

# Haiku Economics: Little Teaching Aids for Big Economic Pluralists

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Abstract: Haiku is a distinguished (if short) form of poetry with roots dating back to 17th century Japan. Poets understand that haiku is the most efficient form of economic speech. But technical efficiency is not the only or even the main goal of writing haiku. Haiku clear a trail for enlightenment and stimulate open discussion. A wide variety of poets, from Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) to Richard Wright (1908-1960), have practiced writing haiku simply to improve their own powers of observation. To date, haiku and economics have not been explored together, and certainly not at the level of principles. This article introduces a new field of inquiry, "haiku economics," and offers tips on how to start the journey in a classroom setting.

Keywords: haiku, poetry, pluralism, efficiency, economical writing, Jeremy Bentham.

# Haiku Economics: Little Teaching Aids for Big Economic Pluralists

By Stephen T. Ziliak<sup>1</sup>

*The prophet and the poet may regenerate the world without the economist,  
but the economist cannot regenerate [the world] without [the poet and the  
prophet]*

Philip Wicksteed, *The Commonsense of Political Economy*, 1910.

Haiku is a traditional form of poetry enjoyed by people from all walks of life. Haiku poetry is simply *adored* (you may have heard) by Japanese courtiers, North American beatniks, and sticky-fingered schoolchildren. “They’re so little” is one of the first things you’ll hear people say about the tasty golden nuggets. Haiku *are* small. Haiku are so small that, conventionally speaking, a poem is complete after 3 lines of 17 syllables, arranged in the serial order 5-7-and 5 again—about the length of one human breath.

Concision of expression—maximization of meaning—is essential. In a bamboo hut or 5-star hotel, from Tokyo, Japan to Kingston, Jamaica, the budget constrained haiku speech writer has an economic problem to solve. If Discipline plus Vision is his Spiritual Guide, Thrift plus Relative Price is her Budget Director.

The bush warbler  
in a grove of bamboo sprouts  
sings of growing old                      (Bashō, n.d., Hamill 1998, p. 92).

In the economy of language, the haiku poet seeks to minimize the cost of effective communication or signaling: endowed with only 17 syllables, every color, sound, and image counts.

The problem is: so many words, so little space. What to do? Haiku poets tend to solve this problem by clicking on images found directly in Nature (bush warbler, bamboo sprouts) while pointing allegorically to some other realm that counts—the realm of *emotions* associated with “growing old,” for example, or—to name a realm that *really* counts—*economics*. Consider this haiku for bears and bulls:

On Golden Gate Bridge  
content in this other world  
a grasshopper sleeps.

Haiku can make a big splash with a little verse. But people are right. Compared to prose writing and other lyric verse, the haiku budget constraint is *tight*. Count the syllables—5-7-and 5 again. That’s it—*that’s* your haiku budget constraint. In haiku you have to

check your bank account while crying or laughing up a storm. Sounds rough but that's the rule. For example, "the invisible hand" is only 6 syllables; it is not a complete poem.

Not every poet plays by the rules. Haiku emerged as a distinct art form, with both an oral and written being, in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan (Henderson 1958, p. 1). Anarchists and beatniks, geniuses and blusterers, wave ancient haiku rules—the 5-7-5 rule included—if doing so will help them tell a truth or lie (even better). One observes in history a little deviation around the 17-syllable mode (Harter, pp. 172-3, in Higginson 1985; Hamill 1998, *passim*). A modern text with examples is *Desolation Angels* (1965, p. 66), by Jack Kerouac:

The sound of silence  
is all the instruction  
You'll get

In Kerouac's darkly beautiful haiku, a sacred lie about "instruction you'll get" (or so an economist would say), the syllable count, the count of natural sounds when said aloud in English, is 5-6-and-2—for a total of 13 sounds or syllables—four short of the total allowed by the haiku budget constraint.

Beginning writers of haiku are advised to take the haiku budget constraint as given, following strictly the 5-7-5 rule. Odds are good you'll find a way with haiku, as many before you have found a way, if at first you'll stick to the 5-7-5 rule (see, for example, Wright 1998 and Knight 1986).

The first haiku master was Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), a samurai poet who took his name from a banana tree a gift he got from a student and under which he once lived (*bashō* means banana tree in Japanese; Hass 1994, p. 5). Bashō looms large in Japanese culture and by now he appeals in the history and philosophy of poetry, aesthetics, and criticism worldwide (Barthes 1982, pp. 69-70). Bashō is more than a great spiritual leader and artist; like Verdi in Italy, he's a folk hero and something more, something deep and of the people: a haiku poet who wrote about the economy.

In the typical Japanese household Bashō is the favorite traveling prophetic monk, the one to be certain to tell the children about, the mythically perfect model of ascetic gentry, a mortal Buddhist Shakespeare, a person to imitate. Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827) is a "much-loved poet" (Hass, p. 145). Issa is vulnerable, he's seemingly American familiar; unlike Bashō, he wears his emotions like a string of pearls or ice cream shop break-up tattoo. People tend to see in Issa a close-up view of their selves and of the world they believe they inhabit. Yosa Buson (1716-1783) is best-known for painting haiku with words and words with color. Bashō? I won't say he's worshiped. But some people—economists, for example—devote entire vacations from work to better understand his inner life—his journey, his discipline. Pilgrims follow closely in Bashō's peripatetic footsteps, walking as he did on footpaths around the island, Edo to Kisagata, sleeping under luxurious electric banana trees, sipping Starbucks tea, and flipping through Bashō's journals to find a blooming cherry tree at the next trailhead on the journey—a medieval *Let's Go Bashō* (Hamill 1998, xxxiv-v, sketches some of the routes).

To date, the mutual and competing principles of economics and haiku have not been explored (Ziliak 2005, 2002; Ruccio 2002). In truth, there is little reason to doubt

that these seemingly disparate arts and sciences converge more than they collide at the level of principles. Three and half centuries of history—on top of plain logic and fact—are affirmative: ultimately, *haiku economics* is its own justification. In fact, in the early dawn of haiku poetry, Bashō himself prepared haiku for hungry workers in the rice economy, people he met on the journey. For example (Bashō, n.d., in Hamill 1998, p. 130):

The young farm-child  
interrupts rice husking to  
gaze up at the moon

Astonishingly, the learned Bashō used haiku to celebrate seasonal cycles of work, song, and food, while linking the three to—believe it—the birth of culture (*ibid*, p. 10):

Culture’s beginnings:  
from the heart of the country  
rice-planting songs<sup>2</sup>

#### Haiku History and the Haiku-Economics Connection

Haiku is a bigger phenomenon than you might realize, and it is loved and valued by great poets. Certainly there is a commercial market for haiku, great or not.<sup>3</sup> Recent best-selling books of haiku at Amazon.com include *Haiku for Jews*, *Haiku Baby*, *Gay Haiku*, *Hipster Haiku*, *Redneck Haiku*, *Baseball Haiku*, and *Zombie Haiku*. What insights, tools, and values, if any, can haiku bring to an economist? What, if anything, can economics do in return for haiku?

