

**Journal of
The British Haiku Society**

Blithe Spirit



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Journal Of The British Haiku Society

Blithe Spirit

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Blithe Spirit welcomes, and exists as a forum for, diverse statements about the writing and appreciation of haiku and kindred forms of verse. The Editor takes entire responsibility for the selection of items for publication and the layout of the magazine, but wishes it to be known that opinions expressed in articles and letters do not necessarily reflect her own. *Blithe Spirit* is published four times a year, cover-dated March, June, September and December.

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Editorial

Mainstream poets are becoming increasingly fascinated by haiku. This can be seen by the proliferation of haiku in the poetry magazines and in one or two recently published 'slim' volumes of verse. In the history of Western haiku there is nothing new about this — haiku was popular in America in the 50s and everyone is familiar with the Beat Poets. But for the last thirty or forty years, it has not played much of a role in the development of poetry in the West, and on the occasions that it has put in an appearance on the printed page, it has usually been in connection with Zen Buddhism rather than in a literary context.

With the widening of interest in haiku there is the possibility — likelihood (!) that those of us in the BHS who have spent some time studying the form and consider ourselves something of an authority on it, will feel tempted to pass judgement on these newly emerging poems. Some of them will seem to fall short of our ideal of haiku and we may feel that the poets are employing methods that detract rather than enhance. For linguistic reasons the Japanese don't rhyme haiku. This in itself may not be reason enough to eschew rhyme in English-language haiku, but most haiku poets feel that the use of rhyme is inappropriate and use it sparingly, if at all. Yet Sarah Wardle's sequence *Housework Haiku* (Poetry Review, Spring '98) is rhymed throughout and so are nearly all the 90 haiku in Paul Muldoon's recent collection *Hay*; it's as if poets coming new to haiku feel the need to give such a brief form greater clout — as if they don't trust it to deliver without a bit of extra 'help' from our own Western literary heritage.

Perhaps now is a good moment to ask ourselves as a Society (and/or individually) how we *should* react. Should we play the role of custodians and judges of haiku, shoot off letters and articles to the relevant literary magazines and organisations, making our opinions loudly heard? Or should we stand back, hold our council, trust to the inspiration and integrity of poets who are discovering and practising haiku perhaps for the first time — watch, listen and learn?

From letters and submissions I have received lately, it is apparent that several writers both in and out of the BHS are looking for a 'new language' for haiku — a way of revitalising it without compromising its essential quality. But exactly what *is* that essential quality is by no means universally agreed on. Consensus is as far round the corner as ever and our own *On the Nature of British Haiku* acknowledges as much when it puts itself forward as a guide rather than a

blueprint. The continuing debate can only be a good thing. It has been said that Buddhism has endured for so long because there are as many different interpretations of it as there are Buddhists. Maybe, likewise, the very lack of overall consensus explains *why* haiku, fixed yet flexible, remains so strong: the controversy that it arouses is a measure of the depth at which it engages us.

Spring is coming round again and is the season for the next issue. Please can you get your work to me by the end of the first week in May?

Caroline Gourlay

Errata

In the Pathway section of the last issue, the haiku *Jigs and reels* and *He mends boots* were translated into Irish Gaelic by Gabriel Rosenstock and not, as stated, by John McDonald.

Also apologies to Sue Schraer whose haiku should have read:

Closing the window
breeze on the curtain
September on my finger

Kathleen Basford

Sadly we have to record the death on 20th December 1998 of one of our long-standing members, Kathleen Basford. Being bedridden since the time she joined BHS, Kathleen was able to write haiku only from memories of the outside world, but these were memories that remained indelibly fresh. Some of us will also remember Kathleen as a most delightful letter-writer, one who with integrity, perspicience and good humour had much encouragement and wisdom to offer other writers of haiku.

A research botanist by training, Kathleen stepped outside her academic field to make the contribution to knowledge by which she will surely be longest remembered. Her book, *The Green Man*, first published in 1978 and republished in 1996, was and is seminal in its field. *The Times* reviewer called it *the rarest, most recondite and fascinating art book, which is a folklore and magic book as well*.

That Kathleen was blessed with an eye to spot haiku moments and a stubborn memory to hold on to them, is apparent not just from the few haiku she published, but from the Acknowledgements to her book. I would like to quote some of both here, so that we might have a little of her vitality to relish as we say goodbye to her.

First of all I must thank my husband for his unflagging support. He has driven me through nearly every county in England and travelled with me to France, Germany and Turkey to look for leafy faces. He has carried the heavy photographic equipment and waited patiently, though sometimes chilled to the bone, while I worked in draughty cloisters and cold churches. Behind almost every photograph lies a story; we stood knee-high in a bed of nettles and soaked by pouring rain to photograph the tympanum at Linley; we were harassed by resentful wasps nesting in a window in the little Church at Cadney; we left a wide-open bag containing all our money on a bench at Queen Camel and returned many hours later to find it in tact, guarded not doubt by the Green Man, with fiercely bared teeth and glaring eyes, watching down on it from the roof boss just above. We shared together all the fun and frustration of the long search and the labours in the darkroom, the many moments of comedy and the occasional moments of cursing!

October maples —
through so many colours
so much light

David Cobb

HAIKU

Maggie West

child's ride
before he climbs in
... stroking the bonnet

beaming smile ...
new shiny leather shoes
.... wheelchair bound

days after the marathon
a new spring
in his step

Eric Speight

Going to the shops
I halt — the street is blocked
by the mountain

In Nant Uchaf brook
the pool ripples gold,
her naked reflection.

Jackie Hardy

before
the edge of the razor
a caress of badger hair

Yoko Ogino

a new ear of rice —
making sure of its weight
in my palm

Katherine Gallagher

a cat with one leg
sits behind bushes
eyeing sparrows

late sunflowers
still staked upright —
heads drooping

Tito

Arriving for
A day of prayer —
A particular marbling
Of the hydrangea sky

(train, nr. Atami, Shizuoka, 6/'98)

Everywhere
Dusk falls
But on the pale magenta heads
Of iris flowers

(Nakosocho, Kyoto 5/'98)

Rod Treseder

city at dawn
engulfed in a rising tide
of sound

sean burn

addiction

to light too strong

moth dims

Mokuo Nagayama

Trimming the garden
makes the sun sink
a bit faster

Sasanqas*
shed their snowflakes
on the red carpet

Caroline Gourlay

midnight birth —
one share of the cow's body
drops to the ground

among tall pines
a silver birch
rising
with the sun

reading all night
whistle of the freight train
on the last page

(West Virginia, USA)

* a kind of camelia

Alison Williams

leaves
divided — joined
by the tree

Claire Bugler-Hewitt

rasping
of the cat's tongue ...
wasps

September rain bow in the horse's back

cool rainy morning ...
the shape in the pillow
of my sleepless night

dark summer sky —
the disturbed ants' nest
glitters with wings

Matt Morden

a layer of dust
washed off the poppies —
summer rain

Ron Woollard

Curtains drawn —
a gate banging
in the wind

Since I began receiving specialist haiku magazines a couple of years ago, I have become aware of a rich variety of views about what the content and form of haiku should be. There seems, however, to be general agreement that haiku offer images received in moments of insight and awareness and expressed in words that can be spoken in a single breath. For the majority the images should be of phenomena perceived directly in the world as it appears to the senses and allowed to speak for themselves without comment or embellishment. Some would prefer to concentrate on images from nature, largely excluding the man-made. Others would widen the range of the source of images to include memory and fantasy and would allow figures of speech to be used. Preferences also vary about the way the sounds are patterned within the utterance of a single breath: syllable counts, stress counts and line arrangements are controversial.

It seems to me that all shared moments of genuine poetic insight have their place in a world that is hungry for them. Perhaps we just need different names (at least within our own minds), to distinguish between the different sources of image that give rise to these poems and to keep them separate; in this way they can all survive and thrive and even cross-breed, while still remaining distinct as forms that engender other forms. I would suggest the names *haiku*, *nature haiku* and *imaginative breaths*.

It also seems that the words chosen to express poetic insights and the way these words are arranged should be appropriate to the content and communication of each poem. Practice of 5-7-5 syllable form or 2-3-2 stress form is good discipline, but should ultimately be a springboard from which to try other forms with spontaneity and freedom.

