

Blithe Spirit



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Editorial

Greetings for 1994!

I attended a contemporary poetry symposium in Belfast recently. An interesting and enjoyable event that had some of the best poets as speakers and readers that England, Northern Ireland, Eire, Scotland and Wales could muster. By way of introduction, the first speaker complained of the marginalisation of poets among writers, a theme that was taken up by others over the weekend. No one mentioned haiku. Except me, of course, but as part of the audience this had little impact. It did get me thinking, though. Where do I, an editor of a magazine devoted to haiku and other kindred forms, fit into the scheme of things?

So best wishes for 1994 from the edge of the margin of the back of beyond.

This issue will have a slightly different look. As I have received fewer haiku submissions this time there are more articles. Often articles are difficult to fit in, so this has enabled me to publish some of those that have accumulated. I like the feel of this issue and I hope you do, too. Please keep sending both poems and articles.

This is the year of the dog so we will use dogs as a theme for the next issue, thus giving equal space to the debate on household pets.

The season corner for the next issue (May) will be winter.

Jackie Hardy

The cover for Blithe Spirit Volume Four has been designed by Patricia V. Dawson

autumn morning -
amidst the last fuchsias
a fresh yellow rose

Richard Goring

stuffing the Guy -
drafts of poems
long ago in print

David Cobb

from a crack
in the stone coffin
an autumn butterfly

Kohjin Sakamoto

falling with the leaves
alighting on the brown hedge
travelling feather

Nathan Littlewood

cider orchards...
ripe with autumn smells -
rowdy red wings

David Walker

Kazue Gill



Let Haiku Dance! - David Cobb & Colin Blundell

In an interesting letter, published in *Haiku International* 1992 Volume 5, under the heading 'On the Translation of Haiku', William Higginson makes the point that haiku written in English have to take account of the fact that the English language has a rhythm 'which is not syllabic at all, but accentual...' The rest of Higginson's letter depends on the obvious fact that English is syllabic and that all rhythm derives from syllables; beyond this, a valid point can certainly be made that accentual emphasis on particular syllables may vary between readers and affect meaning.

It is worth bearing in mind D.H. Lawrence's distinction between formal poetic rhythm and spoken rhythm. No self-respecting reader would render the following in accented iambs:-

Nōt mārblē nōr thē gīldēd mōnūmēnts
Of princēs shall outlīve thīs powerfūl rhyme

It would come out something like:-

Not mārble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme

In the same letter, Higginson restates his well-known belief in a reduced syllable count for haiku ('twelve syllables is about right') and also lends his support to the rhythm suggested by R.H. Blyth ('2 accented beats in the first line, 3 in the second and 2 in the third').

He also asserts that 'an irregular beat pattern, such as that usually found in 5-7-5 haiku in English, suggests random scraps of prose, not traditional verse, to the English-tuned ear'.

Our objections to Higginson's arguments begin with the unfortunate example he gives, which, if accepted, would lead an unwary beat-counter up the wrong path:-

The lake water
 Has surpassed itself:
 Midsummer rain.

Higginson claims that 'this has the 2-3-2 rhythm suggested by Blyth' presumably to produce this:-

The lake water	(2)
Has surpassed itself:	(3)
Midsummer rain.	(2)

We sincerely hope this was *not* what Blyth was suggesting, for the verse can only be tortured into a semblance of 2-3-2 beats by a complete distortion of the natural rhythm of English speech which would, perhaps, give us:-

The lake water	(1)
Has surpassed itself:	(1)
Midsummer rain.	(2)

Blyth did qualify his support for 2-3-2 rhythmical pattern by saying, 'but *not* regularly iambic or anapaestic'.

The variability of stress in English means that, fundamentally, every reader has to work out their own rhythmical interpretation of written utterances: syllabic stress is a non-linguistic signal of meaning and emphasis.

We fear that the example given by Higginson might lead writers into pedantically tapping out beats with a pencil, instead of, or as well as, counting syllables on their fingers as we used to do in school exercises to analyse what Higginson is presumably referring to as 'traditional verse'.

It will usually prove difficult to find as many as seven (2+3+2) natural spoken stresses in the 12 syllables which Higginson recommends; though maybe this is where the haiku poet displays craftsmanship. It certainly does not seem that in everyday English which is our acknowledged yardstick strong beats occur that frequently.

After all this we are still skirting round the edges of the problem. The whole point is, surely, that we speak a flexible language and therefore as poets we have to make the best possible use of that flexibility in relation to our texture of meanings.