Some say not much. Over in the English Department, a teacher claims that writing haiku isn’t suitable employment for her colleagues in the Economics Department, and I agree with her. Hey y’all, don’t quit your day job. But don’t quit on haiku, either. Competing professionally in the 100-meter dash isn’t “suitable” for people like you and me, who (it pains me to admit) run rather slowly when compared with Jamaica’s Usain Bolt. But the fact that most of us couldn’t earn a dollar in a race against Bolt doesn’t mean that our hearts don’t benefit by occasional, spontaneous sprinting across a hilly or flat terrain. *Haiku economics* is like spontaneous, analytical sprinting across the economic plane. It cuts to the logical and spiritual chase of the circular flow, and at a low and constant marginal cost of just 17 syllables.

Making econ work  
in seventeen syllables  
saves Slutsky some time.<sup>4</sup>

The appeal of haiku to economics is obvious. For one thing, the efficiency of the haiku form is unrivalled in economic speech. The super-tight budget constraint which is holding you back in haiku is more than off-set by a boundless freedom to wander. Haiku is spiritual, respectful, observant, scientific, wild, conservative, amusing—a thing to

memorize by heart, and to recite with others, aloud, or sometimes louder, in a classroom perhaps, or at a poetry slam, at a Parisian café or possibly in a prison yard in the state of Indiana or on a mountain pass in the northern interior of Japan.

The first efficient speeches were delivered not at the annual meetings of the American Economic Association but at the all-night drinking parties of medieval Japanese poets. For about ten centuries prior to the century of haiku, Japanese poets (such as Bashō) found occasions to gather together to write long lyric poems, called *renga*. Haiku is the first verse of a *renga*—a linked and often comic verse, collectively written, measuring in length from several to hundreds of stanzas (Hass, pp. 299-307). At a *renga* party, you write one stanza and then pass the *renga*-in-progress to another poet; he writes a stanza or short-link below yours and the pattern is repeated. (Witnesses claim *renga* parties could last until the next day's cocks' crow or the *sake* ran out—whichever came first.). Typically a *renga* began when a “master” or other special guest wrote and recited a verse in the familiar 5-7-5 form. But until Bashō, poets did not treat the opening verse as a poem complete unto itself.<sup>5</sup> Until Bashō and other poets began to study Zen Buddhism, vulgar satire and amusement of the court sufficed for haiku subject matter.

Haiku became competitive, too, and different schools of haiku thought emerged (Henderson, pp. 9-19). By the late 1600s, haiku had become a widely popular artistic outlet, reaching across different class, occupational, and ethnic lines. Haiku first came to English speakers in a big way via Ezra Pound and the symbolist poets, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and, beginning in the 1950s, via a wide variety of spoken word artists, fast talking salespeople, and students of Zen. (Some decades ago, R. H. Blyth's four volumes of haiku and haiku history were on everyone's bookshelf, from Allen Ginsberg's to Richard Wright's [Higginson, pp. 58-9]; today his impressive books are mainly of antiquarian interest.) Haiku output seems to move counter-cyclically with changes in GDP, war, and health, and pro-cyclically with changes of season.<sup>6</sup>

The haiku spirit is an anti-authoritarian spirit—another appeal to economists. In haiku, however, the fist goes up faster, the spirit is high and ever-present, and antonyms such as “pluralism” and “methodological individualism” acquire meanings rarely observed in economic prose (Ruccio 2002, vi; Barthes 1982, pp. 77-80). Like the discipline of economics, haiku answers only to itself, its final subject. In Zen Buddhism, and thus in classical haiku, there is no Creator-being, no Heavenly God (at least there is no god higher than Adam Smith or Karl Marx) to report to or worship. Nature and humans are not “fallen” (Hass, xiii-xv) as they are in Christian, Marxian, and Malthusian mythologies; Nature, like man, just “is” (cf. Macintyre 2003). “The moon and the sun are eternal travelers. Even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home” (Bashō, “Narrow Road to the Interior,” in Hamill 1998, p. 3). There exists no higher plane of existence than the journey called “home”—a poet on a journey is no more present or eternal than a potato leaf in a village field. (Classical haiku is in this sense radically egalitarian.) Perceived experience is said to be transient, contingent, and phenomenal; scarcity is as basic to the journey as is illusion, and all living things—including crickets, silkworms, and egos—are said to suffer and give. In the haiku economy even “cripple flies” have to pay a price:

Morning sun slants cell.

Drunks stagger like cripple flies  
On jailhouse floor. (Knight 1986, p. 17)

Haiku is a spirit summoning a moment into existence that was in some sense already there in Nature; it declares or amplifies or reduces a moment—and sometimes fossilizes it—*by virtue of a deliberate re-scaling of perspective*. Haiku paints a scene in a breath touching the transcendent.

The rainy season—  
bean vines clambering over  
the carpenter's shed. (Buson [1717-1783], n.d., p. 84)

The sudden thunder  
Startles the magnolias  
To a deeper white. (Wright 1998, p. 57)

Haiku is literal yet metaphorical, realistic yet allegorical, transient yet seemingly eternal and transcendental—so as to please or heal or educate the emotions. (Or maybe start a new *renga* party.)

Effective haiku transport meanings between this world and the others. The poststructuralist critic Roland Barthes (1982, p. 69) has said haiku involves “breach of meaning.” Consider, for example, the meaning of Knight’s “cripple flies” haiku, wherein the haiku attaches a fact (staggering drunks) with a false cause (the slanting sun). It’s as if the slanting sun is *forcing* drunks and “cripple flies” (what a phrase) to *get up* from the floor and *walk with a slant*. Knight creates this painful and, for him, true farce, in 17 syllables. (Knight was in and out of jail for many years, and he struggled with drugs and alcohol, too. He was in prison when he began to write haiku.)

Richard Wright’s magnolias haiku uses images from Nature to “take us” into a different set of emotions. “The sudden thunder” (a fact) becomes a false cause (and possibly human) when its clap bleaches white magnolias a “deeper [color] white.” Wright is creating fantasy, sure, as is Knight: flowers can’t “hear” sounds, and “thunder” is a sound. Sounds and colors *are* physically correlated, however, as any teenager, gang banger, or roller coaster rider knows; and humans frequently *do* grow pale when scared. As if magically, then, Wright’s haiku tells a lie about flowers to convey a truth about *humans*.

Don’t get bent out of shape about the rules and religion talk, discussed earlier; the haiku spirit is a free spirit, pluralistic and tolerant, end of lecture. Catholics and atheists agree. Indeed, none of the towering four figures of classical haiku—Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki—were rope-tied to the way of Zen. My own haiku master, the incomparable Etheridge Knight (1931-1991), was not in this world a saint (Knight 1986, pp. 37, 39). It’s the discipline and will to transcend ashes-to-ashes reality, both objectively and radically subjectively, which broadly and ironically appeals.

Remember:  
From ashes you came, and -  
to ashes you shall return.

Still, the Buddhist influence was strong, and to this day haiku poets try stylistically to achieve an impersonal perspective on Nature—free, for example, of individual ego—a form of enlightenment called *mu*. Sometimes—and I say this with deeply felt apologies to Stanley Fish, the late Richard Rorty, and other rhetoricians of “the mirror of nature,” such as myself—Bashō’s haiku dwell empirically on the surface of Nature alone with Itself (Bashō, n.d., in Hamill, p. 150).

A potato leaf  
awaits the harvest moon in  
a burnt village field.