My personal preference is for the nature haiku which I feel offers great healing potential both for individuals and the planet. The visionary speaker and writer David Abram in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* suggests that the engagement we once had with the natural world has, with the development of alphabetical writing,, been transferred to the printed page. Embracing Bashō's 'Way of Haiku' as championed by James Hackett, is a way of beginning to transfer that engagement back.

David Abram also suggests that perception is a two-way process. When, as Bashō says, we 'go to the pine if (we) want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if

(we) want to learn about the bamboo' and find that 'poetry issues of its own accord' it is not just that we are 'plunged deep enough into the object.' The object or creature is also reaching out to us, inviting us to perceive it and share its life. Somehow it is plunging itself into us. When we touch a tree we touch the sensation of a tree that feels itself touched by us. Breathing this kind of perception into a haiku is a process that heals both our relationship with the natural world and heals ourselves because we are not fully ourselves when sealed into our limited human world of contact.

Language arose out of the engagement we once had with the natural world. Words themselves, when experienced with this awareness, become sounds to be used with special reverence. They may certainly arise spontaneously if we are nurturing the awareness of nature that Bashō cultivated in his *Way of Haiku* and that was once inseparable from our way of being.

For these reasons I certainly feel drawn to focus my energy on the nature haiku. Aware that underlying the whole of nature of which the human world is a small part, there is a deep stillness and silence and space, I also feel drawn to embrace any sincere poem that belongs to the encompassing range of haiku and haiku-generated poems. To play with the definition of a sacrament that I learned as a child at Sunday school:

Three outward visible lines
Of inward spiritual space.

HAIKU

Jim Kacian

weaving through
my thread of thought
this swallow

three beers —
the amber glow
of the night

Jane Whittle

I plant this pine
so the wind can make music
I want you to hear.

Alan Peat

the sun blinking
as I walk past railings

a trapped wasp stings
the pane

Leo Lavery

the train
dragging its hills
round the bend

Gilles Fabre

the pregnant cat,
more careful than ever,
crossing the road

first to blossom
this crooked tree
in my street

darkening sky —
on a white counter
I'm cutting squids

Ken Jones

Scarred old sawing-horse
only fit for firewood

These hills
have nothing to say
and go on saying it

Matthew Paul

overcast —
a sparrow pinches peas
from the market stall

Brian Tasker

new ball in a string bag —
the boy in the park
kicking the leaves

A. A. Marcoff

the intense
moment
of the rose

Wastwater
with rock : the wild reality
of light

I cross the road
over to the moon

Gary Hotham

on the smooth pebbles —
the last wave
glistens

slowing darkness —
the bedtime story from the page
she turns back to

on the hour
the sound of the bells —
our shadows making one big shadow

Ross Figgins

Shrine of Guadalupe
old women on their knees —
rows of ripe oranges

ernest j berry

white carnations
on the landing
the colour of moonlight

scimitar moon
the warrior's widow
closes her shoji

morning mist
one by one
lilies

Ruth Robinson

after the drought
dandelions, celandines
wet above the grass

cause for reflection
a wall of rippled blue glass

Leslie Giddens

back Mum
to &
back Dad

eyetoeyeyou&me

Mike Hayes

a few stones
in the middle of nowhere
time to go

David Cobb

under the Plough
a ploughman
turning earth

Francis Attard

Carnival soon
painting masks he talks to them
in whispers

sickle moon fading
coming into focus
a praying mantis

thistle blooms
embellished sky
a deeper purple

John Barlow

from either side
of the rottweiler's mouth
the rottweiler's tongue

eyeballing
the wagtail
eyeballing
me

all along the street
the smell of her perfume
the smell of my chips

THE PATHWAY

This section welcomes haiku and senryu from anyone, members of BHS or not. Each poem should be in two different languages — the *original* and the *translation* (English, German or French). **The Pathway** aims to link those writing in widely-spoken and less widely-spoken languages.

Michael Dylan Welch (English and French)

visiting mother —
again she finds
my first grey hair

en visite chez ma mère —
de nouveau elle trouve
mon premier cheveu blanc

after the quake
the weathervane
pointing to earth

après le tremblement de terre
la girouette
pointe vers le sol

clicking off the late movie
the couch cushion
reinflates

j'éteins le dernier film —
le coussin du sofa
reprend sa forme

Zoran Raonić (Serbian and English)

Na strehi
I na brcima
— ledenice

On eaves
and on moustaches
— icicles

Dimitar Anakiev — from his collection 'Enormous Frog' (Serbian and English)

nova godina:
koverta čestitke
od kalendara

New Year's card:
the envelope made from
an old calendar

prolecno veče:
pod tockom transportera
pregažen gušter

spring evening
under the wheel of a troop carrier
a lizard is crushed

FEATURED HAIKU WRITER Soen Nakagawa (19.3.1907— 11.3.1987)
Keith Coleman

Tremendous stature as a haiku poet ... considered the Bashō of the 20th century.

In the traditional sense, probably the greatest Zen master of modern times.

Gary Snyder

Tetsugen Glassman-roshi

Soen Nakagawa was a man of many parts. In his life haiku and Zen were one seamless practice — indeed, it was whilst preparing his graduation paper on Bashō's *The Monkey's Raincoat* that he was inspired to become a monk. A student of haiku master, Dakotsu Iida, Nakagawa was hailed a 'genius poet' by the age of twenty-seven and later became a key figure in the transmission of Zen Buddhism to the West. He was a dynamic calligrapher and also a notoriously eccentric teacher who, for example, was known to conduct 'tea ceremonies' using instant coffee and styrofoam cups. In presenting him as this quarter's Featured Haiku Writer, I would like to reveal him through his sayings and haiku; except where noted, the following are the words of Soen Nakagawa:

Nowadays ... there is no-one capable of being dumbfounded.

(First talk in US, April, 1949)

Soen Roshi changed people's lives ... every moment with him was an opportunity to wake up.

(Roko Sherry Chayat)

Matter of great urgency
a nut rolls away
alive

Picked
by an old woman's hand
herbs grow green

When your mind is clear enough, even a squirrel becomes your wonderful teacher.

Into the twilight zendo
maple leaves
come dancing

End of the year
woodcutter walks through mud
steps on clouds

We live in a time of emergency; even the earth's atmosphere is polluted. Yet there is a realm originally pure; not even a speck of dust can alight there...

Great earth
not even a lick of mud
year's first laughter

(Journal/haibun Jan. 1962)

*Truly hear the crickets; that is the same as doing zazen.
If an event is unrepeatable, that is beauty.*

Acorn hits
my shoulder
just before dawn

Sweeping the monastery yard
autumn's sound
deeper day by day

Soen-roshi leads us outside, points at Orion ... 'Swallow the stars' he murmurs.

(Peter Matthiessen)

A nun has come to visit
now in the bright moonlight
how bright the icicles!

Doing zazen with patients at the leprosy clinic ...

Nightingale sings
this very place is
the lotus land of purity (Journal/haibun, Spring '57)

*... the incomparable joy he inspired. His fabulously innocent smile. The great
laughter.*

(Louis Nordstrom)

A monk
in real estate —
as shaky as raw tofu!

Mad people
send up a cheer
gumi berries are red

*So we extend tender care with a worshipping heart even to such beings as beasts
and birds ... to insects too, okay? Even to grass ... to one speck of dust. Some-
times I bow to the dust ...*

(Final teisho — talk conveying a Master's understanding of Zen —
to American students. 4.7.1982)

Death poem

Mustard blossoms!
there is nothing left
to hurl away.

*Essential reading: Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Soen Nakagawa, (Shambala, Boston and
London) and Nine-Headed Dragon River: Zen Journals, by Peter Matthiessen, Shambala.*

Crazy Haiku

a sequence

out of a raki bottle
hermetic sparrow
aesthetic rock

drinking raki
the bellflower resounds
in my head

through a raki bottle
the sombre bee orchid
sobers up

in the raki bottle
a spike of turkish
lamb's ears

drinking raki
the bug orchid takes on
vanilla fragrance

in the raki bottle
testicles
of the holy orchid

Bill Wyatt

A Tree is a Tree is a Tree ?

Ion Codrescu was born in 1951. He graduated from the Fine Arts Academy of Bucharest in 1973 and is an art teacher in Constanza on the Black Sea. **Gabriel Rosenstock** interviewed him for *Blithe Spirit* when he and his wife visited Ireland on a translation scholarship last autumn.

