

ORGANIC FORM is an oxymoron—form implies a repeatable technique, and organic suggests shape devised for a specific instance. This brief booklet is a primer of how to marry the two together: how to use space to control a verbal experience to achieve a desired result. Organic shape is the last (largely) unexplored means of presenting haiku, and a challenge to the poet as viewer as well as writer.

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The default form for English-language haiku is three-lines; short-long-short; and flush-left, indented first and third, or stair-stepped. But even normative haiku, with adjustments to their *order*, *unit*, and *field*, can take on additional characteristics which have the potential to enhance their presentation.

```
      w      a      l      k      i      n      g
        i      n      t      h      e
o      r      c      h      a      r      d
s      u      d      d      e      n      l      y
        i      t      s      p      l      a      n
```

The most usual aberration to our default expectation is the one-line poem, or monoku, now an established form in its own right. The effect of changing our usual visual field can be startling and refreshing. This example gains added interest through its reference of shape to content.

along the twilit summer ridge a coyote drags my eye

The consequence of either one- or three-line format for haiku is a default visual scan: top-left, left-to-right. For most poems this is appropriate. But there are times when the poet wishes to invoke a more complex reading pattern. Here the alteration of the content in an acrostic fashion suggests its interconnectivity.

almost
there is
ere

Multiple visual entry to the poem can be combined with other techniques. Slight alterations in word order in an otherwise repeated schema can have a uncanny effect. This example uses repetitious accumulation with an acrostic yoke to draw the various parts into a cohesive whole.

bⁿeside him
b^mesides
b^seside me
s

Repetition and removal affecting the order makes for a powerful combination. The palpable loss effected by the removal countermands the power amassed by repetition, creating a fluid dynamic that remains balanced. The repetition may take on some of the characteristics of its affect.

everyday is the same fluorescent lighting
everyday is the same fluorescent lighting
everyday is the same fluorescent lighting
everyday is the same fluorescent lighting
everyday is the same fluorescent lighting

Just as powerful a combination as repetition and removal is repetition and accumulation. The final array gathers the totality of the aspirations of the poem, or, conversely, holds the potentiality of the entire poem: we may work in reverse, even if time may not. This example illustrates rhythmic replacement as well.

ink the rain stories run together
ink the rain stories run together
ink the rain stories run together
ink the rain stories run together
ink the rain stories run together
ink the rain stories run together

For most poems we are aware of the action of groups of words in concert, but we might consider, and treat, the individual word, and even characters within the word, as the more basic unit. In this instance, a mere typographical “enhancement” marks the time as well as providing a deeper appreciation of the subject.

in the green a hummmmingbird

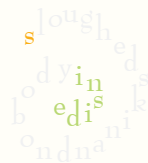
In this example the word is the unit, but sub-units are discovered within it, via typographical deconstruction, that offer a reconsideration of the original. The fade also plays a role, suggesting its easy assimilation into the subconscious. The whole can be said to be more than a summation of its parts.

fetish
is
tic

At an even more basic level, we might consider the emotional impact of individual signs. We take for granted the communicative power of letters, but they are, after all, mere conventions. The substitution of alternative signs may convey realms that add an unexpected and telling depth of field.

Alzheimer's ward
a little affect^{1/0}n from
the robopet

Or else we might deprive the units their unique positions and characteristics, and turn them instead in the service of word painting, where the resultant shapes might intimate some element that broadens the poem. Evoke the content too directly and you enter the realm of haiga: a sloughage would lose its coil.

A circular arrangement of letters in a serif font. The letters are arranged in a spiral pattern, starting from the top and moving clockwise. The letters are: s, l, o, u, g, h, e, d, s, b, o, d, y, i, n, e, d, i, s, o, n, d, n, a, n, i, k, s. The word 'sloughage' is formed by the first seven letters, and 'body in coil' is formed by the remaining letters.

The alternate isolation and clustering of units creates movement and tension on the one hand, and stasis and resolution on the other. Such an arrangement in a poem concerned with just such matters can add a sense of inevitability and depth.

one day just like an
other
un
ripe
man
go

Poems such as this one attempt to work in two dimensions: the instability of the out-of-scale vertical axis breaks the frame and causes a fraught sensation that the undersized and attenuated horizontal axis can scarcely subdue. The visual imbalance speaks to the central concern of the poem.

could
be
either
way
the frazile sea

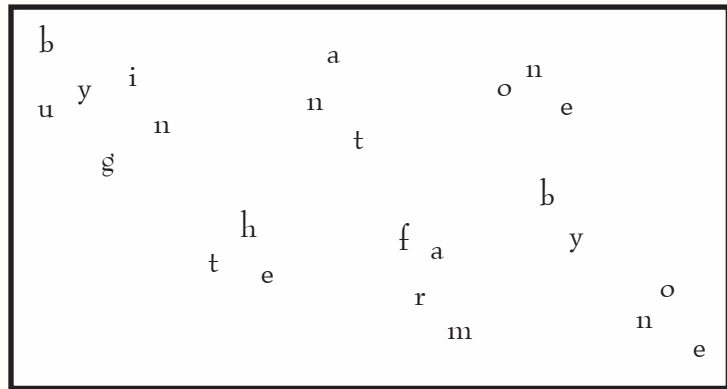
The manipulation of space, and the consequent reading of that space, is the primary advantage gained through organic form. The frame's purpose is containment, the creation of inward and outward elements. The poet might pre-empt limitations of space he inherits by defining it for himself.

inside beyond
the walls
and the wild

If a poet may dictate the terms that define the frame for himself, he may also dictate the terms of when to break it. This automatically brings notions of balance, equality, and inwardness/outwardness into play that may not be available from the default frame, and would therefore need to be suggested in some other way.

in
my
sec
tor
of
the
one
ness others

It's possible to adopt the frame as one of the design elements of the poem. One method, as in Cor van den Heuvel's famous "tundra," is to deny the page the authority to bound the poem. An alternative might be for the poet to reinforce the boundary by asking it to serve as one of the elements that connotes meaning.



All texts share the same constraints as haiku: they, too, are bounded by order, unit and field. But it's possible for a poet to use the limitations of another's text by repurposing it for his own ends. This is a simple variant on a technique perfected by Tom Phillips in his book, *A Humument* (1970).

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.