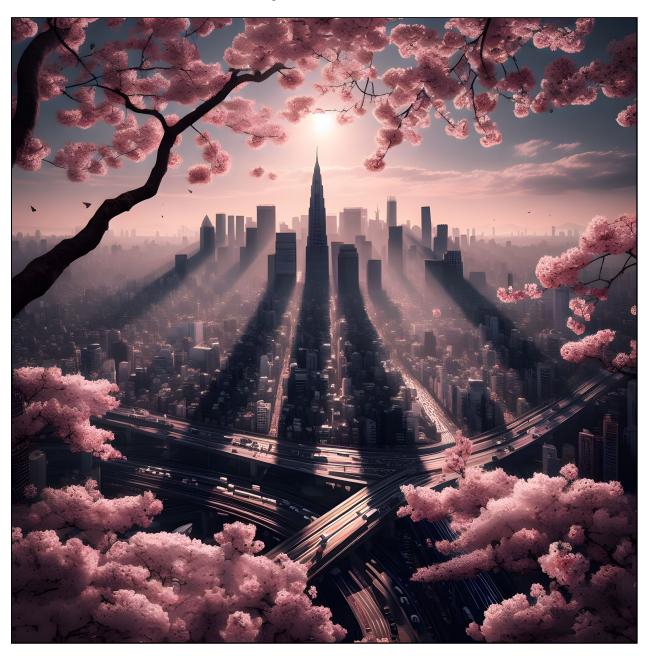# Reflections of a Dream

Cyrus Cousins

An Anthology of Generatively Illustrated Haiku

Preface

Explaining the meaning behind any individual piece of art largely undercuts the point of art itself, so I won't be doing that here. The best way to appreciate this work is to skip this preface entirely, and to experience the work for yourself. Any meaning in these haiku is for you to derive, and any meaning intended by the author is between me and Dall·E 3. That said, this being an experimental and somewhat unique anthology that blurs the line between artist, audience, and medium, some explanation of what we are looking at seems warranted. This work was inspired by the minimalist nature of the haiku: The sparse 5-7-5 syllable nature leaves the reader with an impression, but details, history, and complex ideas must be inferred. The haiku are written and titled by the author, then acting as reader, interpreter, and artist, a generative AI model illustrates each haiku.

The juxtaposition of the vague haiku form with the prompting of descriptive generative AI was quite intentional. While others would be far better qualified to speak on these matters, from my limited experience, the haiku form puts a hard limit on poetic developing poetic description and themes, and frequent references to nature are readily visualized. Indeed, a classical haiku often revolves around two references to nature with a "cutting word" implying some action, and this seems to be an ideal fit for generative art, giving just enough information to produce vivid imagery. This work begins with a somewhat classical lament on the state of the world, as depicted through nature, followed by more abstract musings on doubt in humanity, and concluding with a darker third section exploring the consequences of this doubt on a personal, global, and cosmic level. The more abstract themes of the later sections at times move away from natural imagery and the platonic ideals of classical haiku, stepping more into the territory of contemporary gendai, and are less readily visualized.

While this is a work of art, not a technological description of how to produce such art, in order to better critique and appreciate it, I feel my audience is owed some explanation. Each image was produced by providing Dall·E 3 with the title and text of each haiku. A total of 393 images were generated, or roughly 23 images per haiku. The pieces on the title page and leading each section of this work were also selected from these images. After selecting the images I found to be most resonant with the themes of the work, I took the artistic license to lightly edit these images for consistency and minor color correction.

In some cases, this minimalist approach immediately led to some of the most unique and interesting generative artwork I have yet produced, but others were quite challenging, requiring me to generate many images with some subtle prompting variations to produce the final results. By my standards, 393 images is quite small for a project of this scope, as much of the artistry in generative art comes from the perception of the human artist and their iterative interaction with the generative model. While I surely could have generated better or more appealing images with heavier prompting, I would have considered any substantial prompting to be a failure. Indeed, any customized prompting rather missed the point and betrayed the essence of a haiku. After all, what fool would think that a haiku could be improved with the addition of a few extra words? For me, it was crucial for the generative images to reflect the process of interpreting such minimalist work.

