SM

“As they dream,” transparent— Near the ancient Pythia in Delphi is a museum housing the Omphalos of Delphi: “A carved, oval-shaped stone believed by the Greeks to mark the center or navel (*omphalós*) of the world.” It’s a beehive object housing swarm energy and its treasure of eternal, incorruptible, honeyed gold. The hive shape is surrounded by a woven-net pattern, a cosmic network, carved over two thousand years ago. These bees dream-weave time, a dance of transparencies; considered sacred and connected to the divine, it’s said the second temple at Delphi was constructed entirely by bees—its priestesses sometimes referred to as Delphic Bees. The *omphalós* hive reflects the sacred status of bees as intermediaries between human and divine realms, the center after all of being: origin of all myth, itself a myth. —RG

Second Place: Scott Metz

<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/129>

with. The exception
of the realistic. Flower
in. The center

Everyone should try starting a sentence “with.” It is so hard: with. “The exception”/of the realistic—no *perhaps* about it. “with.” “Flower in.” Absolutely! “The center” (“the center” contains its own period, though hidden by bursting petals). The stop-starts cut; dream cuts through dream, knifelike. Broken bold like a fireworks in utter incontestable bloom. —RG

Second Place: Jennifer Hambrick

<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/131>

the pulse of this night bleeding sunset

Rhythms of heartbeat in the blood coursing through sky. In the thicker layers of atmosphere all the shortwave blues and violets, Rayleigh-scattered, create the dramatic “bleeding” effect, though the color here is closer to harsh; pain on sunset strip; the dark embrace. A poem of emotion and drama pulsing in living beats. —RG

<p>Third Place: Michelle Tennison https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/36-6</p> <p>in this world where everything eats everything a red flower</p> <p>Some moons ago I read “nature is a feast of sacrifice.” All the meat, bone, and blood, rivenrun. To bring just this red-drenched flower. The pain and joy in eros, born of death upon death for all of us, flowers too, bitter-sweet. —RG</p>	<p>Third Place: Rich Schilling https://heliosparrow.com/2024/05/10-29</p> <p>an octave below the dead leaves a sea of stones</p> <p>The environmental sculptor Andy Goldsworthy said of his snaking wall installation, “Stone River”: “It will bring together the stone’s geological and social nature... I like the relationship to the past life of a material—of one hand placed upon another.” The synesthetic layers in this poem echo Goldsworthy’s vision: sound, decaying vegetable, immortal stone, each placed in and on the other. —SM</p>
<p>Fourth Place: MatthewMarkworth https://heliosparrow.com/2024/04/6455</p> <p>diagnosis eve . . . unpersonifying winter stars</p> <p>Waiting for test results can be a time of heightened perceptual focus; in this way it is like a holiday, except it’s more of an inverse, or underworld holiday, in which the shadow of the trope is the thing itself, faced naked. The immanence of one’s death/personal winter strips the stars— which often symbolize guidance, hope, or eternity— down to their starker, lonelier essence. Jung says of this mythless state/world: “[there is] no true link either with the past, or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society.” —SM</p>	<p>Fourth Place: Victor Ortiz https://heliosparrow.com/2025/04/51-3</p> <p>salmon spontaneous singing berry blossoms wild</p> <p>The trochaics swing through this world springing across space like flying squirrels—the words leap, a rushing stream, vibrantly. The wild singing spontaneous; berry blossoms salmon; singing salmon wild; singing berry spontaneous; this poem can be read every which way, and the raw aliveness of nature felt—even Nature herself. — RG</p>
<p>Fifth Place: Shawn Blair https://heliosparrow.com/2024/11/7091</p> <p>deep within a memory the diamond stylus</p> <p>There is a perfection to a memory gestalt—a crystalline etching of moments in feeling, in a compositional frame that speaks to everything of that then; yet also of what we are, to remember “just that.” The conceptual metaphor here is the unreachable “deep within” that arises as shadow or triangulation—a “third” abstract figure, more distant than the gestalt memory or that song spun on vinyl. There is a beauty to the moment that may make it so perfectly memorable—this poem guides us and reminds us. —RG</p>	<p>Fifth Place: Lee Gurga https://heliosparrow.com/2024/11/3-77</p> <p>wren song mending my epitaph</p> <p>The image here, austere simplicity of a tombstone + one bird, is all <i>wabi</i>. Also: the “wren” anticipates the soft “en” in “mending.” Also, the garbled nature of a wren’s run-on song suggests a kind of scrambling of the sense of finality we ascribe to our human deaths. After I die, the earth keeps earthing on my grave. And the words denoting my death, though they may be engraved in stone, are not the end of the story either: the earth’s “words” (is the wren seducing a mate?) repair. <i>The poetry of earth is ceasing never.</i> —SM</p>
<p>(continued)</p>	

Honorable Mentions (all shortlisted:)