GR Ion, you are an art teacher, a haikuist, editor of the bilingual haiku journal, Albatross; your ink-drawings and ink-paintings in the Japanese style, sumi-e, are in many private and state collections; your haiga — ink drawings with haiku and calligraphy — are truly beautiful and your own haiku are recognised and admired in many countries:

*dry tree—
birds dressing
its sadness*

I know you studied under the Japanese master, Ryuhei Nishiyama, now in his mid-nineties, but had you been practising sumi-e and haiga before that?

IC Yes, even as a teenager I was most interested in Japanese and Chinese painting, realising they were very different to European models in technique and perspective. In European painting, man is in the centre of the composition — think no further than the *Mona Lisa*! In Oriental painting man is lost in the landscape. You see first the mountains, the river, the temple, the houses ... man is no more than a leaf, some grasses — not very important. So, firstly the relationship between landscape and man was of interest. Then colours — oil has dominated in the West, whereas ink is the preferred medium in Japan and China. I investigated all this while studying in Bucharest, and in 1974 I discovered some Japanese haiku translated into Romanian (via French) and knew immediately that this was the poetry for me.

GR Literary and painterly accomplishments seem to go hand in hand in the East more often than in the West — Buson, for instance. You would see them as complementary gifts?

IC Yes, two sides of the path. Sometimes when painting I imagine poems in colour, in light. With haiga, occasionally, the haiku comes first; or it could be I paint the image, then add the words.

GR George Stino was writing haiku in Romania as far back as 1939, but it really has only taken off since the '70s, or perhaps the '90s?

IC The Haiku Society in Bucharest started in 1991. The Constanza Haiku Society started a year later as we celebrated 15 years of being twinned with

Yokohama. All in all we can count 100 or so haikuists in Romania, 20 of whom would have at least one haiku volume published.

GR *Someone once referred to Japan as the 'biological mother' of the haiku! There's an ongoing and never-ending debate as to how much of the influence of Japanese models should be absorbed by Westerners: after all, the baggage could contain Japanese customs, folklore, the oral and written literature, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, all forms of Buddhism from Pure Land to schools of Zen, not to mention the genius of Japanese aesthetics, the nature of consciousness and language itself.*

IC I was very interested to see that in Japan there are various schools of haiku, from traditionalist to modernist, each with its own master. Some masters that I talked to about the form and spirit of haiku were open to the idea of its integration into world literature while others guarded it as a Japanese treasure. Bill Higginson brought out an anthology of *world* haiku for Kodansha with haikuists from 50 or so countries! The cricket is a seasonal word for autumn in Japan; for us, in Romania, it's a summer reference. But are seasonal references essential? Haiku can be written about any moment in life; it is a dialogue between the world of nature and being. It is a spiritual activity. The haiku moment means, for me, that a tree is not just a tree. When I touch its bark I feel I am touching a person.

GR *Goodness! You feel that every life form has a latent individuality!*

IC Yes, yes!

GR *Animism?*

IC In some ways, yes. Ryōkan loved the sound of rain. Rain-sound doesn't need translation. A universal language!

GR *Nevertheless, we're stuck with our own language, and syllables. 'Spring' is one syllable in English, two in French, German and Irish, but four in Romanian — 'primăvara'.*

IC Indeed ... I practise writing haiku in Romanian and English. Sometimes it's very difficult to translate my own poems from Romanian into English and vice versa, because I like to have sonority in my poems. For instance, to say 'snow falling' in Romanian, you have a combination of a consonant and a vowel, five times: *că-de-ză-pa-dă*.

GR *And that's snow falling?*

IC Yes, but with a different sonority. In English I look for a kind of visual sonority:

up in the sky
hardly heard, hardly seen:
migrating birds

‘Hardly heard, hardly seen’: is meant to reflect the movement of the birds’ wings
... it’s hard to rise, but easy to fall....

GR It’s been easy talking to you!

IC And to you! We get to know more about nature and ourselves through haiku
— but we also get to know people all over the world and I now have haiku friends
in England, USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, France,
Germany, Croatia, Greece, Colombia, Belgium ...

GR Good luck on your travels!

** Isoji Asô commenting on Bashō’s ‘go to the pine’ wrote: “The way is not to divorce oneself from the pine and to see it with one’s own feeling, but to divorce the self and to enter the pine with a selfless interest. Then a real insight into the pine arises. Thus it will become a pine into which a human heart has entered. It will become sentient ...”*

Favourite Haiku

Arms folded
to the moon
among the cows

Jack Kerouac

Simplicity, omission, and a concrete image are indispensable to haiku of high quality. This haiku is constructed on these elements. Besides, behind the description are hidden the author’s deep emotion and contemplation of the universe. I appreciate them. And the moon is very effective as a season word of autumn.

Yasuhiko Shigemoto

TANKA

Ron Woollard

Alone at midnight
winter's first frost
even the stars look cold —
the distance between
quenches fires.

sean burn

jazz

thelonius monk

monk alone whether
san francisco or other
cities yu took the
beat the music the street right
out my heart my lungs my eyes

tim garland

less to prove contours
of yr horns hoop games gentle
as playin to the
moon to the full to the end
of a different sax line

Keith Coleman

last leaves burning,
the sky catches fire ...
and down the lane
a winter gnat
is dancing over the mud

Haiku occupies a unique position in American culture. A few childhood favorites aside, the average American would rather have a tooth pulled than read a contemporary poem. And I realize how serious a situation this is, since I am a dentist! But while Americans in general have little interest in contemporary poetry, most Americans have at least heard of haiku and often have a surprising affection for it. When they think of haiku, most Americans think of a three-line poem in 17 syllables. This is the way it is taught in elementary school, and apparently, this is also the way it is taught in college writing programs. Even professional poets go on for years publishing three-line 17 syllable statements as if they were haiku poems. I am not going to talk about this understanding of haiku today, as I will assume that everyone here has a deeper understanding of what haiku is or at least what haiku can be. I will take as a basis for this discussion the understanding that haiku is a short poem, that this poem, to quote part of the HSA's definition, "records the essence of a moment keenly perceived in which nature is linked to human nature," that this short poem in English is of unspecified form, that it has some reference to non-human nature and that it is generally composed of images. A concise definition of haiku that I once heard from Bob Spiess is that it is a poem that "presents images that reflect intuitions." It is important to note that haiku thus defined do not present thoughts, ideas or tell stories.

Originally, many of the people in the States that were interested in haiku were so because they were interested in Japanese culture or in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism as it was popularized there in the 1950s and '60s. I will characterize this group by saying that their primary interest in haiku was in its use as a vehicle for spiritual development. Because of this group's belief that the kind of haiku developed by the Japanese masters, and Bashō in particular, is a useful tool for this purpose, this group has had a great interest in studying the characteristics of classical Japanese haiku, its history, its philosophy, and its technique. What was available for this study in the 1950s were the books of your great expatriate, R.H. Blyth, Harold Henderson's books *An Introduction to Haiku* and *Haiku in English*, and Kenneth Yasuda's *The Japanese Haiku*. Later on, these books were supplemented by others, particularly Bill Higginson's *The Haiku Handbook*. Using these resources as a basis, and a commitment to truth as a guiding principle, North America produced several haiku poets of a high level of accomplishment.

More recently, as haiku magazines have proliferated and as anthologies of English-language haiku have become widely available, more people have come to haiku

because of an interest in general poetry or because of an interest in using poetry as a form of self-expression. It seems that many of these people are more interested in experimenting with haiku as a vehicle for expressing their own thoughts than they are in experimenting with themselves in order to find out what haiku has to offer them. In other words, these people's interest in haiku as a vehicle for self-expression takes precedence over their interest in haiku per se. As a result, we have people writing minimalist poems, concrete poems, visual poems and word puzzles of various sorts and calling their efforts haiku.

In the early days of American haiku, when people looked to haiku to provide a new way of experiencing the world around them, most haiku were based on actual experience. Today, however, many of the poems being written and published are no longer based on the poet's personal experiences. We find that in some cases, poets will imaginatively alter experiences to produce a poem of greater impact; poets will base poems on scenes in photographs, on movies, on television programs, or on items in the news, on pure fancy, or even fantasy. In other cases poets will create haiku- or senryu-like poems by manipulating stereotypes. Of course, a certain amount of experimentation is essential to the continued vitality of haiku. However, several questions arise: Is it in haiku that we share our insights, those "images reflecting intuitions?" Is haiku a form in which we can display our wit? Does the creation of the poem as an object take precedence over the truthfulness of the content? Is it some combination of these? These are fundamental questions we need to consider carefully as we go about the business of creating English-language haiku.

