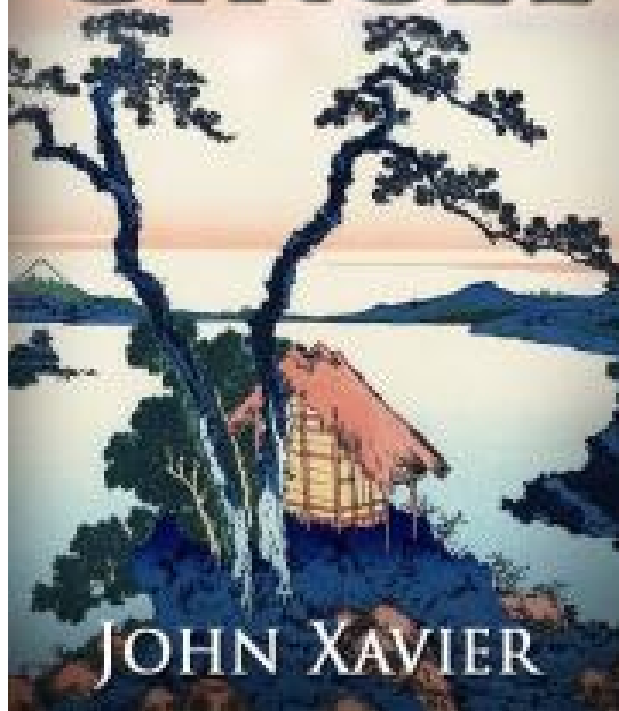


# FULL CIRCLE



JOHN XAVIER

# FULL CIRCLE

a selection of haiku

John Xavier

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*And the days are not full enough  
And the nights are not full enough  
And life slips by like a field mouse  
Not shaking the grass*

Ezra Pound

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## PREFACE

The way we look at the world transforms who we are. In writing haiku, the poet is self-consciously striving to achieve a tranquility within themselves to arrive at the profundity of individual moments. Because of this, haiku requires a greater development of personality than most poetic forms. True haiku at least. In regard to my own achievements in this respect, I must admit that not every poem has been entirely successful but, I have had the good fortune to experience instances of seemingly absolute clarity as a result of practicing this esteemed art. Of course I owe this not only to my own writing but also to reading the work of others, especially those written by the original Japanese masters. If this book can provide anything remotely similar for another then it'll have fulfilled its purpose. And if there's one thing above all that I've learned from haiku, it's that we have the most to gain by increasing our own sense of appreciation.