<p>Jennifer Hambrick https://heliosparrow.com/2024/09/122</p> <p style="text-align: center;">veiled shore the foreign accents of our shadows</p> <p>The choreographer Crystal Pite says “conflict is vital;” its energy and the speech it generates, when engaged with skill/love, can be a kind of expansion or growth. This poet doesn’t shirk from exploring the many facets of human relationship, and I feel understood and supported by the metaphors— foreignness, shadows, and veils— in this unflinching poem. —SM</p>	<p>Mona Bedi https://heliosparrow.com/2024/06/4-60</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ebb tide what the moon leaves behind</p> <p>Earth’s principle of periodicity teaches what this poem envisions in 7 words from Mona Bedi in the shape of that original fertile crescent of Mesopotamia, of herstory before erased-coopted by his story, when there was only interdependence of interrelations among moon and tide, fertility and menstruation, the back and forth of 28-day cycles of beginnings and endings contained within each. Kudos! —DF</p>
<p>Susan Yavaniski https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/4-69</p> <p style="text-align: center;">deep in the woods the instinctual pardon me</p> <p>At first I see lady’s slippers and the brain-like whorls of ferns and other beings that remind us of ourselves and that might elicit an etiquette impulse. But what about the modifier, “deep”? Deep enough that stepping on a pebble awakens feelings of interconnection? —SM</p>	<p>Peter Yovu https://heliosparrow.com/2025/04/33-7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">F-35 overhead my shadow bleeds poppies</p> <p>The F-35 was deployed in Afghanistan from 2018. Striking through cloud cover with stealth and precision, military leaders later described its psychological effect as having created a sense of unpredictability and vulnerability. As such, the shadow in the poem may indicate an advance in shadow-stealth technology. And, “poppies” bleed along with human shadows. This poem limns the landscapes of new kinds of war. —RG</p>
<p>Michelle Tennison https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/40-</p> <p style="text-align: center;">in a desert I’ve never seen a white datura</p> <p>And a third thing unseen is the human imagination apprehended in this poem that literally centers itself in a white datura centered on the second line of sight; datura originating in the Hindi language, land of the gitas, upanishads, indra’s net of a multidimensional universe of jewels reflecting themselves and one another in the whole, datura being also a hallucinogenic form, not seen but experienced nonetheless. And the way the poem opens like a flower. —DF</p>	<p>Rich Schilling https://heliosparrow.com/2024/09/11-29</p> <p style="text-align: center;">a thousand birds still words to grow wings</p> <p>I’ve never stood below migrating Sandhill Cranes or Snow Geese, but I know I’d be overcome if I did. In this sublime poem, speechlessness is full of longing for union + expression, that is, flight. The rhyme and alliteration here is a kind of flight for the tongue: say it: <i>words... birds... wings</i>. —SM</p>
<p>Jacob D. Salzer https://heliosparrow.com/2024/09/13-24</p> <p style="text-align: center;">a single flame in forest darkness the scent of ink</p>	<p>In the darkness of childhood, dream worlds, and actual forests, there’s no separation between flame, ink, and fragrance. Words emit particles as do trilliums and earthworms and igneous rock. That the flame is “single” imputes the sense of oneness along with the eliding syntax. —SM</p>