We worry about Higginson's uncompromising statement that 'an irregular beat pattern, such as that usually found in 5-7-5 haiku in English, suggests random scraps of prose, not traditional verse, to the English-tuned ear'. Many of us go out of our way to avoid creating haiku that sound like 'traditional verse'. Higginson seems to be looking for salvation from 'scraps of prose' (whatever they are) in that very regularity which, as we have suggested, Blyth specifically rules out, and which would not stop the haiku Higginson quotes from being three scraps of prose: 'the lake water' (scrap 1) 'has surpassed itself' (scrap 2) midsummer rain (scrap 3)... (Incidentally, why not render this haiku in the present tense and without the superfluous 'water'?:-

The lake
Surpasses itself:
Midsummer rain.)

On the other hand, much so-called free, non-traditional, verse, which haiku writers do well to imitate, appears to be made up of scraps of prose:-

The winter evening settles down
With smells of steaks in alleyways.
[^u] Six ^o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet.

Look again and you find that these 'scraps' are written in regular iambics except for the two subtle variations noted, which serve to bring you up short.

When we come back to the writing of haiku, four further considerations seem to us to be more important than counting either syllables or beats. The

Cats

evening hush...
a tabby cat
slips through the railings

Martin Lucas

along the High Street:
hip-swinging, head-nodding cats
- Jazz Festival time

Charles Brien

bowed with rain
the bamboo showers
a stalking tom

Jackie Hardy

Neighbourhood cats
lazing on a wild patch -
half-hidden by weeds

Katherine Gallagher

behind the coal box
a black cat licks the wind
out of its fur

David Cobb

deaf cat curled
like a white fur hat
on top of the shed

Adele David

kitten emerges
from a very clean corner
covered in cobwebs

David Steele

What's The Difference?

A Temple Monkey

Members often ask 'Is there any difference between a sprig of gorse blossom and a piece of senryu pie? And could either, with a dash of seasoning and a tie, be served at, say, the winter corner? Let's start with a more basic distinction: haiku and senryu.

These may be compared to two almost identical spaceships, but going in opposite directions. The season is merely a hang-over from our life on earth, fortunately still with us, but optional; just as there are seasonal haiku so are there seasonal senryu. First, then the haiku.

A real haiku can stand any amount of looking at. In fact, that is its purpose in life. It won't budge or go away or make you think of anything else at all, not even the sound of silence. If you go on looking at it for long enough, you will go pappadoodle and the thing will absorb you into itself as though you had never been. This, in our crude western terminology, is known as seeing God in the works of creation; as we go east of Suez the idea becomes immeasurably refined, reaching ultimate enlightenment in the State of California.

Before going on to haiku's mirror image, the senryu, let's take a look at an actual haiku.

out of the bend
the curve of the rear lights
exactly aligns

A.Reg Straichan

The bend is perhaps also a dip, you coming down to it, the others climbing out. The changing pattern of lights is hypnotic, soporific. As the many becomes the one, you continue speeding into it until you hit the vehicle in front. This verse is, of course, a gorse blossom. A gorse blossom is thus, we see, simply an out of season haiku, doing a few TV ads to keep going until the next engagement at regular Equity rates.

The senryu also directs your attention to a real scene; but no sooner done than it sends it off again in one or more directions.

sucking from the pack
the sucker cannot see
the orange isn't orange

Falconer Yeats

So, here, it may take a few fractions of a second to get the picture, but once we have it, our thoughts go racing off on to the packaged foods, the soft drinks industry, trust, comfort, the state of the earth, the end of the world - what you like.

the dandelion seed
on its way
to someone else's garden

D.J. Peel

Wit and punning are natural to senryu and will always be discovered there, if only in the form of metaphor. In this verse the unspecified metaphor in the second line (a letter?, a jaunty visitor?, a teacup without a handle? - whatever) nicely points up the schadenfreude of the situation.

So far, so clear. Nevertheless, the two sets, haiku and senryu, are both fuzzy and intersecting: some members may, at the same time, be both inside and outside their ranks, or so well-placed as to be members of both officer's and sergeant's mess. As an introduction to these complex matters, I leave you to consider whether Richard Goring's fascinating piece is, as originally claimed, senryu or a true gorse blossom haiku.

empty carriage
every seat bearing
a 'reserved' slip

The 1993 James W.Hackett Award: The Prize-winning Haiku

A broken nutshell
and a twisted root remain
where the hazel grew.

