

Blithe Spirit



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The editor welcomes submissions of poetry and articles by members of the **British Haiku Society** (non-members may submit for The Pathway section), on the understanding that these are not simultaneously under submission or consideration elsewhere. Please provide publication details of any item submitted which has already appeared in print. Copyright reverts to the author upon publication in *Blithe Spirit*.

We apologise for the lateness of this issue. The next Journal will be dated February 1994 — submissions should therefore be sent to Jackie Hardy by January 1st 1994. Subsequent issues will be dated May, August and November — this will be the pattern in future.

over-dated
) date for
the month

Editorial

Thank you to those of you who wrote to me with comments on my first issue as editor. They were appreciated. As most comments were favourable I assume *Blithe Spirit* is pleasing most of you most of the time.

Only two issues ago Richard Goring bewailed the quality of tanka submissions. In an effort to encourage contributors the tanka section has been continued and for this issue I have received them in quantity. The tanka in this issue have been chosen by committee. I hope to publish a helpful article on tanka writing in the next issue. In the meantime may I recommend 'Come Pivot With Me' an essay by Jane Reichhold published in the summer 1992 issue of *Bare Bones* ?

Haiku and senryu continue to arrive by every post and very good some of them are, as you will see when you get further into the issue. However I feel our Season Corner seems to be providing only a fading inspiration. Perhaps it has to do with the weather. I propose we add another and varying subject for haiku to each issue. I am indebted to Ken Ellison who thought of this idea. He also thought of 'cats' as a subject. So go ahead, warm these colder days with their furry presence and we'll see what inspires. Continue to write seasonal haiku, too. The next issue's season is autumn.

Jackie Hardy

Season Corner: Summer

Through the wildflower field ...
Our shadows following
At the distance of
A summer evening .

(Eskdalemuir, 7/93)

Tito

summer heat:
the greengrocer stacks
watermelons

Martin Lucas

Summer afternoon:
through bars of light your shoulder
rising and falling

D C Trent

end of a hot day
dead flies
on the window ledge

Ruth Robinson

Perseid shower
snuffs out
my need to sneeze

David Cobb

nature trail gossip -
a Mullein caterpillar
on Water Figwort

Norman Barraclough

Wings rustling,
A dragonfly lands gently
On the baby's warm head

At noon a dragonfly
Against the hot thatch
Pulsating

Summer night storm -
Hoofs of the yearling mare
Echoing thunderclaps

Cicely Hill

Harvest moon rises
silvers the empty cornfield:
stubble hurts my hand

Denise Bennett

bobbing up and down
in the wind - the remaining
fuchsia flowers

Annie Bachini

behind the clouds
I can almost feel
the promised meteors

George Marsh

mid-day buttercup
still holding its drops of dew;
a cuckoo calls

Susan Rowley

Carnival parade -
two police horses
dancing

Summer -
under massed dahlias
sleeping cats

On the lake
nearly-grown ugly duckling
follows its mother

Joan Daniels

mid-summer
morning rain striking cold
on my bare back

a clear night
yet constant showers--
the perseids

Richard Goring

summer afterglow
still
in the skylight

hanging on the lines
in the summer sun
octopuses' legs widespread

Kohjin Sakamoto

Sun, Wind and Sea - Tynemouth Haiku Meet (Group 8)

On the last Saturday in June, four haijin left the car park behind the cliff in Tynemouth and dispersed, windblown, each their own way.

a warm gale whirls customers around the ice-cream van (JL)

In the offshore breeze running a stick
the paper's corner flaps along the hollow railings -
seagull turns and glides (JH) the wind (RP)

On the cliff edge gravestones lean against the sky (CR)

on the cliff the ruined choir shreds the gale (JL)

between harbour walls between harbour walls
white flashes the fishing boat
seagulls sky-diving (CR) trawls a wake (JH)

pincer piers harbouring a handful of empty shells (JL)

on his knees empty beach
the man in waders shoreline
winkling out shells (JH) crowded with rocks (CR)

Below us haijin
Tynemouth Sailing Club on Collingwood's blind side
written on the roof (CR) still uninspired (JH)

The last piece refers to the column monument dominating the cliffs at Tynemouth. Everyone had a go at it.

