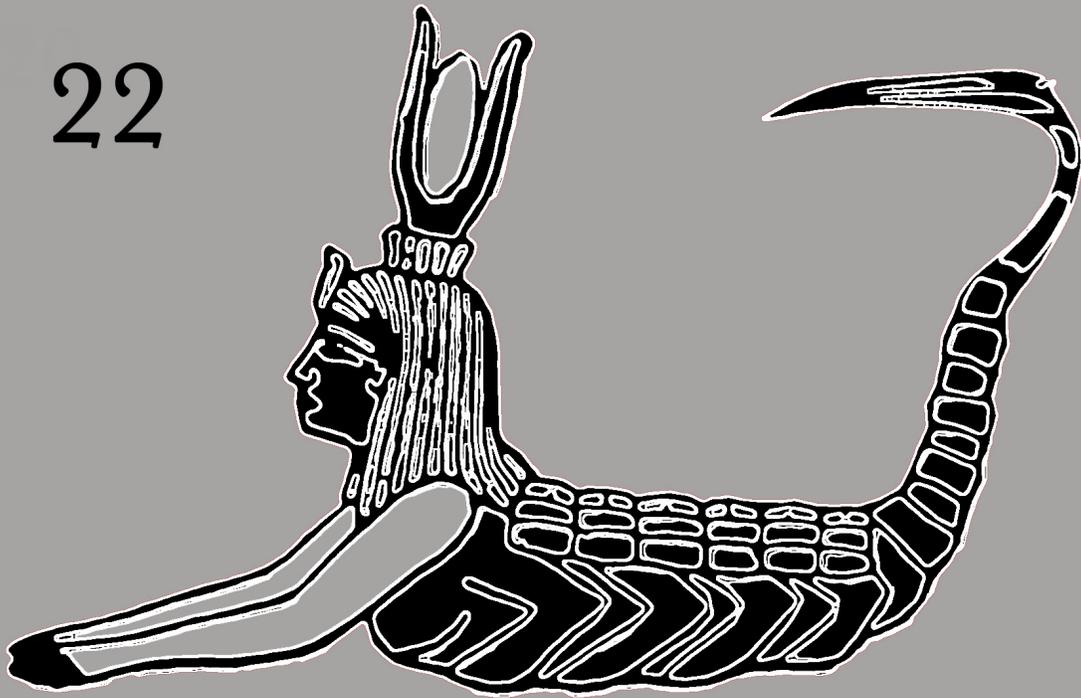


22



## Scorpion Prize 22

### **THE DECISION (A Melodrama in One Act)**

*Dramatis Personae:* Judge Robert Grenier

Various 'haiku'-writing contestants

Court-appointed attorney for contestants

Sergeant-at-Arms

*Scene:* A Court Room in a pink concrete building opposite a Strip-Mall somewhere in Northern California

**Sergeant-at-Arms:** All rise !

**Judge Grenier:** *Stay Standing !* None of your entries is worth a turd ! (None of the contestants experience/experiences Enlightenment.) Therefore, no Prize shall be awarded this year. The income from the Fund shall be diverted to the Grenier Family Trust, and henceforth inure to the benefit of subsequent Greniers, their successors and assigns, in perpetuity.

**Naked & Hairy Contestant:** That's *not fair*, Your Honor ! The Buddha was (*is*) indeed a Dry Turd, but you, Sir, are only a *wet one* . . .

**JG:** *Order in the Court !!* Listen, young fella, you guys and gals aren't Buddha—and furthermore, hardly any of your 'modern haiku' are written in 17 syllables, none is written in the Japanese language, and (speaking of maintaining Any Respect for Any Proprieties of Haiku, as we understand it, which may be Left to be Respected) most of the time you all don't seem to *care a fig* for anything but your own attempts to be 'apt'/'*clever and colorful*', in your desire to demonstrate your ability to 'succeed in this form', before moving on to another !

**Attorney for Contestants:** Your Honor, may we confer in Chambers . . . ?

*(Interlude in Chambers)*

**JG:** Well, then, I presume you have something to say for yourself and them . . . ?

**Atty:** Your Honor, *you have to award this Prize*—this Honor—*by Law*, to one of them there contestants what have entered this Contest—*that’s the Arrangement*—and you *know that* ! I have here a document, dated November 23, 2010, namely a letter to Scott Metz from you, in which you explicitly agreed to be the Judge of the Haiku Contest and award the Prize . . .

**JG:** That may be all very well and good, as far as it goes, Counselor, but I still don’t like these ‘haiku’ very much—I myself was not ‘Enlightened’ that much by any one of them!—I miss the, the *je ne sais quoi*, the *savvy/sabi* of real haiku . . . the ‘undeveloped nature’ of the really good American/English versions of the Chinese/Japanese verses-in-English . . . of the original ‘monumental’/‘simple’ things-themselves I so *emulated* when I ‘*glimpsed them from Afar*’, in R.H. Blyth’s *Haiku*, when I was a kid . . .

