

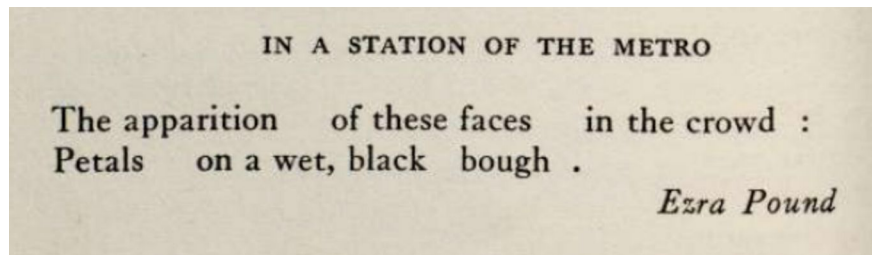
riff on McLuhan  
the process is the product—  
last line still missing

I don't know if Marshall McLuhan's popularity extended beyond the Boomer Generation; he was a Canadian philosopher whose phrase "the medium is the message" is the model for the second line above.\*

As the midpoint of the Arts Marathon approaches, I find a note-to-self on my writing table saying, Write on Why I Do Haiku. Yes, caps like that. Fine title, but Why questions never have one line answers. Because, your mother told you. That wasn't an answer, but rather a challenge to find out for yourself.

Haiku are like the squirrels in my yard: they scamper across the surface, stopping impulsively to dig a divot in the grass, hoping for and usually not finding a morsel. I like to watch them because their antics are amusing, their leaps impressive, and because their bushy tails clearly distinguish them from rats. (I don't see rats, thank goodness, but they exist in my imagination.) I watch them—whether I like it or not—because I eat my solitary meals beside a window, because my eyes are naturally drawn to motion, because I have watched them so often that it has become a comforting habit, and because sometimes I am surprised by what I see.

So why not let it go at that? Just watch the squirrels, and forget about writing haiku? Because I am not content to watch; I want to become the squirrel, or the rat, or the falling petal. Sometimes I just want to be not-me. Other times, I want to understand or to give the subject its due. It was Basho who elevated the haiku, gave it this spiritual dimension. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century poets, Ezra Pound and others, explored Eastern philosophy and literature to inspire their own expressiveness.



I prefer the haiku form because it doesn't make me feel like a poet. I never wanted to be a poet. But I do love observing, thinking, making connections. Haiku allow me to record those processes in a few words. Like lab notes.

I began practicing Zen meditation in 1997, when three separate personal traumas merged into one gigantic threat to my sanity. The practice and the *sanga* (the practice group) helped me survive by reinforcing the belief that there is no fixed me about whose sanity to be concerned. Good fortune has followed bad. Haiku are, for me, a review of what I learned in meditation. When the Marathon is over, I expect I'll stop writing for a while, and give the hours back to more important things. But over the surface of garden chores, housepainting, and piano lessons, the haiku will keep scampering, digging hopeful divots.

\*Marshall McLuhan also coined the phrase "the global village."