

Notes for American Sentences Talk to Haiku Koma Kulshan
(via Zoom, Saturday, October 9, 2021)

History of AS

I first came upon the form in Allen Ginsberg's book *Cosmopolitan Greetings* in which there are 18 examples at the end of the book. I interviewed him when he toured with this book, got a wonderful inscription and did not ask him on that occasion about this form. (One of my great interviewing regrets!)

I DID get a chance to rectify that somewhat by asking his Naropa Institute comrades Anne Waldman and Andrew Schelling about it in an interview four years later and they said:

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Anne-W-and-Andrew-S-on-American-Sentences-2.05.mp3>

I started writing one a day in 2001 in preparation for that workshop, but I had to do the fund drive at KPLU and did not attend! I did start a practice which has not stopped and it allowed for some nice moments to be capture those first few weeks:

1.02.01 - Alternating oil massage, we decide against greasing up the cat.

2.03.01 - 12 vehicle crash northbound I-5 caused by slick roads & a rainbow.

2.06.01 - In right-wing Senator's office, framed picture of the Enola Gay.

2.09.01 - One small spat & you reconstruct front room into bedroom-in-exile.

That last one was rather prophetic, as that relationship ended later that year and several sentences were dedicated to chronicling its decay. Also in those first couple of months the notion of Found Sentences made its appearance in my practice:

4.18.01 - Best bumper sticker this month, seen on Volvo: *Midwives Help People Out*.

Also chronicling life events as in:

6.01.01 - My last view of John Napier, steam rising from the cremation vault.

And more relationship decay:

7.18.01 - "No time for THAT" she says releasing semi-erect morning penis.

Editing Process

While the notions about the magical nature of 17 syllables was prime in my mind the first few years of my practice, as evidenced by those Sentences mentioned, at a certain point the rhythm gets stuck in your head and you don't worry if something is a solid poem and is 16 or 18 syllables. You never use conjunctions or other filler words simply to fill up the syllable count. That said, you can often strengthen the poem by being more specific in your description of the moment. Use of adjectives, like in

other forms of poetry, should be applied with care because if the adjective does not give life, it kills. There is no in between. Adverbs should be avoided in American Sentences, but I believe that's the case in all poetry.

The poems are usually edited in the moment, but also when being harvested, often at the end of the year or when a new publication looms. As always we try to avoid rhetoric, earn abstractions, present something original and ideally reflect, disclose or unearth something of one's own personal mythology.

Differences between Haiku and AS

As you are aware, among the traditions in haiku are the Kireji and the Kigo, the cutting word and the seasonal reference. Ginsberg was not interested in perpetuating these traditions, or he would have simply written haiku like Kerouac and McClure, though their haiku are more like senryu. I started my practice by using dates which often provide a seasonal context, such as:

1.05.09 Would her Thanksgiving stuffing been this hard to flush had we eaten it?

6.20.10 Seattle solstice: Chihuahua shivers in cold rain outside starbucks.

12.24.10 She makes an ornament, he asks if she's taken her thorazine.

10.20.11 Seattle day: wondering if the solar-powered prayer wheel will turn.

I think the cutting word in American Sentences, if there is one, could be the last as above in starbucks, or Thorazine. It's the last word that provides

the context, or that reveals it. But all the above examples clearly engage the sensorium and the date on the Christmas Eve 2010 poem clearly marks the ornament as one that goes on the Christmas tree and that would not be clear without the date. Even the Thanksgiving stuffing is not flushed until being in the fridge, potential leftovers, for at least five weeks which is a comment on refrigerator hygiene.

Criteria for a strong AS

Like in other forms of poetry, you can apply Ezra Pound's melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia to determine a poem's qualities. In the January 5, 2009 poem:

1.05.09 Would her Thanksgiving stuffing been this hard to flush had we eaten it?

There is the assonance of stuffing and flush which helps give the last word of the poem a double kick. There is the melopoeia of assonance and the logopoeia of the final act of this ritual ingredient gone wrong with the added comment about a partner's (& now ex-wife's) food storage and fridge hygiene practices. I won't go into the imagery, but liking something she cooked to feces I think says a lot. In his essay "Creativity and the Fully Developed Bard" Ed Sanders goes over those qualities of poetry and adds a few:

PHANOPOEIA, MELOPOEIA, LOGOPOEIA, (Phanopoeia) TROMOPOEIA, NOOPOEIA, AND MYTHOPOEIA.

