

The Prize Winners of the Hokku Contest Their Poetry and an Analysis of It

by the Eminent Chinese Poet
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Most Charming Mr Editor:

I am overwhelmed! I am humbled! I am snowed under! I said in my heart "There is no poet"—"There may be five poets"—"By the favor if Shang Ti, there may be ten poets." And lo! there are more than five hundred poets! And they are all good poets! Only alas! They are many of them all too good! They are inspired with sacred flame. Their genius bears them aloft upon the snowy peaks of poesy; they will not be bound in the ring-fence of the rules of a competition. Sometimes they scan beautifully, but not in the particular rhythm required. Sometimes they do not mention the magic towers of Downtown; sometimes they forget the Sunset; sometimes they omit the poor little lover man with his troubled heart. Sometimes they write beautiful poetry about something altogether different. Oh! it is wondrous, this nation in flower! It is like the poppy-fields in my beloved Yuunan; it is like the iris gardens that are about Daibutsu at Kamakura!

Look! Here is perfect poesy, the soul of the Hokku. You must all hear it; there is nothing better; it is like a smile kissing a tear upon the cheek of Our Lady Quan-se-on!

The rose petals fall—
The red petals of my heart—
Oh the breath of love!

Oh how bitter
Is the White Poppy Death
There are no more dreams of love.

The pale moth
Trembles with the white moonlight;
Thus my heart trembles with love.

How happy am I to evoke such music! It is so faint, so delicate, so subtle, yet so strong. I quite swoon. I am back in the flower glades of the Salween! But alas! It has nothing to do with our appointed Hokku!

One gentleman frankly refused to compete. This is how he expresses it:

What do you say, sir?
Grind out Hokku in August?
Me for the trenches!

It has been a very long and a very delightful task to judge these hokkus. But the hokku must melt in the mouth like a lichee, and it must be terse and tense and comprehensive like the commentary of Kwang Tze! So if there were even a grain of dust to mar a dactyl, was the masterwork set aside. You must be careful, my friends, with the dactyl! Even in the best of all the hokkus, there are double consonants after a short vowel, and that makes it long. Here is a hokku by M. Foster, 300 West 49th Street, New York City:

"Pinnacels, question
Crimson waters of sunset!
Does she deceive me?"

It is an idea very hokku-worthy. The poet takes nature into his confidence. But the "sq" in line one slightly lengthens the vowel; and so does the "fs" in line two. Yet all the ideas are in this and no others—oh! how diffi-

cult it is to keep to the text, and to concentrate, and to write in bliss all these ideas! Then is J. R. Foster, 30 Irving Place, New York City—are these perhaps twin brothers ardent in art, or beautiful sisters?—with this:

"Monoliths—true love!
Sunset-fury of passion!
What is she thinking?"

This is very perfect writing of the physical and the moral. But still "*liths*" is too long. We cannot make complaint about "*f p*" in the second line, because "*of*" is almost ellipticized in speaking.

Also there is Nerissa Bathurst, 50 West 94th Street, New York (second prize), with this:

"Towers of passion
Glowing red in the sunset!
Heart of my darling?"

Only the "*of p*" can be objected to by the most purist. The idea is delightful, too; the towers are her aspiring thoughts to God, colored by love. The jealousy idea is given (oh how subtly!) by the question-mark. This is real economy!

My Editor, you have a kindly heart, even for the poor exile of Yuunan! You will not put on him the cruel task of deciding between these admirable poets. It is to distinguish between perfections—and is it not written "The perfect and the perfect are one perfect and not two—nay, are none!" We have decided to award first prize to M. J. Herzberg, of 914 S. 19th Street, Newark, N. J., who writes:

"Heavenly fingers,
Flushed with delicate blushes,
Tear not my bosom!"

Alas! the "my" is very long, because it must be emphasized; and so is the "not" before the "m."

But in judging hokkus, or indeed any flower of the pen, one must pay due attention to the thought it contains as well as to the form in which it is expressed. And in this example, it is very hokku-worthy that the poet should think of the towers as the fingers of his love, and of the sunset as his heart.

Honorable mention must be given to Mrs. Mary Bishop Todd, Richard Florence, E. A. Bache, Nina E. L. Lanich, Carolyn Wells, Robert Redfield, Harriet Hawley, and Nelson A. Kellogg.

In view of the extreme interest excited by this fascinating competition, we have decided to offer another theme. Please note that the very strictest attention must be paid to meter; all ideas given in the theme must be brought in, and no others not so given may be introduced; the ideas must be indissolubly connected, and finally all this must be done in the allowed seventeen syllables. Competitors may send in as many attempts as they like. They must reach the Editor of *Vanity Fair* by October 20th. The prizes will be the same as before, ten dollars for the best hokku and five dollars for the second best.

The theme is as follows: *A girl in a garden is hesitating between love and duty. She sees a bee alight upon a rose. She decided, influenced by this omen, and expresses her thoughts in a hokku. What does she say?*