Haiku in America has what might be called an "amateur status." In great part because they have not really understood its properties and potentials, professional poets in America have looked down on haiku as an inferior form. Many of them have assumed that so short a poem must necessarily be easy to write. Of course, you and I understand that the brevity of the form creates one of its greatest challenges: there is nowhere to hide, nowhere to explain what you *really* meant to say. One of the results of haiku's lowly status is that it has been in America, as it has historically been in Japan, to quote Bill Higginson, "a literature written for a popular audience and involving people from all walks of life as authors." While this is undoubtedly one of the reasons for haiku's wide appeal, it has created some serious problems for haiku in America. One of these problems results from the fact that anyone who has the time and the resources can successfully produce a haiku journal. Because some people will support a journal that publishes their own work regardless of its poetic merits, sometimes journals of vastly inferior quality continue successfully for years. While this "success" might be beneficial for the

emotional health, or as we say, the "self esteem" of the editors and contributors, the continued existence of these journals contributes to the perception that it is not possible to write worthwhile haiku in English. Another aspect of this problem is the general unavailability of appropriately critical reviews of haiku books in our journals. To some extent, neophyte poets depend on these reviews to learn what is good and what is bad. If reviewers are unwilling to take poets to task as well as to praise them, it will be difficult for the artform to advance beyond the stage of the dilettantism of which it is sometimes accused.

Speaking of reviews brings another matter to mind, that of assessing what is going on in haiku in countries other than one's own. The fact is, it is as difficult for you to keep up with what is going on in North America as it is difficult for us to know what is happening here. This is one of the primary reasons I made the journey to be here with you today—I wanted to get to know you and your poems better. If any of you happen to be interested in keeping up with what is being written and published in North America today, I would suggest that you consider subscribing to our journal *Modern Haiku*. One of the policies of the journal is to review all haiku-related books sent to it, and even, as in the case of the Waning Moon Press books, some that haven't, but that the editors consider to be of interest to the haiku public. Another resource that is now available to those interested in assessing the progress of English-language haiku is Jim Kacian's *Red Moon Anthology*. This annual attempts to bring together in one book the best haiku in English that have been published in the previous year. I'm sure many of you are already familiar with this book as your haiku have already appeared in it.

So there are a few observations on North American haiku. With your indulgence, I would now like to share some thoughts about the development of the haiku poet.

According to Robert Lowell, "A poem is an event, not the record of an event." Of course this is an ideal, rarely achieved in any poetic form. How are we to make an individual haiku into an event? A haiku is composed of two ingredients: the event or experience and the poet's mind. It is the combination of these two things that can potentially make the haiku itself into an event. To write haiku, then, also requires two things: that we cultivate our powers of attention and perception so that we don't miss the event, and that we cultivate our "poetic mind" or "haiku mind" so that we are able to transform our experience into a poem.

According to Makoto Ueda, the Japanese poet and theorist, Shiki said that there are three stages in the development of a haiku poet: *shasei* or sketches from life, selective realism, and *makoto* or truthfulness. In the first stage, the poet simply

records what he or she experiences. The purpose of this stage is to develop the poet's perceptual abilities, to teach the poet to avoid intruding his or her thoughts and feelings into the poem, and to develop the craft of translating perception into language. This is perhaps the most difficult stage for Americans to endure, since it requires that poets *not* express themselves, that they *not* strive for effect, but that they simply develop their powers of perception and learn to record their perceptions in language. Since this effort frequently results in flat, uninteresting poems lacking in significance (the so-called "so what?" haiku), few people are willing or able to stay in this stage long enough to open themselves to the world as it actually is. For this is a key element of haiku: haiku record the world as it is rather than as we would like it to be. After the poet has developed a sufficient maturity of perception and craft, he or she is able to begin to understand what makes up the essence of each scene or experience.

Shiki suggests that when poets have achieved this understanding, they may move on to the next stage, one that Ueda calls "selective realism," but one for which apparently Shiki had no specific name. In this stage, the poet attempts to select out the essential elements from each scene or experience, and to express this essence in language. The art of selective realism can be said to have been achieved when the poet is able to perceive, select and express the true nature of things. In other words, only after having sufficiently experienced the world as it is, is the poet able to select from or rearrange actual scenes in order to create a poem that both reflects truth (in its ontological sense) and is a poem (that is, an artform in words). I would say that this is the highest stage to which any of us can reasonably aspire. If one has reached this level of achievement, one could truly say that one is a poet, that is, one is making an original contribution to human understanding through the imaginative use of words.

Is there anything beyond this? For the poet who has attained this level, Shiki suggests that the final step is to begin to examine and express the poet's own interior reality. Shiki called this *makoto* or "truthfulness." Contemporary haiku master Yatsuka Ishihara refers to this as the "landscape of the heart." In this most advanced stage, the poet connects exterior and interior in a seamless expression of reality. The early 20th century (US) haiku poet, Aro, quoted by R.H. Blyth, calls this *makoto*, "the truth we create in living with energy, seeking something." *The truth we create in living with energy, seeking something.* Indeed!

I think Shiki's theories are a useful framework for understanding the potentials of poetic development. As you may already know, however, one of the biggest problems for the poet is to be able to accurately assess where he or she is. For

myself, having composed haiku on and off for some 30 years now, I would like to think that I am solidly in the second stage, that of selective realism. I would like to think I am, but find that many of my attempts at "selective realism" are merely attempts by my ego to intrude into the poem, attempts to produce poems that will be judged by others to be good or clever or profound, rather than ones that achieve the true goal of selective realism, which is to make the poem even more "real" than the actual experience. While poems I have composed in this manner are sometimes appreciated by others, I have found that they are rarely satisfying to me; they generally don't pass my own "smell test." As a result, it is necessary for me to return again and again to the discipline of detached observation. As I am sure many of you realize, this issue of ego versus true receptivity to reality is one of the most persistent and distressing issues of haiku.

Can we ever hope to enter the third stage? Shiki's own poems of the third stage were written in the final years of his life when he was fighting a losing battle with tuberculosis. Perhaps one needs the unrelenting focus produced by the experience of facing death to fully develop one's perception and expression.

There is some wisdom in all this as well as a warning. Sometimes young poets try to start off by experimenting with the limits of haiku before they have fully absorbed the essential elements of the world around them and developed a complete understanding of what makes haiku haiku. As I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to stay in the first, or "boring," stage, long enough to sufficiently develop one's powers of perception and expression. For people raised in contemporary Western "instant culture," the tendency is to try to "jump start" their haiku by beginning in the 2nd or 3rd stage. For some very talented people this might result in successful haiku, but for the vast majority of us, it simply produces a short Western poem, either lyric or confessional, that strains for effect, but without what has been referred to as *haiku essence*, the essence of reality. Fine haiku do produce what Wordsworth called "the shock of mild surprise." What could be more American than to amplify this shock until it blows us away?

Robert Lowell remarked of free verse, "I never dared write it until I was about forty. If it doesn't work, if the rhythm isn't right and the experience isn't right, you have nothing ..." It might be fruitful to consider this remark in relation to haiku. Most Japanese haiku masters are in their 60s and 70s and 80s. As I find myself approaching my 50th year, I am beginning to understand why.

Lee Gurga was President of the Haiku Society of America in 1997 and is currently Associate Editor of Modern Haiku. This paper was given at the 1998 BHS Conference in Ludlow.

What Should We Call Ourselves?

David Cobb

Every now and again we are asked to account in personal terms for our output of haiku. Are you a *poet*? Are you a *writer of verse*? Are you a *haikuist*? Perhaps, even, if the interlocuter thinks he knows a thing or two above the ordinary, are you a *haijin*?

What do you answer if pressed? In his book *Messages from Matsuyama*, Yagi Kametaro gives good reasons why we should avoid *all* these descriptions of ourselves. Here, summarising him, is why.

The term *haijin* (although abused in Japan itself) is properly reserved for those of great distinction in the haiku world; the sort of people, a dozen among millions, who might qualify for inclusion in Makota Ueda's anthology of *Modern Japanese Haiku*. In addition, Japanese *haijin* are expected to be accomplished in calligraphy and haiku painting (*haiga*). The term *haijin* is also used spitefully, to put down those who pretend to honour.

In Japan, a poet is a *shijin*, and a *haijin* is therefore something other than a poet. As we are now experiencing in the West, in Japan poetry and haiku are in many ways considered alien to each other.