As Sam Hamill (1998, xi), an eminent American poet and translator, has observed, in feudal Japan, and certainly in Bashō, “directness of emotion expressed without ornament set the standards [for the haiku] of the day.”

While the topics and philosophies of haiku have expanded and changed over time and space, its form has essentially remained the same: mathematically, precisely small. Haiku efficiency was discovered by Japanese poets around the time that Sir William Petty’s *Political Arithmetick* (1690) was first published. Despite Petty, double entry accounting, and what Yo-Yo Ma calls the “Silk Road Project,” this economy of language has not been closely explored.

*Efficiency* in haiku economics is defined as the ability to deliver maximum-impact stories, insights, and meanings at minimum cost. As Hamill says, “Zen [haiku] demolishes much . . . of literary criticism by pointing out that, . . . the surface is very deep; inasmuch as cause leads to effect, effect in turn produces cause” (Hamill 1998, xvii). The First Fundamental Assumption of Haiku Economics is: *Less is more and more is better*.

A spring sky so clear  
That you feel you are seeing  
Into tomorrow. (Wright 1998, p. 16)

The “spring sky” haiku which you have just read is one of thousands crafted by Richard Wright (1908-1960), the author of, among many other things, *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. Wright’s “spring sky” haiku is not exactly what I have in mind when I think of putting haiku and economics together into “haiku economics.” With it the author in exile was trying to free his self from a state of depression and to soothe chronic pains from physical illness (Julia Wright, in *op cit.*, Wright 1998, xii). But on a second reading, Wright’s spring sky haiku can be seen to resemble a martingale, which is a mathematical model, a mathematical metaphor, if you will, used by statistical forecasters in financial economics and other fields, including meteorology. With today’s total information (at time  $t$ ), Wright’s haiku says, “a spring sky” (a good day, a bull market) is “so clear” (it contains so much information, so much clarity, or, alternatively, so much good) you feel “you are seeing into tomorrow” (into  $t + 1$ ). Wright’s spring sky haiku makes for a better *today* by seeing blue skies for tomorrow; only 17 syllables, haiku has

more to give with less. In general, then, combining haiku and economics adds to the production possibilities of economic communication.

Thus the unique strength of *haiku economics* is its ability to deliver big stories, insights, and meanings about *economics and the economy itself*—at minimum cost. For example,

Invisible hand:  
Mother of inflated hope,  
Mistress of despair!

- which, when said aloud, I've discovered, both delights and disgruntles, depending on how the audience is feeling that day about Adam Smith's parable of the market order.<sup>7</sup>

Or:

Neoclassical  
economic scientist:  
old wine, new Skinner.

- a haiku “pun” or *senryu* (Hakutani and Tener, p. 255, in Wright 1998), merging the attitudes of the psychologist B.F. Skinner, a founding father of behaviorism, with an icy sociological interpretation of an old cliché.

Or:

Statistical fit:  
epistemological  
strangling, of wit!

- a rhyming haiku which will sound like blasphemy to an economist who faithfully confuses *statistical* significance with *economic* significance.<sup>8</sup>

Notice that each of these haiku ends in “surprise.” Surprise—particularly the surprise which comes through “irony”—is the haiku-poetry enlightenment maker. Typically a well-placed *kireji* (Higginson, p. 289) or *kake-kotoba* (Hass, p. 312)—a “pivot” or “cut word”—is what startles; it's the signifier creating the surprise. In the “statistical fit” haiku, the cut word is “strangling:” a non-statistical word is being applied (sarcastically) to statistical science. Strangling someone or something is one way to get a tight “fit” (a high *t* stat, a low *p* value) but not your hands around a scientific judgment of “how much effect” (Ziliak and McCloskey 2008). Cut words breach ordinary meanings—they take us into another world.

Haiku irony has a parallel in economic theory: in the irony of unintended consequences. Price controls don't actually “control” market prices: surprise! Import quotas hurt some of the same people the quotas are designed to protect: surprise! Government bailout programs increase the number and kinds of companies appearing to be “troubled”: surprise again!



Here's my "master trope:"  
Irony breeds anarchy  
Good law & order.

Fidel wears a hat,  
Unemployment, illusion,  
Fortitude, a glove.

In the warm April,  
before a morning shower,  
She strips her assets.

But haiku economics is useful for more than economic surprise and criticism. For example, haiku economics celebrates the dignity of labor:

Irish garbage man  
opens a blue plastic bag  
with a regal look.

From England to Jamaica, haiku celebrates the power and beauty of all our children while showing compassion for real human struggles:

Girl with wooden leg  
Kick-boxes comic villains –  
Hummingbirds rise up!

Corrugated steel  
fence links cap off prison wall . . .  
blackbird pecks at chains.

With crickets chirping  
no one notices how long  
a Rasta wears dreads.

Haiku can point to obnoxious pollution—negative externalities—in an otherwise beautiful space, such as the City of Chicago:

The dirty canal  
slipped a curvy finger up  
skyscraper canyon.

The strange plastic fruit  
Swinging from low standing trees  
Makes a worm vomit.

Haiku can size up just about anything, from dead cows and fake leather jackets to different schools of economic thought:

This Chinese jacket  
Sounds like mice crunching ice cubes.  
Dead cows yellow snow.

A futures market  
on “The General Crisis”  
sells short on the spot.

Immanent critique:  
Hayekian *kosmos* is  
Indirigible.

Beggar parasite  
on the voyage of the Beagle  
near a keg of gin.

The crow plucked the fruit,  
Miss Holiday, the sweetest  
Bird, gobbled a bone.

A law of Nature:  
“Philosopher finds a stone,  
Worm buries a fact.”

Hyde Park, Chicago:  
The twilight of the idols  
comes after frank night.

In other words, teaching haiku can contribute to the critical, emotional, and observational sides of our science.

But economists, me included, tend to be clueless when it comes to poetry. What follows is an amateur primer on Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> century English language poetry and economics. This is a necessarily short section, with no pretension of completeness. The goal is to explain how both disciplines fell into a rut, “The Victorian Divide.” I then present a little theory and additional analysis of haiku economics which together, I hope, can serve as a useful starting point for future art and discussion. In the Appendix I offer tips for new teachers of haiku economics.

The Victorian Divide, or: How Judge Jeremy Ruled for Divorce

To arts and sciences colleges, a big benefit of haiku economics is that it brings poetry and economics, the humanities and the sciences, back together again (McCloskey 1998, chp. 1). But division is still the norm, harming poets and economists alike. The

Victorians shouldn't get the last word on poetry and economics. We gave them the last word on crime, eugenics, and pornography, and look where that got us: *on-line*.

