

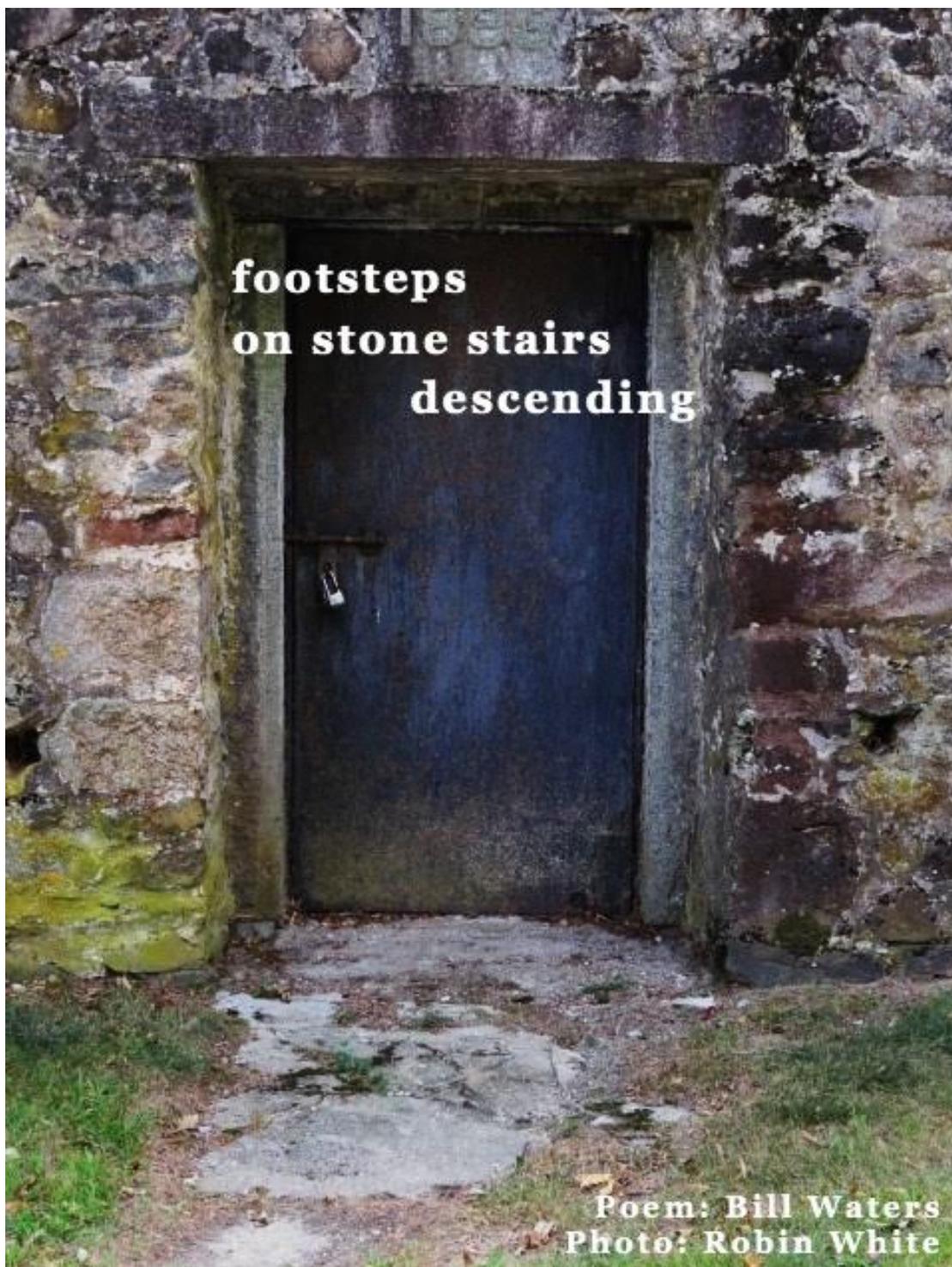
a rainbow for your funeral

all this black
and all this rain

i remember a blindfold
with you describing
the colours to me

it was another time
but in the same place
of loving

ai li



**footsteps
on stone stairs
descending**

**Poem: Bill Waters
Photo: Robin White**

Unheard Voices

in all directions
stampeding—
the hunter's scope

*Catalonia . . .
riot cops shatter
cries of freedom*

beyond the wire—
unheard voices
of the displaced

*drones
targeted killings
. . . bad intel*

black-clad ninja
swarm over rooftops
swords gleaming

*redundant
these cctv cameras
cyber attack*

red tape tangle
our every move edited
assailants unknown

Marilyn Humbert
Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

Neptune's Necklace

rainbow spray
dolphins ride a wave
into the sky

*reflections of cumulus
tumbled in the foam*

shallow dive
bubbles of blue light
mixed with laughter

*sandcastle treasure
Neptune's necklace
mother of pearl*

holding back the ocean
with a red toy spade

*shore break
idle hours playing
with shells*

Ron C. Moss
Simon Hanson

Shadow of a Dreamcatcher

November sun
stretching the shadow
of a dreamcatcher

*pigeon feather
falls into a pile of leaves*

one-man band
juggles his drumsticks
while ending the solo

*where lead these lone
footprints in the snow?*

a shaman's bead
shapeshifting into
bone-colored Moon

the flicker of Konpeito candies
out of a porcelain bowl

*kissing in the sunset
the most important words
still before us*

her despair left for good
in the morning haze

*frogs leaping
inside and out of
the bottomless bucket*

finally cracked
how do spiders dream

*pink clover heads
waving goodbye
as I leave the driveway*

*all neons in the rhythm
of the city night*

Roman Lyakhovetsky
Maria Tomczak

An Introduction to the “Ten-link”

By Clayton Beach

I have been experimenting with a new form in the renku/linked verse tradition, which falls somewhere between John Carley's yotsumono and Garry Gay's rengay in terms of aesthetics and that, at 10 verses long, offers a slightly more expansive form than either—allowing poets to stretch their wings in English language linked verse without having to worry too much about either the topical strictures of longer renku forms or the thematic continuity of the rengay. It is my concern that many talented haiku poets who I would like to see engaging in the collaborative forms are being chased off by well-meaning but stifling anglophone “renku masters,” who impose a strict vision of a Japanese tradition they don't entirely understand and the imitation of which has not yielded a particularly engaging canon over the years. Where is the English language equivalent of “Three Poets at Minase,” for instance? While English language haiku has developed a canon, there are no “classic” pieces of English language renga or renku that are widely regarded as models or extensively discussed by critics, and part of this has to do with both a lack of engagement and an over-reliance on strict models.