Writing haiku in Japanese means putting them down on paper in calligraphy. You can write a novel in Japanese, but you *do* haiku.

Haikuist? The objection to that is that it sticks in the craw as an obviously bastard word. Myself, I'd even prefer *haikuoso*, based on *virtuoso*, but I bet that's just as offensive to the Italians.

Where does this leave us, then? Certainly not with many options.

You can't go round the poetry readings and the festivals announcing to people 'I'm a doer of haiku'. But I have noticed, on self-interrogation, that I've been quite used to telling people, 'Actually, I do haiku myself', or if feeling rather lowly and defensive when confronted with some poetic eminence, 'I only do haiku myself.'

'(One of) those who do haiku'? at first hearing may seem a little odd, but not outside English idiom. We do, after all, refer to sailors as 'those who go down to the sea in ships.' The attractive thing about doing haiku is that it places emphasis

on haiku as a way of life. You can be a doer of haiku without writing anything on paper at all. Jim Hackett once told me that nowadays most of his new haiku are in his camera. And perhaps the better for that? The expression also fits rather neatly with Bashō's dictum that 'a good poet does not *make* a poem; he keeps contemplating his subject until it *becomes* a poem.' (Ueda's translation uses the words 'poem' and 'poet' which rather confuses the matter again; I just don't know whether these are the words Bashō actually said).

Since very few of us in the West do calligraphy, when speaking English there should really be no misunderstanding about *haiku writer*, even among Japanese. What you call yourself is naturally up to you, but I think I shall try in future (I've used all the other terms in the past) to confine myself to 'haiku writer' and 'someone who does haiku'. And I shall continue to hope for publication in *poetry* magazines!

Haleakala Highway

W. Henderson

We hire a jeep in Lahaina and head upcountry. August sun is high in the cloudless sky. An old man sits at the side of the road making hats out of palm leaves. We swerve past him as we come off the highway. The roof is down. The wind blows sweat around the jeep. Bright orange lettering on a deep blue background greets us as we enter the small town of Makawao.

above a cafe
COME IN AND EAT
OR WE'LL BOTH STARVE

Tropical vegetation dwarfs the wooden buildings as we turn onto the main street and park outside a hardware store. I jump out. There's a silence that I realise is an absence of surf. A pick-up truck breaks the stillness. Spirals of dust rise from the ground in its wake. A tattooed arm arches out of either side of the truck, palms tapping the roof in time with the radio. I watch the dust settle. Scrape patterns in the ground with my boot.

banyan shadows
against the green paintwork

I walk into a bookstore that smells of macadamia nut coffee and sandalwood. In a back room lined with CDs someone is playing tablas. Handmade notebooks fill a centre table. Symbols stitched into leather. Buddha's footprint. Three fishes facing an eye-shaped circle. Like a Celtic triskele. Hearing my accent the man behind the counter tells me that they "employed a guy from England last summer." He laughs to himself, says: "I should ask if you know him, right? That's the American cliché." A young woman in a sarong smiles. A silver pendant swings from her neck as she flicks through a book on runes.

chaos theories
filed alphabetically
between coffee breaks

The landscape outside Makawao is prairie-like. Cowboys, or paniolos, work ranches with the Pacific as a backdrop. A surreal reminder that this is still the States — where the surreal and the everyday are inextricably mixed. Back on the highway a light spray of rain hits the windscreen and our faces. We pass the fields where Jimi Hendrix's *Rainbow Bridge* was filmed. This highway rises higher and faster than any other road on earth. Invisible above us is the summit of the massive, dormant volcano from which the highway gets its name: Haleakala, House of the Sun. A sacred place. There are organised tour groups that drive people to the top so that they can freewheel down the thirty-nine mile highway on mountain bikes. Light rain continues to fall. I wipe tiny droplets from my sunglasses.

cyclists and mist
descending
Haleakala

Maui, Hawaii.

Jeddah Cats

Dick Pettit

The Hal al Jaame'ah (University Quarter) is one of the crowded districts of Jeddah. The streets are narrow, and the pavements, where they exist, are awkward to walk on. Cars are parked on one or both sides and there is often no room for two to pass. The streets are seldom empty of people and at night and in the morning are always busy. These are also the times when the cats are out.

a grimy cat
tail up, turns the corner
after another

the smeared bruiser
settles six feet off
with a lick and a scowl

They eat out of the plentiful large rubbish skips. As Moslem families cater lavishly when they can, there are usually good pickings: bits of meat and rice soaked in savoury gravy. It's common for a rubbish bag thrown in to send two or three cats scabbling out of the skip.

hard times —
the cat beneath the skip
is eating bread

The cats like the parked cars. They retreat under them out of the heat and people's way, scratch themselves on the chassis, and at night and morning take them over. They fight, over skips, courting and kittens. These are usually with their mother, like to play and only slowly learn to be wary of people. Now and then they stray or are left alone:

taking up
very little room
kitten in the street

swung by the tail
at the end of a short life;
a heavy kitten

The cats seldom go in through the open doors of flats and houses, but will, if they can, find a safe place to give birth. An occasional cat may take a fancy to a peaceful mat in a friendly doorway, but such a liaison doesn't usually last for long.

kittens — no, kits
already striding down
my hallway

Many of the cats are mean and suspicious. Some, though, manage a certain panache:

a death-defying
cat disappears under
the car headlights

You sometimes see a cat sitting near a pavement seller, or at home in an outdoor market; but it usually keeps its distance and lives off the skips. However, African ladies, with bags hanging from a long yoke, also visit the skips daily, as do boys and occasionally men. These are almost the only people the cats don't run away from

in the cat's eyes
a fellow citizen
in the urban jungle

Jeddah: 7/11/98

Yes, I know haiku should work in the space of one breath; the length of time to read it equal to the length of having the experience and breathing ahhh! (I read that somewhere). But what a lot of enjoyment we would miss in some of the Japanese classical haiku without a few footnotes. Some of my favourite haiku come back to me now with immediacy and bring a wealth of associations with them (learned, rather than experienced, it's true) because long ago I read the footnotes.

In his travel record *Oku no hosomichi* Bashō arrived at a certain village at the beginning of May. He went to the local temple and found it contained the sword of Yoshitsune and the altar of Bankei.

Yoshitsune Japan's favourite war hero, renowned for bravery and all the positive qualities of the *samurai*. Known to every schoolchild.

Bankei Became Yoshitsune's devoted follower, after being subdued by him in a fight. He was a Buddhist priest, immensely strong; carried his altar with him — it's wooden and big!

May 5th. The Boy's Festival in Japan. Traditionally each household with a boy in it would fly colourful paper or cloth streamers made to look like carp from tall poles.

Carp Symbolises the qualities that boys should cultivate: bravery, tenacity.

Altar of Bankei

Yoshitsune's sword! ... Oh, fly
the carp in May!

oi / mo / tachi / mo / satsuki / ni / kazare / kami-nobori
Altar / (too) / sword / (too) / May / in / decorate (with) / paper streamers

And, as an academic footnote; 'When *mo* is used in parallel sequence its additive force is greatly intensified, and suggests also all other things (or actions) of the same kind.'

It's true that Henderson has been rather free in his translation. This is partly because the original haiku did not stand alone: Yoshitsune and Bankei had been mentioned already in Bashō's haibun — and most Japanese would know *whose* sword and altar, without being told.

Here is a more formal version:

Proudly exhibit
With flying banners
The sword and the satchel
This May Festival Day. 2

— but I must say that I prefer the shout of celebration of the former.

1 Translation and quotation by Harold Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (Doubleday Anchor).

2 Nobuyuki Yuasa, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*.

Museum of Haiku Literature Award

Cicely Hill has chosen Dick Pettit's

the baby's come at last —
grandpa congratulates
grandmother

This moment would seem to have taken place in a culture where ancestors are revered and elder relatives respected and so, naturally, has quite a Japanese flavour. A sense of pure generosity is conveyed only because no hint of the poet's ego intrudes.

A close second, and in somewhat like spirit, is George Marsh's *watching a cat / decide not to jump— / little gust of grief*. He sums up cat-pride, cat-embarrassment, cat-shame in a 'gust of grief' which is neither (exactly) the cat's grief nor (exactly) the poet's grief — simply grief.

If *tanka* were eligible for the Award, I should have chosen A. A. Marcoff's *The Mountain*.