The Admiral Lord Collingwood Nelson's mate's
still facing the breeze smooth as a middy's
not a wrinkle on him (RP) bottom (JL)

The four poets were re-writing and reciting round a pot of tea.

crowded teashop
above the trippers' chat
the haijin rage
out through the window
an admiral's back (CR/RP)

(Haijin - Chris Raetschus, Dick Pettit, Jackie Hardy and Jon Longdon)

Symmetry and Asymmetry in Haiku Form

William J Higginson

A traditional Japanese haiku has a rhythm in the ear that suggests both symmetry and asymmetry. This rhythm involves two main elements. First, the three phrases of a Japanese haiku (corresponding to verse lines in English) are arranged with the first and last about the same length, relatively brief, and the middle line slightly longer. This traditional 5-7-5 *sound*⁽¹⁾ rhythm creates a symmetry of two shorter elements around the longer middle one.

R H Blyth, scholar of English literature and Japanese haiku, suggested a 2-3-2 rhythm for haiku in English, counting accented beats. After thirty years of study I have found no other proposal that creates a rhythm in English nearer to that of the usual Japanese. Additional, unaccented syllables smooth the rhythm. (The length of seventeen heavy English syllables usually makes a piece longer than a Japanese haiku by 40 to 60 per cent.)

Second, most Japanese poems move in a classical rhythm natural to Japanese speech and literature, units of twelve *sounds*, roughly equivalent to five-beat (pentameter) units of English. In fact, a traditional haiku in Japanese sounds very much like about a line and a half of heroic couplets in English. (This may be what prompted Blyth to suggest 2-3-2.)

In older Japanese haiku this rhythm was created with a 'cutting word' (*kireji*). In modern practice the first two lines are one grammatical unit, the last another, or vice-versa. In other words, there is a longer pause between lines two and three than between lines one and two, or the opposite. This asymmetry plays against the symmetry of the short-longer-short rhythm.

Almost all Japanese haiku poets have also occasionally put the major pause within the second line, by either placing a cutting word there or using a grammatical stop, usually creating a 5-3-4-5 or 5-4-3-5 rhythm. To a Japanese ear the underlying 5-7-5 rhythm is still there, but shifting the major pause creates a bit of a 'wake-up!' effect. A near equivalent in English might be 2-1-2-2 or 2-2-1-2 beats, but still in three lines.

Today haiku form has generally disappeared from our so-called "haiku" in English. In place of symmetry and asymmetry we have the amorphous. As a result, our haiku have grown slack, or become exercises in pigeon English without the articles needed to please the astute ear of a native speaker and point the meaning.

May I suggest that those who wish to write haiku in English try this:

1. Strive to form your poem into three lines with two, three and two accented beats.
 2. Let there be a major grammatical break, either at the end of a line, or within the second line.
 3. Let your poem sound like English by including just enough articles to please the ear and make the meaning clear.
 4. "Play it again, Sam." As Bashō said, "On the lips a thousand times." Work at it until you hear good, meaningful English with the symmetry and asymmetry of haiku.
- (1) Literal translation of the Japanese word *on* -- what they count when they write haiku. (They *don't* count "syllables".)



Senryu Pie

after the funeral -
mother's comb
clogged with silver hairs

John Gonzalez

old married couple
crossing the bridge at twilight
wear similar coats

Adrian Keefe

my sister on the phone
talks of her grandson
in my mother's voice

Yoko Ogino

The first chill night;
The mother finds herself
Covering up the dolls

Punch and Judy -
All the children laughing,
The father's sad face

Cicely Hill

still within the arc
of the girls' jump rope
a distant airship

Kohjin Sakamoto

More interruptions.
Seething, I open the door -
to my oldest friend

D C Trent

mumbled thanks...
on the beggar's palm
a coin-sized callus

Martin Lucas

under budding branches
looking from grave
to grave

Stuart Quine

a stranger's blur
fills the eye of my camera
at the shutter's click

Norman Barraclough

just a routine scan --
the baby in the womb
playing with itself

after the birth
father goes home to prepare
breakfast for one

the babe at milk --
its nose-wipe left to dry
on mother's breast

David Cobb

in the park
a man and his boomerang
all over the place

Brian Tasker

a lazy day
in my armpit
the smell of curry

George Marsh

On Writing Haiku: A Fortnight's Cycling - Summer 1993

Colin Blundell

Amongst other things, I want to argue that this apparently most impersonal of poetic forms, indulged in habitually and for a specific purpose, can paradoxically, in its effect on the writer, serve to strengthen the complex structure of the self.