It is my hope that this new form will encourage creativity, innovation and digression from the norm, perhaps giving those who have been resistant to the top-down structure of Shōfū renku encouragement to work collaboratively with other poets. In this essay, I will explain the form, suggest some possible variations on the treatment, and then include two recent examples. In this brief introduction to the form I will assume the reader is somewhat familiar with the basic concept of linked verse, or at the very least knows how to write haiku in English. A longer, more in depth introduction of haikai principles and aesthetics should appear in a later feature of *vines* for those who want a deeper discussion of these matters and the mechanics of linkage.

Both the yotsumono and rengay are forms that are native to the English language, but whose names are orientalist—John Carley's “four-thing” was not a Japanese invention and the word would not necessarily be recognized by a Japanese renku enthusiast, and Garry Gay simply made a portmanteau out of the word renga and his name. I'd like to push for using less unnecessary (especially invented) Japanese loan words in our critical and theoretical assessments of haiku and linked verse; I prefer to simply call the form by the number of verses involved rather than invent a nickname that is all too clever. Decalogue? Too pretentious. Ten-spot? Too willfully hip. No, I believe ten-link should suffice. The Japanese nijūin for instance, translates roughly to “20 rhymes.” In established forms following codified progressions and prescribed templates, the existing names should suffice, but moving forward, I see little reason for an elaborate name attached to every novel pattern of linked verse.

The ten-link originated from my writing non-thematic rengay in an experimental vein using the single line (monostich) format. Kala Ramesh and

Marlene Mountain's collection *One-line Twos*¹ was, a call to arms of sorts—encouraging the experimental, gendai haiku inspired crowd to start taking collaborative linked verse more seriously and bringing a more adventurous aesthetic to the world of linked verse. Mountain has been writing experimental one lined sequences since the 70's, but this collection is the first of her linked work where I've seen two poets infuse renku with expert use of the multiple cuts and advanced disjunctive techniques that have changed English language haiku poetics so dramatically in the last two decades. It is not a perfect work as a unified whole, but the sparks of genius it exhibits and the potential for further development it demonstrates both combine to make it a watershed moment in linked verse. Ramesh, too, establishes herself as a powerful voice in the genre.

I found that when working in the monostich format, a 6 link rengay often looked paltry and felt underdeveloped, especially when we eschewed an obvious theme and embraced a more renku oriented link-and-shift aesthetic. The sequence always ended just about the time it felt like it was really getting going. Mountain and Ramesh got around this limitation by writing two separate rengay in pairs, alternating who writes the first and thus gets the “long” lines. The line lengths went (long-short-long-short-long-short) for both, switching the order of the poets between the two sequences of a pair rather than switching line length in the middle of one as is often done in 2 person rengay (L-S-L-L-S-L).