WINTER

eric l. houck jr

bitter wind
broadening his smile —
snowman

windy leaves
scampering
the kitten

sudden sneeze
a flock of starlings
sweep skyward

ai li

much colder
this morning
your empty coat

midnight ...
the widow puts her smile
in a glass

this tomb
with a window
for a full moon

Allan Jarrett

New Year's Eve
and looking for rain
in the darkness of trees

W.M.Tidmarsh

The frosty sun sinks;
our mingled breath
misting the cold glass

Diana Webb

early December
sweeping silver stars
into the dustpan

condensation
frosting the pane
beads of full moon

in courtyard tables
upturned for the winter
water collects sunlight

Ron Woollard

On my lap
the old cat stretches
as the fire purrs.

Klaus-Dieter Wirth

Snow in the evening
preparing a white night
with nothing but silence

Linda Marshall

dressed as Santa
a sales assistent smoking
outside Woolworth's

Terry Cuthbert

Young man begging:

on his blanket
a single snowflake

iced moon
on the rocks:

we drink winter

John Barlow

nearly Christmas—
eating satsumas
barefoot

David Steele

smell of split pine —
released, the nails sink
into the snow

valentine's day —
in the stable an old bat
and a spring chicken

Fred Schofield

misty fields
a crow turns
on a cold wind

Arwyn Evans

Hoar frost —
barbed wire
blossoms

Wind from the north —
from the fell-side farm
barking barking

Crystal morning —
a sudden peal of bells

Sting in my nostrils:
the ring of solid peat
beneath my stick

Stanley Pelter

waiting in snow
warming one thought
feet freeze

Alison Williams

morning glow
over frozen grass
mist shifts

Yasuhiko Shigemoto

The Santa Claus
singing a song with a mike
in his hand

Leo Lavery

snow
creeping back to
its brick wall

David Rollins

morning field —
the old horse
chewing mist

January night —
the vase
empty of flowers

beaded snow
falling on the pond
this constant hush

Nora Leonard

scraping a pumpkin
in a frost-crusting garden;
earthy chill of ghosts

Bill Wyatt

Winter seclusion —
me and the moon's reflection
in the window

Pond frozen over —
two small fish in the depths
like a pair of eyes

Philip Rowland

dark winter's day —
the stopped clock
older than the passing year

Keith Coleman

ibex
cracking horns —
the woodcutter's axe

REVIEWS

Cold Morning. An international haiku anthology, edited by Margaret Saunders. The Herb Barrett Award, hamilton haiku press. £4.00. 237, Prospect St. South, Hamilton, ON L8M 2Z6. Canada. 1998. ISBN 0-9691638-9-4.

I believe the haiku is holy as the dream of a bee. With that in mind I was delighted by much in this anthology which presented a fine mix of holiness and ice-cream. My favourite poem by the winner of the first prize, Giovanni Malito, was the humane and humorous:

puddles
my dog goes around
my daughter goes through

Elizabeth St. Jacques (winner of the second prize) also deserves a mention for the dynamic:

midnight tent
leaving it I leap
into a net of stars

I also enjoyed one by Winona Baker which has a certain joyous mischief:

such faint fragrance
in this unknown wildflower
I should not have picked

But the final word I leave with ai li for this resonant view of mysterious beauty:

leaving them alone
moonlight
on roses.

Shorelines by Tony Mariano and Bruce England. 1998. Small Poetry Press. PO Box 5342, Concord, California 94524. (No price given).

A collection of variable quality, most of the haiku capture the spirit of California and North America and also remain universal. This, for example, which has much wonder:

Fading fog grew dark
turning into a mountain
as the sun rose

After close observation of nature and its mysteries (the redwoods, the mists, the coast) there are some finely humane touches:

The flashing of smiles
as I pass her on the beach
just me looking back

One or two of the later poems are rather too slight for me, and one or two too intricate and explanatory, too involved and verbose. But there is much of promise here: many to do with the sunlit road, cars, bars and dolls remind me of the world of Jack Kerouac. An enjoyable read. A kind of cowboy haiku and tanka pilgrimage and a Californian experience.

A. A. Marcoff

Natural Pavement. A BHS Dales walk 1997. Hub Editions. £6.00 inc p&p. Available from Fred Schofield, 12, Grovehall Avenue, Leeds LS11 7EX.

This is a more than usually ambitious account of a BHS walk, experimenting with photographs, both coloured and black and white. It is written throughout in haiku-type present tense, odd-seeming at first, but one gets used to it. Not knowing the Pennine Way, I got out the map and followed their progress day by day.

The narrative is good, the itinerary easy to follow, the writing is light in touch and the humours and descriptions of small accidents are there in amusing detail. But I began to feel uneasy. It was as if they walked a map and not a live countryside. The writing does not kindle into any warmth about the shape, colour, feel of the landscape they walked through. It seemed no-one had responded to the moors and the valleys with any feeling that here be grandeur, beauty, urgent colour or boring drabness. The walk was detoxifying — cleared city lungs, gave escape from desk and sink and was fine physical exercise, but all that could have been found in any sports centre. I had no idea what the landscape looked like and I wanted to know. I was given names of places on their route, hotels and youth hostels, railway stations were worth a comment as were the crowds at Malham and Malham Tarn. But the magnificent scenery that had drawn the crowds seemed not to have been registered

and was passed over in silence. Why bother to go into the hills? A map will suffice. But the high places are holy. There is no such passion in a map.

Haiku are slotted into the text as if that made the narrative a haibun. Bashō's haibun are not a hiker's notes on holiday jaunts, they are an integral part of his pilgrimages; the journeys, the poems, the contacts with places and people mysteriously fuse into an artistic whole, a centred religious experience. Bashō's haibun are only possible to one of Bashō's mind and experience. Our haibun are often merely guide-book prose and haiku in uneasy partnership.

A group-walking tour can't help but be a social event, too distracted by surface chatter to give the quiet for the haiku moment to emerge. This BHS book tries to break new ground. It certainly makes plain the problems inherent in the attempt to bring the haiku mind to work on the writing of travel narrative, raising it to the level of haibun.

The book is fun to read and is a gallant venture into difficult new terrain. More power to you and thank you; it is exciting to see efforts go beyond our familiar horizons. We are learning to realise what we don't know and to admit what we can't do. That is a good start.

Eric Speight

Zen Haiku: Poems and Letters of Natsume Soseki translated and edited by Soiku Shigematsu. Weatherhill 1994. A6 pp128. ISBN 0-8348-0324-0.

The title *Zen Haiku* is in a way misleading. Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) was a prolific and still famous novelist of the first two decades of the century; also a painter, calligrapher and poet in Chinese. One of his formative experiences was a 10 day sazen in December 1894. However, 'the gate to enlightenment remained closed'. He retained a preoccupation with Zen and treasured contacts with monks; a number of his verses refer to Buddhahood, Zen sayings and *koans*, but not so much in reverent spirit as that of a man measuring the received truths against his own experience. Some of these are humorous, as are most of his affectionate portrayals of monks and a postulant (himself). An extract from a letter gives his position: 'Zen is not words or phrases but actual practice, isn't it? If you are in the dusty world and buffeted at the mercy of it, then I wonder if there is any difference between the Zen life and the Zenless life'

So nuggets of Zen will be found only in the footnotes. But the collection of 180+ haiku, arranged in seasons and interspersed with short extracts from letters, has a definite integrity. There are many tones, but one voice. Many of the haiku are simple, some mere weather reports; yet they come over as the writer's considered record. The frequent absence of detail comes from a natural habit of putting the matter as directly as possible, without posturing or poeticising. There is a seasoning of impressive, witty and subtle pieces, which are highly quotable; but to highlight those would be to misrepresent the general character of the collection. Here are 6 verses:

The bottom of the tub
Drying on the hedge:
Spring sunshine.

The muddy water,
A school of children
Swimming.

Small amount of sake
Remains in the bottle:
Chill of the night.

New Year's dream:
Not about finding money
Or about death.

Autumn winds —
Haunches of a cow on its
Way to be butchered.

To Buddha:
Best to dedicate
White chrysanthemums.

Much of the credit for transmitting Soseki's steady voice must go to the translator, Soiku Shigematsu. Only the English is given, but one is hardly ever made to pause to consider if the translation corresponds to its original. There are very few obscurities of reference and meaning. The language is transparent, the scenes clear, the collection is refreshing and cleansing.