Lots of people have things to say, variously repressive and liberating, about writing haiku: authoritarians require strict rules; anarchists make up the rules as they go along; Japanophiles base what they write on a distillation of what has already been written by Japanese 'Masters'; those with a Zen inclination look to see what a haiku can do to express Zen sensibility; many are united in holding that haiku should eschew a personal viewpoint and be expressed in a sparse impersonal kind of way, without poetic diction and without preaching or telling the reader what to think. Transplanting such a deceptively simple product from its cultural origins into an alien philosophical tradition is hard - Zen thought is qualitatively different from that 'inspired' by the likes of Plato & Aristotle; syllabification is not the same in Japanese as it is in other languages, and so on.

What about the impersonality of the haijin? Study any collection of haiku by an individual Japanese writer; you probably won't be able to identify the writer from one anonymously presented example but the collection as a whole will reveal a personal approach or style: the way individuals write haiku is determined by their philosophical bent, unique sensibility and their selection of 'rules' - a combination just as for writing any kind of poem. Personal sensibility is a factor often denied any kind of status by haiku-theorists and what results in their writing is often bland, imitative, without the power to give the reader a sense of having been allowed access to an experience that was of some significance to the writer. On the other hand, from any point of view let alone from a Zen, anti-dualist, angle, the idea of a writer-less pen formulating a non-observed observation in an economical kind of way is absorbing because mysterious. The impersonality of the writer is, of course, a familiar idea to post-Eliot generations - it is not uniquely Zen. The mask of impersonality can transmit what occurs when you simply enter into the flow of the universe and allow it to impose its demands on you!

However, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that to adopt such a standpoint requires an individual (personal) point of view, decision-making, a certain cast of mind, unique sensibility. The impersonal becomes the personal possession that enables you to convert sudden moments of awareness into permanent notations of reality, triggers for recall of experience.

So what rules operate? It may be just a matter of personal whim. I choose to write haiku in three lines with 5-7-5 English syllables respectively; I eschew obvious metaphor and simile (whilst embracing the linguistic commonplace that all words are metaphor); I use ordinary language (though what is ordinary to me may be extraordinary to somebody else); I am happy

to use the first person pronoun because I am aware, even when I'm being impersonal, that impersonality is only a mask - it's really (who could deny it?) *me* doing the writing; I do not make a conscious decision about whether I'm writing a strict haiku with a seasonal reference or being more free with content, maybe even veering towards a *senryu* on the basis that it's my relation to experience that's predominant, my awareness that dogs me every second of the day. In practice, I can't be bothered with the distinction between haiku and *senryu*; the important thing is the way that three lines can be made to focus so much of one's inner life; it seems to me that, getting hung up over fine distinctions, people fall into the dualist trap that Zen neatly disposes of - the subject of little three-line focussing strategies is not Nature (haiku) versus Human Pretentiousness (*senryu*) but all of existence, individually channelled, *advaita*.

*

An 800 mile bicycle ride threads personal experience on the ribbon of road; the rigour and discipline heightens the sense of self; haiku written along the way anchor experiences - they are 'I-tags', billet-doux you affix to the flow of experience, conceptual milestones. At the beginning, heading north from Luton to Argyll, I had a feeling of high expectation which had an *oceanic* quality about it:-

sunrise & a thrush
whistling into my brain -
sky of limpid blue

I didn't think about it at the time, but there's a combination of the small close sound of the thrush whistling *out* all the dross in my brain with the enormous vision of an overarching blue sky at dawn. The feeling is of the clarity and temporary order I always feel at the start of a long cycle ride. The important thing is that it doesn't tell the reader all this - it does not tell the reader what to think at all; nor did it tell me what to think at the time; it was immediate, completely unrevised, conceived whilst still half asleep with none of this analysis in mind. It is very exciting when a haiku just pops up from the Other-than-Conscious Mind. But this does not always happen. For instance, what began life outside the Strines Inn, Derbyshire, as three separate observations:-

this bright hillside;	a small boy swinging
a moment of sheep baa-ing -	became:- between the noises of sheep
a small boy swinging	on this bright hillside

which seemed altogether tighter, depending on the word 'between', and brought the separate observations into a coherence of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic sensation. The essential immediacy of the haiku experience does not seem to me to be contravened by this 'recollection in tranquillity'; in fact it could be argued that the real haiku-moment was when I re-read the original and thought, "Aha! There's a different way of doing this!" But now I'm not so sure it's 'better' so I'm left with overload of consciousness.

