

Blithe Spirit



Journal of
The British Haiku Society

Volume 5 Number 1 February 1995

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Blithe Spirit

Journal of the British Haiku Society

Editor: Jackie Hardy

Articles, correspondence and submissions for Season Corner, Senryu Pie, Gorse Blossoms and Tanka Sections should be sent to:-

Submissions for The Pathway section only should be sent to:-

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The Secretary, [REDACTED]

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Blithe Spirit welcomes, and exists as a forum for, diverse statements about the writing and appreciation of haiku and kindred forms of verse. The Editor takes entire responsibility for the selection of items for publication.

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Editorial

Volume 5 will bring changes. Number 3 will have a guest editor in order to allow me more time to complete my MA dissertation. The guest editor will be Susan Rowley. Susan has a particular interest in renga, so those of you with similar interests in the form have plenty of time to get going.

Meanwhile. Most of the articles in this issue of Blithe Spirit were presented as papers to the Second International Haiku Festival at Constanța, Romania in September 1994, or are about the Festival and its successor, the Third International Haiku Festival, to be held in 1996. Also there's an article on renga writing.

This year is the year of the **pig**, so we will have a porcine theme in one of the issues. But this time the theme is **colour** — a broad palette which I hope will provide a rainbow of inspiration. I am indebted to Joan Daniels for this idea. All new ideas are most welcome. There were too few letters to warrant a section this time, but consider **Letters to the Editor** and **Favourite Haiku** as running themes.

The season corner for the next Blithe Spirit will be **winter**. Contributions are sought before 8 April.

Jackie Hardy

Season Corner: Autumn

At the field's edge
Mayweed flowers, bedraggled —
Yet, this autumn day...

Cicely Hill

The rainbow curves
behind thinning poplars
to touch a wet city.

Andreas Schöter

after the goodbye kiss
the sweetness
of a russet apple

November mist
soon after midday
all the lights are on

Martin Lucas

policeman sweeping
a leaf-strewn station yard
— the Law with a brush

Charles Brien

Reviewing my life;
a maple leaf yellowing
falling leaf by leaf

Paul Seto

Wet fallen leaves
smell under sulphurous smoke —
Guy Fawkes Night

Tsunehiko Hoshino

Autumn has arrived
this morning, with a slug
climbing the shoji

James Kirkup

Autumn afternoon —
sunlight creeping still further
across the carpet

autumn wind
steadily filling
the fresh-dug grave

Remembrance Sunday
only the faint rumble
of a distant train

Richard Goring

Election campaign
rain sticking a maple-leaf
on Chancellor's mouth

Rudolf Thiem

The wind in the pines
makes me lonely for you
a mile from home

Jim Norton

As the nights lengthen
Rose hips and spindle berries
Light up the pathway

Doris L Ambrose

This wet night alive
with newly freed leaves scuttling
into the headlights

David Steele

Hunting for conkers
we comb the same patch of grass
without success

Autumn morning
a rain-soaked rose
sways in the breeze

Katherine Gallagher

**Basho's Haiku —
A Form of Poetic Discourse**

Adina Ciugureanu

Both classic and contemporary haiku are generally regarded as a concrete, objective 17-syllable form of poetry illustrative of life in snapshots and focussing on seemingly unimportant manifestations of nature. If writing haiku means self-detachment in mirroring nature for most poets, there are, however, the great masters to whom nature and the self are one and who actually express themselves in expressing nature. Generally speaking, haiku is written when the poet's intuition and perception of nature vibrates at the same level with his/her perception of self. The poetic form generated at this usually-called 'haiku moment' is revelatory of both nature and the poet's self, as, in other words, it expresses nature through the poet's self. As a result of the marriage between poet and nature, haiku becomes a transitive form of poetry mirroring them both at the same time and with the same intensity.

However, there are haiku masters for whom the nature-self dialogue represents the primary level of poetic expression, whereas the secondary philosophical, religious level is made up by the translation of the self into nature and the expression of both as a unit, not as marriage. In this way haiku loses some of its transitivity and objectiveness and gains reflexivity and expressiveness. It is in the haiku moment that the haiku expresses itself.

The higher the degree of reflexivity and expressiveness gets, the deeper and more complex the negotiation of meaning between the literal and the philosophical level becomes.

An example, illustrative of the way haiku may shift from transitivity to reflexivity and from objectiveness to expressiveness, is Bashō's poetry.

