

Anna Maris: Swedish Haiku-ist
by Crystal Claros

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Born and raised in Malmo, Sweden, Anna Maris is a Swedish poet and writer who specializes in haiku work. She has works published in both American and English journals and articles and has poetry collections published by Red Moon Press and Miders forlag.

Outside of her poetry work, she has much experience as a journalist, a teacher, film production manager, newspaper editor as well as a publisher. Her passions include being involved with positive impacts on the environment and being part of the Swedish Haiku Society since 2016.

Her haiku seem to have this consistent theme of reflecting on the past and nostalgia. There are familial connections sprinkled throughout her works as well.

bus stop
the old man
never gets on

Maris, Frogpond, 36

The purpose and meaning behind this haiku was tricky for me to discover. In my head I envision what is literally written: A man who is sitting at the bus stop and staying on the bench instead of getting on the buses. I wonder why he is there or what persuades him to stay. Is he hiding from someone? I like to think he is tired and wants to rest and appreciate the world around him. My mind goes towards Forest Gump who is on the bus stop for the whole movie until the very end when the bus eventually does come. He sits there and tells strangers his story. I read this haiku want to know what story this old man has to tell.

home town
in the familiar houses
strangers

Mayfly 59 (2015)

Definitely a familiar feeling. Maris captures this sense of sadness and change in this haiku which I really connect with. When you are away from home, return, and then come back to see new faces in place of old ones you know and love can be uncomfortable. Change is uncomfortable. Home is not the same as it used to be which is such a hard pill to swallow. Part of growing up is not knowing but understand that not everything lasts forever. Maris putting the word "strangers" on that last line alone is a powerful move. Unfamiliarity is introduced so abruptly, just like this word in this haiku.

birthday card
my son cannot read
grandma's writing

Honourable mention in the 26th ITO EN Oi Ocha Haiku Contest, 2015

This Haiku clearly tells the reader that the son is young enough to only understand clear, straight letters versus cursive which is most likely what grandma wrote in. It is an innocent moment that is captured here. The grandmother here loves her grandson enough to write him a nice card, a genuine gesture. Maris displays the feelings of youth, family and love.

paper boat
another worry
sails away

Maris, *Frogpond* 37:2, 2014

I imagine Maris is working on making these paper boats with her son. They have many failed attempts all around the kitchen table until they make the perfect one. In my head this one perfect paper boat is colored in crayon and has her sons name on it. When they take it outside to follow the stream along the sidewalk as it rains, this distresses the author. She is spending time with her son, it is therapeutic, hence the reference to her worries “sailing” away with the boat.

haiku
my father wonders
if that is all

Maris, *Failed Haiku*, issue 1

To me this haiku reads either comedically or tragically. On one hand I see a father truly not comprehending how haikus work and can't wrap his head around why they are so short and significant. On the other hand I see a father who is disappointed in his child for pursuing something that to him is meaningless and insignificant. He does not understand it therefore he does not respect or appreciate it. I enjoy the pacing of this poem. It sounds like his thought process. The pause between “wonders” and “if” to me is a display of the father's confusion. I feel like there should be an ellipsis there because he has nothing to say in between that space.

desert walk
a new way of seeing
pidgeons

Anna Maris, *Blithe Spirit*

I absolutely love the simplicity of this haiku. Maris has revealed that this haiku gave her a bit of conflict. When tackling the feeling that this haiku was meant to reflect, it took her some time. She comments “Just because you have a vision of what you want to convey doesn't mean that it instantly comes as a haiku. You most often need to work on it”. I think that quote is wise. Although writing and art is subjective, there is a carefulness to poetry that needs to be attended to in order to keep it digestible in my opinion. I think Maris really understands this and tries to keep the accessibility in all the work she does.

my creaking joints cicadas

Heron's Nest, volume XVII, number 2, June 2015

I recall many walks this summer when the cicadas were everywhere when I felt the weight of my legs and the pressure of the heat. This haiku reminds me of these times. I can really hear the sounds of the cicadas throughout the forest as well as feel the humidity of this summer. The person in this poem must have been walking for a while, maybe they are on a hike. I love the use of the word “creaking” here as well, it really make the sound specific and clear.

first frost I give a beggar nothing

Frogpond, *Haiku Society of America*, Issue 38:2, 2015

In an interview with Anna Maris, she discusses how this was her favorite haiku she has ever written. She says “That is my most cited poem and appears in a number of anthologies and books”. I personally think this poem stands out due to its untraditional format. Instead of the expected 3 lines, there is just one. A few of her more notable poems are structured like this which is so interesting to me. It is out of the box and creative. This poem in particular is quite shocking to me, as in this situation one would be expected to be selfless but instead, she is honest and does not do anything. It makes me wonder why she did not help the beggar or what was going through their minds. Was she in need as well? Is this a situation where both parties are suffering somehow so she had nothing to give?

spring rain
an old letter
unfolded again

Anna Maris

As previously stated, the theme of nostalgia and reflection is often referenced during Maris’ work. I love the line “unfolded again”. I imagine this letter to be one that is held dearly to the person in the haiku. The rain must remind this person of them. I want to know who wrote the letter and why it is a significant one. I see myself in this haiku. Rain is my most favorite weather of all time and whenever it begins to pour I get excited like a kid. It makes me want to dance, play soft music, and appreciate it. I often will send videos or audio recording of my favorite rain moments to friends and loved ones so they can share it with me, I will never understand why it is so significant to me but it is. I also enjoy getting sentimental gifts over materialistic ones. I told my boyfriend the only thing I wanted from him for my birthday was not anything store-bought, but a love letter. I got it and I reread it ALL the time. I see myself doing something like this person in this haiku.

days blur into one another self isolation

Maris, *days blur*, 4

Discussing her favorite pieces she has written, she reflects on a monoku she loved. Maris states that she loves it because “it can be broken off in so many ways in order to create different meanings. To me, that is what a truly good monoku is about.

days blur / into one another / self isolation

days / blur into one / another self isolation

days blur into one / another self / isolation

This one became the starting verse that sparked a collection of covid-haiku published last year.” As I mentioned earlier, I think Maris is really good at capturing this consistency in letting the readers access her work through their own experiences. It allows us to be part of this haiku and see it from our perspective which I think is part of the reason it is so fun to read, write, and indulge in. This haiku was definitely one of my favorites, as the variety to its interpretation really entices me. I personally think back on the stay-at-home order March 2020. The only option we all had was to self-isolate and the days really felt combined. “Blur” is the perfect word used to describe this literal historical event that we all lived and honestly survived through. It really could mean different things from the perspective of the beholder which is another reason to love haiku.