The following was written at another dawn, a little different from the thrush piece earlier!

outside the Strines Inn
blackbird with gob full of grub
craps on a table

To be associated with others who will eat there later in the day!

I often like to record the precise place where a haiku was written. There is significance for me in 'Strines Inn' though not necessarily for the reader; but such a reference does emphasise the universal importance of place in human experience.

beyond trees in rain
the noise of children shouting -
the river torrent

At the time I concocted this it was raining so much that I had to keep the words going through my mind for several miles before I could write them down in a teashop in Kettlewell; it's the powerful unity of an afternoon's experience: the 'noise' of children shouting gives them an abstract quality that makes them blend with the feel of the rain and rise above the sound of the resulting torrent where they were presumably playing or canoeing. On the same afternoon high above Kettlewell:-

the hills are still there
but the rain & mist came down -
the crackling rain-hood

Knowing that thick cloud was obliterating an enormous vista which I had seen on a previous cycle ride made it somewhat galling that the focus of my senses was limited right down to the crackling of rain on my plastic hood.

official view-point
car-park totally empty -
afternoon of rain

I have small affinity with car-drivers but the loneliness of the deserted tarmac is obvious and also the irony that those who could stay dry in such circumstances weren't around for the experience. Into these three lines also pour ideas related to the futility of all human endeavour: the large space of tarmac made pointless by rain and mist, the way in which human pomposity is settled by snow on railway tracks or by Mississippi floods. So, too, the 'official viewpoint' (like Blake's 'Chartered streets') somehow makes the landscape into just another plastic commodity - it seems that people have to be told where to find Beauty instead of making it for themselves. But none of this was available to my Conscious Mind when the three-liner literally *swam* into spontaneous being; the current analysis is done very much after the event and it surprises me to find how much of my thinking is focussed on a simple observation which is what the three lines remain when you

disregard the analysis. Every word we possess carries its whole history about with it; words are metaphors for their history.

In writing three-liners, I usually aim for a shift of emphasis or perspective after the first or the second line but in this one the medium is the message - a break-up of the normal flow of ideas:-

all the furniture
of dead railways - viaducts
tunnels: these signals

Signals of what? Well, I get very upset when I cycle past dismantled railway lines.

Other signs of death and decay force themselves on you; a few miles before Carlisle, for instance:-

in the old churchyard
the new graves are mown weekly -
the old forgotten

There's a calculated ambiguity here which might be worth unpicking!

Sometimes on cycling trips I combine one passion with another and go some distances by train, occasionally going back the way I've come on the present or previous trips:-

trains annihilate
the long distances cycled -
still the rain comes down

Coming down by train from Oban to Glasgow you can't help being struck by the contrasts of scenery:-

the same train window
frames mountains rivers & lakes
and slums & scrap-yards

There are multiple contrasts here: similarity & difference, movement & stasis, 'beauty' & ugliness, natural order & man-made disorder.

At home again I'm struck by the cessation of movement; the trance induced by the flowing band of road under me ends and I go into the old familiar static trance of sitting on a summer lawn, so different from that lawn I sat on in far Argyll.

the bumble-bee's wings click
in the straggly privet hedge -
sweet smell entrances

here the devious roads
from Scotland and North England
braided all in one

'Here' - inside my brain which is where the journey started with the thrush whistle, emptying it to allow it to be filled with things markedly different.

(concluded at foot of page 16)

Museum of Haiku Literature Award

The £50 prize, sponsored by the Museum of Haiku Literature, for the best haiku or senryu published in each issue of *Blithe Spirit*, has been won by Kohjin Sakamoto with his haiku from the previous issue (July 1993) :

a cake of ice
leaves the shore
at the touch of my finger

Jim Norton writes: "I resolved to allow a hovering attention to be pulled in by a freshness of image, completeness of expression and a touch of ordinary magic."

Bamboo Shoot's

warm sun now on my back
and my shadow
walking a little straighter

is a worthy runner up.

George Marsh has agreed to select from this issue.