Bashō's earlier poems reveal a concrete reality of things built on seasonal elements: spring with rice, rain, beetles, skylarks and pheasants; autumn with crows, wild boars, withered branches and storm-winds; winter with snow, ice chrysanthemums, fallen leaves and pinetrees; summer with ponds, frogs, grass, fields, rivers, cuckoo, woodpecker and octopus, among other symbolical elements, all disclosing genuine intuition of the innermost depths of nature.

However, this concrete reality of things is perceived, roughly speaking, in two ways: it is either mirrored by the poet's self as in:-

To bird and butterfly
unknown, a flower blooms:
the autumn sky

Spring starts:
new year, old rice,
five quarts

As it fell
water poured out —
the camellia bell

or it comes out as the expression of the dialogue between the poet's self and nature as in

Not even a hat —
and cold rain falling on me?
Tut-tut, think of that!

Oh, these spring days!
A nameless little mountain
wrapped in morning haze!

Eight views? — Ah, well,
mist hid seven when I heard
Mii-dera's bell

It may have been Bashō's inborn dialogical tendency that made him transcend the concrete reality of things, amazingly perceive their innermost quality and rightfully reach the core of reality, its ultimate truth, the absolute. It may also have been Zen philosophy that influenced his choice of entering the core of things and of translating the image perceived into

words. So, Bashō's earlier poems either refer to the world around as a world of things opposed to, but reflected in and by the self, or relate nature to the self in a dialogue in which nature can be the self's interlocutor a sort of third persona. (Compare 'Wake up! Wake up! It's I / who want you for companion, / sleeping butterfly!' with 'Snow that we two / looked at together - this year / has it fallen anew?')

The self-nature dialogue reduces the degree of objectivity and referentiality of the text and increases the degree of expressiveness and reflexivity:-

Out comes the bee
from deep among peony pistils —
oh, so reluctantly!

for instance, is more than a mere snapshot of nature life. The poet discloses his feelings toward the image perceived only by identifying himself with it. He becomes the image; the self and the bee are one. Through this self-nature identification, the poem becomes expressive in revealing the poet's soul and reflexive at the connotative level of the text.

A similar example disclosing the depth to which man and nature could coalesce may be:-

Wake up! Wake up! It's I,
who want you for companion,
sleeping butterfly!

Although the poem would seem more cohesive if 'I' was considered to be the poet, there is nowhere in the text, except in spelling, a clear support for that. I might refer to anything which would relate itself to the butterfly. The I-butterfly dialogue could clearly be, in this case, between two inherent parts of nature. (However, according to Zen philosophy, the identity of I is easily established if we think of the philosophical dilemma about which of the two — the man or the butterfly — dreams of being the other one.)

By identifying his self with nature, Bashō manages to achieve unity between the self and the other, to background the dialogical feature of the text eventually, and to foreground monologism. It is at this point that we can talk about a negotiation of meaning at text level:-

This road:
with no man travelling on it,
autumn darkness falls.

is an ambiguous poem due to the multiple interpretation of the word 'road' which entails different interpretations of the words travel, autumn, darkness. Is 'this road' a mere road Bashō saw, the road he was travelling on, the road of life, in general, ending in old age or the passage to death? The poem transcends the literal meaning, which would make a beautiful haiku anyway, and reaches deeper metaphorical meanings. The more we shift from the literal to the figurative level of the text, the more enclosed it becomes, by hiding much and revealing little.

According to Bashō, this is the type of haiku 'we never tire of', the haiku that reveals only fifty to sixty percent of its meaning. But in this way, haiku turns from concreteness and objectivity to abstraction and subjectivity; it becomes metaphorical. One clarification is needed in Bashō's case, however: his haiku does not use metaphors, it *is* metaphor. It is the metaphor of life ('On the moor; from things / detached completely - / how the skylark sings!' or of death ('On a journey, ill, / and over fields all withered, dreams / go wandering still')

By transcending the concrete reality of things, Bashō builds his own 'reality' in which the self and the other become one and from which he can perceive our reality from a different, detached perspective. So, the reality beyond is actually the support of the concrete reality of things. It seems that the two realities co-exist and sustain each other and that, through Bashō's haiku, we have become aware of them.

Favourite Haiku

Patricia V Dawson writes:

Night in the tropics
The half moon — its other half
Dropped in the lagoon.

This haiku by James Kirkup is one of my favourites. It is immediately visual and evocative. Through a concrete image the impossible becomes possible. It takes flight.

