

ROBERT SPIESS MEMORIAL HAIKU AWARD COMPETITION FOR 2014

As a memorial to Editor Bob Spiess, who died on March 13, 2002, Modern Haiku sponsors the Robert Spiess Memorial Haiku Award Competition. I am grateful to Modern Haiku for the opportunity to judge this contest, which is one that is close to my heart. Many fine poems were submitted to the 2014 contest and I give thanks to all the poets who entered. The winning haiku are of exceptional quality and closely follow the spirit of this year's Speculation from *A Year's Speculations on Haiku*, (Modern Haiku Press, 1995):

After the awareness of a haiku moment, the poet must select and arrange the words of the haiku in such a manner that when the haiku is read or heard, the words arouse or evoke in the reader/hearer those immediate feelings that the poet had. The art of haiku is that of the haiku poet's feel for words, the selection of the absolutely appropriate words and the exact positioning of them.

First Prize: Ernest J. Berry

alcatraz manacles of kelp

The surprise of the haiku moment is readily apparent when reading this one-line haiku chosen for First Prize. The haiku's peculiar yet absolutely appropriate word choice and those words' exact positioning closely adhere to the Speculation. The first word of the haiku refers to Alcatraz Island, now a recreational area but for many years the site of a notorious twentieth century prison. The "manacles of kelp" evoke an image of the fate that awaited those inmates who attempted to escape. The phrase also transports the reader/hearer into the present as this same image is viewed by today's tourists. This haiku reminds us, as Faulkner wrote, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

Second Prize: Carolyn Hall

quince blossoms
he stops
the chemo

I awarded this quality haiku second prize because it follows the Speculation's dictum that the poet's selection and arrangement of words not only mirror his/her experience but evoke or arouse the same immediate feelings in the reader or listener. The six words of this haiku make for a powerful reading while at the same time evoking a strong emotional response. The unusual phrase "quince blossoms" is paired with the more-widely encountered "chemo." The feeling of helplessness is muted by the action of choice ("he stops") and the promise of quince blossoms. The haiku beautifully illustrates the fragility of human existence, the humanity and strength of free will and the near-eternity in the cycle of nature.

Third Prize: Kristen Deming

alone now
no ruby slippers
to take me home

This third-prize haiku presents a twist on the universal feeling of loneliness by adding a touch of dark humor. The second line, originating in the film classic *The Wizard of Oz*, but now incorporated into the modern lexicon, adds depth to the haiku. Loneliness echoes in the melody of the haiku's resonant "o's," is mediated somewhat by its alliterating "r's," and ironically reinforced from first word ("alone") to last ("home"). The Speculation is met as the reader feels the poet's mature acceptance of her/his fate.

Honorable Mentions (ranked):

thousands of feet of darkness above us sleeping swifts

John Barlow

This haiku depicts the force of one's limitation when viewed through the prism of the natural world. The haiku contains two primeval images, "thousands of feet of darkness" and "sleeping swifts." The poet's insertion of the phrase "above us" between those two images puts human nature right where it belongs, in the middle of these natural forces.

lullaby
meteorites flash
beneath heavy lids

James Chessing

Many haiku use the word "baby." In this haiku, a baby's presence is deftly suggested in the first line. The link of observation "beneath heavy lids" and imagination "meteorites flash" distinguishes the poem and infuses it with a strong sense of intimacy.

tall grass a hand drowning in snow waves

kjmunro

In this one-line haiku the choice of words presents an atypical image of heavy snowfall early in the season. The allusion to Stevie Smith's poem, "Not Waving but Drowning" gives this haiku an added depth.

For this year's Robert Spiess Memorial Haiku Award Competition, there were 340 entries from 81 poets in 9 countries.

Roberta Beary, judge
Billie Wilson, contest coordinator