AUTUMN

shrivelled leaves –  
floating in an empty  
goldfish pond

sunflowers with  
drooping black faces –  
clouds gathering

amid sand and logs –  
mice roaming  
in daylight

a calm night –  
I listen to the waves  
rolling in the dark

the injured ladybugs  
always find my  
shoulder

orange peel in dirt  
and the black shimmer  
of gathering ants

shaded streets  
where yellow leaves  
shower the dawn

swaying in  
the evening wind –  
an empty bird house



wrestling dogs –  
owners socializing  
with coffees in hand

a sudden gust  
and a plume of leaves  
scatter the street

chestnuts and  
their exploded husks –  
I watch my step

hosing down a wall –  
a tired old man  
shrugs off the chill

gleaming, vanishing –  
flies touched by twilight  
through the trees

waiting for sunset –  
the chill breeze sneaking  
inside my jacket

stooping heron –  
coolly eyes an enamored  
photographer

ripples in the lake –  
after the loon  
takes off

parting clouds –  
now suddenly the  
yellow grass is golden

the weeds also –  
withering from the  
seeping autumn

eddies in leaf piles –  
squirrels sharing  
their secrets

a neon sign –  
the falling leaves  
in violet light

mist, headlights,  
and an umbrella  
broken on the curb

dark pigeons  
landing in golden leaves,  
scattering them

scarlet  
and pale pink –  
leaves along concrete

autumn –  
in city parks  
Midas wreaks havoc

city worker  
with a leaf blower –  
the crows scatter too

the gospels of graffiti  
across garbage bins  
in empty alleys

fenced-off jungle gym –  
orange leaves  
piling up

dark glistening streets –  
black pools tingling  
with soft rain

an old man busking –  
his dreams  
never came true

Muslim girl in  
a head scarf wearing  
sandals in autumn twilight

spiraling leaf –  
a golden death lost  
in an explosion

the old hotel in autumn –  
ivy crawling up it  
like fire

forty seven  
brown pine cones –  
ten thousand orange needles

rain patter on my window –  
plus here and there,  
fireworks

crushed beer cans  
lying in the grass –  
last night's fun

fire crackers  
and wild screaming –  
the joys of devils

beside some pools  
left by last night's rain,  
a goblin mask

November begins –  
red poppies everywhere  
like open wounds

the cars screeched,  
the witnesses rushed,  
the blood pooled

midnight in neon –  
the overflowing drains  
dashed by cars



books piled  
along the street –  
rain got to them first

today only one  
busker braves the chill –  
autumn setting in

pinned to their chests –  
the only red flowers  
I see now

bright blue sky –  
amber leaves encircling  
the tennis courts

squirrels on a  
chain link fence –  
scattering from me

unseen waterfall –  
arriving at my feet  
in a slow stream

leaf fall in darkness –  
lit yellow street lamps  
under a pale sky

in drizzling rain –  
sallow hued leaves  
strewn across red brick

imagining a heron's cry  
underneath their  
wasting nests

the rain on my window  
in synch with these  
impatient fingers

rain clouds –  
still the moonlight  
pierces them

one bee –  
stumbling over  
fading irises

fierce wind –  
leaves colliding  
with the passing cars

downtown –  
wind thrashing  
the tops of bamboo

well-kept lawns –  
dew glistening  
from street lamps

a tree's shadow –  
amid the orange leaves,  
mushrooms hiding

steam curling  
from a house vent –  
the silent well-lit street

grimacing  
porch pumpkin –  
a crow playing dentist

lampposts at night –  
the soft rain falling  
in their auras

crows gathered  
at the tree's base –  
foraging through leaves

leaves crowd the pool  
of a condo complex –  
red, yellow, green, orange

father and son –  
two red umbrellas  
crossing a stone bridge

strewn leaves –  
their water stains  
left on stones

parked cars –  
varying leaf piles  
betraying time

flooded train tracks –  
rotting beams buried in  
shards of granite

black power lines –  
the perched crow  
gently grooms a friend

white autumn sky –  
impassive as the  
bright leaves fall to earth

passing clouds –  
the sun, a bull charging  
a toreador's cape

empty tennis court –  
now only the leaves going  
back and forth

crows foraging –  
creeping dirt patches  
swallowing the grass

copious  
orange berries  
bend drooping stems

a dropped rake –  
the abandoned park  
still unfinished



dogs barking –  
the peaceful sound  
of rain disrupted

a screeching train –  
people's lips  
moving

rain at night –  
under umbrellas,  
faces, phone lit

WINTER

the first snow –  
a barrage melting  
into sidewalks

cold morning –  
on distant mountains,  
snow-capped trees

early winter –  
snow patches  
surviving in shade

silver pool –  
Medusa's gazed  
on all these bare trees

stirring a pot –  
my thoughts as tangled  
as these noodles

snow at night –  
gleaming in the air  
of well-lit alleys

her long hair –  
snowflakes vanishing  
one by one

under a fir tree –  
watching the snowfall  
spiral in the wind

snow downtown –  
the whole sky white  
at midday

snowy night –  
all the dark streets  
brighter now

under street lights –  
shadows of snowflakes  
crossing the snow

shocked looks –  
snow falling from  
the awnings

wisps of cloud –  
leaving the mountains  
poorly shaven

cawing crows  
rising from a field  
of abandoned snowmen

crow tracks  
around the birdseed  
in the gray slush

totem spirits –  
the whole blue sky  
inhales you

busy streets –  
mounds of snow  
blocking parked cars

snow worn down  
with boot prints –  
dead grass showing

a fallen tear  
slowly seeps outwards  
on my napkin

a new mole appears  
like a heretic  
on my sacred skin

silhouettes kissing –  
their breath hanging  
in the air

cars horns at night –  
in cold darkness  
anger flares

a train station  
before dawn –  
the vast silence

a child perhaps –  
one icicle torn  
from a row



sake!  
almost as intoxicating  
as your red lips

seagulls!  
it's bread!  
have at it!