I found this separation and numbering of the sequence into two six link pairs to be a bit awkward, so I streamlined the process by making somewhat of a “double rengay,” with the verses following a pattern of L-S-L-S-L—L-S-L-S-L. This is intended for two people, and gives both parties ample time to play lead with the long (or 3 line) verses, and to play support with the short (or 2 line) verses. It also gives a strong feeling of a bipartite structure, with two symmetrical halves, rather than the 3 part jo-ha-kyū structure of traditional renku—creating a different potential for dynamics and development.

Understanding the dynamics of the ten link requires looking a bit at both the yotsumono and the rengay. In the yotsumono, there are four verses, or “ku,” alternating in 3 lines (or one long) and 2 lines (or one short). There is no overarching theme in a proper yotsumono. The first two verses are linked by some sort of wordplay, conceptual tie, or tonal/narrative progression. In the second pair, the sequence shifts away from the first ku, abandoning all conceptual ties to the opening verse and changing tone, connecting only between the second and third. The final ku links to the previous, may connect to the first as well, and provides resolution to the sequence. There are no overall topical proscriptions or prescriptions, and no theme should be discussed beforehand to encourage a sense of improvisation.²

At its simplest, the ten-link can be seen as an extension of this fugal state, where each stanza is a new voice that shifts away from the verse before last, propelling the sequence onward. If this dynamic is chosen, it is best to avoid any conceptual or thematic ties to the verse before last, and repeating very obvious elements of any previous verse in a sequence so short is also best

avoided (except in the case of the final verse, which can tie to any previous ku). Repeated topics after the halfway point are forgivable, as they are two different sections and some time has elapsed. As I see it, short topical or seasonal runs of up to 3 verses can be utilized according to standard renku practice. If the aesthetics of Shōfū style renku are pursued, the form is essentially just a development (ha) section of a renku shorn of the formal beginning and close. However, I personally am leaning away from strict adherence to the Shōfū style and encourage poets working in English to exploit our own native poetics more fully and bring innovation to the form rather than relying entirely on the Japanese models, to which I feel we can hardly do proper justice. As such, while these are recommendations for how to utilize this form, ultimately there is no *wrong* way to do it, insofar as the collaborators are happy with the results.

At only 10 verses long, this form isn't intended to be a full renku, so not every season needs treatment, and a single moon or flower verse can be a nice nod to tradition, but they are not necessary, and using both together could be a bit heavy. There are no topical restrictions on politics or love, nor proscriptions against heavy tone etc. The only requirement is that there is some level of variety in the constituent verses, linkages used, and a wide range of the use of cutting, tone, and varying complexity of the individual ku—all what Earl Miner described as “unity in variety.”³

Seeing as how this form initially developed as an extension of the rengay, all the tools of the rengay are also at our disposal. In the rengay, there is an overt theme that is sustained through the entire sequence, sometimes being only loosely suggested in the shorter verses, but ideally included in every ku. Some poets choose additional themes and do not connect the other stanzas by any other means outside of the established themes, thus the sequence is not “linked” in the way Japanese renku is, but “braided” together out of several threads. I tend to see the rengay as a form of linked verse with an added theme, and so I still provide a secondary level of “link and shift.” The rengay I have seen published recently are mixed in terms of which interpretation they choose to follow, though my preference lies in those that retain a feeling of movement and progression in the spirit of linked verse. In terms of the ten-link, I believe an underlying level of link-and-shift is absolutely necessary for the form, and a purely braided, sustained set of themes with no underlying shift would be more of a collaborative *haiku* sequence than an actual *linked poem*.

Themes in rengay can be of two different types. The *motif* is a general class of words or cluster of images that share a definable quality that can be varied, but which does not form any sense of temporal progression or thematic evolution: scents, sounds, flowers, trees, birds, a particular location/setting or homage to a person or famous work of art etc. All of these motifs can be varied but not really developed in a linear sense. Motifs can be subtle or obvious, though if chosen unwisely they can become unbearably twee. I recommend avoiding motifs that require the repetition of a handful of words and leave the writers scrambling for synonyms.

The second type of theme, a *progression*, is a theme or topic that can

undergo narrative or at least sequential development, that has a definable progression from start to finish; this could be a single day (from daylight to the dark of night) a love affair (from flirting to break up), a single season (a progression that has a long history of development in Japanese poetry) or some kind of current event or historical/mythological story. Some themes of this nature may need prior discussion and ideally should be started early on in their respective plot and develop chronologically, rather than starting *in media res* and skipping around. I see the seasonal “runs” in traditional renga and haikai as progressions in this sense of the word, thus these so called “themes” in renga are often not as far from the linked verse tradition as some would say they are—it's just that they last longer than usual.