Lesley Lendrum, Scotland

This verse was chosen for its superb balance between content and form, ie for its 'haiku moment' and for its skilful rendering into a 'haiku poem'. And, certainly, the finished poem shows a clear understanding of (and respect for) what constitutes the experience of the 'haiku moment'. In this case, the awareness of a most subtle natural event: the stark emptiness where once stood an old nut tree - one whose presence and fecundity the writer might well have known and enjoyed for years. Carefully chosen modifiers vividly render a ravaged scene that is an excellent example of Zen's *suchness*, or the depiction of 'the thing just as it is'. The mood of the moment is stark and melancholy, befitting the suggestion of loss, or even a sense of outrage. And most impressive is the poet's sensitive *interpenetration* with the destroyed tree, a loss which suggests feelings of compassion, or even identity.

The formal expression of this 'haiku moment' is equally impressive, in that it represents what I have long suggested in my books as the best norm for a 'haiku poem' in English, ie three lines, composed in approximately 17 syllables. In this case, in a successful 5-7-5 alignment, all of which testifies to the writer's skill. The 'haiku moment' is depicted clearly and directly, and as in the best haiku, is easily comprehended. (No minimalistic, telegraphic puzzlement here.) Each line is written as a phrase group, with no dangling articles or prepositions at the end of a line. As noted above, the adjectives 'broken' and 'twisted' evidence a careful word choice that allows the reader to vividly share the scene and its mood. This haiku is deceptively plain and simple. But it actually manifests great care and sensitivity on the part of the writer to depict such a remarkably subtle experience with nature. Moreover, *the poet's presence is apparent* (as it most often should be in haiku), and is so suffused with the natural event, that readers can experience this particular 'haiku moment' for themselves - one of the principal aims of haiku. All in all,

this verse is a fine example of a haiku poem, and I congratulate the poet for its sensitivity and skilful presentation.

Highly Commended

Down in the meadow
a horse keeps nodding his head
under the full moon

*Makoto Tamaki,
Andorra / Okinowa*

Disappearing in front
disappearing behind
the forest path unwinds me

Ken Jones, Wales

above the tree-line
silence - only the whisper
of the chair-lift wheel

*Ruth Robinson,
England*

All in the autumn dusk
except the sun-lit summit
of the highest hill

Nokuo Nagayama, Japan

moon reflection
forming and reforming
between drops

Susan Rowley, England

Hanging on
long after the cart
the scent of hay

Marijan Cekolz, Croatia

Gorse Blossoms

...when gorse is out of bloom, kissing's out of fashion...
Other seasons, all seasons, no seasons, haiku, etcetera...

meditating
in the zendo -
a brass buddha

Cy Patterson

Cart rumbles -
in the lane
a stretch of droppings

John Gonzalez

furrowing
Aphrodite's face
acid rain

Sharon Lee Shafii

before the temple gate
dumped by a flash flood
a fishing boat

in their cage
sleeping all day long...
fishing cormorants

Kohjin Sakamoto

Roman summer villa
Its mosaic savage dog
now invites me in

Erica and Owen Facey

cars race noisily
into
the gentleness of drizzle

Martin Lucas

trial run
my newly-planted seedlings
scratched

new tenants?
under the bat box
strange droppings

Ruth Robinson

For a few seconds -
the new moon reclining in
a mountain hollow

James Kirkup

Obliging rain —
It comes at the crest of a ridge
In front of a teahouse
With a river view ...

(near Besisahar, Nepal 6/90)

Tito

Late afternoon -
rows of fishing boats
lift in the pinkish haze

Katherine Gallagher

the branch below
nods
as a drop falls

Fred Schofield

Writing Haiku/Senryu is Good for the Brain CB

In *Blithe Spirit* Volume 2 Number 1, I suggested that the insight represented by the appearance on the page of a haiku/senryu was the product of Right Brain activity; the elements that go to make up the initial spontaneous haiku/senryu moment are apprehended in the flash of recognition that is characteristic of Right Brain activity. The subsequent wrestle with words in linear sequence, I suggested, was an affair of the Left Brain; in *Blithe Spirit* Volume 3 Number 2, Jackie Hardy calls this the 'stewing' process, which is exactly what it is. Reconciling the haiku-moment with its expression on paper is a matter of maintaining a healthy balance between Right and Left brains.