But seriously, judging from the economics of the average poem and the poetry of the average economics article, Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot, Bentham, Mill, Marshall and other long-stocking dead are winning. Currently it seems as if there is no relation at all between economics and poetry – haiku or other.<sup>9</sup>

Shaw married poetry to economics in plays and Fabian pamphlets long (some say happily) forgotten on both sides of the divide. The unusual G.B. Shaw died in 1950 which tells you, a reader in or after 2009, a bit more about the post-War supply of economic poetry. Like Ambrose Bierce one searches in vain for it in a deep, dark pit.<sup>10</sup>

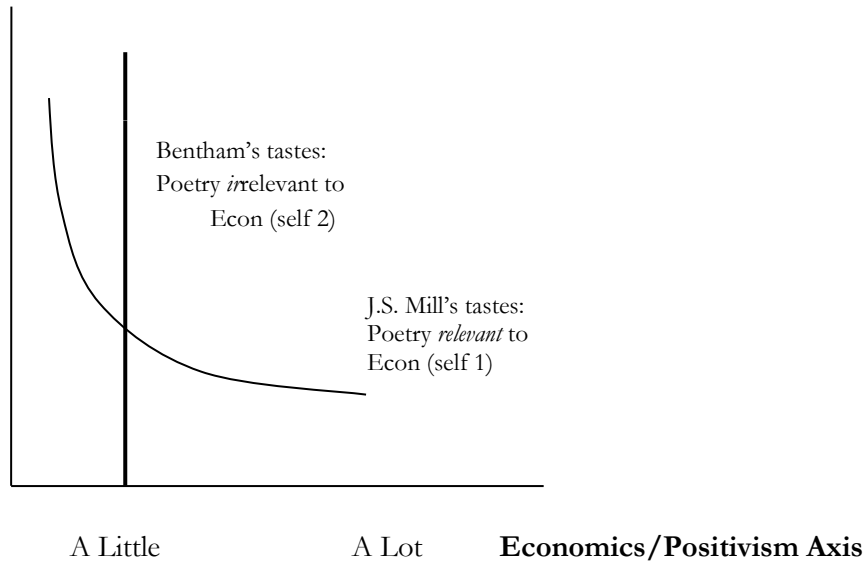
The gap between poetry and economics was widened and deepened years before by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the founding father of hedonistic utilitarianism—the stuff we teach. Bentham wasn't holding his nose when he compared poetry with “push pin” –a now antiquated children's game similar to today's “pick-up sticks.” But in truth it was piles and piles of poetry which Bentham refused to pick up or commend. Like the logical positivists of the century just passed, Bentham claimed that poetry has no positive role to play in economic education. Said Bentham:

The utility of all these arts and sciences,—I speak both of those of amusement and curiosity,—the value which they possess, is exactly in proportion to the pleasure they yield . . . Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either. Everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished only by a few. The game of push-pin is always innocent: it were well could the same be always asserted of poetry. . . . It is true, there have been noble spirits, to whom poetry and philosophy have been equally indebted; but these exceptions do not counteract the mischiefs which have resulted from this magic art (Bentham 1825, Book 3, Chp. 1).

Another perspective, indifference curve analysis, says that without poetry, or without some alternative way of reasoning about incommensurable utilities, ethics, political values, and tribal allegiances, an economist has a deep decision problem to solve. If she is a utilitarian, positivist, or “Blue Meanie” (from The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*), and especially if she is all three of these things, her indifference curves for poetry and economics cross and zigzag. Her split-personality, which is bequeathed, it would seem, from Bentham's own preferences, implies that her own utility function cannot be maximized. See Figure 1.

Figure 1  
 The Victorian Divide, as Seen by a Representative Economist:  
 Our Indifference Curves Cross, Forming a Values Gap

Poetry/Humanities Axis



{CAPTION}

Conclusion: Economists lack a Rational Way to Value Poetry and Economics.  
 As Shown by John Stuart Mill, a Divided-Self can't Account for the "Theoretical Indifference" to One's Own Feelings

Each indifference curve shows the various bundles of poetry and economics consumption yielding equal amounts of happiness to a rational haiku economist with stable preferences. On the convex or banana shaped curve of Figure 1 (self 1), bundle A Lot of Poetry/A Little Economics, high up on the left-side of the curve, yields the same happiness as the bundle A Little Poetry/A Lot of Economics, low down on the right side of the convex curve. On the vertical indifference curve (self 2), by contrast, A Lot of Poetry yields *no* additional happiness, regardless of the consumer's current level of either Poetry or Economics consumption, and heedless of relative price. Self 2 doesn't value poetry of *any* kind at *any* level. He resembles the character of Jeremy Bentham or of Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens's *Hard Times*: all counting, no sense. Self 2, in other words, is your average Ph.D. economist. He has lexicographical preferences: "Never mind Shakespeare," Self 2 says with Bentham and a grin, "I am a scientist."

Self 1 is a scientist, too, but he doesn't climb into a hole as Self 2 does when it comes to language, feelings, and imagination. Self 1 feels recognizably human. Our first self represents the preferences of the wiser and older J.S. Mill, for example, and of other poetry valuing economists, from Adam Smith and Charlotte Perkins Gilman to J.M. Keynes and Deirdre McCloskey, people we'd like to learn from. Sometimes it's optimal, our most literate economists agree, to educate oneself with Dante's *Inferno* or Dr. King's sermons or Richard Wright's *Haiku: This Other World*.

The cultural and cognitive divide is caused, I'm saying, by a second self which was foisted upon us long ago by Bentham, by the younger Mill, and by Marshall, Robbins, Stigler, Lucas, and that ilk—you know, by the sponsors of the votes in your department against the history of economic thought requirement. Self 1 is what most of us really want and need: "*Poetry, Yeah Baby, Bring it!*" we say; however, we feel forced by incentives and conformist sociology to act like Self 2 even when on vacation underneath a bamboo tree: "*Booo!*" our other self says, "*We Want Bentham! We Want Bentham!*" our second self, a real stickler, demands.

But the real problem we face is that our indifference curves *cross*—they're irrational, meaning that we can't determine our optimal bundle of poetry and economics demand. In the standard theory of the consumer a rational agent has only one self. Tastes are supposed to be consistent, transitive, and reflective of a utilitarian motive, "more is better." In the history of economics after Bentham's *Rationale of Reward* (1825)—and especially after logical positivism and Lionel Robbins' *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1935)—these assumptions about taste are strictly violated (Ziliak 2009). The two selves of a modern economist cannot be bridged by economic theory itself. Something additional is needed to fill the gap.

Since Victorian times, and especially after ideological Benthamism, we've needed an economic-art to bridge the gap between the two selves of an economist, between the seemingly disparate worlds of poets and positivists.

"If you were to trace the separation of art from life historically," the poet and haiku master, Etheridge Knight, explained to a colleague, "you would trace it back to the Greeks when Plato and others made the "head thing" the ideal—reasoning being the ideal—there was a separation between reason and emotion" (Knight, n.d., in Rowell 1996). "I think the Black Aesthetic differs from the European Aesthetic mainly," said Knight, "because it does not separate art or aesthetics from the other levels of life. It does not separate art from politics, art from economics, art from ethics, or art from religion. Art is a functional and a commercial endeavor. The artist is not separate from the people."

But utilitarian economists are by Knight's definition today's leaders of the separatist movement. Saying so does not excuse poets from accepting their fair share of the blame (and some poets don't want to be excused: see, for example, Bly, Hillman, and Meade, eds., 1992, and Hass 2007). Many "separatist" or "divisive" examples could be cited but the fact that *most* poets sneer mindlessly back at economics without reading any is made clear in a popular satire by W. H. Auden, "Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times" (1946):

Thou shalt not answer questionnaires  
Or quizzes upon World-Affairs,  
Nor with compliance  
Take any test. Thou shalt not sit  
With statisticians nor commit  
A social science.