On Writing Haiku: A Fortnight's Cycling - Summer 1993 (from page 15)

Haiku is life-transforming *not because it's haiku* but because the discipline of regularly and habitually tuning in to experience to receive moments of enlightenment, exhilaration, awareness of contrast, paradox, irony, etc, harnesses psychic energy and leads to a state which it might not be too much to call ecstasy. Admittedly I embarked on this journey with plenty of cash available and the only discomforts were a sore bum, frequent wet-through clothing, roaming leg pains and a constant head-wind to battle against, but I did feel at one with the beggar haiku writers of the past and imagine that their way of overcoming extreme poverty and lack of home comforts was through building such small haiku-moments of ecstasy into a composite and complex whole that transformed their experience.

Gorse Blossoms

"when gorse is out of bloom, kissing's out of fashion."
other seasons, all seasons, no seasons haiku *et al.*

ocean spray -
the twisting branches
of a wild pine

evening rain -
below folded hands
a bowl of rice and beans

Nika

Feeling deep regret:
the cicada's shell, once touched,
became its grave clothes

Tamaki Makoto

shedding all those sheaths
this year's bamboo shoots up
as high as the old ones

windy evening --
mingled with church bells
the temple bell far and near

Yoko Ogino

Stuck in the letter-box
newspapers half
wet again

Ken Ellison

miles inland
over the market town
the squeal of gulls

graveyard grassed
new pathways
from old stones

rushing through stations
trying in vain
to read the name boards

Richard Goring

In the spider's web
a butterfly's husk
shudders

The cat's yawn
is all
pink tongue and indolence

Bamboo Shoot

nunnery gate
still closed
in the falling snow

circling flight of cranes
straightens, bound
north

Kohjin Sakamoto

tipped from the beer can
the centipede staggers from
foot to foot to foot...

Martin Lucas

Night things :
Dogs curled up ,
Fires flickering
And sudden breezes .

(Mandalay, Burma 9/77)

Tito

an old notebook,
labelled on its back
one and sixpence

Patricia V Dawson

pale sweeps
of green phosphorescence
the midnight swimmer

(Kuwait 1979)

Susan Rowley

The blue morning sky --
among the broken clouds, the moon's
silvery fish scale

James Kirkup

walking on my own
noticing for the first time
the lane winds uphill

David Cobb

silent my pen runs on,
recording the outburst
hushed by the gavel

David Blaber

spring morning -
police sirens
weave in and out
the birdsong

Annie Bachini

Seascape
between the stones
of this delicate cairn

Three crosses
at crazy angles
the pilgrim path

Ken H Jones

The island temple
at ebb-tide a path appears
the faithful approach

Dermot O'Brien

letting out the cat
sniffing the air -
the smell of autumn

Brian Tasker

the tolling of the rigging
in the breeze
calling the faithful to sea

George Marsh

'Haiku and the Tea Ceremony' Meet

On 12 June, nine BHS members were present at a Tea Ceremony at the Urasenke Foundation, home of British Tea Master, Michael Birch. Once we were gathered in the *machiai* (waiting room) the master's assistant spoke of the principles of the Tea Ceremony: harmony, respect, purity, tranquillity. She explained the significance of the four-and-a-half mat room, that the *roji* (path to the tea room) is intended to break connection with the outside world and that the low door (traditionally no more than three feet high) was intended to produce a sense of modesty and equality. When she left to fetch towels Stephen told us something of the history of the ceremony.

The tea master joined us after refreshing the garden with the sprinkling hose. Stephen presented him with a smooth, pale stone from North Wales.

Once in the tea room, we paid silent respect to the tea objects, the hanging scroll, the flower arrangement and the tea bowls. The characters on the scroll said: 'Travel east, travel west - yet ever at home in the selfsame world'. As we watched the master preparing the tea, his movements and the simple elegance of the artefacts made us conscious of our respect for him and also for one another. Taking the bowl as it was offered, one by one, we drank the thick, green tea. Afterwards we walked in the tiny garden.

C.H.

Nagomu hodo, tetsubin no oto, tō no keru

With the warming-up of conversation ,
The sound of simmering

In the iron kettle

Goes further away ... *Satomi* (trans. SHG)

The tea master's eyebrows
how they bush and curl
on his laughing face

Jim

The purple cloth is folded ,
Summer cloud-light flooding in -
Moss, grace, silence ...
Us !

Tito

Still unopened
The greenish hydrangea flowers:
The taste of tea

Cicely

The guest bows
The tea master's dog
bows back

Martin

The Pathway

This section welcomes haiku, senryu and tanka from anyone-- member of BHS or not. Each poem should be in two languages or more - the ORIGINAL (any language) and the TRANSLATION(S) (English, French or German). *The Pathway* aims to link those writing in widely-spoken and less widely-spoken languages.

