



Blithe Spirit



Journal of
The British Haiku Society

Volume 2 Number 2 April 1992

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Blithe Spirit

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The Pathway

David Cobb

Editorial

Reaction to the new-style *Blithe Spirit* has been very positive, at least on the part of the small number of you who wrote. Your editors really do want to know what you think, as much about the presentation as the content, so please do tell us. The "packaging" is fully in our hands, but the content is very much in yours. We have what we consider a most varied and worthwhile selection of articles and poems in this issue. We can only maintain the quality (and the quantity) if you keep sending them in, giving us the enjoyable task of reading, debating and choosing only what we think are the best for publication.

One "grumble" we did receive was that the print was rather "black" in places, making it difficult to read. This is an outcome of the printing (actually, photocopying) equipment and paper used. We will be trying to improve on presentation by some experimenting with typefaces, font sizes, line spacing, etc. in this and the next few issues. Please bear with us during this period - and let us know which styles you prefer.

Perhaps an outline of the production method may be of interest - if nothing else, it will reveal what a labour of love is involved! Both of us prepare our input (Colin selects the haiku/senryu, Richard the articles and tanka) on a word processor running on IBM-compatible PCs. For the previous issue, Richard's files were copied to floppy disk which was then posted to Colin, who imported these and his own work to Timeworks Publisher, a desktop publishing package also running on the PC. Timeworks is used to lay out and typeset everything (although, in the end, some good old-fashioned manual cutting and pasting of printed output was employed last time). The Timeworks pages are then printed as A4-size master copies and the masters are reduction-photocopied to produce over 200 sets of Journals. Richard now has his own copy of Timeworks, so for this issue we each produced various master pages, Richard's being posted to Colin for printing.

That ends the "hi-tech" stage. From here, everything is decidedly "low-tech". Each journal now consists of several A4 sheets, each with four A5 pages photocopied onto it. These have to be folded in half, collated into sets, then 50 or so sets are stacked in a wooden frame with all the folded edges facing outwards and the lot weighed-down by a common housebrick. Glue is brushed over the folded edges and dried with the aid of a domestic hair-dryer. A knife blade then separates each journal and its vertical outer edges are trimmed with a Stanley knife and straightedge. Next, the cover, folded A4 in thin card, is glued around the set of pages. All this work is done by hand, on individual copies or small batches, and all by Colin. Finally, envelopes need address labels and stamps applied, then a copy of *Blithe Spirit* and other documents inserted and the envelope sealed, before they are all consigned to the mail.

Unfortunately, when producing the last issue, margins were left too narrow and so the cover had to be applied as two separate A5 pieces, with sliced-up adhesive carpet tape acting as a spine joiner. Colin estimates the operation from folding to finishing the covers took him 27 hours for 235 copies, while stuffing the envelopes took two people three hours each. We have no figures for reading submissions, typing, typesetting, paste-up and photocopying.

Once again in this issue we have applied some "clip art" decoration. While it is fun to play around with the position and size of these ready-made computer drawings, we really would like to use some of your own original work (or good quality photocopies of it). The one piece of original artwork in this issue is Charlotte Smith's drawing accompanying David Cobb's "rook" haiku. Line drawings with no large, solid-black areas are best - the black often causes the photocopier to crease pages and jam the machine. We may also be able to use suitable black-and-white photographs.

Your submissions for the next *Blithe Spirit* must be in our hands by 6 June. Meanwhile, we trust you will find much in this issue to interest and entertain.

Colin Blundell and Richard Goring

Sound and Sense in Haiku in English Edward Glover

Lately I have been considering the complex question of the relation between sound and sense in haiku in English: not "English haiku", for many of those studied have been American, etc. It is a platitude to say that in the finest lyrics ("the best words in the best order" - "emotion recollected in tranquillity") the perceptive reader should ideally not want to change a word: sound and meaning harmonise. This is putting it baldly, with no attempt to analyse (even if I could) why certain combinations of words particularly affect us.

...magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn...

Initially I decided to facilitate like-for-like comparison and contrast, by taking a look at five haiku all relating to fish, in their own fluid element, which obviously gives scope for alliterative and onomatopœic effects, as well as more subtle combinations of vowels and consonants. Here are the first two haiku, from my own pen:

The kingfisher strikes:
a thousand silver minnow
splinter the stream with light

Gaping fish in still pools
wait for the whisper and crackle
of melting ice

In the first poem, line one, with its strong consonants (k-str-k), suggests a sudden action, whereas line two, relating to a shoal in water, has softer consonants (th-s-s-lv-m-nn) and longer vowels (ou-ow). In the last line, if the consonants (spl-str-t) point to the flurry of the frightened fish, the vowel sounds (i-ea-i) relate to the lines made by the darting fish. Note how the incidence of accents helps to suggest the character and purpose of a line: two strong accents, three less vigorous, and a final three with an emphatic last word.

The second poem, like the first, is built on contrast, not so much of stillness and action, as of silence and sound. After the first line, with its four unassertive accents, its softer consonants (p-f-sh-s-ll-p-ls) and long vowels (a-oo), comes a line that leads from "wait" to "whisper" and the firm consonants of "crackle".

Finally, the short vowels of line three (o-e-i) then throw some emphasis on the "i" and "s" sounds of the last word, "ice". Instead of the 2-3-3 accents of the first poem, this has 4-3-2.

James Hackett has a fine fish-and-water poem:

Deep within the stream
the huge fish lie motionless,
facing the current

At the outset though, before analysing the sound-sense connections of the poem, let me refer to a flaw: "the", twice repeated - three words out of twelve - is no advantage. The haiku would lose nothing in meaning and would gain in euphony if it read *Deep within their stream / huge fish lie motionless, / facing the current*. The poem, as far as "facing", is like a vignette, and only the last word, "current", suggests movement. It may be underlining the obvious, but the reader is asked to consider the contribution to the whole effect, of particular sounds and their sequence:

1. the restrained consonants (m-f-sh-l-m-'sh'-l-s-f-'s')
2. the long vowel sounds (ee-ea-u-ie-o-a)
3. the stronger consonants in "current" (c-rr-t)

Look now at just three words of the poem: if these are well-chosen, it would be difficult to replace them. "Big" for "huge", "unmoving" for "motionless" and "fronting" for "facing", may mean the same but something would be lost, and the sound is a key factor. Finally, the accents, which are crucial, though there is no metrical pattern. The two accents in line one emphasise "deep" and "stream". If line two is read with a brief pause after "fish", and with four accents, not three, this lends weight and substance to the image. The two accents in line three relate to the fish - "facing" - and to the element they live in - "current" - which in turn takes the mind back to "Deep" and "stream".