Pound, in his **ABC of Reading** wrote, "You still charge words with meaning mainly in three ways, called phanopoeia, melopoeia, logopoeia."

"Throwing the object (fixed or moving)
onto the visual imagination."

II.

(Melopoeia)

"Inducing emotional correlations by the sound
and rhythms of the speech."

III.

(Logopoeia)

"Inducing both of the effects by
stimulating the associations
(intellectual emotional)
that have remained in the
receiver's consciousness
in relation to the actual
word or word groups employed."

To these I have added Tromopoeia, Mythopoeia and, from George Oppen as suggested by Chuck Pirtle, Noopoeia.

Tromos means trembling in Sappho, and *Tromopoeia* means the excitation in the reader, in the auditor *and* in the performer throughout the body, from poetry. Tromopoeia therefore is the cluster of muse skills that guides performance, and also the mind as it performs reading the poem.

NOOPOEIA I George Oppen made a note in his daybook: "Pound's Melopoeia, etc—Amazing to have forgotten Noopoeia—revelation. Amazing to have forgotten lucence, translucence. . . ." Noopoeia covers sudden clarifications, insight and revelations on a localized, poem-by-poem basis (as opposed to mythopoeia—the biggest scale) as "The Secret Mind Whispers."

MYTHOPOEIA: I the universal strands that speak to the numinal and absolute—mythopoeia also covers explanations the mind

reads out after long study and reflection—those sudden clarifications illuminate connections on the grandest scale.

The muse of story telling and plot

(tell a good story and the whole
world will listen)

The muse of rhyme and alliteration

The muse of pulses and meters

The muse of the beauteous data-cluster

The muse of Visual Array

The muse of humor

The muse of exquisite nature image

The muse of allegory

The muse of mythopoia—at tracing
the numinal

The muse of condensation and pithiness

The muse of Brilliant Associative Flashes

The muse of Tromos (Τρομος) and Body Tones

(Sappho's Tromos, or trembling)

("If you don't have your body as a
factor of creation you don't have a soul"

Charles Olson)

The muse of the Performance Zone

The muse of Composition by Field

The muse of the long line

(Homer, Ginsberg)

The muse of narrow-lined precision

The muse of Brilliant Metaphor

The muse of Etiology and Causes

The muse of Sandwiches of Striking,
Disparate Images

The muse of the brilliant foreground
(Odyssey)

The muse of the brilliant background

The muse of Dictation from the Sky
(Rilke, Eliot)

The muse of sudden clarifications

The muse of satire

The muse of the Visual Image (Retentia)

The muse of the dithyramb
The muse of ire and indignation
The muse of personality and characters
(the late Hardy)

The muse of Emotive Typography
The muse of the Multi-Century Maxim
(Ginsberg, Olson, Heraclitus)

The muse of Compassion & Sympathy/Empathy
The muse of Verse Containing History
The muse of First Thought/Best Thought
The muse of Reworking and Perfecting
(Dylan Thomas' 117 versions
of "Fern Hill")
and many others

Your muse-mix shifts through your life
Different times of day, too, are better
for various muse-skills.

You have to study your muse-mix.
It changes as you live.

One of the greatest modern examples
of an artist adjusting the mix of his muses
was Henri Matisse
who in the last creative months of his life
in 1952 and 1953, 81 years old,

not able any longer to paint and sculpt,
confined to a wheel chair,
racked with anxiety and *timor mortis*
at night sketching faces on the
ceiling above his sick bed
with a long stick with crayon attached—

but nevertheless was able to adjust his muses
even in a wheel chair
to produce some of the finest art of the century
those wall-sized works of painted paper cut-outs

One could study the metrics of the poem, but I do not have formal training in metrics and tend to use those rhythms which are part of my own genetics (Afro-Cuban) and my environment which includes many years as a Jazz radio DJ and many more years as a builder of Spotify playlists which are also an artform.

Works Cited:

Nelson, Paul E. *American Sentences*. Baltimore, Apprentice House, 2021

Sanders, Ed. "Creativity and the Fully Developed Bard." *Disembodied Poetics*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1994.