Thou shalt not be on friendly terms  
With guys in advertising firms, . . .

Thou shalt not live within thy means  
Nor on plain water and raw greens.  
If thou must choose  
Between the chances, choose the odd;  
Read *The New Yorker*, trust in God;  
And take short views.<sup>11</sup>

Still, the current gap between poetry and economics cannot be explained by a lack of space for them. A full century before McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics* (1985), John Stuart Mill (1873) himself made a plea for putting poetry and economics back together.

Mill was trying to repair a problem which the former Benthamite and secret Horace-lover had helped to create: "From this neglect both in theory and in practice of the cultivation of feeling," Mill confessed in Chapter IV of his *Autobiography*, "naturally resulted, among other things, an under-valuing of poetry, and of Imagination generally, as an element of human nature" (1873, p. 94). Of the "most sectarian period of my Benthamism," the contrite man continued, "the correct statement would be, not that I disliked poetry, but that I was theoretically indifferent to it. I disliked any sentiments in poetry which I should have disliked in prose; and that included a great deal. And I was wholly blind to its place in human culture, as a means of educating the feelings" (p. 95). "Imagination" and "human nature" are no small matters, the older and wiser Mill is saying, and minus poetry both are put at risk.

Mill knew. Around the age of 20, conflicting ideas and feelings in a man with no training on how to handle them led to his famously dissected nervous breakdown. As a self-described "traditionally conservative" philosopher has recently observed:

This breakdown, described in Mill's remarkable "Autobiography," was in part a response to the hard-headed utilitarianism of his father and his circle of "Philosophical Radicals." The cost-benefit morality that James Mill had inherited from Jeremy Bentham, and which he had instilled into his son, left Mill bereft of all emotional succor.<sup>12</sup>

Mill's depression was followed by a long period of ardent mechanical utilitarianism, Bentham's "cost-benefit morality." In the *Autobiography* (1873), he confessed to that breakdown, too.<sup>13</sup>

But by 1873 it was too late. In the minds of economists poetry had already fallen in status to a level somewhat below pick-up sticks. The sectarian damage – the blind theoretical indifference to poetry and other moral sentiments – was culturally embedded in the body economic. In the twentieth century few economists would pay attention to Mill's quiet reversal on the role of feelings and poetry to economics.

It isn't hard to see why. Despite ground gained by the new behavioral economics, logic and models have swollen in epistemic status, crowding out practical wisdom. Today's intellectual descendants of Mill and Bentham – and certainly the high-cream of the economics profession – crave mechanism and finality in economic tales. *De gustibus non est disputandum* is the mantra of their anti-poetry of economic assumptions. Tastes and values, they say, are identical, and both are just like data, coming to us like oxygen. Open and shut, they claim, objective and non-negotiable. And so despite nervous

breakdowns among teenagers, despite the pharmaceutical industry, globalization, racism, the war on terror, carbon footprints, and the history of campus shootings in America, economics professors continue to allocate little or nothing to the education of *feelings* about economic life and science. They seem content with life such as it is on one side of the divide, a mirage.

A large opportunity cost of our investment is, as Mill said back in 1873, “Imagination generally” and “poetry” particularly as a means of educating feelings in socio-economic thought. The gap between poetry and economics is deep and wide, true. But as Mill discovered, the most treacherous gaps exist inside illogical indifference curves, inside our selves.

### Haiku and Economics are Close but not Too Close

Haiku economics can help to bridge the gap between feeling and not feeling in economic discourse. Pairing haiku with economics is methodologically speaking obvious though historically speaking it hasn't been seriously done. Ironically, haiku and economic methodologies in general form a nearly perfect union. Imagine a Venn diagram, in Figure 2, one circle representing haiku, the other economics. What is the overlap? Huge: both subjects claim to be dead serious about two principles - *efficiency* and *counting*. Put the two principles together—efficiency and counting—and you've got econometrics, you've got economic theory, and you've got haiku. Therefore, haiku economics already exists. True. Q.E.D..

Figure 2  
The Overlaps between the Principles of Haiku  
and of Economics are Large-to-Perfect



Mathematically and figuratively speaking, the haiku/economics overlaps are  $n$ -dimensional, meaning that there are more envelopes and quarter-moons of overlap than Figure 2 displays. For example:

- Loss—the idea of sacrifice—is a principal overlap. Loss, loss functions, and opportunity cost plain and simple are absolutely central to both haiku and economic approaches. The idea of economic loss is central to this centuries-old haiku by Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827; reprinted in Hass, p. 253):

Don't worry, spiders,  
I keep house  
casually.

You don't have to be an economist (though being one helps) to imagine the costs of keeping spiders. Haiku and economics overlap in other dimensions:

- Haiku theory, like economic theory, does not deviate from a simple set of assumptions and rules of conduct (scarcity, parsimony, representative examples, life-cycle approach, etc.): and both take the budget constraint as given;
- The union of haiku-economics creates unintended irony, insight, frustration, and happiness not produced by the sum of the two arts - the non-overlapping moons and quarter-moons of economics and haiku. "The best haiku . . . are inwardly extensive and outwardly infinite. A severe constraint imposed on one aspect of haiku must be balanced by a spontaneous, boundless freedom on the other" (Hakutani and Tener, p. 249, in Wright 1998).

They were called "Sir"  
when they were being raised—  
these silkworms were. (Issa, n.d., in Henderson, p. 136)

Consider Issa's haiku from an economic perspective, as Issa himself did. Instead of writing a long-winded economics article about silkworms and silk, Issa summed up his points in 17 syllables.

What's "The Economic Problem" in Issa's silkworm haiku? The economic problem is that many perfect little gentlemen once again will have to die. Fine young men will be killed. The Motive? Maximization of profit, pillow comfort, and sensuality. Still, costs are involved, serious costs. The Model? Haiku. The Facts? Numerous. Here's the main one: Silkworms in Japan (and especially in China) contribute to more than GDP, aesthetics, and foxy undergarments; silkworms contribute a lot to the underpants of poetry, too (including morals and manners in with the poetry). Harold G. Henderson points out (p. 136) that in many Japanese households silkworms "were given the title *sama*, a term of respect"—thus the use of "Sir," in Issa's line 1. But as Henderson (p. 136) explains, *sama* "can have more affectionate connotations than 'sir'". The claim is that Issa was being reserved, Issa was understating the case, the love and honor that his 18<sup>th</sup> century reader *in reality* gave to the silkworm. The Irony? The thing we love – we, the silkworm loving death squad – must kill. But the irony doubles in the unspoken conclusion to Issa's haiku: "these" Sirs are dead, and they lost their status, too, but they are more valuable when dead—the poet is wearing them!

It's been said that Robert Solow is a masterful writer of irony and metaphor in the field of economics (McCloskey 1998, Chp. 3-4); clearly, metaphor and irony are major factors of technical change in the field of haiku. Issa's silkworms show by how much.

Of course it's the metaphorical collisions of haiku and economics, the non-overlaps, which yield new perspectives and produce novel data. Not everyone is convinced. Despite their power to tell an economic *story*, economic haiku may be too parabolic in mood, too direct in word choice, too normative in judgment, too peaceful in soul, too serious in observation, too correct in observation, too *free* in spirit - to be claimed by many economists.