And so to two poems by David Cobb:

shimmer of fish
without any motion
through a film of ice

the torrent passes
in soft slow ripples
through the gills of fish

After the exhaustive treatment of the three poems above, readers may prefer to do for themselves a similar analysis of these two, so here is merely an indication of a few relevant features. Comparing the first poem with Hackett's, note:

1. Similar consonants are used (sh-sh-'sh'; mm-m-m; f-f)
(sh-'sh' ; m-m ; f-f)
2. David Cobb's poem needs no "action" word, like "current": its "still" effect owes much to the short "i" sounds (i-i-i-y-i) and the long vowels (ou-o-ou-i)
3. "Ice", both as monosyllable and solid substance, contrasts with the tremulous suggestion of "shimmer".

The second poem is especially successful: its long vowels; its sibilants; the repeated "p" and "l"; the three accents in line two; and the forceful "torrent" (compare "current" in Hackett), modifying first to "ripples" and then to "gills of fish".

I had written so far and was planning a final paragraph when, right on cue, *Blithe Spirit* 4 arrived - with this very poem and a Dutch translation that perfectly illustrates the intimate connection between sound and sense in a language. The corollary of this, unfortunately, is that the effects are very difficult, if not impossible, to attain in another language. Here is Marianne Kiauta's translation: *de stroom vindt zijn weg / in langzame rimpeling / door vissekieuwen*. Neat though this is, how much has been changed! "The stream finds its way" (I gather) serves for "the torrent passes", but is surely a bit lifeless? Though "in langzame rimpeling" might do, we have lost "soft slow ripples" - so vital a line. Then for the pleasant and conclusive cadence of "the gills of fish" we have "vissekieuwen", with its "k" and "n". So the conclusion from this one example (by no means a novel one, and in no way a reflection on the exciting new *Pathway* venture) might be that a good poem could suffer considerably in translation because of a language's uniqueness. (Could any readers offer us for comparison a French, Italian or Spanish version?).

Anyone not yet persuaded of the significance of "sound-cum-sense" is invited to look at the last page of *The Pathway* and three haiku:

Continued at foot of page 9

Season Corner

Cold sparrow sits on
shoulder of gnome, angling
for fish-finger bits

Ken Ellison

a swarm of dunlin roves
stabbing the mud - but Monsieur
Curlew strolls and probes

George Marsh

cow-track
the good mud
squelches

glossy black beetle
slips under
a leaf

blackbird
leaves - a branch
waving

Chris Mulhern

winter morning....
café radio playing
"Summertime"

a black cat sits
beneath the bare birch
frost-free grass

Richard Goring

How many old men
December puts in prison -
linctus and blankets

Dim days of solstice:
rooks flap home through half-light,
clouds douse the low sun

Kenneth Vye Bailey

nude in bed
feeling
the cold

unseen in fog
wingbeats past the window -
cawing crow

Brian Tasker

winter sky -
the heron hears fish bite
a mile away

wanting a pee
the cat tries different doors
to avoid the snow

frosty fields -
through the mist
monuments to sheep!

Tessa Rose Chester

old men
and sparrows
huddle

Fred Schofield

A winter scarecrow
for company swings at its wrist
a skeleton crow

A crystal picked up
in winter soon warms my hand:
two worlds in transit

Edward Glover

Twelfth Night:
a carpet of pine needles
and a lonely star

Joan Daniels

Warm breath starts to melt
frost on the window - reveals
a whitened landscape

Pamela Johnson

winter wind -
alone this evening
I water my plants

M J Gunton

uncomfortable
ducks on fragile ice paddle
in holes of water

Annie Bachini

Winter evening
From the train window -
Red sun bouncing
Through a bare wood.

(near Tochigi, 1/83)

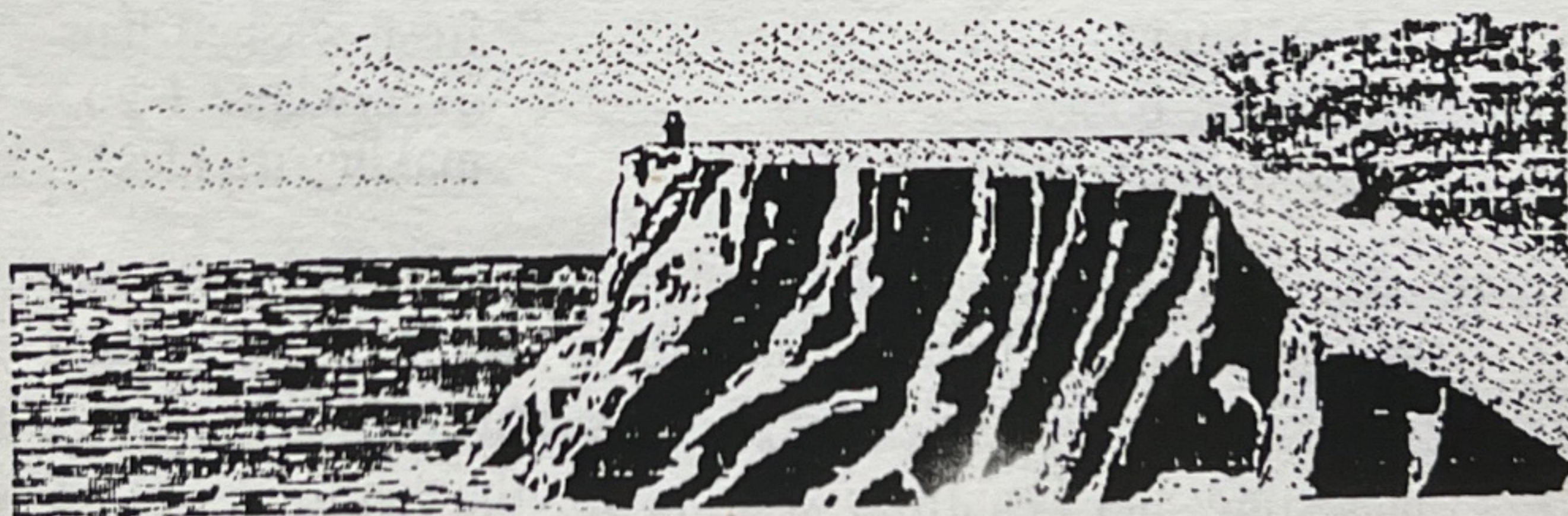
Beginning of winter -
Over bare fields,
A steady, fleecy
Rain of snow...