Dick Pettit

The Path of Flowering Thorn: the Life and Poetry of Yosa Buson by Makoto Ueda. Stanford University Press. 1998. ISBN 0-8047-3042-3. Hardback, 226pp.

We have learnt from Blyth to think of Buson as one of the 'great four' masters of Japanese haiku before this century. As Professor Ueda himself puts it, he was 'a towering figure ... in the minds of most Japanese haijin his only rival is Bashō'. Yet even in Japan, until recently, he was 'known largely as a painter' and studies of his poetry 'used to be markedly fewer than those of Bashō'.

In the West, in the English language, Buson has remained even more obscure until the publication of this book. Apart from what we have been able to pick out here and there from Blyth's books, there hasn't been anything devoted solely to Buson, treating his life and work in a broad way. I must except from this statement *Modern Haiku*, which has, in instalments over 17 issues, been publishing Leon Zollbrod's *Reluctant Genius — the Life and Work of Buson*, a project which is still not complete.

This book is therefore essential reading for the serious student of haiku, but, lucidly written as Ueda's books always are, I can't promise you this one will be sheer delight. Buson is, in comparison with Bashō and Issa, not a particular charismatic character; he did not engage in adventurous excursions to the Deep North, or the like. When occasionally, we have a brief glimpse of his character, it is not of our beau ideal of a humble man.

Access to a large number of Buson's poems, elegantly translated by Ueda himself, is rich compensation for the lack of warm personality, but here, too, there are frustrations. Ueda's elucidations of the haiku are fascinating, but the reader is constantly demoralised by the thought, 'I'd never have been able to read anything like that into it.' Buson's poetic ideal, according to Ueda, was *rizoku*, that is 'detachment from the mundane'. His haiku 'tempt the reader to construct a story', but without deep knowledge of Japanese culture, eg. *Noh* plays, this is well beyond the scope of most Western readers.

Buson sought to regenerate haiku after a decline following the death of Bashō. Whilst revering Bashō's work, he developed his own style; he was, Ueda tells us, 'more receptive to bright colours and sensually appealing subjects and less reluctant to use them to create a picturesque, dramatic, even erotic effect. A seeker of ideals that were more aesthetic than religious or moral, he would freely let himself wander into a land of exotic beauty far removed from contemporary society and indulge in otherworldly dreams to his heart's content.'

It is pretty clear from this that Buson would have found the BHS so-called 'consensus' *On the Nature of British Haiku* rather restraining. But the different point of view is always worth sharing, so I think you really should read this book.

A Raindrop, a Flowering River by Ernest Berry and Graeme Matthews. PhotoImage, Blenheim, New Zealand. 1998. Hardback, 12 x 11. 146 pp. ISBN 0 473-05106-0.

This sumptuous book might turn any haiku-poet rainbow-coloured with envy. Graeme Matthews has roamed the world with his camera and taken a range of spectacular colour photographs, mostly long-focus landscapes, but some close-ups of natural objects, such as kelp and frosted grass. Ernest Berry, using these photos as his inspiration, has produced a haiku for each of them. The constraint of working in this way might daunt many of us, but Berry is one of the most fecund poets and hardly ever fails to give us a haiku that really adds a new dimension or insight to the photograph.

In fact most of the haiku have a life independent of the photographs. Some examples:

receding tide
taking with it
the night sky

dusk
africa disappears
into itself

morning mist
reclaiming the hills
from early light

This book would be such a delight on your coffee table, or at your bedside, that I feel almost churlish to give it anything but unstinted praise. But there is one stint it may be only fair to the prospective purchaser to mention.

Photography is about the positioning and movement of light, so haiku based on photographs will inevitably pick up on this. Berry sees light as an active force, almost an anthropomorphic one; it walks foothills, it pierces the silence of a cormorant, it makes grasses dance to it, whilst in its absence, darkness draws together rocks.

Leaving aside the haiku where light is referred to indirectly (as in 'night sky' and 'dusk' in the first two poems quoted), there are over 20 haiku where the actual word 'light' is used, as in the third example. Some readers might find this just a little monotonous. I hope they won't, for it really is rather wonderful to have such a panoply of light.

David Cobb

...click... by Martin Lucas. Hub Editions. 1998. £4.50

violin by Martin Lucas. Bare Bones Press. 1998. No price

My first impression of the first of these books was that from a visual point of view it was very much in the vein of his previous two from Hub — its size and high contrast cover photograph. Once inside, the preamble suggests an era that is past

for the author, up to the watershed of St. Swithin's Day, 1997; the reader will sense, perhaps, that this is a spring cleaning before a new start.

The name itself indicates a photographic aspect of haiku — the instantaneous impression of a moment, and indeed the visual element, figure very strongly in this collection to the point where it becomes positively filmic:

first darkness of dusk
silently a white owl flies
in the empty lane

A strong sense of light and shade is present in several of these haiku, but it is sometimes at the expense of any humanity towards the subject matter itself. For instance:

lame sheep
limping
the skyline

Many present a very precise audio sense as well, not to mention a tactile (the award-winning *watchstrap*) and olfactory sense (*a beety smell*). There is also a very keen awareness of the elements that make up the spectacle of nature — I learnt a few new words and envied his familiarity with the names of flowers and plants. Along with this there is a confident ease with creative wordplay — *musselled rock* and *gullshadow / zipping the ridges*. And as before the cyclical year is followed through the haiku, which is satisfying as a unifying theme for this rather large selection.

However, apart from some which have an immediate impact: *sun / coming out... / on catkins* and one of particular beauty: *barely a breath / spinning silver / the toy windmill* I personally find I miss the presence of the writer beyond that which is registered by his five senses. The experience of the moment seems to be held by precise observation in resonant, often pleasing alliterative language and doesn't go much further. I suppose asking anyone to reveal a little of themselves 144 times and give it clear, acceptable expression is asking too much. However, Martin Lucas was the first English haiku poet I read to any great length and I'm sure I'll be reading him for a long time to come so I feel this response is due. I look forward to more things like:

the sound of shingle
sucked under the waves ...
deep night

The new departure hinted at in ...*click*... is clear in *violin* — everything has changed — cover, binding, the quantity (29 haiku for a limited edition of 29 books) as well as the ambiguous *un*-natural title. But the real change is inside; the format for every page is a single line — not always the uncompromising spaceless line which the reader has to disentangle in order to uncover its usually universal sense, many use spaces to signal meaning. This approach works very well on page 1, capturing time through the use of space:

greenfly pausing over my poetry notes

and superbly in the spaceless:

green to green a gliding magpie

But by the time you have reached page 6 the 1-line format seems indistinguishable from the 3-liner we are accustomed to:

between sea & sky each ridge of hills a darker blue

and is a hindrance in one or two others where the combining elements *feel* a little arbitrary and the second element tacked on looks exactly that:

a morning of frost melting woodsmoke

It is a shame that the success of many of the haiku in this book is marred by those which are forced into the single line. I would have preferred a more concerted effort to have a unified selection of haiku which really work as one-liners:

train to catch I listen to your violin

Allan Jarrett

Journey to the Interior — American Versions of Haibun. Edited by Bruce Ross. Charles E Tuttle Co. Ltd., North Clarendon, Vermont, USA. ISBN 0-8048-3159. \$21.95

In this, the first anthology devoted to original haibun written in English, Ross collects the work of twenty-five contemporary North American authors. In a comprehensive Introduction parallels are drawn between Bashō and a number of American writers. Ross identifies the narratives of writers such as Thoreau and

Muir which evoke episodes of spiritual challenge or revelations about the natural world as being preparatory to the development of an American tradition in haibun. Latterly, Eastern influences on the writings of Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac highlighted the possibilities of the form in English.

In the anthology, Ross concentrates on haibun from US magazines and chapbooks. The overall standard is high, with good examples of both humour and solemnity. Themes explored include the nature of love and dwelling in places both familiar and unknown. Stand-out pieces include Tom Lynch's *Rain Drips from the Tree*, an account of hitch-hiking across the US and Canada, and Penny Harter's *A Weekend in Dai Bosatsu Zendo*. There are a few examples of the more sentimental aspects of American writing, though this is a minor flaw.

Overall, the anthology shows the great possibilities of haibun, particularly when an author extends beyond the traditional journey themes and skeletal prose more common to British examples. A good addition to any haiku library — when might a similar venture highlighting British haibun be possible?

Matt Morden

The Second New Zealand Haiku Anthology edited by Cyril Childs. New Zealand Poetry Society 1998. ISBN 0-473-05374-8 NZ\$ 20 (approx.£6.50).