My whole brain was recently suddenly jolted back to this theme when, reading *'The Right Brain'* by Thomas Blakeslee (MacMillan 1980 - ISBN 0-333-29090-9), I came across a reference to Zen as one of a number of 'techniques for silencing verbal thoughts, thereby tapping non-verbal consciousness'. The writer goes on to suggest that 'the philosophies behind [all such] disciplines often represent an extreme denial of the left brain, which is as one-sided as [Western] denial of the right... the techniques they have developed could be used to give students a taste of pure right-brain consciousness'.

It seems to me that the excited anguish of the balancing act between left and right brain proclivities is what Jackie is describing.

The very act of writing haiku/senryu and sticking at it is good for the brain: it exercises both halves in judicious tandem.

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 languages.

The following, in Croat and English, are from *Sparrow* Vol 1 Nos 3-4.

Mala stakalca
Kotrljaju dječaci.
Proljeće je tu.

Boys rolling
marbles of every colour —
first day of spring

Smiljka Bilankov

Naizmjenice se pale:
čas krijesnica,
čas zvijezda.

taking turns
to twinkle — glow-worm
and star

Jadranka Brnčić

Između kišnih kapi
lagano —
leptirić.

plum petals
slipping into
the shell of a snail

Željko Funda

Mala stapa u
utabanom snijegu
velike stope.

trodden snow —
a small footprint rests
in a bigger one

Anica Gečić

Lonac žganaca
tri puta pregrijanih
na staroj peći.

a pot of mash
heating on the old stove
for the third time

Rujana Matuka

Kamičak: pljus, pljas!
Kružići vode šire
zjene dječaka.

pebble, plip-plop!
rings in the water
like the small boy's eyes

Delka Rubčić

Sred prazna grada
gladne žrtve rata
hrane golubove.

town under siege —
refugees feeding
the pigeons

Mile Stamenković

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 this time been won by Cicely Hill with her haiku from the previous issue (December 1993).

George Marsh writes: "I am giving the first place to the tea-ceremony poem by Cicely Hill. Although it might be more sketchy and less skilfully finished than some others it has hit upon mysteriously fascinating relationships beyond my grasp.

Still unopened
The greenish hydrangea flowers:
The taste of tea

The expectation and innocence of the tight flowers, which are like green tea before it opens in soaking, are held in balance with the fulfilment and experience of the fragrance and the flavour of the tea. The whole poem renders an atmosphere of special hushed attention to the reality of the moment which seems to me to give the reader a sense of the tranquillity and alertness the tea ceremony aims to produce."

Stephen Gill has agreed to select from this issue.

Tanka

high on the strand
I have written your name
one side of a heart
and my own
furthest from the sea

F.J.Dullaghan

after the typhoon
bodies bulldozed
into a common grave
always the silence
when we watch the TV news

Jean Jorgensen

the wind blown clouds
lighten and darken
lighten and darken
the room
in which we argue

Brian Tasker

after the run
still in sports kit
he and I
still eating croissants
and watching the fog

Michael Gunton

green shoots
sprout from the head
of noble Romans
endlessly circling
their broken urn

Ken Jones

As I turn a page
in the family album,
my great grandfather
quizzes me with the sharp eyes
of my most recent grandson.

This morning wet leaves,
clinging to your empty car
in a treeless street,
tell me that it rained
all night in the forest.

Patricia V. Dawson

Reviews

Bill Wyatt: 'Spring Ephemerals' A4, photocopied, 21pp

Bill is a new member of BHS, but an old hand at haiku: he was a contributor to Gerry Loose's haiku magazine 'Byways', back in the early 1970s, and you'll find him mentioned in Bill Higginson's 'Haiku Handbook'. He sent me a copy of 'Spring Ephemerals' and after reading it I have passed it into the Society Loan Collection, so that others may borrow it. For anyone who was thinking of trying to write a haibun this might provide some inspiration.

To simplify: Bill quotes extracts from letters and other documents of the period which tell the story of Thomas Willisell, 'the old soldier who played a large part in the development of field botany and afterwards worked with John Ray', and has woven these together with a journal of his and his pals' botanical trips to fields and woodlands which Willisell probably searched 300 years earlier, and with haiku - his own, as well as others' translations from the Japanese. So he finds for Willisell (d. 1675?) the neat epitaph from Basho,

summer grasses -
all that remains
of a soldier's dream

I have, in honesty, to say that it is not all as neat as that. The haiku are, often, rather slight, and apt to be infused with sententiousness, though those who are happy with the 'merely descriptive' type of haiku will like some of them. To give a perhaps better-than-average sample:

Turf Fen Nature Reservoir nr. Lakenheath

Hairy Rocket (at last!)
Erucastrum gallicum (rare)

the French Rocket
loses a wing
& gently glides away

Marestail
Hippuris vulgaris

there in the water
if you sweep the surface
the moon would sink

Finally, a flavour of the personal journal:

'Did a fish restaurant before a pint in our B and B pub. Tried the hotel up the road, which had a fair rock band and Adnam's beer. Then on to 'The Six Bells', which was very busy due to a carnival, loud thumping rock band playing in street next door. Dick left a little early. Graham and I had to carry Brian on our shoulders because of damage to his back after falling off a ladder earlier that week. Landlord of our pub very irate and upset, because he thought Brian was drunk. He said, 'I don't mind you getting pissed, but I'd rather you got drunk in my pub!'

The topical-historical-botanical-poetical mix (if you hear echoes of Polonius in that, turn a deaf ear) has an unusual piquancy. Bill refreshes us because, like Basho, he looks carefully under hedges and wonders at shepherd's purse. DJC

Jean Jorgensen: Border Crossing (haiku and related poetry 1987-1993)

Four Seasons Corner, 9633-68A Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T6B 1V3, Canada.

This book is divided into sections: haiku, renga, sequences, parallels (in the spirit of Vincent Tripi) and linked lines, each section heading illustrated with line drawings by the author's son, Brian.

Jean Jorgensen manages to communicate the vastness of Canada in her haiku:-

wilderness fort
scattered among unmarked graves
wild roses in bloom

The reader is made aware of its excesses of heat and snow, the presence of numerous tracts of water.

third year drought -
lake's slow retreat
into itself.

I was aware, too, of things outside my experience: bluejays, coyotes, gophers, prairies, aspens:-

Badlands of Alberta
all over the sandhills
yellow cacti in bloom

As the page of awards testifies Jean has a sure touch as a haiku poet. I think what she does best, however, is her slightly disturbing haiku. Judge for yourselves from these:-

Staff party -
hand on his wife's back
while his eyes wander

just as in childhood
before dad's coffin is closed
a kiss not returned

JAH

Senryu Pie

No tears as yet -
hanging in the garage to dry
onions

Cy Paterson

going on holiday
we show each other
our special clothes

Fred Schofield

stormy night -
in the morning two heads
on my pillow

F J Dullaghan

Remembrance Day -
thinking of a grandfather
I never met

Annie Bachini

Sus pen ded
in the air between us
frosty words

William Scott Galasso

the leaf in your hair
brightens the do of it
this autumn morning

Four year old Batman
pauses to obliterate
a passing lorry

Wallies wave flags
as the fat lady sings
Rule Britannia

Patricia V Dawson

this shaking hand
disturbs the pattern
floating in my cup

Ruth Robinson

shortsightedly
peering in the mirror
everything's fine

Susan Rowley

in the 50c pile
on the sidewalk...
Paradise Lost

Sharon Lee Shafii

Sodden leafy ground
slipped and you
fell about

Ken Ellison

Why Nobody Likes Senryu

R.H.Blyth

There has been a haiku boom, and a Zen boom, but there has been no senryu boom, and this article proposes to explain why - or rather, why there never will be.

Haiku are nature poems which are short because the experience, all experience, is (supposed to be) timeless. 'Nature' is a very restricted nature indeed, including only the harmless animals (with the exception of wild boars) and excluding all evil-smelling plants, and omitting the struggle for existence, death, and anything violent whatever. Most of the things are small, or are dealt with in a small way. Whales for example are not Ahab's whale, but those of Matthew Arnold, which

Sail and sail with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye?

No one, therefore, can have any particular objection to haiku. Most people pretend to some love of nature, and are willing to allow the existence of haiku, provided they may keep their television and motor-car, and continue to live a life that is diametrically opposed to the haiku way of living.

Zen is another harmless toy: you can play with the fire of Zen without burning your fingers. Of course, if you go so far as doing *zazen*, your legs will hurt agonisingly, but to get rid of a neurosis some inconvenience is unavoidable, and the mysteriousness, the indefinability, the very inaccessibility of Zen are attractive to the ambitious fanatic. Everyone likes the esoteric. Inside, you can exhibit your knowledge to the vulgar herd; outside, you are mad to get inside. To (clever) Roman Catholics, Zen is seen to be even more poisonous than pantheism; it is a mystery that competes with the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. But after all, it has no political power or social influence, so it is not necessary to excommunicate Daruma and the rest of them. Zen does not change a man's life, and make him resign from the presidency of the whiskey company, and incommode his family; or become a pacifist and betray his country. It makes him a better salesman, a better golfer, a better public speaker, a better butcher even, of animals or men. Zen can never be exactly popular, but a

smattering of it might well become one of the extra graces of an international gentleman.