the red light at  
a dark crossroads –  
no one waiting

eighteen-point stag head  
watching over the  
dinner party

filled to the brim –  
upright boots  
left in the snow

bare earth –  
a lonely pigeon  
pecking away

dark blue –  
the city like a  
long saxophone note

marble lions –  
their dead eyes mirror  
the darkness

a young couple  
breaking up –  
the trees silent

the moon alone –  
like Marie Antoinette's  
pale severed head

the bruise of midnight  
lords over deathly  
settled snow

cafe at night –  
a girl puts on lipstick  
slowly, so slowly

winter rain –  
the perching crows  
silent in the trees

downtown –  
the café patrons  
arrive from darkness

snow topped mountain  
vanishing into a  
white sky

vacant wheelchair –  
beside it a man  
asleep on the vent

orange life vest  
heaved on to the rocks –  
a sea still famished

a stranger's  
name written on  
window fog

statues  
made monstrous –  
snow at night

soy sauce mishap –  
the packet spraying  
like a beheading

a flock of ducks  
flee across the bay –  
wa wa wa wa wa

led by hand –  
a toddler on ice  
with his mom

cat paws in snow  
show off who was first  
to rise this dawn

ominous night –  
rumbling rail yards  
fill the air with dread

frosted grass –  
every step  
a delight

a crow and seagull  
fighting over  
garbage

raindrops  
eroding footprints  
in the snow

nodding to sleep –  
at last my books just  
clatter to the floor

morning dark –  
the dusting of snow  
settles on branches

icicles –  
where the birds  
use to gather

downpour of  
giant snowflakes  
painting the earth white

too many problems  
for so few  
beers



streets black from rain –  
a smooth gray sky  
pregnant with light

skeletal beach fort  
made from driftwood –  
I give it two days

crow  
on a trembling branch –  
shaolin

the wind  
swirling in the trees,  
finding nothing

**SPRING**

my bare skin –  
the surprise of the  
first raindrop

veiled sky –  
wet ferns sagging  
with the rain

a young crow  
flying from a branch –  
droplets falling

receding snow,  
broken by a  
waking earth

bare trees  
in fresh rain pools –  
a brief glimpse

wings flapping –  
a crow standing on  
a stone owl

a shared look –  
the silence between  
opposite trains

rain falling  
on wet asphalt –  
slivers of sunset

going home –  
the train's windows  
streaked with rain

silver rings –  
rain failing in pools  
on flooded streets

a young man –  
growing a moustache  
too soon

budding trees –  
dripping from the rain  
on a chill evening

laughing toddler  
in full rain gear –  
puddles exploding

flooded train tracks –  
islands of willows  
swaying in the wind

dark morning –  
city lights coloring  
wet streets

blooming  
cherry trees –  
a dog pissing on one

dusk shimmers  
in the clouds –  
gulls riding the wind

naked easel  
left on a sidewalk –  
overcast sky

kill me, but my children  
will still eat yours –  
a worm

reading late –  
the soft patter of rain  
on my windows

umbrella  
tumbling away –  
the owner sighing

cherry petals –  
floating along  
a flooded curbside

arriving geese –  
shades among bare trees  
in the blue dusk

one heron –  
croaking among  
empty nests



a light rain –  
the mild darkness  
of a neon night

mushrooms blooming  
in freshly cut grass –  
touched only by dew

behind an inukshuk –  
one white flower  
blooms

cherry tree –  
glowing with a  
new sunrise

she slides off her coat  
and it's not just the  
warmer weather

flood silt –  
green saplings  
already sprouting

geese –  
sipping from a puddle  
like connoisseurs

the clap of pigeon wings  
as the flock bursts  
out of nowhere

lightning! the sea fading  
back into the night –  
then thunder

new leaves coming  
even as the dried husks  
of the old still cling

overflowing  
drinking fountain –  
a crow investigates

a dying tree  
being swallowed in  
thriving ivy

tunnel exit –  
silver strands of rain  
falling beyond

evening walk –  
shadows and petals  
along my path

weeds and grass –  
bulging from cracks  
in a parking lot

looming storm –  
violently swaying  
rows of trees

gleaming raindrops hung  
from curve-stalked  
dandelions

as the cherry blossom  
petal falls, my heart  
splits open

your body, my body –  
our sweat mixed  
together

dew on a chain link fence –  
pink cherry blossoms  
in full bloom

walking in grass –  
everywhere I go  
crushing young flowers

an addict face-down  
on pavement –  
cherry blossoms falling

aloof mushroom –  