(Lechlade, Glos., 11/88)

Tito

low sun -
moving in the next field
my shadow

Jackie Hardy



Sound and Sense in Haiku in English (from page 7)

- Note the obvious differences in sound (even if, like me, you know no Romanian) between the three languages in "Ploaie de vară", "pluie d'été" and "Summer rain"
- Do the same with the Italian (with its vowels and repeated "l") and James Kirkup's English (with ck-ck-br-cl)
- If from Italian to English we move from "softer" to "harder", in the last haiku the position is reversed: we move from the "harder" Dutch (g-sk-t-ch) to the "softer" English (fl-f-l-bl, and long vowels).

I welcome readers' reactions to this tentative essay: the subject deserves a whole thesis perhaps, and anyone interested is welcome to the idea!

Haiku Moment and Haiku Eye

Michael Gunton

Following several articles in *Blithe Spirit* vol 2 no 1 about perception, I want to try to express a number of things I have been discovering about haiku moments and the haiku eye in the eighteen months or so since I have been reading and trying to compose haiku.

I have always known moments of simplicity and depth, but now perhaps I have found a form which can deliver them, almost untouched, to the reader:

I slipped and fell -
The Mountains are still¹

Through haiku, I am learning to be more aware of the resonance and beauty of the ordinary and commonplace:

at midnight
a distant door
pulled shut²

fresh-washed hair
everywhere I go
making trickles³

My brief acquaintance with Japanese haiku and tanka in translation are leading me to discover a specifically Japanese sensibility, and to appreciate for myself things which Japanese poets have found interesting and beautiful: waiting for the kettle to boil, I look out of the window through bare branches to the moon partly covered by cloud; at Christmas in an otherwise unremarkable carol I am struck by the line "watching by moonlight on mountains alone". I will never be able to write Japanese haiku, but as I learn from the craft, I find myself absorbing some Japanese preoccupations. I don't think I'm alone here - this can be a point of real cultural contact and exchange.

I am discovering the "haiku eye", and the thrill of it. Sometimes I experience something of what Takahama Kyoshi meant:

