

AMY A. WHITCOMB

The Desert Inside Us:
Mary Austin's California in Found Haiku

In the nest
A little more breath
Than noise

Fifty-seven buzzards
One on each of
Fifty-seven fence posts

The cattle
Rolling up
Their slow eyes

The buzzards
After three hours
Had clapped their wings

Coyote trot—
The raven flaps up
And follows

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

“The Desert Inside Us” was created from Mary Austin’s *Land of Little Rain* (1903). About the haiku and their composition, Amy A. Whitcomb writes:

These five haiku poems found in Mary Austin’s essay “The Scavengers,” in her book *The Land of Little Rain*, are part of a much larger project of mine to revisit canonical American environmental writings and render them easy to read and engage with by today’s standards. Ecocritic and professor Ian Marshall has made interesting work of finding haiku in the writing of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden by Haiku*, which was the inspiration for my project. My contribution, as a millennial, longstanding haiku poet, and trained scientist, is this attempt to marry the aesthetics of immediacy, brevity, and juxtaposition from haiku with environmental concerns and the many varied voices of our environmental history. So far my project includes 440 haiku from over 60 celebrated authors and is collected in a manuscript-in-progress titled *A Gentler Shovel*. It’s been fun to use a known form to discover similarities and differences in environmentalism in the US over a century.

Amy A. Whitcomb lives in northern California and can be found online at amyawhitcomb.com. Her work has also appeared in *Modern Haiku*, *Poet Lore*, *Baltimore Review*, *New South*, *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. She serves as a volunteer reader for *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

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