* * *

Hélène Kesting (Afrikaans and English)

My ontydige
tuiskoms: twee duiwe
maak die hof by die voordeur

Die kuiergaste vertrek
skielik ek alleen
kyk! Slak teen die ruit

sonder om te weet
waarom lig ek my voet --
enred 'n hotnotsgot

My untimely arrival:
two pigeons at the front door
making love

Suddenly alone
the guests having departed --
Snail at the window

Not knowing,
I lift my foot,
making way for the mantis

Horst Koepsel (German) and David Cobb (English)

der sturm riss bäume --
nachbars haus ist jetzt näher doch
uns nicht nahe

trees felled by the storm --
walls of the neighbours' house
seen, but no nearer

Deon Kesting (Afrikaans and English)

Blou vleiblonmetjie,
met jou allemintige
Grieks-Latynse naam

Suidoostermis krul
op teen die krans: duifgekoer
word al inniger

Die klam luggie
bo die hawe voltooi
die dou-spinnerak

Little marsh flower,
with your overpowering
Greco-Latin name!

Crawling mist:
the rock pigeon's cooing
intensifies

A waft of moist air
above the harbour, completing
the dewed cobweb

Tom Becks (Dutch and English)

Wind kerft zijn koude
op de doorgroefde basten.
Ogen plengen vocht

The wind carves
into the furrows of tree bark.
Eyes weep with the cold.

Hoge schuimwolken.
Onder de brug een lange aak
met zandheuvels

Cloud foam:
Under the Rhine bridge a barge
with hills of sand.

* * *

Yasuhiko Shigemoto (Japanese and English)

Genbaku no dōmu chōchō jiyū kana

How freely
Butterflies are flying about
In the A-bomb dome!

Hiroshima no enten kibishi to yū nakare

Never say
The blazing sun of Hiroshima
Is unendurable.

Hiroshima no kōshin chū no uchiwa kana

Memorial walk to Hiroshima --
How indispensable
This round fan!

* * *

Mariko Kato (Japanese and English)

Yuugure no shijima ni aoku tokeru goto
ajisai sakeru machi ni wakarenu

I parted from her
in a town where
hydrangeas bloom
as if they were melting blue
in the silence of evening

Tanka

it's a holy place
this rock fall hollow where hills
press-in daunting close
a thread of water let down
the small cliff where pale trees lean

(The Craigy)

Eric Speight

fright in his eyes
at the space between us -
he wobbles, straightens
then cycling wide
laughs back at me

Frank Dullaghan

It speaks volumes,
your bouquet, arriving fresh
from Interflora
with no card, a bunch too much,
a valentine too far

As we sit on a
crowded beach I remember
an empty strand, where
we danced naked, full of hope
and in time to this same sea.

Patricia V Dawson

post-coital sweat on
your lips and between your breasts
I want you again
a tick crawls across the sand
with an even greater lust

John W Hadler

In Memory of Birgit Skiöld
(double tanka)

The tea is nothing
without the bowl. The flower
is nothing without the vase.
—The hand is nothing
without the eye of feeling.

You were tea and bowl.
You were both flower and vase,
complete as all and nothing
—Your hand is drawing,
still, with the eye of feeling.

James Kirkup

Birgit Skiöld: Swedish painter and photographer

high in the wind
elbows back and wrists loose
the gull soars on nothing
but slight corrections
to the tilt of its nose

George Marsh

When the willow has reached
My balcony ,
Will I have left ?
The future is like a memory
Of a trailing firework ...

(Uenosakuragi, Tokyo 10/80)

Tito

Dragonfly Ginkō (Group 1)

The day began by the Thames at the Water Research Centre with a meander through its wetland that took us to a pond created purposely as a habitat for dragonflies.

Between the rustling
of iris leaves, the rustling
of dragonfly wings

David K

Kusa musu michi, nukete shimizu e, akatombo

From the path of dank grasses
Emerging over clear water -
A red dragonfly.

Ayzen (trans SHG)

Southern and Brown Hawkers, Darters and Blue Damselflies abounded under a warm August sun.

Over the dragonfly pond -
the humming biplane

Martin

dragonfly shadows
flit across the pond, searching
eyeless

Norman

While the party composed, Stephen gave a geological and cultural perspective on the dragonfly. In Japan, at the time of the Bon Festival they were believed to carry on their backs the souls of the departed to their former homes. A pub lunch in nearby Hambledon village was followed by a compositional stroll alongside a Thames flood channel.