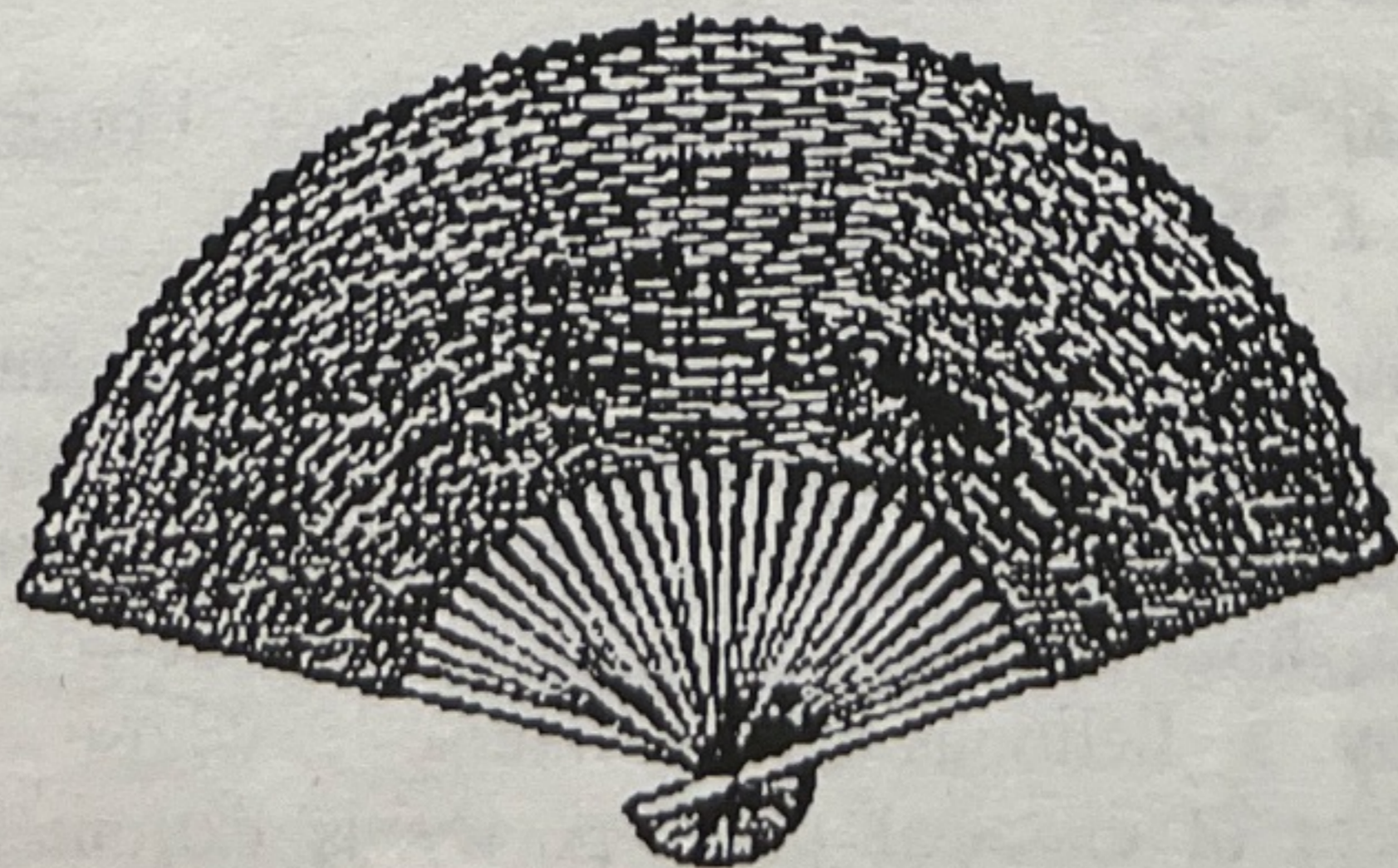
Autumn wind:
Everything I see
Is haiku⁴

Sometimes words come too, but it doesn't bother me if they don't; sometimes I think "Where could I begin?". But there are also times when I have no energy or opportunity, or when there is not enough clarity, to hope for haiku moments. I now treat these times as a warning signal (though they have led others to haiku moments)!

Then there are the times when I feel in the mood and go looking for haiku, for instance along the seafront. (I'm not really interested in striving to evoke a particular season, but nature I find endlessly inspiring, although many haiku I write also tend towards the "serious senryu"). Alternatively, I look through my collection of postcards of works of art or black and white photographs, and see whether there are haiku moments there. In a way this second approach is perhaps derivative, but it is also an attempt to come into contact with the world of the artist or photographer, and it can generate a fresh experience.

These are only my first steps. It's a journey, and I'm enjoying it.

- 1 Santoka Taneda, *Mountain Tasting*, trans John Stevens, Weatherhill, 1980 (p.75)
- 2 William J Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*, Kodansha International, 1989 (p.3)
- 3 *ibid* (p.36)
- 4 Bownas and Thwaite (eds), *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*, Penguin, 1964 (p.166)



Reviews

Francine Porad: *A Mural of Leaves* (from PO Box 1551, Mercer Island, WA 98040, USA. \$ 5.00 ppd)

A particular attraction of this well produced soft pocketbook are the six *renku* (chains of "free" haiku in one-line arrangement) written by Porad in tandem with six different partners (anne mckay, vincent tripi, Paul O Williams, Connie Brannan, Tom Clausen, Marlene Mountain), presumably, considering the time it took to compose each of them, by post. This would be an excellent model for those of our members - quite a few, I believe - who are keen to get into interactive versifying, but find the *renga* set-up either daunting or impractical. *A Mural of Leaves* also has some biting senryu about the Gulf War, e.g. *sandwiched / between haiku meetings / a war.* DC

Lee Gurga: *The Measure of Emptiness* (from Press Here, PO Box 4014, Foster City, CA 94404, USA. \$ 7.50)

The 70 haiku/senryu in this landscape paperback have been printed in style, one to a page. Though by the 1990 winner of the Mainichi prize for "strict form" haiku, nearly all are in "free" form, even down to extremes such as *foxglove / hums / the autumn hillside*. Gurga is brilliant at finding a word (here, "hums") which, with unobtrusive cleverness, encapsulates the vitality of nature; finding a word that strikes twice (as here, because "hums" works both transitively and intransitively). Something longer, and more typical of the collection: *old pond / out of the watersnake's mouth / the toad's eyes.* DC

Hokusai: *One Hundred Poets* (Cassell, London. 14" x 10", 222 pages. £ 55.00 from bookshops)

One hundred tanka from one hundred different poets (the *Hyakunin Isshu* collection) illustrated (here in almost full-size reproduction) by the print master Hokusai. The artist has given many of the poems a twist, however, by having them interpreted, or rather misinterpreted, by a fictitious "Wet Nurse", whose understanding of the subtleties of classical court poetry is extremely thin! This device allows Hokusai to have fun with the meaning of the tanka. As the poetry collection itself was completed in 1235, only poets who lived

between the 7th and 13th Centuries are represented (pre-haiku period) - Hitomaro, Narihira, Teika, Saigyō, Yakamochi and Tsurayuki amongst the male poets; Murasaki, Izumi and Sei amongst the women. Author Peter Morse has produced a fine work of scholarship, in which not only are interpretations of the poems (both the recondite and the mundane) discussed with considerable clarity but also interesting details in the illustrations are well explained. As only 27 of the prints were completed during Hokusai's lifetime, only 27 are here reproduced in full colour; most of the remainder being drawings. Printing by Dai Nippon has ensured a splendid physical appearance for the book. Other strong features: a useful explanation of *kyōka* (18-19th Century tanka parody), a good bibliography (including a *Hyakunin Isshu* in Ukrainian), helpful indexes and - perhaps most interesting of all - a comparison of 36 different English translations of a single Komachi tanka about cherry blossoms. As with Satō's *One Hundred Frogs* compilation of translations of Bashō's famous frog pond haiku (Weatherhill, 1983), this too serves to remind one of just how much scope there is in Japanese poetry for creative reading! To find fault with one aspect of an otherwise excellent book, I am bound to say that the 1917 MacCauley translations of the 100 tanka, which have been afforded the highest profile throughout the book, are unpoetic and dated. *Lo!, 'tis, thou and e'en do not speak to me!* SHG

Editors' note: *it is likely that this book will only be stocked by major London (and perhaps some other city) booksellers, so would-be purchasers elsewhere in Britain will probably not have opportunity to first examine it locally.*

Also received:

Dermot O'Brien: *Beads* (Excalibur Press, London. £ 3.95 from bookshops)

Some 150 poems, very many devoutly religious, laid out in haiku style, though few stand as true haiku. RG

Colin Blundell: *Feather Fallen Out* and *Chasing James* (Hub Editions, available from the author. £ 2.00 each plus 24p postage)

Two more of Colin's little booklets containing his haiku/senryu, and including more examples of his (in)famous "found haiku". RG

More Tanka (and some Haiku) Thoughts

Editor's note: *My article promoting the tanka in the previous issue of Blithe Spirit seems to have sparked off more than a little interest. The piece below, by Ernest Sheppard, I have published in full because, although it expresses a concern based upon an incorrect assumption (that a tanka is an extended haiku), it contains an excellent appreciation of some of the elements of true haiku, which I feel deserve a wide reading. Thank you, Ernest. I must also express thanks to Bill Higginson for his Haiku Handbook, upon which I have drawn heavily for my own following article, which I hope will make clear that haiku and tanka are separate entities in many vital ways, yet also linked through a common heritage. After these articles, readers will find a selection of members' tanka submissions - do let me know which of these you like or not, and why. RG*

Is the Tanka Haiku-related?