Special Awards for Innovation	
<p><i>Award for Micro-narrative (1):</i> Shawn Blair https://heliosparrow.com/2025/03/3-79</p> <p style="text-align: center;">while we were gone a fog touched all our belongings</p> <p>What is the “fog”? The easiest answer is that something happened to the “we” on the journey that fogged “our” eyes. Or: nothing happened to the protagonists, but the ordinariness of things struck them newly upon their return. The fog is also concrete and very Edward Gorey or Hayao Miyazaki to me, perhaps creeping in as a blob-like creature whose only distinct feature is its long fingers. —SM</p>	<p><i>Award for Micro-narrative (2):</i> Sam Calhoun https://heliosparrow.com/2024/12/2-93</p> <p style="text-align: center;">earth burned all night sending postcards to the stars</p> <p>What are the postcards/embers telling the stars/embers about ephemerality? About climate change?—SM</p> <p>An interesting choice, to send snail mail, even if metaphor. There are likely pictures on the postcards, Rome or Florida, perhaps. We were here. And it really was like this picture for a time. —RG</p>
<p><i>Special Award for Musicality:</i> Cherie Hunter Day https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/19-12</p> <p style="text-align: center;">tongue-tied raven the night calligrapher’s arrow</p> <p>Say it three times fast, in the dark, softly enough for raven the night to hear.—SM</p> <p>It’s a story that must be read to learn more and readers want to know! What shocking events have caused the raven, most shrewd and vociferous of birds, to be at a loss for words? Or is the raven made of ink, its figure felt to swirl—embarking from the leading edge of the pen. The arrow seems to lead further onward onto the white blank of the page, an unfinished music. —RG</p>	<p><i>Soulful Ecosphere Prize:</i> Carissa Coane https://heliosparrow.com/2024/08/2-86</p> <p style="text-align: center;">benthic requiem a bruise that aches down to my marrow</p> <p>The benthos—plants, animals, and microorganisms that live on, in or near the bottom of any body of water, like clams and insect larvae—are a primary food source for mammals. Mammal marrow fluid contains blood stem cells and other components essential for blood cell production. As without, so within: the bruise the poet feels as apposite to their deaths is “down:” at the bottom of the physiological cascade that maintains her inner balance. Billions of cosmic organs sound the requiem, enough vibration to bruise all of our marrows, even when we choose to stop up our ears. And then, like after any good short poem, silence: healing, flow. —SM</p>
<p><i>Orbital Geometry Award:</i> Michelle Tennison https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/33-6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">four winds in the maple traveling around the sun</p> <p>Oh my, the wind, Aeolus, Greek god of Winds, which/who inspire, that is, breathe into, travels 'round the rooted maple, carrying molecular exchanges of photosynthesis with each unfolding of each leaf; and we breathe within this orbital cycle of life. Swept up, away by the unflinching simplicity of this creation, this poem. Thank you. —DF</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>New Sciences</i></u></p> <p><i>The following works present poems relating to computation, theoretical physics, AI, etc. in a novel light. The Special Awards below highlight and hopefully lend further visibility to this category of increasing social and aesthetic interest.</i></p>
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<p><i>Hitchhiker's Guide Prize:</i> John Pappas https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/16-19</p> <p>asymptote's edge the barely blue of snowdark</p> <p>The haiku immerses the reader in a subtle and paradoxical scene: a boundary (asymptote's edge) representing infinite approach yet never arrival, paired with a nuanced sensory experience (the faint blue of snow, illuminated in darkness). The asymptote metaphor reflects a condition of yearning, striving—perhaps emotional, intellectual, or spiritual. The edge signals a perceptible but unreachable border. The “barely blue of snowdark” adds a visual and emotional mood that is quiet, cold, and ambiguous. The blue insinuates calmness, distance, or melancholy; snowdark suggests a frozen, obscure environment, neither fully lit nor fully dark—an in-between state. This ku evokes a moment of liminality and delicate tension: the space where understanding or goal remains forever out of reach, within an ambiguous, shadowy, yet subtly beautiful environment. (<i>perplexity ai</i>, with help).</p>	<p><i>Networked-Intelligence (IIT) Prize(1):</i> Richa Sharma https://heliosparrow.com/2024/08/4-65</p> <p>contextual intelligence a frozen tree raises my head</p> <p>The term “contextual intelligence” has been used recently to refer to systems that adaptively interpret situational data for user interactions, personalization, and operational efficiency, particularly in AI applications and robotics. Despite the seemingly static (even bleak) condition (the frozen tree), the ku inspires the narrator to “raise my head,” hinting at awareness, perception, emerging hope, or new understanding. (<i>perplexity ai</i>, with help)</p>
<p><i>Networked Intelligence (IIT) Place (2):</i> Lee Balmeo https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/7504</p> <p>th3r3 1s m1sc0mmun1c4t10n with1n th3 st4rry f4br4c 0f th3 un1v3rs3</p> <p>I love the l33tspeak! (leetspeak, “leet”) Interesting that <i>perplexity</i> doesn't distinguish it from native English. We have now become the digital-analog cyberpunk beings of William Gibson's dystopian imagination. —RG</p>	<p><i>Quantum Entanglement Prize (1):</i> John Pappas https://heliosparrow.com/2024/07/14-20</p> <p>crumbless now a forest of decision trees</p> <p>In the context of data science and artificial intelligence, “decision trees” are models used for making choices or predictions. A forest of them (like the random forest algorithm) represents many options or many paths through a problem. Clarity in complexity; harmony amidst multiplicity. “Crumbless”: so, perhaps nothing is left behind, no remnants, nothing scattered or wasted; perhaps suggesting something intact, unfragmented, or undiminished. (<i>perplexity ai</i>, with help)</p>
<p><i>Quantum Entanglement Prize (2):</i> John Pappas https://heliosparrow.com/2024/07/15-21</p> <p>deep in eeldark the plainsong of wetware</p> <p>“Eeldark” is a rich, invented or poetic word—evoking the slippery, shadowy darkness where eels dwell: watery, liminal, mysterious depths. It conjures a setting that is both literal (deep underwater, obscure) and metaphorical (the subconscious, the unknown, the complex recesses of the mind or systems). “Wetware,” a term from computing/AI, meaning the biological components of a system (the brain, the living mind). Contextual intelligence as emergence: The poem might evoke how, even in the tangled, obscure depths of complex situations (eeldark), the most basic patterns of comprehension (“plainsong”—simple, grounded understanding) resonate from our organic minds (wetware). (<i>perplexity ai</i>, with help)</p>	<p><i>Quantum Entanglement Prize (3):</i> Joshua St. Claire https://heliosparrow.com/2024/08/9-39</p> <p>sunlight shattered by a peacock's feathers many worlds</p> <p>What a total moment of apperception and perception held by this happening fan of a peacock's colors rainbowed splendor that even sunlight itself in its endless nano prisms is shattered, split apart, like the atom; these many, nay countless worlds of which we are. Such beauty! —DF</p>
<p>(continued)</p>	

