THE PIKU

MICHAEL KEITH
Salem, Oregon

The word-length pi mnemonic has been around for some time; a classic example, said to have been composed by physicist Sir James Jeans, is:

How I need a drink, alcoholic in nature, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics!

In this sentence, the number of letters in each successive word "spells out" the initial digits of the irrational number pi, whose value begins 3.141592653589793238462643383...

In this article we introduce the doubly-constrained writing form which I call the piku: a standard haiku (with three lines of 5-7-5 syllables) that also obeys the pi word-length constraint. Here are a few examples, ranging in style from traditional to modern:

Bud, a stem, a bloom
sheltered by Basho's great oak.
Large protects smallness.

For a week I sweat
threshing my field's wheat and chaff
Dualists' nightmare.

Man, I know, I sense,
struggles to deduce life's end.
Silly endeavor.

Fog, a mist, a cloud
enshrouds an island hotel.
God-awful furlough.

See a fist, a shake--
Beethoven so defies death.
The Fifth Symphony.

Now I take a break
strolling on Stokes Beach for hours.
Glorious nighttime.

It's a bird, a plane,
appearing in cloudy skies--
It's brave Superman!
Yes, I call a bluff
unfolding my straight flush now.
Poker champion.

Egg, a beer, a steak
decorates my shower floor.
I've drunk overmuch.

We next offer an homage to Alfred Hitchcock's movie The Birds in four piku stanzas. This was inspired by observing that in English the names of the four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, winter) are all six letters long! Thus the four stanzas, each representing a season (the title is also a mnemonic):

IT'S A BIRD, O ALFIE HITCHCOCK

Dew, a mist, a steam
ascending in spring azure;
the skies overcast.

Now I view a scene
(Hitchcock, in summer movie):
"The Birds" permeate.

See a bird, a flock
gathering in autumn skies;
the panic persists.

For a time I stand
listening to winter winds;
the peril subsides.

And finally, a single-stanza summary of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven":

Now a thud, a knock
unsettles my window panes;
The Raven intrudes.