Horses

dark church & full moon
rising up behind the tower
movements of horses

Colin Blundell

race commentary,
spilling from the betting shop
— poker-faced punters

Charles Brien

the old school-room clock
its clip-clopping pendulum
cart-horses passing

Brian D Thompson

Racehorses, steaming
in the winners' enclosure
Chanel-Number-Five

John Shimmin

Farm-horses
jostle for space
at the trough

Katherine Gallagher

closing his eyes...
the horse
while I'm washing him

Kohjin Sakamoto

after her swim
the bay mare
paws the sand

Cecily Staunton

Always a bad corner;
now through wet fog
the tail lights
of parked horses —

Petrouchka

Pit pony
redundant
afraid of the sun

Hamish Turnbull

Museum of Haiku Literature Award

Tsunehiko Hoshino has chosen Ruth Robinson's

estuary
the artist's brush
catches the hot sun

Professor Hoshino writes: I recommend the dynamism of this haiku. The words of 'estuary' and 'hot' are quite effective in offering the scene and I felt happy to be reminded of Bashō's famous haiku:

Mogami River
it has plunged the hot sun
into the sea.

(trans. Helen C McCullough)

Gorse Blossoms

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

in my childhood bed
the rattles of passing trains
echo round the room

Annie Bachini

Almost a full moon
solitary cicada
prolongs my loneliness

Bill Wyatt

Bald mountain,
Cloud shadow —
In the cool wind,
Losing the river sound.

(near Pisang, Nepal, 6/90)

Tito

fading into moonlight
before reaching the temple gate
this narrow road

Kohjin Sakamoto

Having moved house
discovering the ways of sun
through old glass

David Steele

coming from her house
he stops to stroke
cherry blossom

George Marsh

the first snow —
my son's footprints
sledge runners
head for the hills

Frank Dullaghan

trashed cars piled high
in the muddy yard —
a blaze of headlights at sundown

Petrouchka

somewhere in the hall
a door is locked, or unlocked;
tea steams...

Martin Lucas

Crossing The Barrier

David Cobb

In his travel writings, Bashō records moments when he 'crosses barriers' as being of deep significance, spiritual, poetical and cultural; they are not just topographical curiosities, but milestones in his development as a poet.

The Second International Haiku Festival at Constanța, Romania, 16-18 September 1994, was, for Colin Blundell and myself, who were among the 50-60 privileged to attend it, rather like one of those 'barriers'. We advanced towards it with some trepidation, but left it with feelings of euphoria, achievement and enrichment. ('Crossing the barrier' also means

escaping from the indifference and even antagonism towards haiku which many of us encounter at home — this does not apply only to the Brits — and discovering that there are other countries — New Zealand and Romania itself, for example — where haiku are accorded a place of honour alongside other poetic forms; and of course that haiku is a universally-shared poetic experience.)

It is probably no overstatement to say that this Festival is, to date, the greatest haiku event ever to take place in Europe, and its success was due, above all, to the vision and indefatigable energy of Ion and Mihaela Codrescu, and their charisma which has extraordinary power to mobilise the efforts of many helpers. If there was a **Nobel Prize for Promoting Haiku**, no one but the Codrescus could possibly be candidates.

Imagine, in a country where there are logistical and financial problems, surmounting the task of transporting and accommodating 16 participants from abroad (representing Belgium, Britain, Croatia, France, Japan, New Zealand, USA). Imagine getting out a bilingual anthology ('Round the Pond', how some 50 haikai around the world first encountered haiku) and at the same time a special bilingual Bashō commemorative issue of the journal 'Albatross', to coincide with the Festival. Imagine mounting a haiku book exhibition in the Museum of Art and an exhibition of Romanian students' haiga posters at the House of Culture, where 22 papers were read in the lecture theatre. Imagine arranging for all these papers, as well as all announcements, etc, to be available in the two 'official' languages of the Festival, Romanian and English, either through prepared translations in print or impromptu consecutive translations; with a few additions in and out of French for good measure. Imagine arranging a quintet of four musicians and a soprano from the State Theatre to rehearse and perform Colin Blundell's two song cycles based on haiku by James Kirkup and myself (a 'world premiere' performance which was greeted with long and deserved applause). Imagine interviews on local radio and national TV, reports in the press. Imagine launching a series of new awards for achievement in various fields of haiku — British readers will be pleased to hear James Kirkup was given the award for translation. Imagine taking 14 haikai, some of them quite tasty, to Dracula's Castle, and bringing them out again, alive. Imagine, if it doesn't introduce a note of bathos, dealing with baggage lost in transit by the airways. All this the Codrescus and their twenty or thirty helpers accomplished without appearing to shed a grey hair. It was a triumph of organisation under difficult circumstances.