prefers its exile  
in the shadows

blossoms  
filling the air –  
then the rain shower

water dripping  
from a wet awning –  
the sun breaking through

lingering sunset –  
each leaf touched with  
its own light

cherry blossoms  
settling over  
rows of graves

far from shore –  
one poised swan ripples  
the green lagoon

orb-weaver spider  
strolls its moistened web –  
dew beads quivering

the soft shush –  
invisible rain falling  
on dripping leaves



SUMMER

resting in  
a tree's shadow –  
milkweed floating by

hunting swallows –  
glinting as they  
swerve in circles

the river's ripples,  
the grass by the shore –  
both flowing east

soon to hunt –  
the molting dragonfly  
helpless for now

glaring sun –  
an old man tying  
a shawl on his wife

people flinching –  
the crows unleashing  
parental wrath

the sun and the crows  
have both become  
vicious

the sound of  
running water –  
in the heat, it's music

the chickadee  
hangs from a thin branch  
bent towards earth

as soon as the  
angry crow stops,  
the birdsong sweeps in

empty cocoon –  
yet so far this summer,  
no butterflies

ruined bridge –  
lounging I gaze on  
the river below

muted clanging –  
heavy industry  
across the river

bumbling pill bugs  
roaming through  
jungles of grass

flies buzzing  
against the glass –  
the summer beyond

sparrows singing  
from razor-wire –  
a garden store lot

kissing on a bench –  
their leashed beagle  
barking in earnest

trembling leaves –  
dark outlines against  
a blue evening

water beads –  
sliding down the  
glass of lemonade

hazel fly –  
exploring my  
solo picnic

crawling over  
a rose's petals –  
the business of ants

waving in the wind –  
a spider's web on  
the wild shrub

dandelions  
in clustered rows –  
dragonfly perches

she pulls a breast out  
on the train –  
her baby squealing

lost in thought –  
the first butterfly  
of the year appears

the swallows  
chasing each other –  
riverside sunset

sudden dawn –  
sitting as the train  
exits a tunnel

seagulls whirling  
in the gray sky –  
a summer morning



leaf shadows,  
butterfly shadows –  
kindred forms

shadow's creeping  
into city streets –  
a luminous sky

life imitates art –  
the grass by the stream,  
a scene from Seurat

my body gone –  
the grass slowly  
recovering

goose down –  
tumbling over a  
freshly cut lawn

swarming ants –  
winged drones ascending  
into the light

brushing over  
a darkened city –  
the orange moon

far mountains –  
the mists there hued  
with the dawn

window smudge –  
where the sparrow  
met its end

suddenly in  
empty streets –  
the scent of lilacs

leaf shadows –  
their flutter turning  
the grass alive

dashing robin –  
stops and eyes me  
suspiciously

arbutus trees  
rustling at night –  
the humid darkness

lightning strike –  
its flash seeping from  
the tall grass

secret lilies –  
pushing aside brush  
I find them

a ladybug  
on the window –  
I can see up her skirt

summer fireworks –  
thousands of faces  
gleaming in the dark

trash everywhere  
except garbage bins –  
fireworks aftermath

avoid our sandbox –  
it's been visited  
by cats

tide receding –  
small stones glistening  
in the noon light

stone bench –  
a crab's claw shell  
left there

lone honeybee –  
too picky to land on  
any flower

haloed garden –  
a wide shaft of light  
piercing canopy

yellow caution tape,  
across a park road,  
gently swaying

wind in the trees –  
like a stadium chanting  
very far away

clothes damp with sweat –  
I return at dusk  
and undress slowly

near a city park –  
the fading remains of  
children's chalk drawings

busy fruit stand  
at the corner store –  
one plum rolling away

yellow grass  
ousting green rivals –  
the tide of August

bright August day –  
the urban lagoon  
sparkling brown

goose down in the air  
drifting all around –  
my beating heart

as I rest in shade –  
an old woman passing,  
sweating and haggard



dandelion seeds –  
the slightest breeze  
and they're on their own

as a silver evening  
fades into the night,  
columns of flies stir

August rains arrive  
with languid thunder –  
tea in the calm dusk

tree debris  
along a roadside –  
the smell of sawdust

among the foxgloves –  
faint strands of silk  
testify to spiders

the leftover rinds  
of watermelons –  
a twilit park

in a dark room –  
through white curtains,  
a faint glowing moon

beach bonfire –  
whirling sparks rising  
in a darkened sky

beach bonfire –  
their orange faces  
