

Haiku lovers flock to campus for conference

By Garrett Fitzgerald - Oct 22, 2015



From Oct. 15 to Oct. 17, 2015, Union acted as the meeting place for the niche society that is Haiku North America.

If you were on campus over the past week, you may have seen any number of long-haired, bearded haiku sages wandering around the grounds of old Union.

These followers of an ancient art could frequently be seen with somber faces and thoughtful eyes, deep in conversation, listening intently and searching for the entire meaning of a word.

These are the men and women who are keeping haiku alive in the world, and Union was their point of rendezvous this year.

The Haiku North America conference is held every two years, bringing together haiku poets and their works. This year, keynote speakers included the biggest names in haiku poetry.

There was Randy Brooks, from Millikin University in Illinois, who spoke about the teaching of haiku; Ion Codrescu, from Romania, who created a unique collection of poetry mixed with painted art; and Red Pine, who recently returned from a journey to China in search of Buddhist hermits who continue an ancient tradition of living a life of solitude and verse.

Nott Memorial acted as home to a bustling hive of literary activity last Friday morning. Tables full of haiku collections littered the room, with a few event volunteers tending to the wares.

Brief snippets of broken conversation from poets could be heard throughout the room.

The congregation of middle-aged men and women devoted to the written word acted as a distant experience from what many students at Union are accustomed to.

This was apparent, as the Nott was nearly empty throughout the conference. Thousands of collections of haiku books remained untouched for the duration of the event.

Marilyn Hazelton, editor of the Tanka journal "Red Lights" and volunteer for the 2015 conference, explained to the sparse students the intricacies of the international poetry scene.

Throughout conversations, she conveyed that poetry is not only alive and well, but also how a few lines of words can provide comfort in the moment. She shared, "The ability to reflect and encouragement to reflect has eroded."

In a too-quick world, it is often impossible to slow down and remove all anxieties of the world from the mind.

People traveled from all around the world to Union to hear some words in a 5-7-5 syllabic scheme.