Special Award for Translation

Vladislav Hristov

<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/12/10-34>

front line
the soldiers who
no one can assemble

Vladislav Hristov

<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/12/9-42>

fluffy clouds
one shaving foam
for the whole war

The neurochemical changes that occur with trauma can bring into the foreground things that our brains usually let slip, like a cloud. Here, this cloud—fluffy, comforting—is as useful to the soldier’s psyche as shaving foam is to his face. And the salvation is in the ephemerality of these twin objects, one above and one below. Impermanence is a soldier’s religion. — SM

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Heliosparrow Haiku Frontier Awards 2025

—Haibun Section—

Judge: Jennifer Hambrick

Haibun Rankings

First Place: “The Subjective” Sabine Miller (<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/22-14>)

Also: The Embodied Poetry Award

Second Place: “Out of the Air” Diana Webb (<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/06/44-4>)

Also: The Mirror Award for the Critique of Human Nature

Third Place: “And Drifted Away” Sabine Miller (<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/19-13>)

Also: The Metaphor Award

Fourth Place: “Travels with Scarecrow” Sabine Miller (<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/04/18-16>)

Fifth Place: “To warmer climes” Diana Webb (<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/55-3>)

Also: the Epistolary Award.

Special Awards

The Mirror Award for the Critique of Human Nature

“Out of the Air” Diana Webb

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/06/44-4>)

The Interpenetration Award

“The Architect’s Plan” Diana Webb

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/06/42-4>)

The Ekphrastic Freedom Award

“Water for my stain” Diana Webb

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/07/48-2>)

The Epistolary Award

“To warmer climes” Diana Webb

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/10/55-3>)

The Metaphor Award

“And Drifted Away” Sabine Miller

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/19-13>)

The Embodied Poetry Award

“The Subjective” Sabine Miller

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/22-14>)

Anthropomorphism Award

“Fairy of the lilac” Diana Webb

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/03/57-3>)

The Orpheus Award

“Waaaaater the little boy said” Diana Webb

(Special Award for Musicality)

(<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/65-3>)

(continued)

The Subjective

For seven days, an embryo's mouth rests on its heart.

A poem from that first silence when the spine gently lifts them apart.

rose-colored mountains
when we were seeds
in the garden of Babel

the smaller petals
like terrace steps
deep into the rose

front-row seat to the knitting together of a new human body in the very same depths that nurture this person's poetic spirit and give rise to a poem. Person and poem are fused at the cellular level. The haibun's two haiku open up to a wide shot of the earthly context—rich in metaphors of growth and flesh—for the gestation, with mountains contrasting mightily with seeds and a rose opening and offering a deep dive to its tender heart.

There's a bit of confusion about "the garden of Babel," which I take to refer to the storied Hanging Gardens of Babylon, though the reference could be an inadvertent conflation of the biblical Tower of Babel and Garden of Eden. Regardless, this haibun is a poem of place whose locus—the womb—far transcends in awe that of any town, garden, or tower. The embodied perspective of this haibun explores sacred and mysterious terrain that in the English-language haiku/haibun realm is far too often rejected as uncomfortable and undesired subject matter. This reality is perplexing, given that everyone comes from the womb, and trying to wrap the mind around our shared origin in this place is as legitimate a part of the universal human experience as is delighting in daffodils and butterflies. Indeed, in its profound mystery, it is arguably more awe-inspiring. In this sense, this haibun is an important one: it joins the work of courageous poets who, in the face of resistance, have explored the terrain of the female body and the rich emotional and psychological experiences inextricably connected with it, amplifying the twin mysteries of human procreation and artistic creation that merge seamlessly as metaphors for this place that once nurtured us all.

Out of the Air

Flowers I noted en route to the polling station.

Alcanet, blue as an unpolluted sea.

Dandelion seed heads, spheres that children use as clocks, with most already blown away.

