

Michel Pleau

The Light of Haiku

I didn't write my first haiku poems. I simply lived them.

I was eight years old when a poem was written in me for the first time. But first, I have to look back at that solitary child that I was, feeling bored in a yard in the Lower Town of Quebec City. That child is sitting at the top of the stairs and looking at the brick walls, the neighbours' clothes lines and the little patch of sky above his head.

The child doesn't know it yet, but he will soon encounter poetry. In fact, his parents have succeeded, after a lot of effort, in renting a cottage on the banks of Lorette River. This will be the most wonderful summer of his life. The wonder at the changing solitude of the moon, the discovery of the wind in the trees and in his heart, and the beauty of the sun that glides lazily over the water like a canoe. I finally found myself in the presence of what really counts.

So it was in the summer of 1972 that began, without my knowing it, the slow work of poetry. It felt so good to write without putting a single word on paper! I lived in the writing of the trees, I played with the words of the wind. I heard, in the song of the birds, the music of the poem. I finally named life for the first time. Each thing found its name and I discovered, with emotion, my own name in the world. I turned over stones and an entire life that I knew nothing of was revealed to me. I loved those insects frightened by the light and that very special smell of what has slept for a long time in the night. I adored digging the earth, hoping to discover a few treasures forgotten by the Indians or else an old book come from the night.

Until that summer when I was eight, I had the impression that I was mostly living with my eyes closed. But I didn't want to sleep anymore! An all-encompassing light, from a very distant history, was once and for all opening its arms to me. Now I was the one, using a magic formula, unfortunately forgotten, who made the sun come up! Each morning was a little miracle of the word. I imagined a secret union between the words and the light. I would discover much later, especially thanks to the practice of haiku, that this link really exists.

In my collection *Soleil rouge* [red sun], I tried to say the origin of words

*I listen to the wind
in the forest
I hear the word wind*

and I quoted as an epigraph these magnificent words by Philippe Jaccottet taken from a poem entitled "Le travail du poète" [the work of the poet]:

*watch like a shepherd and call
everything in danger of getting lost*

I echo the words of that great Swiss poet and hope (but perhaps this is only an illusion) that my little haiku will save, from oblivion and loss, what seems to me to be the real world. I write to see life: its beauties and its mysteries. It was Gaston Miron who said, "Poems are the eyes of the poet." I would add, "the haiku opens the gaze." The reader of haiku does not ask the poet to have talent. He asks him to see. Since, after all, we are living in a world of the blind. Many still have closed eyes and occupied minds.

But fortunately, the haiku throws light on shadowy areas of existence. It throws a strange net over the world to gather in a forgotten light. I believe that the work of the poet of the instant is not to say, with beautiful words, what everyone sees but rather to reveal what exists and what our eyes no longer see. There was a time the history of humanity when we "saw" a lot more than we do in our era. Men and women knew how to observe and interpret many signs in nature. They knew, for example, how to read the sky. But who, these days, looks at the sky and its poetic lights?

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