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In the spirit of this issue of Roadrunner I spent my time with its poems without knowing who wrote them. Among the many compelling and original haiku there were two poems I kept coming back to. Their beauty and meaning difficult for me to easily articulate. Mysteries, in other words.

where does the idiom come from potatoes

A great example of a mental construct as one of the haiku's possible elements. Thoughts, reproductions, questions, quotations, samples. All of these are part of the perceivable world we often associate with the form. Some people still feel such things should be avoided in haiku, that they bring too much of an authorial presence or intruding "I" into the poem.

Such mental constructs are not really personal or idiosyncratic anyway, as much as we need to believe they are part of who we uniquely are. They belong to the accumulated human conversation that has been going on for thousands of years. As poets we should already be very cognizant of this conversation, as all of our verse is merely a response to the poets who came before us.

As for the potatoes, I have a soft spot for them in poems. They are very compelling characters, whatever scenario they find themselves in. Here they seem to answer the question about the idiom's origins. And for a second it makes perfect sense. And then you realize the potatoes are not the answer. They are equal partners in the poem with the mental construct. Thank goodness. We can put the idiom aside and make potato soup.

mannequins wearing new fall colors
the edge of our universe easy
to forget

On the one hand it's hard to go wrong with mannequins. Monstrous doubles. The Uncanny Valley. Horror movies and romantic comedies set in shopping malls. And yet they can be dangerous shorthand. So fixed in their associations that we have no latitude to understand them otherwise. Here the mannequins appear in "new fall colors," the language of advertising and the spectacle. While this may seem to rejuvenate these almost people, it does quite the opposite.

There are no new fall colors. There is the plethora of hues, shades, and colors we see each autumn and sometimes forget to notice. As for the Fall Line, this year's new is last year's old. It's all about tricking you into desiring what you already have. We put the mannequins in their new fall colors and it only highlights their chipped paint, their odd angles, their doll-like eyes.

Then we get our serious cut. We're about to confront the edge of the universe ("What is real and what isn't?" "The Fall Line makes us unreal?"), and it makes itself known to us first with a visual representation. A refreshing use of a poetic convention we don't typically see in most haiku.

And it's not the edge of the universe, it's the edge of our universe. In its simple postulation it admits the presence of many universes. And at the same time asks "What is our universe?" "What is its edge?" And here we stop. Does it actually have an edge? What would it look like? How to conceive of such a thing? Or is this statement leading us astray?

Here we have a second invisible cut in the poem. "How can I forget something I've never been aware of?" Because it's easy to forget. To me this brings us back to the mannequins. Doppelgangers frozen in time. Waiting for next season's new fashions. Knocking at the edges. Hoping for an answer. "Maybe we are the edge itself?"

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