Soon big winds will come  
Already hawk flies low-down  
bickering with me. (McKim 1988, p. 64)

I reply that “significance testing” and “philosophical utilitarianism” are indulged by those same bickering hawks but they haven’t copped to *those* fictions (Ziliak and McCloskey 2008).

At Georgia Tech a colleague in the economics department suggested I add a little color to my haiku by tossing all of them into a big, blue recycling bin. Amusing fellow, I agree. But why would an economist—in the event, a self-described expert at industrial organization and behavior—forsake his most efficient verbal technology? Even *haibun* – a mix of prose-poem with haiku - is a comparatively sluggish form of speech, a limping slum dog. (That reminds me of a joke, courtesy of my daughter: “What does a snail say when it’s riding on top of a turtle?” Give up? “Wheeee!”) If efficiency is the goal, then we ought to agree: haiku wins. Measured by the marginal additional output of ideas-and-feelings per syllable, haiku is the Usain Bolt of economic speech. Conveniently, only three “states of nature” or “lines” are needed to tell an economic story (or, McCloskey 1998, pp. 13-15, argues) *any* type of story. The three lines of haiku do the job for you. Haiku wins again, a triple crown:

The morning glories  
ignore our drinking party  
and burst into bloom. (Bashō, n.d., in Hamill 1998, p. 133)

Bashō’s “morning glories” haiku is so full of meaning it induces in the reader’s mind a plurality of stories (about springtime, about *renga* parties, about cause and effect in science), proving further the Pareto superiority of the haiku form. A haiku poet may not become the next Bashō but it is good to remember that in scholarship as in poetry diamond and coal are different phases of the same life-cycle.

#### Haiku Journey, Closing the Gap: My Life with Etheridge Knight

I began my own haiku journey with a friend and mentor—a great American poet and haiku master, Etheridge Knight, Jr. (1931-1991)—in Indianapolis, 1987 to 1991. Like Shaw’s Doolittle I sometimes felt unworthy of it; certainly our friendship was not formed on the basis of my achievements in poetry. I possessed a B.A. degree in economics, and was working for the local welfare department, when we met. But if you like jazz music, The Last Poets, and cool people, you ought to know about my muse, Etheridge Knight (Rampersad, ed., 2006, p. 10). One mutual friend of ours—the eminent poet, teacher, activist, and translator, Robert Bly (1926- )—claimed to me in January 1991 that Etheridge Knight was “America’s greatest poet in the oral tradition—period.”<sup>14</sup> Bly repeated the claim on other occasions, and in front of distinguished poets. Dear friends, acquaintances, and family—Elizabeth McKim, Galway Kinnell, Yusef Komunyakaa, Sonia Sanchez, Donald Hall, and others: I don’t know a single prize-winning poet or Ivy League professor among you who disagrees with Bly.

Knight—Bly and we are saying—was our muse—I almost want to say our *musical*. He had the sound and feel of a lion or a bush warbler; a rising wind or suffering slave; a tenor sax or late-night bass. Etheridge Knight was a verbal warrior in control, a dub master who could sound like an egg cracking under pressure, a soothing sex machine, or rickety old cash register dropped to the ground, depending on his (and our) needs. Etheridge Knight himself was like an evolving human hip hop *renga*, and people he met—from street people to Nobelists—were invited to sing along. Language was his currency. He was a toastmaster, meaning he co-invented rap. I wrote and recited a few stanzas (not very well) but I was a bookish young bohemian, a father and economist with moxie. (He called my son, “Apollo.”) We laughed a lot, I listened a lot, and he treated me like a colleague. He told me I ought to write haiku about economics. I told him I didn’t understand and I went into another world.

Ten years later, I climbed out of the pickle jar where economists and other wounded tend to store their emotions and where I for a while was the big, fat dill; around 2001 some uncomfortable exogenous material was clogging up the arteries of my life (nothing to do with scholarship or teaching); no matter, I fell out of the pickle jar and into language, haiku in particular.

I began to understand the meaning of “less is more and more is better.” I began to telephone my family and friends a little more frequently. I took longer, more thoughtful walks in the wood, using all my senses as best as I could. Yes, I wrote silly rhymes when at first I began to *hear* and *feel* economics, seventeen syllables at a time. But just as Etheridge predicted, it was haiku (not brine) that poured out of me. I told my students at Tech about it and they welcomed me in the traditional Japanese way by writing haiku of their own.

I continue to learn from Knight about language and economics. In a lecture “On the Oral Nature of Poetry” (1987) Knight asked two questions relevant to economists and poets—anyone who writes: “Where do metaphors, in history and language, come from?” Knight wondered, and: “What do metaphors coming from, say, Shakespeare’s time, have to say to the people living in the economy of now?”

Generally speaking [Knight told a crowd gathered to hear him at Colorado State University], *a people’s metaphors and figures of speech will come out of their basic economy*. If somebody lives near the ocean and they fish, their language will be full of those metaphors. If people are farmers they will use that kind of figure of speech. Metaphors are alive. *When they come into being, they are informed by the politics and the sociology and the economy of now*. That’s how language [and therefore economics] is. And when we try to use dead metaphors, metaphors that were relevant in Shakespeare’s time, then the audience cannot get in because the metaphor [used by the old poet or utilitarian economist] is outside of the audience’s experience.

Economics and poetry go fishing in the same rhetorical sea; that’s what Knight (and Basho’s “Culture’s Beginnings” haiku, quoted earlier) is showing us. Second, says Knight, a people’s speech—their metaphors and other figures of speech—“will come out of their basic economy.” Our most basic images, Etheridge Knight noticed—President Obama’s nerves of “steel,” the New Testament’s “fishes and loaves,” Adam Smith’s “brewer and butcher”—what these and other basic figures of speech have in common, he

found, is that they are *economic* in origin. That's what Knight (and, again, I believe Bashō) is saying, too. "Google," for example, is already a verb, as in "Why don't you Google that?" Knight's third and final point is that a persuasive economic metaphor will have the audacity to speak to the politics and sociology of now if it is going to stimulate today's economic thinking about now. The largely self-educated Knight, who seems to have independently discovered these insights, continued:<sup>15</sup>

When you're using language to evoke a knowledge that the audience already has, they know it from experience, and the poet is not lecturing, not handing out data. Gwendolyn Brooks told me, "Poetry is using common language in an uncommon way" (Knight 1987 [1988], pp. 13-14).

Pairing haiku with economics, then, is not handing out data. The unusual pairing expands the set of "live" and "uncommon"-speeches – two criteria, it would seem, for an economic poetry speaking to the politics and sociology of now. And at the same time their union stands to meet a common demand for parsimony and precision.

### Writing and Feeling the Economy

If Knight and I and many others are anything like typical, then teaching your students haiku will help them to stay out of Bentham's emotional pickle jar. It will help them to see language as economy and the economy as language and thus their economic writing and powers of observation will improve—we're talking about clarity, accuracy, lucidity, decorum, elegance, and especially economy—or so I'll predict after 8 years of experiment and control (Pilon 2008, p. 6).