The Introduction tells us 'that New Zealand writers have given haiku a distinctive Kiwi voice with Moutoa Gardens, a ti-tree, wharenuī and Te Rauparaha...' but I was pleasantly surprised to find that I did not need to reach for the encyclopaedia at every page!

Thirty-five writers are represented in this collection with over 300 haiku; twice as many as in the first anthology which was produced in 1993. There's an unobtrusive biography under each writer's name, which is infinitely preferable to fishing around in the final pages if you want to know more. While many have qualities of both haiku and renryū, the more easily defined are well represented, such as Glenda Fawkes'

twilight
the last gull
edged with gold

and Sandra Simpson's

birthday party —
he hasn't the heart
for ninety candles

The haiku cover a wide range of styles and subjects as you would expect in such an anthology; some are more effective than others. A handful left me none the wiser, nevertheless the variety was refreshing and I couldn't help but smile at Nick Williamson's

9 a.m.
the spontaneity workshop
begins

This book is beautifully presented and well worth reading; there are many notable haiku. My favourite, for the way it captures the 'haiku moment' so perfectly, is this one by Mark Thomas

still pond —
a leaf falls
into itself

I need say no more.

Janice Fixter

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Dear Editor,

When someone of the stature of Paul Muldoon (President of the Poetry Society) has a poetry book (*Hay*) published by Faber with no fewer than 90 haiku in it, one wishes with all one's heart for one of those rare meetings of understanding, artistry and experience between the 'haiku fellowship' and the 'poetry world proper.' So I embarked on this book in the most welcoming and positive way; virtue which is unsoured by knowledge born of experience, that *Poetry Review* (the Poetry Society's own journal) will never reciprocate by commenting on a collection of haiku by one of us.

To begin, one must thank Muldoon for being serious about haiku, not indulging in them as a little harmless sport on the side as other 'name' poets have done. He means to write poetry of worth, and about once in ten shots actually hits a target that anyone, in or outside the haiku fellowship, would probably be glad to have come within a whisker of. Some examples:

The first day of spring.
What to make of that bald patch
right under the swing?

I lean to one side
to let a funeral pass.
It leans to one side.

A mare's long white face.
A blazed tree marking a trail
we'll never retrace

There's a trail of slime
that runs from the ladysmock.
I'll show you sometime.

Open-ended. The first neatly and productively ambiguous. Use of caesura to juxtapose effectively and elegantly. Uncluttered. Images not buttered with conjecture or piety nor marmaladed with simile or metaphor. Some fragrance of Robert Frost, perhaps? Strict uses of 5-7-5 and rhyme, for sure, because that's something Muldoon sets store by. Those of us for whom haiku is our main medium of expression will probably feel this lack of variety is self-inflicted crippling.

But other 'Muldooners' have all those features which we Meister-haijin struggle to avoid, with generalisations and anthropomorphisms too (genuflecting horses, birds giving thanks, teasels that always lie low aspiring to raise a nap and so on). Rhymes range between the fairly unobtrusive and the full-in-your-face (like *Pangur-banger*). And generally speaking, that most essential feature of good

haiku, juxtaposition that releases the ineffable, is missing. Instead, Muldoon tends towards long-drawn-out verses that dogleg all over the place, limping under an excess of imagery:

Sunflower with fence-posts.
Communion rail. Crozier. Cope.
The monstrance. The host.

But what ultimately saddens is the so-whatness of so many of these haiku. No guts, just debonair flab:

We buy flour, bacon
and beans with pollen we pan
here in the Yukon.

A muddle of mice.
Their shit looks like caraway
but smells like allspice.

At this stage, then, Muldoon's haiku output is a precious muddle of domesticated mice. They look like haiku, but smell like soap. Yet there is enough to make one hope Muldoon will persevere with a form to which he might well contribute something both authentic and fresh.

David Cobb

Dear Editor,

Brian Tasker's review of *Tanka Splendor 1997* (Blithe Spirit, Vol. 8/4) is full of slung rocks. But only once does he score a true and painful hit when he points out some unseemly swagger in my introduction: *I have become expert in spotting a flaw in a poem that disqualifies it from being published or being a winner in a contest.*

What I meant by 'spotting a flaw in a poem that disqualifies it' was that some poems have flaws that are fatal, i.e., are too prominent to ignore. Not one of the 31 tanka that I picked was perfect. All had one or two minor faults, but none of them was serious enough to undermine a poem's integrity. In fact I have never seen a perfect tanka or any other kind of poem. And, of course, no judge (or editor) has ever been, or ever will be, perfect in his or her evaluations.

Brian then aims his sling at three tanka from the anthology, but clearly fails to inflict any damage. Margaret Chula's interweaving of images involving a stillborn child, a rejected manuscript and the torn padded envelope in which it came, keeps on being brilliant. Similarly, Ann Cooper's juxtaposition of telephone tag and an

empty playground with autumn leaves adrift in the wind remains effectively original. And Caroline Gourlay's jagged line breaks in her tanka *loving you so much* continue to accentuate the piercing realization of unequal love in a long-term relationship.

George Swede

Dear Editor,

I write in response to Annie Bachini's point about avant-garde haiku and the suggestion in reply that the poems of A.A. Marcoff and Iain Crichton Smith break the mould of tradition. This ties in with Annie's excellent workshop at the AGM on core principles. It would seem that one of the fundamental core principles that our understanding (in the West) has grown from, is that haiku evoke an experience, feeling or image that *can be shared* or that writer and reader are essentially interchangeable. This also ties in with the concept of 'Cultural memory' that Haruo Shirane discusses in his book on the poetry of Basho: *Traces of Dreams*.

With all due respect to A.A. Marcoff who has every right to write haiku how he pleases, two examples in BS 8/2 are in opposition to these core principles: mood. / sun. / death. and Zen / pilgrimage. / Zen dust. They might be considered avant garde, but what do they achieve, other than a dependence on the writer for what they mean?

One way to move haiku forward without sacrificing the core principles is to continue to move the emphasis further away from nature, which limits the scope and so often is little more than description. One of the concepts mentioned in *Traces of Dreams* is that of *sugata* which according to Shirane is an image that suggests an emotion without stating it. To my mind, this is what makes haiku so attractive as an antidote to our 'in-your-face' Western culture. To see more poems about our everyday human relations which touch on the unspoken between us, would be a delight and truly an innovation, without devaluing the traditional in the process.

Brian Tasker

Dear Editor,

I was very interested to read Brian Tasker's review of *Tanka Splendor 1997* in *Blithe Spirit* 8/4.

As Brian stated, the *Tanka Splendor* contest is 'an important event, primarily because it is one of the few places where the development and growth of tanka in the West can be assessed.' Jane Reichold, as organiser of this contest and through her work in various editorial roles, has done much to encourage this development.

However, what prompts me to write is Brian's closing remark: 'What is clear, though, is that if tanka is going to develop in the West, it will need more room than 31 poems a year to do it in.' In the early 1990s, some haiku magazines in the US and Europe began including a page or two of tanka, and one or two other journals even devoted a considerable proportion of their pages to the form, though other forms always took preference to the tanka.

It is also interesting to note that there was a concurrent resurgence of interest in tanka in Japan, perhaps linked to the success of Machi Tawara's excellent *Salad Anniversary* (1988). No doubt aided by its originally contemporary use of language, this remarkable collection sold 2 million copies in its first year of publication, going on to sell several million more copies and twice be translated into English. The growing occidental interest in tanka also encouraged the Nihon Kagin Club (Japan Tanka Poet's Club) to begin publishing an English-language journal (*The Tanka Journal*, 1993 —), though the editorial stance here was somewhat less 'cutting edge' than Tawara's refreshing style. Then in the US, Sanford Goldstein began the short-lived tanka journal *Five Lines Down* (1995-'97) with Kenneth Tanemura and in 1996 Laura Maffei established the excellent semi-annual *American Tanka*. Now this spring sees the publication of the UK's first tanka journal, *Tangled Hair*, from the Snapshot Press.

John Barlow

I see from the editorial that there has been some question about articles sidelining haiku. I can appreciate that there are probably space limitations, but in my opinion the articles are a strong feature of *Blithe Spirit*. I find they help to put the haiku into a context. I've not been a subscriber long enough to see a trend towards longer articles, but if this is the case I would not be against it.

Alison Williams

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