Yuku natsu no, sora o todomari, itotonbo

Perched on the sky
Of passing summer -
The damselfly.

Satomi (trans SHG)

the dragonfly
searching for somewhere to land
ignores the beer-can

David C

Later, sitting on the lawn at the home of Medmenham friends, compositions were discussed, and a just-dried water-colour by Ayzen of one of his haiku was presented to our hosts. The day ended with a last stroll, until darkness had begun to gather.

Evening by the river -
Again the bindweed
Furling up
Its snow-white flowers .

Tito

NB

Reviews

Brian Tasker: *Woodsmoke* (Bare Bones Press, 16 Wren Close, Frome, Somerset, BA11 2UZ. £3 postpaid - cheques payable to B Tasker)

Brian Tasker has put together another of his small tasteful books; the form and meaning of Brian's poems are uniquely bound. This time there are twenty three haiku/senryu on recycled paper with a rag and fibre cover, raffia tied.

In *Notes From A Humdrum*, Brian suggests that "haiku belong to us all" in that they are a recycled rather than an original experience. Yes, but through his consciousness, Brian's process of recycling yields a new way of perception.

Yet Brian never forces his perception on the reader. Often it is the reader who must provide all the 'doing'. In the poem

a light rain -
into the evening mist
woodsmoke

from which the title of the collection is taken, the haiku 'does' nothing, for there is no verb, no 'doing' word. The haiku just 'is' - a skilful juxtaposition of images creating a mood that is numinous, ethereal, tenuous. Yet, at the same time, what could be more earthy, minutely defined, precise?

Brian is master of the haiku that 'isn't', too; a paradigm of what is best left unsaid. Take

after the birthday wish
the smell of wax

Few readers will be unable to identify with this haiku moment. But who could claim to recreate it so well; have the courage to leave out so much? A definition and concision which does not preclude an 'open-endedness' that echoes in the mind long after reading it.

A collection for the connoisseur. Don't miss it.

JAH

Saigyō - Poems of a Mountain Home, trans & intr by Burton Watson (Columbia UP, 1991. £8.95)

Over 200 tanka by Saigyō (Satō Norikiyo), the monk-poet 1118-1190. With romaji and brief occasional notes on settings and history. The introduction gives a short biography and illuminating discussion of Saigyō's mind and outlook. The translations (to this non-Japanese speaker) seem more bland than the originals; as Burton Watson illustrates, there are subtleties and allusions which need extensive notes and may not now be recoverable; nevertheless his versions are a consistent and transparent medium. Saigyō's frequent depictions of bleakness and loneliness come over in them as less wistful 'sabi' and more painful adjustment to what has, still, its own beauty. The large pb is sewn and attractively designed on good paper.

Robert Aitken: *A Zen Wave - Bashō's Haiku and Zen* (Weatherhill 1978, rep 1989. £10.95)

The thesis is that Bashō's finest haiku owe their quality to Zen experience: even that Bashō is something of a lay-preacher, leading his readers into states of mind which echo and will induce understanding of and attraction to the Way. The twenty-six chapters each have one theme haiku, and maybe some more, with Zen explanation and further illustration.

About 70 of Bashō's better-known poems are translated with romaji, transliteration and language notes. Although not exhaustive, the explanations on cutting words, as they occur, are rare and valuable. This double provision for the English reader is essential to understanding Bashō and reveals, for example, simple and complicated syntax, ambiguity etc. The medium format pb is sewn on good paper.

Japanese Death Poems - written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death, trans, intro & commentary by Yoel Hoffman. (Tuttle 1986, rep 1990. £15.99)

The introduction gives a short clear account of Japanese poetry. The earlier 'death poem' is illustrated by about 40 tanka from earliest times to the 20th century. These are mainly the poetry of deliberate statement, but there are a few senryu and light pieces. The romaji is given with language notes on particularly interesting points and the translations are direct. The Zen monks wrote in Chinese: brief lives and translations of about 40 poems: these mainly declare or enact Buddhist truths. The 320 haiku are collectively very striking. They were not always written in the days before death, but seem to present the deepest truth the poet could find about life, death and him/herself. They are both moving and fine examples of the craft. RDP



Journal - hand made in a garden shed in Bunyan Land