suspended in gloom

terrace garden –  
a vague bright outline  
in the blinding sun

even in summer –  
the noise of dead leaves  
scraping pavement

on the white wall  
of a bathroom stall,  
the mosquito waits

summer moon –  
enjoy your podium  
before the rains

azaleas at night –  
swaying with the breeze,  
floating in the dark

a steep slope –  
here blackberry bushes  
offer their last fruit

hushed evening –  
twirling clouds of flies  
breeding silently

a summer breeze  
in the late night stirs  
trees to gossip

as I leave –  
only my footprints  
fading in grass

## FIDELITY AND HAIKU

In the history of world literature, the only poetic form of comparable significance is that of the sonnet – but today the sonnet is nowhere near as popular. A majority of poets probably try their hands at sonnets but even people who don't strive to be poets write haiku. Sadly this has not been a good thing for the art form. Contrary to the hope one might entertain that writing haiku would elevate ordinary people with poetic feeling, the fact is that the widespread interest in this art, especially in the west, has polluted it. Most people don't have any real sense of what haiku actually are because they've been inundated with so many poor imitations of them. These imitations furthermore fail to capture even a fraction of the value provided by authentic haiku. As Schopenhauer caustically remarked, *"If you put a spoonful of wine in a barrel of sewage, you get sewage. If you put a spoonful of sewage in a barrel of wine, you get sewage."*

The problem is essentially a lack of fidelity. People who corrupt the art of haiku with their crude attempts at replicating it simply don't care enough make an effort at understanding what it is they're trying to participate in. Perhaps it's the inevitable result of a kind of cultural overconfidence but, whatever the reason, a significant majority of people in the west have reduced the definition of haiku to anything written in a five-seven-five syllabic format. Yet even if this rule functioned without any difficulties with the syllables of non-Japanese languages, still it would be like defining a sparrow merely by its anatomy – despite the huge difference between a dead sparrow and a living sparrow. So too the formal rules of any genre of poetry cannot give us what truly animates it.

To really understand haiku you have to welcome the state of mind that allows a person to absorb the world around them with a sense of reverence. This is how you find the beauty in things. And more than any collection of formal rules, this is the essence of haiku. Not that this belongs to haiku exclusively, clearly this kind of general sensibility is present throughout all forms of poetry, but in haiku it achieves its highest degree of focus. Because every true haiku is about a single individual moment of insight where some kind of underlying relationship becomes manifest to the poet. As a result, the art of haiku has naturally been associated with the practice of Zen and in both traditions the emphasis is on achieving a kind of enlightenment. What differentiates them however is that Zen involves a totality of epiphanies that culminates in an ultimate self-negation – haiku on the other hand are each individually self-contained.

In many of the haiku written by the Japanese masters however, one only perceives the negative space of the poet – that is to say, their presence is given entirely by the context of the external world. Not all of course. This tendency however does point in the direction of something that's fundamental. Because all our forms of relationship require a measure of self-negation, to create a space for the other to inhabit us, any form of poetry that concerns itself with obtaining insights from the natural world must empty the world in part of its authors. The writer of haiku opens themselves to everything around them with suspended judgement.

This trust in the world is the kind of fidelity required here. A species of faith. Since good haiku are produced through a highly discriminating selection from experience though, this mustn't be construed as an excuse to fill haiku with just anything. Rather the initial suspension of judgement is merely a necessity for inviting the rare and elusive creatures of epiphany. Like the feeding of shy birds, profound thoughts also require silence. The master of haiku then cultivates inner silence. In this manner they show their awe and respect for the life, becoming true to it.