Ernest Sheppard

The article on tankas in the last issue of *Blithe Spirit* has set me thinking about certain aspects of this form as an extension of the haiku. The following observations are intended to raise some questions as to whether the tanka can properly be regarded as haiku-related.

I have not the benefit of a copy of Higginson's *Haiku Handbook*, so I do not know whether he has discussed the question as to the extent to which the Japanese tanka retains the true characteristics of the haiku. Certainly, the element of brevity is compromised by the addition of 14 further syllables, and that expansion, it seems to me, seriously affects the other parameters of the true haiku.

Richard Goring's article has already adverted to the increased lyricism and the attenuated terseness of the tanka, and quotes Higginson, that love, the human emotions and nature have been consistent themes in Eastern and Western tankas, as they have been in English sonnets. If these elements are already to be seen in the single tanka, how much more are they liable to find expression in the linked sequence of tankas (which I have seen referred to as "tanka-renga"). Thus Richard's example illustrates the danger (if danger it be) of the haiku spirit being lost in lyricism and emotional

content. Yet I have always understood that excellence of the poetic idiom in a haiku is inimical to its factual and impersonal tone; that the "suchness" of the object observed calls for matter-of-fact statement, shorn of all pretensions to poetical feeling. Clearly, the risks for writers of haiku when they turn to composing tankas are, that they will be tempted to "pad", that the immediacy of the experience will tend to be buried under terms which are suggestive of post-event reflection, thereby losing the "Now" of that experience which the true haiku brings out.

Another element of the true haiku which is in danger of being lost in the tanka is what H G Henderson in his excellent book *Haiku in English* calls the "principle of internal comparison". This means that at a level deeper than the merely factual juxtaposition of apparently unconnected words, the latter can suggest valid comparisons which in other poetry are represented by metaphor and simile. The most potent of such internal comparisons arise from the haiku experience which can have levels of meaning of which the writer himself may well not be aware. Here too, the attenuation of the haiku-experience into the tanka can prove hostile to the principle of internal comparison.

I should welcome some comments on these points from experienced writers of tankas, especially those conversant with the Japanese form. Am I needlessly exercised about the tanka as "sport" departing from the haiku-spirit, or is its difference recognised as legitimate?



A Brief History of Tanka

Richard Goring

Most languages, in their everyday spoken form, have developed a "normal" sentence length, with such sentences often featuring a brief grammatical pause at some point around their middle. In English, for example, "I picked up the box and took it to the counter" is (I hope you will agree) about average length for a conversational sentence and would usually be uttered with the faintest of pauses just before "and". Although quite radically different in structure from English and other Western languages, Japanese shares this characteristic with them. In the Japanese case, the pattern established centuries ago was a length of about twelve sound-units (*onji*), with the break after the fifth or seventh *onji*.

As poetry began to evolve and take written form, the practice developed of arranging groups of these twelve-unit segments with their grammatical breaks all going the same way, usually the five-unit part first, and rounding-off the poem with a final seven *onji* phrase. Poems of this form, with anything from three to over 100 groups of twelve-unit phrases, were known as *chōka*, which translates roughly as "long poem". Poems of two twelve *onji* segments, with the final seven-sound phrase, were known as *tanka* ("short poem"). With the breaks in the twelve-unit segments both occurring after the fifth *onji*, we thus have the classic 5-7-5-7-7 *tanka*.

The *tanka* form dates back to at least the 7th Century AD, and many of the poems in the *Manyōshū*, the oldest great Japanese anthology, dating from the early 8th Century, are *tanka*. The dominant rhythmic pattern of the time placed a major grammatical break - which in English *tanka* (and *haiku*) is indicated by some form of *cæsura* - after the first group of twelve sounds. By the time of the 10th Century *Kokinshū* anthology, a major break near the middle of the second twelve *onji* group had become popular and subsequently dominated.

From the *Kokinshū*, completed around 914 AD, to the *Shinzoku Kokinshū* of 1439, there are 21 Imperial anthologies, containing some 33,000 poems, virtually all of them *tanka*. Poetry composition was a necessary and highly-regarded skill for the Japanese aristocracy, so the imperial collections represent but a small fraction of

all the tanka that must have been written over more than 700 years. The form has survived down to the present day, but its popularity declined with the shift of political and economic power from the aristocracy to the warrior and later to the town-dweller and the merchant. It was replaced first by the *renga*, out of which sprang the haiku and senryu. However, from the 19th Century various Japanese poets have given the genre new life and now, at last, it has begun a global spread.

As to subject matter, the tanka has endured a prescribed content range, just as have most other Japanese forms. In his *Haiku Handbook*, Bill Higginson notes that "if the sonnet was the typical vehicle for the love poetry of English and Italian courtiers during the Renaissance, the tanka served a like function during the five centuries of the Nara and Heian Periods (taken together, roughly 700 to 1200 AD)". But while sonnets often speak of lost or unattainable love, the tanka was the main form in which notes were actually exchanged by lovers. It was a custom for a man to return home from a night of pleasuring and immediately to sit down and compose a tanka of gratitude, perhaps commenting upon some specific event that had occurred. The note would then be despatched to his lover, by messenger or servant, and the lover would be expected to instantly compose and return a suitable tanka response, even if that meant arising from sleep. Tanka expressing desire for another were also sent.