The Western Europeans came away from the Festival with a shared feeling that the onus is on them to keep the series going. The Romanians (this is the second Festival they have organised, remember, the first being in 1992) cannot be expected to go on carrying the torch for ever more. It is up to Britain, or Belgium, or the Netherlands, or Germany, or two or three of these acting in concert, to organise a Third International Haiku Festival, in 1996. If this does not happen it will be a great shame. (We understand that Alain Kervern has plans for a haiku festival at Brest in Brittany in the year 2000, but movement must be kept going in the meantime.)

The format of festivals should not be allowed to fossilise. What worked well in Constanța in 1994 might not work again so well if repeated in, say, Cambridge or The Hague, in 1996. So I would like to conclude with a few suggestions:-

- There might be discussion of certain practical matters (eg ways of introducing the young to haiku) on the basis of working papers prepared and circulated beforehand. These could be refined during the conference and remain as tangible products afterwards.
- After individual participants have given their talks, time might be set aside for questions and comments from the floor. (At Constanța there was, for example, no way of challenging a statement such as 'There has never been an erotic haiku'.)
- A chairperson should be empowered at each session to ensure the speaker does not overrun the allotted time.
- When calling for papers, the organisers should ask potential contributors to avoid, as much as possible, use of esoteric or academic language. At our festivals there are always likely to be quite a lot of ordinary people (like myself) who do not respond easily to statements such as 'each complex being is made out of a plurality of times, interarticulated through subtle and multiple devices', to give one example.

Well, we 'crossed one barrier'. Now let's go on confidently toward the next one!

Senryu Pie

Japanese lady,
asked about Bashō, prefers
to speak of Shakespeare

Patricia V Dawson

Limping towards
the man on crutches —
a faint nod

caring for the mountain
all those feet

John Shimmin

railway platform tryst:
she is mouthing "I love you";
he yawns in her face

Colin Blundell

a smiling soldier
caught at war — flashes his knife
for the camera

Annie Bachini

at the staff meeting
everyone ignores
the empty chair

Frank Dullaghan

Police station yard;
at the end of his tether
someone's Rottweiler

David Steele

Found Haiku

Colin Blundell

(The Art of Doing More than One Thing at a Time)

Life is very short and there are so many things yet to do. Formal education does not help: it is dedicated to practical outcomes — getting a qualification, getting a job; we are educated into concentrating on just one thing at a time; so our minds become channelled into specific interests, specific concerns. From a career point of view, if we are teachers we cannot be space travellers; if we are deep sea divers we cannot be train drivers. Formal education narrows our scope. But there is still simply not enough time to live two or three lives at once. If we are scientists we tend not to be poets; if we are gardeners we find it difficult to be long-distance lorry drivers.

If we *do* try to become good at doing a range of things we often feel guilty about doing one thing to the exclusion of another, increasing our sense of frustration. For instance, a few years ago I got myself into the following life-debilitating trance: there were lots of books I wanted to read but I also wanted to spend time writing; you can't do both at once, I thought, so I lost energy from being frustrated when I spent time reading and I felt frustrated when I spent time writing — when I was reading I was not busy producing the literary masterpiece that is still hiding inside me but when I was writing I was not attacking the pile of books to be read.

What would it be like if you could read and write both at the same time? What would it be like if you could read to write and write while reading? This line of questioning led me to write 'found poems'. You might be reading a work of philosophy, a novel, a newspaper article and suddenly sense that you are reading a poem embedded in somebody else's writing. To start with I went to obscure or ignored writers and told myself I was doing them a favour by re-cycling some 'poetic' idea in their prose that they were not aware of — and helping them to get their names into print again after long time in obscurity.

Anyway, I had discovered for myself a way of doing more than one thing at a time and as a result put together a number of books of found poems without frustration — no, with excitement!