So who to vote for? The poet John Clare who wrote 'I love wild flowers', and 'my friends forsake me like a memory lost'.

from tip of a pen
poised in the asylum
how words fly free

natural resources in the pursuit of wealth and power? The poet John Clare threw in with the wild flowers, not with humankind in general, and not even with his friends. Those friends, Clare tells us in his 1848 poem "I Am," forsook him, speaking volumes about the disappointing limitations of the human mind and soul when it comes to how we treat each other. Near the end of The War to End All Wars, and amid the wondrously lyrical surges of vibrant nature imagery in Sara Teasdale's poem "There Will Come Soft Rains," Teasdale wrote, "no one would mind, neither bird nor tree / if mankind perished utterly." The concluding poem of Webb's haibun alludes to the more than two decades Clare, a victim of psychotic delusions, spent in mental health asylums, where he penned "I Am," among other poems. While under care, Clare

First Place and The Embodied Poetry Award:

"The Subjective" by Sabine Miller

Researchers of human development place great weight on uncovering how the patterns of physical development *in utero* influence physical, psychological, intellectual, and emotional experience during life outside the womb. In a fresh twist on the trope of haibun-as-travel writing, "The Subjective" takes the reader into the womb inhabited by a human in the earliest days of development. This person's mouth and heart are intimately connected, and the haibun's prose tells us that the person's first utterance—still *in utero*—is a poem, transmitted through the neural pathway of the spine materializing between heart and mouth. We have a

Second Place and The Mirror Award for the Critique of Human Nature: "Out of the Air" by Diana Webb

This haibun, which could be read merely as a random thought-moment *en route* to voting, is actually subtly making a deep point. That point is that nature often offers the world better options than do humans, when it comes to what or whom to believe in. Would you place your bet on the appearance of wildflowers each spring, or on the promises of politicians? Would you rather see a world in harmony with the eternal cycles of nature refreshing itself, or continuing on the path of exploitation of people and

was separated from society and grew immensely as a poet, his poet's soul and mind communing in an emotional safety rare in the world at large. Clare may not have had many visitors. But each year the alcanet and dandelions returned.

And Drifted Away

Ignorance launched the boat. Ignorance of what?
Of itself. Wrapped in translucent skin.

blue noise . . .
paper folded in-
to the shape of you

the concluding haiku suggest is made of paper. Ignorance sets itself in motion, launches itself onto unspecified waters that carry it along a current to—wherever. And doesn't ignorance work just like this? Loosen it from the moorings of intentional learning and critical thinking and ignorance will drift along wherever the wiles of the world may take it, revealing itself ("translucent skin") to all who see. In the concluding poem, the fresh image of "blue noise," the hyphen at the break between Lines 2 and 3, and the final line, which holds a mirror up to each of us, stick the dismount.

Third Place and The Metaphor Award: "And Drifted Away" by Sabine Miller

This haibun establishes a sharp metaphor with effective economy of means. The title could have been the second phrase in a first sentence reading, "Ignorance launched the boat *and drifted away*," and so cleverly prefigures the action of the mini-narrative by way of disjunction. Ignorance is the tenor of the metaphor, and the vehicle is the boat, which

Travels with Scarecrow

You could watch those cliffs forever.

I am watching those cliffs forever.

baptism of mist
when we were young
mountains

consecrated
in snow the thin floating
pines

Fourth Place: "Travels with Scarecrow" by Sabine Miller

A clever and deftly insightful conversation with a scarecrow—the speaker's offhand utterance, "You could watch those cliffs forever," is met with the perfect response from Scarecrow, who, on its post, can do little else but "watch(ing) those cliffs forever." The two poems that follow offer a tour—hence, travels—of the scene, with nature images that blur the lines between human and non-human nature—"baptism of mist," "when we were young mountains," the pines' state of being "consecrated in snow."

Fifth Place and The Epistolary Award: "To Warmer Climes" by Diana Webb

Recall the days when people would take trips and send friends and family members postcards bearing pictures of luscious beaches or breathtaking landmarks. The idea was that the sender longed to share with the addressee the experience of being in this distant place. "Wish you were here" became a postcard cliché. This haibun returns to the type of intimate prose that could have been handwritten on a postcard. "I'm sending you this," begins the prose, which carries a nostalgic tinge and has the feel of reaching back decades from the speaker's present moment in the adult world to younger years. Recollections of a previous date nearby, with memories—of swans, a chippie, a chalk-speckled beach—still as clear and vivid as the perpetual sparkle of sunlight on waves. In the concluding poem, mixed with the ocean's roar are echoes of a schoolkid romance, as the remembered moment takes us to a classroom with an old-style chalkboard bearing etchings of a bird and a heart. As much as this haibun suggests friendly reminiscence, beneath its lyrical imagery and intimate tone lies a tender subtext of reconnection. Such is the power of a sweet letter penned just for you.

The Architect's plan

Percy enchanted his paper boats with a skim round the rim of kingfisher blue in a spell to shape-shift his soul. He saw the sky in the pond and the pond in the sky. Air and water as one and the halcyon bird as three in one as sunlight struck in a flash of vision. He could see his fate in the origami knowing his essence would soar through the tip of a sail.

skylark spirals
myriad tinted fragments
gleam transparent

The Interpenetration Award:

"The Architect's Plan" by Diana Webb

In his essay "[Skinning the Fish: Interpenetration in Haiku](#)," Jim Kacian describes interpenetration in haiku as a "level of connection with the subject [that has] deepened, beyond sympathy ... to empathy." "Empathy," Kacian

continues, “is *identification* [my emphasis] with the other, and an actual taking on of the intellectual and emotional reality of the situation.” In “The Architect’s Plan,” Percy, the protagonist, plays with his paper boats, entry points into his imagination that set his mind free to experience sensory perceptions blurring into each other across space: “He saw the sky in the pond and the pond in the sky. Air and water as one and the halcyon bird as three in one.” All of what in the second line of prose is described as the “shape-shift[ing of] his soul” culminates in Percy’s taking flight—perhaps both metaphorically and literally. The skylark in the concluding poem could well be Percy himself.