As William J. Higginson, a poet, translator and co-author (with Penny Harter) of *The Haiku Handbook* (p. 253) observes, writing haiku "help us make our language more accurate, base our writing in images [not abstractions], and cut our words to the essentials." Higginson is not an economist but we appreciate his attention to cost. Knight, I have mentioned, learned haiku in the 1960s, in a jail cell at the Indiana State Prison. A U.S. poet laureate, Gwendolyn Brooks, from Chicago, was his first teacher. With another poet and publisher, Dudley Randall, the already nationally acclaimed Brooks had started a "Poets-in-the-Prisons" program. Knight was an early product of it. He told me and many others that writing poetry saved his life:

[Before I discovered haiku, Knight said] my poems/ were / too 'prosy' – too filled with 'abstractions' rather / than/ images . . .

I really got into haiku [he said] when I learned . . . that the 'original' haiku poets/ were in to haiku *primarily* as/ an/oral/being and the 'written' poem as secondary – as simply an/ extension of the spoken word (quoted in Higginson, p. 254).

Imagine a representative economics article written by a 'prosy' growth theorist or 'prosy' economic development specialist and you'll get Knight's point. The formerly 'prosy' poet's point is that writing haiku improved his, a great poet's, writing. Therefore, *a*

*fortiori*, teaching haiku economics can improve student writing about economics, too (see Appendix).

Another reason to write haiku is that it gives readers and authors a clearer vision through personal empowerment: “Writing haiku,” as Higginson notes, “claims and confirms one’s experience of the world, and offers an opportunity to construct ideal experiences which enrich one’s inner life.” My friend Knight had, like his friend the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, of Nigeria, spent a lot of hard time in solitary confinement. Knight was able in those dark hours to reinvent his deeply troubled inner-life; he was able to avoid confusing it with the misery he felt in the gray-stone pain and racism of his outer life, by writing haiku:

Under moon shadows  
A tall boy flashes knife and  
Slices star bright ice. (Knight 1986, p. 18)

The falling snow flakes  
Cannot blunt the hard aches nor  
Match the steel stillness. (Knight, p. 18)

“Due to the imposed brevity,” haiku writers “must base their writing in images”—“the most powerful tool of all writing” (Higginson, p. 251). Precisely.

Haiku, it seems, is the bomb. Richard Wright, the legendary inventor of Bigger Thomas, became a late-in-life enthusiast for the powerfully imagistic art-form. He found joy writing over 4,000 haiku during the last year and a half of his life (around 10 per day).

Factory whistles  
Bring flurries of fat snow  
In a winter dawn. (Wright 1998, p. 48)

“One of my last memories of my father during the summer and autumn months before he died is his crafting of thousands of haiku,” said Wright’s daughter, Julia Wright (vii-xiv, in Wright 1998). “He was never without his haiku binder under his arm,” she said. “He wrote [haiku] everywhere, at all hours: . . . My father’s law in those days revolved around the rules of haiku writing,

and I remember how he would hang pages and pages of them up, as if to dry, on long metal rods strung across the narrow office area of his tiny sunless studio in Paris, like the abstract still-life photographs he used to compose and develop himself at the beginning of his Paris exile. I also recall how one day he tried to teach me how to count the syllables: “Julia, you can write them, too. It’s always five, and seven and five – like math. So you can’t go wrong.

In conclusion, if writing imagistic haiku can enlighten Bashō, heal Richard Wright, inspire Gwendolyn Brooks, and liberate Etheridge Knight, it may be strong enough to save our students from a career inside one of Bentham’s cruel joints. Economists needn’t

fear experimenting with a little haiku. As an author told his 18-year old daughter, “It’s always five, and seven and five – like math. So you can’t go wrong.”

## Appendix

### Teaching Haiku Economics, Pluralistically— An 8-Step Program for University and High School Economics Instructors

Step 1: Accept the Journey. Your journey in haiku economics begins with a meditation on The First Fundamental Assumption of Haiku Economics: “*Less is more and more is better.*” Remember also what your haiku master says: “To teach haiku effectively, you will want to smile.”

Step 2: Don’t Talk Too Much. Dwell for a moment on the meaning of this passage I found in Paul Goodman’s *Speaking and Language* (1971, p. 10): “A long apologetic for Zen Buddhism [and thus a long apologetic for haiku] in prose [taking up lots of space and words for purposes of philosophical justification] doesn’t make sense; the more the [haiku] philosophy is talked, the less believable it becomes.” Listen to Goodman and reflect again on the meaning of the first fundamental assumption. Share your newfound wisdom with your students. Invite them to accept the journey.

Step 3: Reward and Advise, Lightly. Remember what Billy Collins says in his poem, “Introduction to Poetry” (Collins 1988, p. 58): torturing a poem, Collins says, is not allowed. His point is some people tie a poem to a chair and beat it with a stick trying to get the poem to confess a meaning or economic logic. According to Collins, if it’s meaning you want, it’s better to drop a live mouse inside a poem and stand back and watch. Haiku is filled with valid rhetorical mouse droppings; in haiku, therefore, the only act of violence or torture is a lonely mousetrap or occasional bad smell. Reward the student who shows a light touch. Rejoice when they can smell as well as hear the sweet industrial sounds of *homo economic* trains of thought. Remember: Imagistic writing is key. Show students examples of imagistic haiku written by a range of distinguished authors, Issa to Wright.

Step 4: Don’t Read the Wrong Stuff. Dear Colleague: If you’re reading Barthes on haiku and feeling bored and cynical, stop reading Barthes on haiku. Barthes was a genius at a certain kind of abstract post-structural criticism but Roland Barthes on haiku is a chair, trust me, you don’t want to sit in let alone be tied to. Still, for a theorist his *Empire of Signs* is required reading.

Step 5: Encourage Haiku Scholarship. Some students will want to educate themselves in the culture of haiku. Suggest they consult any or all of the 5-H’s listed in the References: Hamill, Hass, Henderson, Higginson, and Harter.

Step 6: Use Haiku to Teach in the Moment. When I am lecturing I’ll sometimes blurt out a haiku spontaneously as if I know before I say it that it’ll raise questions and spirits. I’ll take a minute to explain what I think the haiku adds to the lesson. Sometimes I write haiku on the blackboard—next to a graph or formula—it costs almost nothing.

Step 7: Think of Practical Tips. Okay. A student haiku you get is boring or irrelevant or not poetic—what, if anything, can you do to help? Ask: does the poem have a “cut” word? Does it have a *surprising* cut word—capable of expressing irony or

sarcasm? Ask: do the chosen images work well on both descriptive and metaphorical planes of meaning? Sometimes I'll hear in my own speech exactly five syllables: "invisible hand." But where's the haiku? Those are just five sounds in my mouth. What is it about the invisible hand - or with other people's perception of it - if anything, that I wish to express? However I answer that question, my haiku has to have a "punch line"—a big surprise—typically in the third line.

Punch lines, cut-words, and enlightenment through irony are the hardest parts of haiku to learn and teach: the artist's goal, after all, is to use 17 syllables to show by example that "less is more, and more is better." To get a meaningful punch line suggest your students try to create double entendre—a literal/transcendent "breach of meaning" which can turn metaphor into description, description into metaphor, and even sadness into joy. Be concrete, and urge them to courageously and assiduously explore the worlds of synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, analogies, puns, and other grammar-school devices. Some of the best images for use live inside a good thesaurus or dictionary. But most of the best images reside in the language of the invisible hand and in the economy itself. Like fish from the sea, the images are on the tip of your tongue. Most importantly: tell them to observe, listen, and feel, using all their senses—the discipline and challenge of haiku is to truly "be" in the moment. Thus Kerouac's metaphor: the "sound of silence."

