

June 15, 1971

179 East 70th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Olau san:

Thank you for letting me see your haikus. I received them Thursday morning, went through them rapidly, and that evening had a chance to discuss them with Henry Kauterman.

He told me he had already taken two for H-W, and wanted a third, "Surprise".

Friday my wife and I went to the country for our first long weekend, and I went over there carefully with her. Naturally, she has had a long experience in haiku-reading, and I consider her judgment even better than Henry's.

The result was another proof that there is no accounting for Taster. Her favorite was the "Rainsops", mine the "nothing but snow." Admittedly, this is an old subject, but you have given it a new and excellent twist,

Incidentally, Leroy did not want it because he said it "sounded like Hackett". I can't see the cogency of this reasoning, because it is my belief (and generally accepted) that Hackett is responsible for some of the finest haiku ever written in English.

However, I don't suppose you sent me your haiku just to be told which ones various people liked. (I liked them all - naturally, some better than others - because I felt that in all of them you had something to say.)

At the risk of being professorial and "patronizing" I am going to write a bit about Technique - partly because I think you want me to, and partly because I know I want to,

There is a "rule" in haiku Technique - to me a very important one - "Never use any unnecessary word". I have not time to go into the reasons for it here, but in two of your haiku you disregarded it, and I would like to point out the effect this had on the reader - in this case, me.

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In the "housefly" poem the word "stubborn" is unnecessary. (If he "keeps on returning" he must be "stubborn".) (a) I, the reader, am being told your judgment - I am not being allowed to put myself in your shoes and make the judgment for myself, as you did. (b) By having my attention directed primarily to the character of the fly, everything else - the dog, the heat, etc. - are driven into the background. I am sure this is not what you intended.

In the "autumn rainfall" poem "fallen" is unnecessary. It must be "a fallen leaf" - no need to emphasize the fact! Here the "fallen" does not confuse or mislead the reader; it simply takes up needed space. In "picture" haiku, like this one, the sharper the picture, the better the reader can "identify". Here the particular kind of leaf does affect the experience. I shall remember this poem, but unless you prove to me I shouldn't, I will think of the last line as "a wincing leaf." (Perhaps I am influenced by Shiko's:

" Favored by us all / turning to such loveliness /
red leaves that fall. ")

Your one-line poems strike me as embryonic
haiku - somehow not quite complete, I will go
into this later, if you wish, BUT, only on the
condition that you feel free to challenge any statement
or proposition I may make - or, for that matter,
any I have already made. In other words, that
you will not be "polite" to a much older man.
It is my firm conviction that in haiku there can
be no generation gap.

With all best wishes, and hoping to hear
from you again, I am

Yours most sincerely,

Harold G. Henderson