Tanka were also written in praise of nature and, as time passed, they also began to employ natural imagery to express human emotions. All of these strands may still be found in modern Japanese tanka - and certainly also in English-language tanka.

Among the names associated with the form are Kakinomoto Hitomaro, whose work may be found in the *Manyōshū*, Ki no Tsurayuki, an editor of the *Kokinshū*, Saigyō, a 12th Century aristocrat who became a Buddhist monk, whose work, much admired by Bashō, may be found in the *Shinkokinshū* (see also the review of *One Hundred Poets*, elsewhere in this issue). More recently, Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), an early feminist whose best-known work was also her first, *Midaregami* (*Tangled Hair*), a fine collection of love tanka - many quite erotic, and Ishikawa Takuboku (1886-1912) have carried the torch. Even

more recently, Machi Tawara (b.1961) published a first book, *Sarada Kinenbi (Salad Anniversary)*, containing many linked tanka, which took Japan by storm, selling 3 million copies in under two years - and bringing her more than 200,000 tanka written by her readers!

Further proof that the form is still robust in the country of its birth is that the Emperor holds a tanka contest each year, which the entire population is eligible to enter. He chooses the subject of the poem, then his subjects struggle for weeks and months in endeavour to win the supreme accolade, to read their tanka in front of the Emperor and his family on New Year's Day.

So it can be seen that the tanka is a quite separate genre from the haiku, and in fact predates it by around 900 years. And the tanka has its own characteristic content. Yet there is a strong link between the two forms. Bill Higginson again - "Poets of the classical era often met together for the purpose of composing and sharing tanka. By the 13th Century it became the fashion, after some hours of deep poetic concentration on their individual works, to relax by writing a humorous renga together. The form....resembled a chain of tanka, with each poet writing a stanza of about seventeen sounds (5-7-5) or about fourteen sounds (7-7) in turn. The haiku originated as the opening verse of a renga....in terms of its origin, the form of the traditional haiku is incomplete."

As to the form and content of current English-language tanka, for examples read the annual Mirrors International Award booklet containing the 31 entries selected as best. The booklet is published under the title *Tanka Splendor* and also contains a tanka and essay by the selecting judge, who for 1990 was Sanford Goldstein and for 1991 was George Swede. Also worthy of perusal is Jane Reichhold's *A Gift of Tanka*, which has around 100 of her own, mostly "free form" tanka and a useful article. I will close with a quotation from Ms Reichhold, ".....everything will be tried and we will graciously allow it to be called tanka until someone gives it a better name". Now who would like to comment upon that?

Tanka Splendor and *A Gift of Tanka* are available from our member Brian Tasker, who, by the way, along with Dee Evetts, has a tanka amongst the selected 31 in the 1991 "Splendor".

...And Now for some Tanka

Editor's note: in addition to his article, Ernest Sheppard sent his three-poem entry which was also successful in the same competition as mine published in the last Blithe Spirit. I note that Ernest has given his set an overall title and that though the first two can each stand alone, the third seems dependent upon the second, which raises the question of whether it is a tanka or the second half of a *chōka*? We also have two other tanka sequences, from Eric Speight and Doris Husband. We welcome your views on these as well as upon the singletons. And there are three tanka from Adam AntAthair-Siorai, who also poses a question for each one. Please consider these questions and make your responses direct to Adam, but copy to us if you wish. RG

Painted on Silk

Moonlight flooding through
opal cloud-rents paints shadows
of the bamboo leaves
with exquisite precision
on the courtyard's pale flagstones

The tipsy poet
beneath the white mulberry's
cool canopy writes
with rapid brushstrokes of the
inconstancy of all things

He exempts the bridge,
arching like a cat over
its own reflection
in the still pool, in words which
make it imperishable

Ernest Sheppard

a mirror of stars
I stand empty by the lake
sun-quenched undisturbed
then you ripple through my mind
the death of a thousand stars

Frank J Dullaghan

Bucharest, hell's fine
democracy, struggles; dreams in cold
comfort: accountants
juggle figures, debt and lies;
liberty - travesty - dies

Is punctuation, where there are many areas within a work to be explored in such a short space, acceptable to add to the meaning when most editors/publishers don't annotate the works that they publish?

The unredeemed world:
the earth is moving, drifting
towards danger
down the river, drying up
stormy weather as peace sleeps on

Although no titles are used, and footnotes provided by the author rarely quoted, can an introductory line be employed to set the general pattern of a work in the manner that a title would normally be?

Powerless are the
peacemakers blunting daggers;
such long sorrows
thrust into cities the night
when innocents the guilty fight

How oblique can a work be without becoming obscure; or is it better to allow each reader their own interpretation of the sequence of events and their meaning?

Adam An-tAthair-Siorai

four slender roebuck
pause at the coppice-edge -
flicking ears and tails
and nibbling pale primroses
while the goods-train clatters by

Tessa Rose Chester

Taoist Temple, Jurong, Singapore

This little temple
explodes chromatically
amongst housing blocks
its gods and dragons laughing
at anonymous concrete

They hedge their bets - see,
this altar, Taoist gods; that
Buddhist and round here
all the gear for Taoist seers
and those who call up spirits

It's individual,
exuberantly itself
refuge for drab souls
cramped and dulled in air-con shops,
release for the profit slaves

Eric Speight

Six sparrows scuffle
on the turf, untidiness
outside the control
of Government, the Police
and outraged Parks Department

Eric Speight

writing paper, if
you are thinned with clay
smoothed and sealed with size
you will crinkle and distort
for ever when soaked in tears

George Marsh

The cat purrs on my knee,
his claws, to my discomfort,
going in and out: my flesh,
and birds' - love
and ferocity needle-sharp

Edward D Glover

Tanka from the Silent Pool

Between the reed mace stems
She repairs her silken web
From the centre point
A sensor leads to her lair
To spring the fly trap once more