Senryu are verses of the same form as haiku, but originating in the middle of the eighteenth century, in 1765 to be precise, with the first volume of *Yanagidaru* [from which all the examples are taken]. The aim of the many authors of the senryu was to show up the hypocrisy, sentimentality, self-deception, on other words, the humanity, of other people and themselves also. Their especial object of derision was, of course, the upper classes, the warrior, the virtuous man, the sage, that is to say, the humbug.

The Chief Retainer of the Ladies' Quarter
Treads on something
That makes him make a face.

The Chief Retainer was in charge of all the affairs connected with the ladies-in-waiting, and would be especially solemn and unbending in mind and visage, but one touch of nature makes the whole world stink, and pride goes before his gall. His face is one of cosmic disapproval, and that is the funniest, foolishest face of all, for 'this dungy earth' is all God gives us.

Another verse, which shows the senryu disrespect for religion:

The earnest money paid,
It is now respected
As a divine tree.

Someone has just decided on a certain tree as timber for a shrine, and paid some money on it, and from now on it looks different from other trees... Noted also is the vital connection between money and religion. They produce and support each other.

The following shows us that virtue is a garment which a man puts on and takes off at will:

At the boat-hiring place
He takes off and leaves behind
His domestic integrity.

[This] was on the bank of the Sumida River, where those who visited the Yoshiwara came and hired a boat for the purpose. At this place a man stopped being a husband and a father and became an animal. Everybody talks too much (and writes too much, and reads too much) especially about his own interests. This general truth, or platitude, as some people like to call it, is particularised in the following:

The visitor from Nezu
Talks too much
About the strains of the house.

Many carpenters lived at Nezu. When one of them came, invited as a guest, he could not keep his big mouth shut, but must talk about the badness of the building and the incompetence of the carpenter who made it.

The hero is debunked along with the rest of them. No man is a hero to his valet...

The petty samurai
Spends his days
With spiders and drains

Most of the warrior's life is spent cleaning the house and its attendant drains. Even one crowded hour of glorious life is not his, but only an age without a name.

The insincerity, unfaithfulness and opportunism of men is frequently glanced at:

The husband;
When his wife dies,
He sends a letter to her.

"Her" is another woman that he is intimate with...

Enough examples have been given to show what kind of literature... senryu is. Senryu is the reality of human nature, omitting all the truth and goodness and beauty as being something that because of its own intrinsic merit does not need support or advertisement. Senryu are not so much an attack upon falsity and hyperbole and sentimentality and hypocrisy and self-deception, as a defence of truth against the attacks

of human-beings, for "all men are liars" except the senryu writer...

Though not the slightest bit reformative, senryu reproves us. It never praises us for any virtue we may possibly have, but points out the defects or excesses in that one and only virtue. It keeps reminding us of all the things we want to forget... The instinct of humanity is against senryu, the most humane of its creations and rightly so. We must have a Way to walk on, be it democracy, culture, Christianity, science, the Way of Haiku, Zen even; but senryu are like holes, air-pockets, like the spaces between the rungs of a ladder.

Actually, however, senryu are not merely negative. They involve a positive philosophy, a conscious or unconscious realisation that to forgive is human, but to err is divine... Whatever Way of Life is proposed, senryu will laugh it out of existence, not from any nihilism or pure love of destruction, but because, as Laotse said: "The Way that can be called a Way is not the Eternal Way." Thus senryu can never be popular, any more than the atomic bomb, which it resembles, can be popular. As far as a boom is concerned, it is the aim of senryu to prevent it...

Senryu touch all our most sensitive spots: they tell us the very things that that we do not wish to know and which we would almost literally rather die than know. Thus the only people who read senryu are those who write them and they are an odd squad, supersensitive to the frailty and folly of humanity and their own, and yet not realising or not feeling deeply the dreadful cosmological consequences of their knowledge. Only certain Japanese could do this and retain their equanimity. The rest have always consciously overlooked senryu into practical non-existence. I myself read senryu gingerly. I never know what painful memory it will prod, what last balloon it will puncture. At every senryu my God forsakes me.

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