I have since come across research that suggests that the more you train your mind to do several things at once the more mentally agile you will be and the longer you will live! Haiku is, amongst other things, the Art of Doing More than One Thing at a Time. Therefore haiku prolongs active life. For

instance, you might be digging the garden in spring and suddenly realise that the swifts are overdue:-

the swifts being late
this year blackbirds do solos
in apple blossom

You might be preparing a lecture late into the evening:-

the darkness becomes
just the ticking of a clock —
I become the clock

Or you might be reading a book of short stories by Paul Bowles:-

He went out on to the deck... The boat was moving through a wide estuary dotted with clumps of plants and trees that rose out of the shallow water. Along the edges of the small islands stood herons, so white in the early grey light that their brightness seemed to come from inside them...

You suddenly realise that you've stepped out of the story for a moment and out of time into a haiku, a found haiku:-

in grey light — herons
so white their brightness seems to
come from inside them

'The Found' occurs in all forms of creativity: in art the *object trouvé* is very much a twentieth century phenomenon; in music Olivier Messiaen's 'Oiseaux Exotiques' is a good example of a reliance on found elements; in English literature (the only one I really know) there are very respectable precedents for lifting things from other people's writing — Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and T.S.Eliot's 'Wasteland' being two examples that spring to mind. And Bashō found haiku in Chinese poetry.

Because you could find yourself accused of plagiarism or of reading haikuesque ideas into the object of your reading, it seems necessary to justify the practice of *Found Haiku* and to discuss antecedents. The most compelling argument for *Found Haiku* is that human life is nothing more nor less than a **finding**. Though we may wish to change the world we do have to take it as we find it. We find the universe. The universe is an *object trouvé*.

This planet is an *object trouvé*. Unfortunately we are moulding it to destruction instead of making it into a work of art. When you are up in an airplane and it is all reduced to a patchwork quilt it is still a work of art; up close, hideousness brushes up against beauty. Noise pollution against silence.

Life is a finding. We find houses to live in and landscapes to garden. If we are lucky we find somebody special to love. Reading books is a finding — ideas and words that make poems in spite of the author. But what would authors think of what they might call cheating? The only real author I know is James Kirkup who seems to be constantly surprised and amused and pleased by the haiku I find in his work:-

bruised-looking twilight
sinisterly still and mad —
the fortune-teller

train stations at dawn —
just the halo of a lamp
above a barred door

cold tobacco ash
the aroma of travel —
facing the engine

I do not know how other authors would regard the practice of Found Haiku. Usually I play safe only to find things in dead authors! I've discovered that haiku don't jump out of every author but Proust is a gold mine of Found Haiku; he is one of those authors whose prose is full of moments of awareness:-

tripe vendor's whistle
and the hooting of the trains
in different octaves

look at blades of grass
on a railway embankment
when the train has stopped

at long intervals
under the tall chestnut trees —
suspended raindrops

Sometimes I tinker with the words I find in a text but the real thrill comes when, in the middle of a long piece of prose, you suddenly realise that you are reading an embedded haiku in 5-7-5 syllables, which just happens to be the way I chose to write haiku. So in Paul Bowles:-

shrill bird cries come down
with perfect clarity from
the uncut forest

or, with two or three words cut out:-

vast moonlit clearing —
night thick with eternity
just beyond the gate

Something magical happens — it's as though a haiku was waiting to find you. You are reading all unsuspecting and suddenly you and the words on the page interpenetrate. Literature, other people's writing, is a mechanism for finding yourself. Paradoxically, you only find haiku that are projections of your own sensibility.

Ordinarily, haiku are a response to the *'world out there'* — trees, tramps, sky, plum blossom — these concrete things which the haiku transcends in a feedback loop give us the stuff of haiku. Why should not the words on the pages of books and newspapers and magazines also provide the stuff of haiku? They are a kind of equivalent of frogs and ponds.

Haiku is the regenerative art of doing more than one things at a time. I recommend that you give yourself a mental set to look for haiku/senryu next time you turn to reading.

(Hotel Condor, Mamaia September 1994)

From the British Haiku Society's 'Consensus' 1

No 19 Makoto Ueda predicts the future development of haiku and senryu:-

As more and more Western poets write haiku or haiku-like poems in their languages, Bashō's influence on them through the haiku form will become diluted, often to the extent that it will disappear from their poetry. That is what is expected; in fact, that is precisely what Bashō wished for. He always encouraged his students to cultivate their individual talents rather than follow him with blind faith.