**Atty:** Times have changed ! If I were you, especially given the state of the economy, I wouldn’t want to be seen as standing in the way of progress in this field . . . Our nation’s economy was founded on the dream that we as a people have the right to be free of cruel and unjust foreign influence and control over the means of manufacture of our goods. Just as in 1776 we asserted our right to turn our own domestic cotton into cloth woven right here in America, and just as we have in recent times purchased, transported and reassembled the stones of London Bridge for the delight and edification of tourists in Arizona—just as we have made our *own* Eiffel Tower to be marveled at by dollar-bearing revelers in Las Vegas—so we have the right, and indeed the obligation, as Americans to shape the forms of our *own haiku*, to our own liking, here on these shores ! Just between you and me, Your Honor, there may be a lot of *money* to be made *by Americans* in this developing new industry of *haiku* assembled and marketed domestically, so I feel it is my duty to ad-

wise you as a friend to be careful not to err in this matter, by seeming possibly to be an Enemy of the People's Advance . . . not that I think in my heart of hearts that you could ever be any such thing . . .

**JG:** Where is the 17-syllable *form* with which I am familiar? Where is the customary grouping of 17 syllables into lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables each? About the only thing one can say about contestants' efforts is that they are all short . . . !

**Atty:** Your Honor, it is very well known that haiku are short poems; all of contestants' poems are short; therefore, as a matter of pure logic, it must be granted that contestants' poems are haiku ! Alternately, here in America, an *American haiku* is anything we say it is—we repeat this message by producing more of our *wonderfully wild and free 'haiku'* every day, which pleases us—and the Devil take the hindermost !

**JG:** There are no plum blossoms, there is no mention of Mt. Fuji ! (*sobs*)

**Atty:** Judge, you're becoming emotional . . . It is your *duty* to award a Prize !

(*Back to the Courtroom*)

**Sgt:** Court is in Session ! All stay standing up !

**JG:** You may sit !

**JG:** I'm *sorry* that I ever said that (*sobbing*) . . . I mean that there were no Winners . . . that's not right ! And I'm sorry to have ruled to siphon off the income from the

Fund to myself, my heirs and successors . . . that's not just ! Speaking as a private individual, I actually sort of *like* 'haiku' . . . even in the crummy/neo-American-imperialist/appropriative/rip-off sensibility that 'thinks' any old '*dear*'/'*bright*' short poem *can be a 'haiku'* . . .

**Atty:** Judge, you seem to be in a little better spirits now . . .

**JG:** I shouldn't be awarding this Prize ! I myself *don't know the first thing* about haiku !

**Atty:** Don't let that worry you, Your Honor !

*(JG breaks down in tears; the proceedings are interrupted)*

*(Interlude with music from the Noh play "Hagoromo")*

**Sgt:** Court is in Session ! All rise !

**JG:** Please be seated ! Everyone will be relieved to know *I've changed my mind* ! There will be a Winner, if not a monetary prize !

**All & Sundry:** How Good !

**JG:** It is my considered determination that the Winner is . . . Carolyne Rohrig, for her *haiku*:

**drawing a breath  
old elephants go there  
to die**

Personally, I'm grateful for the fact that the poem is divided into the customary three lines, and though there is no effort to respect the time-honored convention of the 5/7/5, I am nonetheless persuaded by circumstance that the poet has 'wanted to acknowledge the form of haiku', as it has existed for many years in Japan, and at the same time created an entirely *new*, American poem. This is a *plus*, nowadays—especially considering the state of the economy, and the opportunity that a 'creative updating' from the Japanese model may bring *needed income*, to help reverse the disastrous outpouring of funds from our country's Treasury !

I might note that I especially admire the bringing together of the 'classic 3 elements'—in this instance the *inspiration* activated in the first element, "drawing a breath," juxtaposed together with the completely-independent-initially "old elephants," with the added-on addition of the spectacle of the long-migrating "elephants" who "go there / to die" including what becomes a 'lived recognition' of how long it takes this one elephant to walk "there" as one reads the poem—these 3 different 'things', brought together as One Developing Occasion, so that they all seem to 'flow together as One', in the manner which R.H. Blyth documents can be instances of the kind of haiku he identifies (on p. 292 of my copy of *Haiku*, Vol. 1) as the first of his three kinds of haiku, "concord of colour or feeling or form" . . .