Fairy of the lilac

It would hold a fragrant trace of some *je ne sais quoi*
each droplet of which would rivet a footstep before
the next overtook to glide beyond like a miniscule
bead on the thread. This is the thread that would
lead to the long-lost creature. My designer costume
would be a layered cobweb of beaded thread
tinged with a waft from a flower that’s gathered in
spring. The thread would appear to emanate from
the weave and when caught in a certain rainbow
light the dominant colour would be somewhere
between indigo and violet, lilac. This outfit the
mirror of the cocoon that enwrapped me for far too
long.

scuttled away
the spider
a fairy in disguise

from hiding. The concluding haiku suggests a fusion of the speaker’s self with the spider described bit by bit in the prose and, as the poem describes, scuttled away, as spiders so often are. The reader is left potentially to understand the speaker in the haibun as the spider, a metaphor for the overlooked self. A deft breaking of the proscription against anthropomorphism, this haibun is also commendable for its narrative restraint and on-point fairy-tale imagery.

Water for my stain

A matter of choice for some. The river Jordan
perhaps or somewhere local, fed by a sacred
spring from deep within the earth. If you’re a
baby it’s just pot luck. A font in the parish
church or in one case the stoop in a Chapel
that’s both a tourist site and a place of
pilgrimage where once the Virgin Mary is
said to have appeared. Grandma did it
surreptitiously in desperation while atheist
husband looked elsewhere. No need for a
priest and I don’t need one either. The view
from this window enough for me and the
music of streaks of rain as they strike the glass.
The flow of the moment.

rose petal
in a glint of sunlight
the drop in its well

Note: Ekphrasis from Vermeer’s *Woman with a Water Jug*, with title from Sonnet 109.

The Anthropomorphism Award:

“Fairy of the lilac” by Diana Webb

One in this author’s series of haibun inspired by the costumes of fairies in the Prologue of Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Sleeping Beauty*, “Fairy of the lilac” is a clever envisioning of self in cinematic, fairy tale terms. The costume described in this haibun is hypothetical: “It *would* hold a fragrant trace of some *je ne sais quois...*,” the prose begins. It then gives the reader a mysterious tight shot: “each droplet” of *je ne sais quoi* “would rivet a footstep before the next overtook to glide beyond like a miniscule bead on the thread.” A bit more of the story is revealed two sentences later: “My designer costume would be a layered cobweb of bead thread tinged with a waft from a flower that’s gathered in spring.” Then, in a slightly wider shot, the lilac of the title returns: “The thread would appear to emanate from the weave and when caught in a certain rainbow light the dominant colour would be somewhere between indigo and violet, lilac.” The idea of “the mirror of the cocoon that enwrapped me for far too long” reveals the speaker’s longing to emerge

The Ekphrastic Freedom Award:

“Water for my stain” by Diana Webb

The challenge of ekphrastic poetry is to go beyond merely offering a reading of the artwork to tell a story even possibly quite distantly inspired by it. The story Webb tells in “Water for my stain” is an unexpected take on the simple scene in Johannes Vermeer’s painting *Woman with a Water Jug*, which inspired the haibun. The scene depicts a woman standing near a window, resting one hand on a water pitcher and looking at or through the window while the other hand opens it. In Webb’s hands, this scene is the prelude to a bespoke self-baptism. No need for the River Jordan, a local stream will do; no need for a priest; no need for a church or chapel overrun by tourists. How each person connects with the divine, by rights, can be unique.

(continued)

W a a a a a ter the little boy said

slipsilver flow of the river in ripples a flee of a
fingertip slide and a shatter each smithereen free
in release of a runnel.

kingfisher mercuries aquamarine a shimmer to sea

The Orpheus Award for Musicality:

“W a a a a a ter the little boy said” by Diana Webb

The unexpected language—“Slipsilver flow of the river,” “a flee of a fingertip,” “a release of runnel”—delightfully suggests a child’s uncontained joy at playing at the seaside. Even more delightful are the alliteration and assonance rippling through the prose: “flow of the river in ripples a flee of a fingertip slide and shatter each smithereen free in release of a runnel.” The concluding haiku is a welter of visual images—kingfisher (the bird and also the shade of blue), aquamarine, and shimmer, and the transformation of “mercury” into a verb crackles with freshness. The anapestic rhythm of “kingfisher mercuries aquamarine” bounces the haibun to a splashy conclusion.