This approach lies in stark contrast to how I would normally use generative AI systems. In my experience, generative AI art systems excel at illustrating abstract symbolism and subtext, creating appropriate details, and generating variations on a broad theme. Most of my work heavily prompts these systems, not to ask for specific framing, actions or scene compositions, which often go largely ignored, but rather to incorporate subtle details, both stylistic and concrete, into an image. For me, the process of creating generative AI artwork generates a snapshot of an unstable dreamlike imaginary world. In this work, I sought to achieve the same goals with extremely minimalist prompting, so that the illustrations would reflect only the haiku and the cultural understanding of them (as captured in the training of the generative AI model), rather than my interpretation of them. The title of this anthology references this perspective on the medium, though the title of each section and each haiku is purely chosen artistically.

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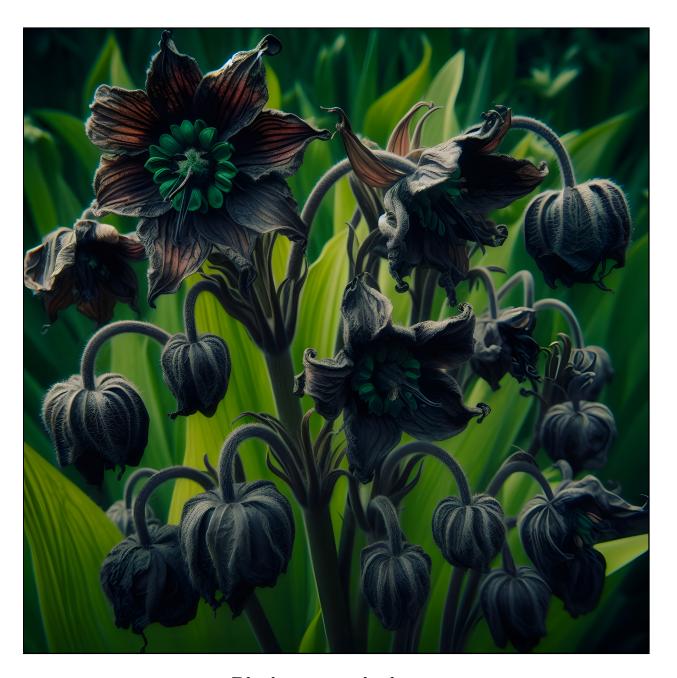# Contents

Part I   Vestiges of Beauty

Black Fire

Black cherry blossoms.
Embers carried on the breeze.
Yet beauty persists.

Silhouette on the Wind

Dark flowers bloom.
Cast shadows on the city.
Oh Zephyr take me!

Age of Rot

Black tar petals droop.
Rot blights the burnt countryside —
how beauty festers.

The Hollow Shell

On this burnt-out Earth,
nothing of beauty belongs.
But still you remain.

Frostbitten Tears

Winter's biting chill —
to see your face by moonlight,
such sweet suffering.

Part II   Nocturne of Doubt

Prometheus' Lament

To hold in my hand
 the radiant sun's fire;
 arrogance of youth.

Dreamer's Gate

Mourn what could have been.
Darkness hidden from the mind.
In sleep the gate falls.

Bitter Coffee

So much left to prove.
Bitter coffee burns the tongue,
held by clouds of doubt.

Indecision

To boil the seas,
dying embers in the rain,
or to fade away?

Potential

Black flowers in spring.
Will they bloom to change the world?
Or rot on the vine?

Inner Blindness

So sure of myself,
blind to the Cataclysm.
The end came too soon.

Seirenes

Turn back now my dear,
    lest you be cast asunder,
        dashed upon the rocks.

Part III   Into Outer Darkness

Extinction by Fire

Senseless winds of war.
All life erased in silence.
Souls burnt to mere ash.

Starspawn Shower

By ashen nightfall,
a sea of stars rains to Earth.
Darkness reigns above.

The Inevitable

In darkness it lurks.
Behind the veil of shadow,
time's arrow ends all.

Madness

The seeds of Madness
 lie dormant within us all.
Would they never sprout.

Dementia

Memory fickle,
we go through life not knowing.
The hourglass drains.

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