Finally, Step 8: Enforce the Discipline, Complete the Journey. To teach discipline to deviant beginning writers I place a tax on violators of the 5-7-5 rule, the imagistic rule, the mandatory economic content rule, the accuracy rule, the humility rule, and any other rule as I see fit. I encourage you to do what's right in any given case. So let's say that Tim writes an elegant imagistic poem about a chicken plant in Mississippi but he's used 3 syllables too many. Tim's poem is over budgeted. Subtract a point. Tim wrote a fine poem but he broke the counting rule so he gets a "Sweet!" or other word of encouragement plus 2 of the 3 possible extra credit points (in haiku it's the point about discipline that counts). A typical exam in my economics courses will be appended as a midterm exam was in Economics 101, Fall 2008, at Roosevelt University:

**[Optional extra credit: 3 points]**

Write a haiku about the economy or economic theory. Remember, a haiku is a short imagistic poem, technically complete after three lines and 17 syllables, arranged in the serial order 5-7-and-5 again. "Imagistic" means using concrete words, such as for example spider, egg, and dollar, to convey a general or universal feeling, idea, or phenomenon, such as banks, savings, and spending.

(5) \_\_\_\_\_

(7) \_\_\_\_\_

(5) \_\_\_\_\_

Students, I find, will write haiku if given the chance; reward them for doing so and odds are they'll write more and better. People who write haiku tend intrinsically to write more

haiku—a monotonically increasing function—regardless of extrinsic rewards. I don't know if the function converges at the point of massively better logic or improved economic policies but hey, ask again next year, eh? Besides, as Bashō said, it's the journey that counts.

I've received student exams covered with three, four, five haiku, though the students realize I grade only one. Students explain that they got on a roll and “felt like writing more.” (How often do we hear *that* from an economics student?) I see the voluntary writing stemming from a certain kind of generosity—the generosity of classical haiku.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen T. Ziliak is Professor of Economics at Roosevelt University, Chicago. His email address is: [sziliak@roosevelt.edu](mailto:sziliak@roosevelt.edu). *Acknowledgments*: I thank countless many for your patience, humor, respect, and comments. Haiku is communication and haiku economics is no different. I must thank a couple of poets from the Indianapolis days, my dear friends Elizabeth McKim and Francy Stoller, for keeping me afloat on the boat of the dream, with and without Etheridge in this world. David Ruccio and Deirdre McCloskey I thank for early and constant encouragement. Mary Pilon (*The Wall Street Journal*) and Steve Levitt I thank for enthusiastic comments and attention. Jack Reardon I thank for believing in the project. To Suzette B, Deirdre M, Helen M, Doug M, Erik H, Steve J, Jim P, Billy B, all the Zs, Nate W, and students and faculty at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory, and Roosevelt: without you, I wouldn't know what it means to prefer vegetable broth over duck soup.

<sup>2</sup> In classical haiku a *kigo* or “season word” appeared in line 1 or 3, telling the reader the season of the year (literally) while setting a mood (metaphorically). In Bashō's haiku “rice planting songs” is in line 3. Haiku economists might substitute “season” for “cycle” as in “arc of the business cycle,” as in “investors' mood,” and “boom,” “bust,” “mania,” “lull,” etc.

<sup>3</sup> In Japan in 1957 Harold G. Henderson (1958) counted over 50 distinct magazines with and about haiku—“most of them successful commercial ventures” (p. 1, footnote). “The issues that I have been able to check,” he said, “contain a minimum of fifteen hundred haiku each” (ibid, p. 1).

<sup>4</sup> The economist Eugen Slutsky (1880-1948) was born and raised in Kiev. Slutsky made seminal contributions to economic and statistical theory. The “Slutsky equation” is a popular mathematical tool which takes more than 17 syllables to explain.

<sup>5</sup> The 5-7-5 alone was called *hokku* or *haikai no renga* and Bashō is given highest distinction by most observers for exploring the possibilities of 5-7-5 as a distinct and complete art form. Massaoka Shiki [1867-1902] coined our current word *haiku* (Higginson, p. 20). Compare Hass, p. 299 and Higginson, p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> During the collapse of financial markets (and thus of short-term personal wealth), in 2008, even Wall Street traders began to write haiku and other light verse (Pilon 2008, pp. 1, 6). Other economists began to write haiku about economics, too—mostly for the first time. See Mary Pilon's blog, “The Wallet,” and Steve Levitt's and Stephen Dubner's blog at *New York Times/Freakonomics*, for examples and discussion. Keyword search: “haiku economics.”

<sup>7</sup> Ziliak 2002, pp. 111-113.

<sup>8</sup> The haiku are from S. T. Ziliak, “Haiku Economics, No. 2,” *Rethinking Marxism* 17 (4, 2005), pp. 567-569; the problem with “statistical significance” is discussed in prose and haiku in S. T. Ziliak and D. N. McCloskey, *The Cult of Statistical Significance: How the Standard Error Costs Us Jobs, Justice, and Lives* (University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> In the realms of knowledge and criticism, however, see: Woodmansee and Osteen, eds. (1999), Cullenberg, Amariglio, and Ruccio, eds. (2001), Nelson (2006), and Klamer, McCloskey, and Ziliak (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Popular legend claims the American author and humorist never went to Mexico, as planned. It is said that Bierce (1842-1914?) went instead to Arizona, the Grand Canyon, where he intentionally plummeted to his death. His remains have not been found.

<sup>11</sup> Published in 1946 and reprinted in W. H. Auden's *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House), edited by Edward Mendelson. Also see: page 1084, in William H. Kruskal, “Statistics: The Field,” *International Encyclopedia of Statistics* (New York: The Free Press), vol. 2, eds. W.H. Kruskal and J.M. Tanur.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Scruton, “Thoroughly Modern Mill: A Utilitarian Who Became a Liberal—but Never Understood the Limits of Reason,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 19, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Contrast Janice Carlisle's *John Stuart Mill and the Writing of Character* (University of Georgia Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication: Bly to Ziliak, Denouement Gallery, Indianapolis, IN, January 1991. See also: Bly 1988, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Knight's insights with M. Bahktin, quoted in H.L. Gates 1988, p. 2, epigram, with Gates, pp. 47-51, and with McCloskey 1998, *passim*. But the bookish Knight was not aware of the books by McCloskey and Gates. Besides, we weren't seeing what Knight was seeing: that metaphor and other basic figures of speech *originate in the economy*. Sometime in 1990 I thought I was Mr. Smarty Pants when I told Knight about McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics*, which I had read and adored and wrestled with at least twice since 1989. I was wrong; Knight was the smart one, he had me pinned, and he hadn't read either book. On Knight's creativity and persistence as a student of language and society, see the essay printed in *Painted Bride Quarterly: The Etheridge Knight Issue*, by U.S. Poet laureate Donald Hall (Hall 1988, pp. 95-96).