The Pathway

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

Marcel Smets (Flemish and English)

een purpuren bloem
gaat samen met de regen
naar haar donkere grond

a purple flower
goes together with the rain
to its dark ground

de regen tikt
tegen de stilte
van dit huis

rain is tapping
at the quiet
of the house

Clelia Ifrim (Romanian and English)

Crabii caută
stele căzute-n mare —
cerul răvășit

crabs scabbling over
stars fallen on the sea —
the sky in their claws

Latră un câine
la pielea de pisică
luna pe garduri

a dog is barking —
stretched on palings, moonlight
and the skin of a cat

Constantin Abaluta (Romanian and English)

Toamnă. Un greiere
și-a fâțut cuib
in bastonul orbului

Autumn. A cicada
has nested
in the blind man's stick

Plonă —
în fântână
soarele strălucește încă

It rains —
the sun keeps on shining
in the well

Rudolf Thiem (German and English)

Sommernachmittag —
Am Rückspiegel im Fahrtwind
turnt ein Grashüpfer

a grasshopper vaults
from slipstream to rear mirror —
summer afternoon

Schwül-heisse Nacht —
Gartenlärm der Nachbarn
lästig, einschläfernd

sweltering night —
neighbours' garden rumpus
sends me at last to sleep

Miriana Bozin (Serb and English)

Moljci rodnog sela
pojeli ste haljini
iz dalekog sveta

moths of my homeland —
eating up a dress sent
from a distant world!

U tmurnom danu
sretoh osobu što voli
tmuran dan

on a sombre day
I meet someone who loves
a sombre day

Tom Maretić (Croat and English)

Noć u zaljevu.
S jahte dopiru zvuci
pranja posuda.

The bay by night —
the clink of washing dishes
from a yacht.

Planinski lanac
skriven je njenom oku
malom lepezom.

Vast chains of mountains —
in front of her eyes
a small fan.

Manuela Miga (Romanian) and *Iona Pop* (French)

În pâmânt străin
sâ vorbești limba maternă
cu un papagal.

en terre étrangère
parler sa langue maternelle
avec une perruche.

Olga Dutu (Romanian and English)

amurg violet —
strălucirea zăpezii
trădează luna

violet twilight —
the brilliance of snow
betrays the moon

Șerban Codrin (Romanian) and *Ștefan Benea* (English)

Nopti fără greieri.
Ceva i se întâmplă
universului

Night without crickets.
Something is going wrong
with the universe

Catherine Mair (English) and *Kerewai and Paeahi Wanakore* (Maori)

in the undergrowth
somewhere, he's growling away
— the old bull

roto ite ngahere
te pūru korōua
aue haere kau ana

head to tail
two thrushes
pulling out worms

upoko ki te whiore
ngā manu
kukume toke ana

the rooster seeking
his mate around the framework
of the new house

kei te taha o te whare hou
te tame heihei
kimi haere anā
i tōna hoa

Tanka

a drop of malt
and the fire's glowing embers...
my palate, my skin
like watercolour paper
spreading the sunset of you

George Marsh

I should never
have been shy
of your first kiss
it was your last that was untrue

Frank Dullaghan

Now in middle age
and enjoying gardening
I would like to talk
to my parents again
— having learned some of the words

David Steele

I walk by the park
where we first met —
its lamplights flicker
as the early morning rain
clings to the summer grass

Annie Bachini

All night, sleepless
As the stealthy cats
I notice
That a bright star has moved...
All the way across my window

Tito (at Uenosakuragi)

The Time Between Links — A Fresh look at Renga

Dick Pettit

The groups writing renga in the UK are small, scattered and occasional. This article is in part an attempt to foment interest and activity. It makes the case for a new description of renga links, from the point of view of the 'speed' of renga. Many accounts of renga linking focus on the large number of ways a verse can be connected with the one before, and the fun and artistry there is in exploiting them. This account considers renga as the finished art form which is read and performed aloud, and whose dramatic flow is determined by the pattern of links.

The best analogy for renga is of a scroll painting, down which a frame travels holding two scenes or verses at a time. The scenes are connected in different ways. The two best known descriptions are by Nijo Yoshimoto (1320-88), versions in Hiroake Sato 'One Hundred Frogs' and Geoffrey Daniel BS Vol 2 No3; and Bashō versions in Makoto Ueda's biography and Leonore Mayhew's 'Monkey's Raincoat'. Yoshimoto's list looks bitty and superficial, though it is clear he was aware he was giving only the outward signs of something which came from 'the heart'. Bashō attempts to transcend the mechanical quality of Yoshimoto and his successors by the categories scent, echo, reflection, rank, and mental image. These are not clear-cut distinctions.

