

## SEVENTEEN DESERT HAIKU

*Scott Samuelson—Department of English*

On this spot I once painted  
a favorite watercolor with my son.  
Now he is gone.

This day will turn hot,  
but now the dawn shadow  
feels like fall (or is it spring?)

Removing litter:  
Beer bottle to the wind  
starts to sing.

Cow ribs pointing up:  
Desert shipwreck.

Amid the grays and faded green  
the dark rocks are rusting.

As I drive the May back road desert,  
sage and grass brush the car's  
underbelly: waves against a boat.

May desert: an orchestra  
Tuning up: fluting doves,  
Cow brass, lark trills.

The spring desert  
Shows warm bold colors.  
Where is that cold wind coming from?

The shadow and the light  
wash toward me.  
The sunrise's quiet tide.

From grass to lava rock  
the almost unseeable web.  
Where is the spider-artist?

I remind myself: the desert dove  
is not really mourning.  
That's its song.

Lava and lichen:  
Fall desert's  
crusty old married couple.

White skull and decomposing fur.  
Sheep or wolf?  
This is how the lamb and lion  
Lie together.

Out of last year's steer chip:  
Two golden brown mushrooms.

Desert dandelion:  
fluffy tufts sparkle  
with first frost.

Invisible cobwebs.  
When the sun catches them,  
split second of purple scarlet blue.

As I compose these haiku,  
the sun rises  
and writes warmth on my back.

## VAN GOGH AT SEA

Scott Samuelson—*Department of English*

*"I had to kill it to paint it."* VVG 1889

Only a year of paintings left in him, Vincent,  
full of passion and pigment, saw, caught, and killed  
the Death's Head Moth. Then gave it  
two-dimensional resurrection.

I do not apologize that we live on the surface.

The sea exists to sail across.

The horizon is both idea and line,

at once straight and curved.

Your friend stands before

*Two Sunflowers, One Upside Down*

crosses his arms at his chest, and weeps.

You know he might be the one.

You never realized the depth of the surface.

If it is true that the play of children is worship,  
surely Vincent was a child.

If it were Ketchikan instead of Arles,

how would he have outlined the sea?

At thirteen and a half laps around the rolling

Lower Promenade Deck, swabbed with overcast

northern light, I look out at the impasto sea

feeling the joy of the outside of things,

and think of Vincent's moth

and its most majestic murder.

## TEACHING GWENDOLYN TO SEE THE BUTTERFLY

Scott Samuelson—*Department of English*

My son holds his young daughter.  
They are growing into each other.  
He thought, we all thought once,  
That there was just one circle,  
but when you have a child,  
you realize there's another circle  
going simultaneously.  
Everything is a structure to be built.  
We are all suspended in silence  
until we have children.

A common swallowtail flits in front of them.  
I see my son's excitement lies not merely  
In the *Ding an sich*, but in showing Gwennie  
This magical creature. He points to it.  
He names it. But these gestures  
And incantations cannot connect  
Her eye to its flickering flight.  
How do we quicken the eye  
Of those whose pure sight cannot yet  
Conjure the quick?

Men stand around the fire looking  
Into its mystery, teaching the boys  
The wordless ways of the flame.  
Or hoist the raven onto their backs  
To help with the hunt.  
Aboriginal women swaddle babies  
To back for the 4000 mile trek into childhood.  
And by the time the child can walk on its own  
It has heard and begun to hum  
The songs of the land.

The day will come when Gwendolyn will see  
Not only the common but also  
The tiger or the giant swallowtail  
Or perhaps even its cousin  
The Australian Ulysses or Mountain Blue.

But right now my son flies away.  
He has seen a bright lively yellow bird  
Dart high to a nest or perch.  
We had never seen this beauty  
Until we took the child into our arms.  
Then the light shone on both of us.

Someday, not many years from now,  
In that same spot she will say to her father,  
“Daddy, come listen to the flowers.”  
And perhaps not knowing he is about to enter  
The region beyond the dream,  
He will think, “She means *see* the flowers or *smell* them.”  
Hand in hand they will approach  
The giant wild rose bush.  
And there a tumult of buzzing—  
Bees about their loud, sweet work.  
“See,” she will say.