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— Alterku & “Various” Section —

Judges: Donna Fleischer, Richard Gilbert

<p>First Prize Sabine Miller (prose-poem/haibun) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/04/24-14</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sanctuary</i></p> <p>Alone in my wandering listening to the walls</p> <p style="text-align: center;">rats like pieces of flint from the road</p> <p style="text-align: center;">rats peppering this paper house</p> <p>Whose circle of need have I squared? windmills abandoned to the wind</p> <p>I didn't build the house to watch it burn, but the fire was a worthy flower.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">it exhales with me the reservoir in the mirror</p>	<p>This poem walks the road of this linear and spherical world in its cadence, rhythm, diction, and couplet form; it walks as human with a soul companion who listens and speaks in the concluding couplet with its mystical haiku. Yes, I argue this poem to be a haibun for these aforementioned reasons, and one that prefigures and anticipates the most of what we know of the sub-genre so far from Bashō. How? It enters into a complete mystical state of being as seen in the Bhakti poets, most closely, Lal Ded, it travels via soulfire which bursts the confines of the visible, sensory world into the ten-thousand footsteps of present light as experienced in the poems of charlie mehrhoff, the contemporary American carpenter-mystic. Now, with this poem, Sabine Miller creates something new and entirely inclusive, like Whitman, Blake, Jabès, mehrhoff, Lal Ded — worldly, otherworldly. It is a supreme honor to witness this truth, this beauty, and to say “Sanctuary” already accomplishes the highest award for blazing a new path for all of us. —DF</p> <p>The reality of rats in walls, rats “like pieces of flint”—already in the grey zone of fever dream or being spooked, the spacing of stanzas like gaps in time, in loss felt, in “whose”—I feel the loneliness of the modern condition; yet too, the Quest: all of history underneath the novel, our inner Quixote tilting. In finale, a new element, most scathing of all, limitless fire flower? Goodbye to all that—almost—the one pure source being seen/unseen. —RG</p>
<p>Second Prize Cherie Hunter Day (visku/alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/21-14</p> <p style="text-align: center;">t hespa ngleofl iesatthep eripher yofwa r</p>	<p>Cherie Hunter Day's poem shapes and forms. It transubstantiates or transliterates ocular vision in the physical sense from within our entire human psychic raison d'être to survive into the force to make war, that is, to conquer by shaping the horizontal axis of the immanent human eye into vertical metal in an elliptical shape or spear that also reflects its origins in elemental fire in the shape of a flame. We apprehend how it begins with a single line of one alphabetic consonant, / t / as in the tip of a spear and widens into alphabetic letter jumbles only to narrow again to that last single line consonant, / r /, the last alphabetic letter in the word, war. The end. It mirrors western epic literature as we know it in Gilgamesh and The Iliad; even tips its spear point to itself as visual poem echoing chants of war in the babble of phonemes. Far fetched? Consider the unconscious. —DF</p>
<p>Second Prize Grant Hackett (alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/31-11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">keeper of the solitary soul permit me space among the flocks of this earth</p>	<p>Rainier Maria Rilke in a nutshell. A prayer where the addressee is this poet who keeps solitary soul with the flocks of this earth and knows to keep vigil with their own solitude in order to pursue the great work. An honorable bow to this poem. —DF</p> <p>Written with the broad breadth of a deep soul. —RG</p>

<p>Third Prize Jennifer Hambrick (prose poem) https://heliosparrow.com/2024/09/125</p> <p>still night drops beats heavy in hollow thoughts slip to the past you carve light into the darkness mark time in incantations wrap your mouth around these words I am the phantom song you sing</p>	<p>For this reader-speaker this is a lexical sound poem that visualizes; it shapes musical ambience (think Brian Eno who composes color with sound via repetition into form) with the first line repeated pronouncement of sibilance (think sybilance of chant, of oracle) of the serpentine hissing phoneme / s /. A shift into darkness, the beginning, creation beginning and ending in the rhythm of night into day, perpetual, word. A reminder to read aloud. —DF</p>
<p>Third Prize Grant Hackett (alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2024/02/haikoan-16</p> <p>who hasn't an eye that refuses light and helpless blood in their breast when shall our honey smell faintly of death</p>	<p>Perhaps to bring the timeless back into time, in form via the lexical contraction 'hasn't' and in content with the semantic element of honey inscribed with dead wings, undeliverable pollen. Smell (note, not scent, too elegant a word), of death in life; otherwise the syntax of line one would be Biblical; big G God is not speaking in this poem but little g god, perhaps mythical orpheus, keeper of bees, returned from darkness, doomed to eternal vocalizations without his eurydice. When shall we today realize and be moved to change from the smell of death we bring in our cups? A deft, oracular poem! —DF</p>
<p>Honorable Mentions (all shortlisted:)</p>	
<p>Grant Hackett (alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/32-10</p> <p>my hands cry out all night in their sleep dawn rises with a hole in its palm</p>	<p>Visual, tactile, aural: a surreal synaesthesia, wounds and a plea, memory flown with the resurrection. Empathy for this cutting pain, who cried out all night, and through those searching hands—towards what in the night, and for why? Inchoate, grief; hand and palm of dawn too—with emptiness at the center shot through. —RG</p>
<p>Grant Hackett (alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/05/27-9</p> <p>life leaves its artist's mark small, red — then weeps that i live, bled</p>	<p>There is at the outset the novel “life leaves” and too the neologistic “artist’s mark”—I check my forearms hastily to see. No, but where then? Small, red, weeps, bled; that kind. “Weeps that I live” is all-encompassing; tragedy, yet necessity—which is tragedy, in essence, or would seem so, at the time. It is an artist’s statement; the poet marked by the poem. —RG</p>
<p>Scott Metz (alterku) https://heliosparrow.com/2025/02/128-2</p> <p>desert. Ice to the point of cubism. And its lover</p>	<p>Desert heat Mirage. Each word in this alterku bequeaths the next; two end stops employed strategically within the lines instead of at the 'end' which remains endless in this poem returning to begin to turn toward end to re-turn to begin and so forth. Ice on the individual level of perception when heat stroked we see what is not there, see what we project shaped into a third-dimension repeating itself at different angles! So the lover is the heat-desire of the desert. Animism. All alive and shifting and transforming as the action that is to love. Art amazes! —DF</p>