I personally recommend that every renga have at the very least one motif or progression with an underlying link-and-shift, though it can be profitable to utilize all three at once. An over-reliance on several motifs without an underlying link-and-shift provides a rather stale and stilted aesthetic, without a sense of movement to my ear. While some choose to avoid any conceptual link-and-shift and tout this lack as a fundamental feature of the renga, with its presence marring the form, I simply can't agree.

In terms of the ten-link, we have to take into account the extra length; a motif can quickly become tedious over 10 iterations, so it is possible to separate the motifs between the two halves, choosing contrasting or complimentary motifs and in a sense providing a link-and-shift between the two halves of the poem as a whole. A progression could easily be sustained over the entire sequence, or two different progressions could be split over the two halves, again contrasting or shifting after the turn. Discussion of these choices prior to the composition of the piece is certainly welcome, as in renga, but I think over time and with familiarity of the possibilities, poets will be able to do this organically and on the fly, with very little discussion beforehand. Sensitive partners ideally could spot a possible theme and progression within the first two verses, continue on with it and then recalibrate after the switch of verse length before the 6th ku with minimal discussion. This form works equally well in alternating 3 line and 2 line verses, as well as alternating long and short monostich haiku.

Two final notes about the aesthetics of linkage. Renga literally translates as “linked/collaborative song,” referring to the fact that this form evolved from the tanka, with which it shares the second character (歌). It was seen as a sequence of linked, two part poems, each sharing its second half with the next, thus each ku is really only one half of two longer poems rather than an independent whole, and is read twice in two contexts. Modern *renku*, however, has the second character meaning verse or line, (句) referring to the solo haiku. John Carley called the practice of reading linked verse as pairs “execrable.”⁴ However, reading medieval renga and haikai without this shifting and re-contextualizing of every verse is actually completely inaccurate, historically speaking. I find the consideration of linked pairs as units—and writing them such that meaning can change from one pair to the next—still remains at the heart of linked verse and is what makes this form unique as a body of poetry, even when a distant linkage (fragrance) is the

predominant method used. I encourage those working in English to look at the poem both ways and decide for themselves which aesthetic is preferable.

A second misconception about the historical forms is the idea that there are little to no kireji after the first verse. Use of kireji is more complex in Japanese than English, but suffice it to say that the use of kireji after the hokku verse is varied, and less prevalent in the short verses, though still present in many of the "3 line" ku—a perusal of any historical haikai sequence will verify this. In the context of our contemporary linked verse, I think we can use even more cutting than is the norm in orthodox renku.

I have far from perfected this new form, and have kept it intentionally loose and flexible in order to encourage participation and further development by others. Ultimately, the best way to work out the mechanics of linked verse is to just jump in and start writing. I look forward to seeing what others can do with the ten-link and hope that it serves many writers well. Here are two examples to being with.

Works Cited:

1. Ramesh, Kala & Mountain, Marlene, *One-line Twos*, (c) 2015 Bones— journal of contemporary haiku
2. Carley, John, *Renku Reckoner*, (c) 2013 Darlington Richards Press, pg. 76
3. Miner, Earl, *Japanese Linked Poetry*, (c) 1979 by Princeton University Press
4. Carley, John, *Renku Reckoner*, (c) 2013 Darlington Richards Press, pg. 94

dusk comes early

losing ground
to the headwind
a distant rook

*in the dark woods
one ghost orchid in bloom*

under a swamp apple
the murky water
remains mum

*weather-worn mudflats
prisoners' unmarked graves*

saturday night cabaret
he dons a wig
and zebra print stilettos

*stabilimentum
more questions
than answers*

we avoid any mention
of the perils of sunk cost

*a moonflower
opens and closes
its scent*

the censer swings through
blue wisps of latin

*a stone angel
covered in lichen
dusk comes early*

Clayton Beach
Caroline Skanne

the eyes of a fly

a sparrow alights
on the wind blown wire
natural harmonics

*another day teased out
to a single note*

beluga clouds
the icy moon sets
into the sea

*a hermit crab scuttles
its crumbling shell*

discarded plastic
in the postmortem
of a forgotten evening

*an old salt
spins a yarn or two
into open wounds*

and what of the plowshares?
we'll learn to love 'the bomb'

*sickle moon
a spy dome deflates
at Waihopai*

a thousand times reflected
in the eyes of a fly

*in alpine snow
only the radar ping
of a blackbird*

Clayton Beach
Hansha Teki

Copyright © *hedgerow*, 2018. All rights revert to the respective author & artist upon publication. No work featured here may be used, copied, sold or distributed elsewhere without permission. All correspondence to: hedgerowsubmission@gmail.com