A cloud of gnats girate
In airy dalliance repeat
Their never ending
Dance in the shady stillness
Of the waterside willow

Darting and hawking
Iridescent dragonflies
Helicopter wings
Spread a hovering rainbow
Above the water lilies

Fat carp glide below
Boatmen denting the surface
Astonishing frogs
Peep from floating lily pads
The water iris flutter

A caddis larvae
Small harassed housewife scrabbles
Adding more debris
To her untidy narrow
Domain among the kingcups

A water beetle
Dingy and undistinguished
Dives with a bubble
Becomes a silver creature
In the waving water weed

As the daylight fades
Clearing their throats frogs tune up
For the serenade
A breeze ripples the water
Whispering rushes shiver

Doris L Husband

Gorse Blossoms

Only lonely stones
and water with no sparkle:
death of a goldfish

Paper aeroplane
the colour of evening:
heron in flight

Cars curtsey
in procession
along bumpy road

Celia Warren

A haiku a day,
just seventeen syllables;
so little, so much

By the river stands
an old man; a boat passes,
children wave their hands

An old man watches
chestnut buds unfurl and sniffs
leafsmoke on the wind

Jar full of tadpoles;
the child gazes unaware
of marvels to come

W M Tidmarsh

Up to one's chin -
the bath bubbles foam
when telephone rings

Unexpected wind:
In crowded elevator,
Sound of pin dropping

Ken Ellison

words
you go to sleep in the tent now
I'll stay out here

George Marsh

on the café counter
a vase containing
dead carnations

squirrel foraging
in the dead leaves
a golf ball

Richard Goring

An eon's labour:
rock-stacks topple
to a splash

Moonlit rocks -
trawlers bob
at anchor

Matthew Paul

as I get older
looking more
like my mother

birds quick
on the slow stream
fast glitter of moon-lit rain

fluttering
her windy scarf
and white butterfly wings

red sunset
seeping between branches
wet caterpillars

Diane Albertina

young mother
pushing her baby
sucking a lollypop

Brian Tasker

a hundred hawthorn
line the railway track - grace notes
for a thousand birds

Tessa Rose Chester

sudden animal
dead in our headlights
won't make the news

Fred Schofield

Your ten fingers evoke
the moonlight: I ensnare it
in icicles

Edward Glover

sun celebrating
its journey across the sky -
soft shadow of wine

taking for granted
the rising sun and ourselves -
we pull curtains wide

F J Dullaghan

How soon the rose fades -
summer's whole extravagance
clothed briefly in red

Brian Wells

Round and round the pool
the two goldfish circle
beneath the lilies

Joan Daniels

after the crash
the doll's eyes
jammed open

M J Gunton

Within this crystal drop of dew
the whole world is hanging
upside-down

Old bumblebee,
lugging along that body
wherever he goes

Waiting in darkness,
an aged blind man sitting...
listening for the moon

R Christopher Thorsen

I have to use ink
The typewriter is broken
The haiku still speaks

The well-worn marriage
Comfortable as a bed
Difficult to leave

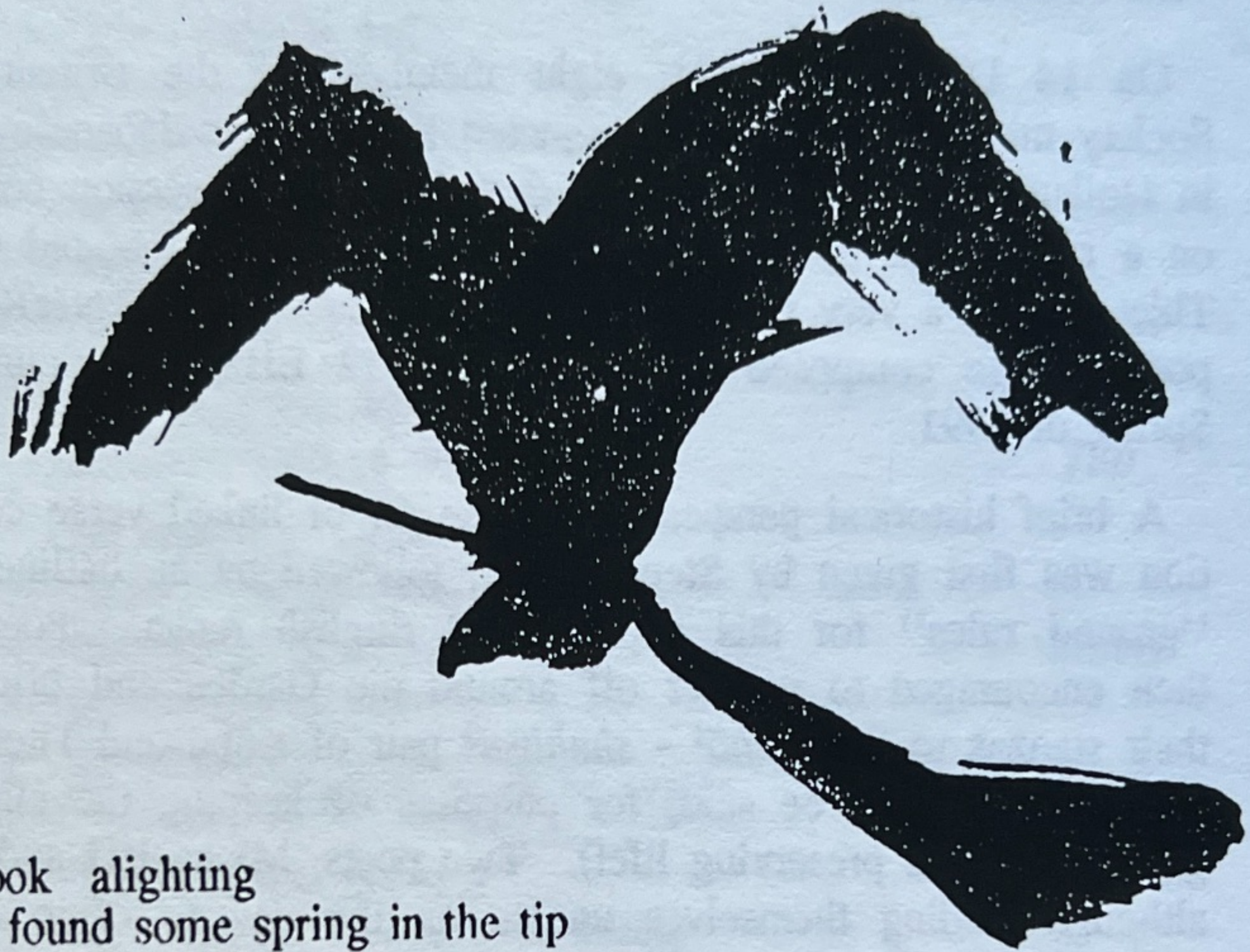
The well thought haiku
Can weave the threads of the soul
Into a carpet