Victor Ortiz (prose-poem, alterku)

<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/02/31-8>

am
a
part
that
sparks

backward
walks

a day
away
as
far
as

half
way

Stray moments, fragments, haphazard-walk through the page lane almost like bowling, rolling, dancing along, with the near-rhymes. But there is also a message in code, something a precocious child might compose that adults aren't able to read, as the Sphinx riddled Oedipus on his way to Thebes. Her lesser-known riddle is: "There are two sisters: one gives birth to the other and she, in turn, gives birth to the first. Who are the two sisters?" You can google it or ask your pet AI, but the answer probably is: "a day away as far as half way." Unbelievably, this is within an eyelash of the key. It's best not to answer too correctly, lest the Sphinx kill herself; though to be wrong? is to be eaten as a rule. This poem is the spinning coin landing precisely on its edge. —RG

Scott Metz (alterku)

<https://heliosparrow.com/2025/03/136>

we

see

we
want

to
see

the
vers

i

on

our
selves

Immediate thoughts arise, of Pessoa, Portugal's great modern poet, who wrote "How hard it is to have eyes and see only the visible!", wrote Alberto Caeiro in the English translation from the Portuguese, *The Complete Works of Alberto Caeiro* by Fernando Pessoa. How? Why? The poem looks to be a mirror repeating the vowel / e / throughout, as in eyes and, yes, phonically the i's, too. It is a duality of an imbalance of ego, to use Freud's blaze for one of the tripartite members of the psyche we try to escape. This poem by Scott Metz is. —DF

(continued)

Peter Yovu (sequence)

<https://heliosparrow.com/2024/08/20-12>

On the runway, early. The sun goes right through the plane.

Kids at play. One squeals. And doesn't know it.

Jug band on the street. His Adam's apple angular, the guy playing washboard.

Rush hour. People streaming into the subway on a downdraft.

So many strangers. A big face painted on a van smiles by.

Rose buds. The music the empty clay pots made when tapped.

Hillside cemetery. The child on my shoulders glimpses the sea.

The downpour stops. Butterflies return, most of them white.

Threw a rock in without thinking a fish jumped.

Might I call this 9-line poem “totally with it”? What is the it? Not anything out there & not anything in there. What could be there but what is here. Time and space non-linear in this poet's hands; these dimensions, instead, like Gertrude Stein's pre-Cubist, that is anticipating Cubism, lines, are as spherical as the natural world. Jump on at any point! There is no center, no binary, no narrative. How freeing it is to read these freed lines, poetry free of a central man of diamonds to sum it all up as in a Wallace Stevens poem, the title forgotten long ago. Girded by the rhythms of the day in morning sunlight, school recess, playground children, buds, graves, the sea, summer in a downpour over as suddenly as it began, mostly white butterflies out again, from where? The same place where the fish jumped at the suddenness of a tossed rock; from some somewhere between this and that, these and them, the indiscernible by eye, the all of it made effable in poetry, in Yovu's “observations” made with all five senses as one and that altogether one, soul. Thank you, poet, poetry. —DF

A marvelous poem of haiku-extension, the full stops shape each subject: a disjunct pause in each line stops time or the mind, briefly. And the poet arrives, flying into a city, catching snapshot glimpses and presenting them cinematically, it turns out to be a journey with a purpose, ending with roses, at a cemetery. With “the child on my shoulders”; the environment shifts suddenly to time, history and family. And another shift: in the last lines the world speaks from inside out, ending in presence. All of life expressed one timeless breath. —RG

(finis)