Critics of this poem might assert that it 'didn't attempt enough'—*Far Better*, I say, to undertake to articulate the circumstance of what presents itself to the mind and all the senses to be accomplished, *for what it is*—and possibly to develop that toward

what may elsewhere lie hidden in it !—than to strive to ‘magnify’ out of proportion what actually lives, resident in the material !

I was moved by the ‘simplicity’ of the ‘exercise’—that in the beginning there is the inspiration of “a breath” . . . and that, in the end, there is the expiration, over the course of the poem, of something like that same inspired breath . . . so that we *experience* as readers something like the long course of existence durationally existing in our own lives, ‘dramatized’ in that of the “old elephants”, who magically know-more-than-we-do . . . to “go there” to *expire* . . . presumably in the company of the other elephants . . . How far we, as ‘individuals’, and as a ‘Society’, have wandered from that !

**Atty:** Judge, all of us here in this Courtroom, I’m sure, are grateful and most appreciative that you have decided that it is within your capacity to render this Decision ! It has become evident to all present that all of this business of *haiku* means a lot to you . . .

**JG:** But I have not Finished !—There is a Runner-Up !—or in fact two Runner-Ups, or Runners-Up ! I think of the two together, rather in the manner of the way in which haiku originally occurred in Japan—as the first, 5-7-5-syllable, element to occur in a theoretically endless series of ‘call and response’ poems, in which one person would compose a 5-7-5, and another would respond with a 7-7, and the next with a 5-7-5, on until the End of Time !

I propose that two entries by John Martone might be organized in this way, and thus constitute a kind of ‘continuation’ of the Japanese *renga* form and ‘social circumstance’, except that here he’s ‘doing it by himself’:

## **vulture the chest's last organ**

And

## **vulture my other side**

Though each of these poems contains only *two* elements—and this is a *Flaw*!—nonetheless the ‘proximity’ of the “vulture” to “the chest’s last organ”—as an inspired offering of the heart, perhaps, to the bird, while the author is alive?—followed in this representation/presentation of the two together by an impossible imagination that the by-now truly ‘dead & largely eaten’ author could have the *capacity*/presumption to be able to somehow turn what would be left of ‘himself’ *over*, to give that “other side” *also* to the “vulture” . . . this would require a terrific, magical capacity and desire, which Martone’s second “haiku” appears to be the fact of . . .

The two *haiku*, separately or together in this sequence, represent the imagined bringing-to-pass of an imagination of a ‘happy conclusion’ for an American Left on Earth . . . or for anybody, any thing made of flesh and blood, since the time when the “vulture”—the wonderful flyer we call here in California the turkey buzzard—came into existence, to do its work!

Another attractive element, which appeals to me as a ‘traditionalist’, is what may be only my imagined remembrance of Robinson Jeffers’ late “Vulture” poem—*if* this is a factor, rather than merely my ‘association’, then one could say that these two Martone *haiku* both acknowledge and condense the Jeffers poem . . . rendering

much of the ‘setting’ of the already-‘short’ Jeffers seemingly ‘unnecessary by our modern standards’ . . . so that the *drama* envisioned by the original—and this is part of the attraction of these two poems to me, that they do appear to ‘come from’ & ‘subtly revise and alter’ their source, if it is a source, in the manner of the old Japanese haiku !—is condensed, such that, by reading and ‘understanding’ this *haiku*/ these *haikus*, I admire the prospect and am almost ready to give my ‘whole being’ to the local turkey vultures in this way . . . Any poem or poems which cause the Reader to *embody* and *imagine out from* what is being said in their own physical bodies and living minds . . . must be *All Right*, I say !

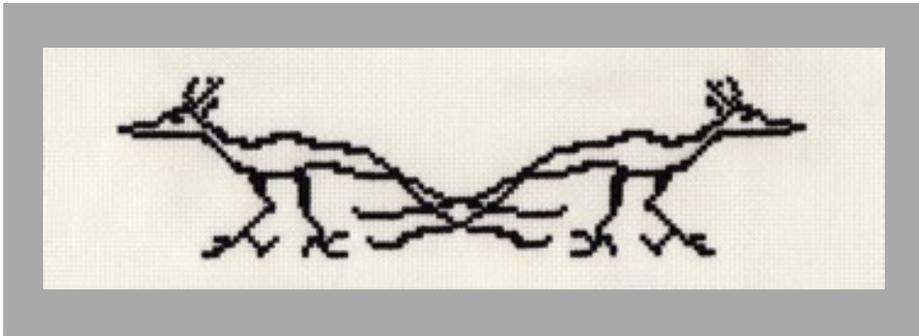
**Sgt:** Court Is Over And Done With ! Go Home ! !

**Naked & Hairy Contestant:** OKAY ! !

—**Robert Grenier**

January 6, 2011

Bolinas, CA



**Roadrunner 11.1**

—February 2011—

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