

Once More, the Moon

1.

Mother Moon approaches
the sea's waiting plain
to whisper so sweet a song

the everlasting gods themselves
shall measure out prayers on silk

2.

I see the rising moon
and long
to be

disordered
tangled pitiless
fierce

immediate as water

3.

Come out, see

moon and tide,
waste and wandering,

all sorts of men
who come and go
fitting thousands into things—

(For a short while, stay)

4.

A moon's white can see
night growing late
this sad, sad autumn
years and/or death
my sleeve on snow

5.

Autumn river
shining sky
short grass
dawn's moon

you say, go beyond

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

Melissa Frederick created “Once More, the Moon” from English translations of *Hyakunin Isshu* by William N. Porter (1909) and Clay MacCauley (1899). About her process of composition, Melissa writes:

I love Japanese poetic forms, and I especially love how modern poets have experimented with the traditional rules of Japanese poetry we’ve all been taught (the 5-7-5 haiku, for example). Completely by chance, I discovered *Hyakunin Isshu*, a famous 13th century collection of 100 tanka from 100 poets writing as early as the 9th century. The pieces in the anthology present interior landscapes suffused with natural imagery and rich in the allusions and double meanings the Japanese language allows for. During later explorations, I discovered two English translations of *Hyakunin Isshu* from the turn of the 20th century (*A Hundred Verses from Old Japan* by William N. Porter, and *Single Songs of a Hundred Poets* by Clay MacCauley). These earlier collections, which include bombastic Victorian reconstructions as well as direct translations from the Japanese, introduced new linguistic filters and word combinations through which to read the tanka.

In my own work, I formed word banks from the language I found in the Porter and MacCauley editions and drew on those banks for the text of my poems. I decided to stick to the usual five-line structure but allowed myself to explore new ways of shaping meaning within those five lines. Most importantly, I couldn’t get away from the image of the moon that appears in the *Hyakunin Isshu* so prominently. In the original poems, the moon is character, emotion, chronology, and memory. The moon is one of the stars of the show, and so I made it the center of mine.

Melissa Frederick is the author of *She* (Finishing Line Press 2008). Her work has also appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Muse/A Journal*, *Blanket Sea Magazine*, and elsewhere. She lives in suburban Philadelphia.

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