Elsie Torrent

Mangoes, park planted
in dismal line between blocks,
still manage to fruit

Eric Speight





a rook alighting
has found some spring in the tip
of the brittle oak

David Cobb

Brush drawing by *Charlotte Smith*



The Season Corner theme for the next *Blithe Spirit* will be "Spring". We will also be acknowledging our debt to P B Shelley, whose birth bi-centenary falls on 4 August, so do let us have some "lark" poems as well.

"....all were reminded of the many rules and goals to remember when writing and editing haiku. These included such matters as correct spelling and punctuation; natural line breaks; eliminating wordiness; avoiding rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile and pathetic fallacy; keeping the haiku 'in the moment'; and creating internal comparison."

from a report of the Haiku Poets of Northern California Winter Meeting, published in *Woodnotes*, Spring 1992 issue.

The Frozen Sun

On 14 December, 1991, eight members of the British Haiku Society met in the recently completed Kyoto Teien Japanese Garden in Holland Park, London, for a three-hour *renga* session conducted on a rug spread in a corner of the intermittently-fogbound Garden. This was, in a very real sense, a "follow-up" to the 'NITROGEN' postal *renga* composed by a group of 12 BHS poets during the Spring of 1991.

A brief historical perspective on the art of linked verse composition was first given by Stephen Gill, followed by an outline of the "ground rules" for this experimental English *renga*. Poets were then encouraged to wander off around the Garden and bring back their stanzas to the *sōshō*¹ - *shuhitsu*² pair of Kobu and Tito. (This was also, it must be said, for purposes of keeping the circulation going, and thus preserving life!). Two poets, Michael G and Fuitsu, although finding themselves unable on the day to offer anything suitable for inclusion, were nonetheless in all other ways in a thoroughly participatory mode. At about 2.30 pm, because of the cold, it was decided that any verses as yet unconsidered were to be sent later on, along with any suggestions for alterations to any existing stanzas and links, to the *shuhitsu* for final editing.

Some weeks later, after due correspondence and further consideration, he decided together with the *sōshō* that only two additions and three slight alterations would be made to the *renga* as it stood on departure from the silver-and-gold Garden that day. Whilst recognising that our efforts were far from perfect, it was felt that the freshness and balance of the whole was in danger of being compromised by too much after-the-fact tampering; and it was best to leave it more or less completely alone. The way we had chosen on the day to confine ourselves to composing poems "of the *real* place and of the *real* moment", and then to link them in a sequence which would recreate the poetic discoveries of a few hours of one *real* day, meant that, in spite of *renga*-like 3-2 line alternation, our linked verse was always going to be, in essence, more of a corporate *rensaku*³ than a multi-seasoned, imagined,

“classical” *renga*. But perhaps this is exactly what we British
want our *renga* to be? SHG

The *shuhitsu*'s final transcription reads as follows:

Across the iced pond
the stone lantern is holding
the first gleam of sun *Kobu*

At first, more birds than people
in the garden of quiet mist *Tito*

A criss-cross of twigs
dripping in an eerie void -
the colour of space *Mavis*

Ice so thin
the ducks seem to walk on water *Jim*

Time passes slowly -
the crack of the bamboo clock⁴
hammering the rock *Michael C*

The boar-scarer⁴ dispels
distant sirens speeding by *Jim*

In the freezing fog
a squirrel's fascination
with a thermos flask *Kobu*

Lapping up fresh water
off the rock's marbled surface *Michael C*

A morsel of bread -
the squirrel making light
of forbidden grass *Kobu*

Policewoman confronts poetry
with her walkie-talkie *corporate, with
assistance from
Royal Parks Police*

Huddled together
creating, sharing the new -
in Kyoto's mist *Michael C*

Top-knotting the lantern
An inflated robin *Kobu*

At the brim of the hill,
a beech still bearing
most of its russet leaves

Tito

Bronze parchment of peeling bark -
verse without words

Jim

He stops and eyes me,
then brushing with his tail the dew
the fox moves on

Mavis

The sun balances on a limb
of overspreading trees

Katherine

Coins in the pond -
more copper
than silver ones

Kobu

The sun, not so long since come,
already looking a little old

Tito

Reflecting
on the ice reflecting
on the frozen sun

Kobu

- 1 *sōshō*, traditionally, a master of the art of *renga*, who would normally be invited to compose the initial *hokku* verse
- 2 *shuhitsu*, host and scribe, who might well compose the *wakiku* second stanza couplet, as well as transcribing onto paper the whole linked verse as it evolves
- 3 *rensaku*, a sequence of haiku by a single poet
- 4 *shishiodoshi*, a thick bamboo flask mounted on a pivot and positioned under a steady trickle of water. Gradually, it fills up...until, overbalancing, it empties the accrued water: and, in so doing, gives the rock beneath it a sharp "thwack". With this, the flask is automatically returned to its original position under the trickling water. Thus, every few minutes, a loud "bop" to scare away wild animals (which might otherwise be able to devour a farmer's ripening cereal crop). The device had a practical use in the countryside around Kyoto in medieval times, but was later incorporated as a fashionably "rustic" addition to temple and private gardens.



Hand Made
In
A Garden Shed
In
Bunyan Land