Reading and writing renga recently, I've become aware of another way to describe the links, useful in both composition and analysis. In this, there are only three kinds of link: S, P, and T.

● S — same scene, sideways, sequel. The second verse continues the first, or gives detail or the backdrop to the first, etc. This is the most common type of link: all illustrations from Basho 'Natsu no Tsuli' (The Summer Moon) translated by Ueda:-

31 various types of lovers
who appeared in the past
are recalled to mind [in a poetry anthology]

32 in this fleeting world, no one can escape
the destiny [death in poverty]
of [that famed poetess and beauty] Komachi

● **P** — parallel picture, part. The second verse takes some aspect, trivial or profound, of the first, and gives an analogy:-

28 the lid is warped
and doesn't fit the chest

29 at a hermitage
he stays for awhile
and then takes off

In reading, the pause after 29 is longer than after 32, to give time to register the link — longer still for this type [P] after more cryptic parallels.

● **T** — transform. This link is unique to Renga. The second verse changes the meaning or connotation of the one which went before, so that it changes before one's eyes:-

20 dreaming, he spoils his socks
in the black mud

21 a swordbearer on foot
trying to catch up
with his master's horse [T]

22 an apprentice carrying a bucket
stumbles and spills the water [S]

23 doors and sliding screens
are all covered with mats
at this mansion for sale [T]

24 the pepper pods have turned red
with the passage of time [S]

25 noiselessly
a straw sandal is braided
in the moonlight [T]

The careless dreamer of 20 becomes the swordbearer (21). His hurrying causes the apprentice (22) to spill his water, but in 23 the apprentice is no longer out in the street but in the courtyard of a house empty for long enough for the peppers (24) to ripen. In 25 the house becomes a peasant's who is working at night. It could be said that Ueda's translations and commentary emphasise narrative at the expense of more delicate qualities; but on the other hand, his explanations of the links are thoroughly convincing.

There's no room to exemplify at length, even from classic renga, but the reader can try out the three types on any renga, ancient or modern and will find that though there are some difficulties with obscure links and some links seem to fit two categories at once, in general the three types are a sufficient description. The interesting point is not that this is so but that each type has a definite effect on the character of the renga.

The S-link is in a way the basic pace of the renga, though there will be variations in the length of the 'pause for appreciation' caused both by the subject matter and by whether the link is close (*soku*) or distant (*shinku*). These provisos hold, though, for the other two types. The P-link is slower. It may take a little puzzling out and when the solution is found time is needed to savour it. A succession of P-links close together make for reflective renga. The T-link is a fast one. It makes its surprising changes in its own direction and the interpretation of the verse before, but forces hearers/readers to keep with the speedy transformations whether they have grasped all that is happening or not.

A very convenient renga to illustrate all this exists in *Sora Sen*, the 'Farewell Gift to Sora' (translated in *One Hundred Frogs*). Towards the end of the *Oku no hosomichi*, Bashō's companion Sora became ill and went on ahead. Before he left, he, Bashō and Hokushi started this renga to which Sora's last contribution was verse twenty. It was finished by Bashō & Hokushi writing two verses each in turn. There is a marked difference between the two halves of *Sora Sen*. Using the S/P/T scheme, the first twenty verses are S-8, P-9, T-2 (plus the *hokku*) and the last sixteen have S-9, P-0, T-7. So, while the overall totals of S-17 P-9, T-9 are reasonably typical of a Bashō renga, the two separate halves are unusual and show the characteristics of the P and T links very clearly. First P:-

- | | |
|--|--|
| 3 "The moon's good."
They kick off their pants
for wrestling. | 6 he fells brushwood along
the hilltop bamboo grass path [P] |
| 4 sword running out of its scabbard
stopped in a moment [P] | 7 hail falling
on the mountain to the left
the Suge Temple [S] |
| 5 the blue depths
an otter jumps in
the sound of water [P]
(Hiroako Sato says Bashō made
no comment on this parody...) | 8 four or five prostitutes
on a trip to the country [S] |

The renga has the usual vivid scenes but the three poets, used to each other, are taking the opportunity to try out the refinements of their art. There is something of the relaxed elegance of the earlier courtly poets. One function of the P-link is to act as metaphor. So the wrestler going into a hold is like the sword stopped from the scabbard and that in turn is like the otter going into the water: the comparisons are not merely diagrammatic —

each part reflects some unobvious quality of the other. The brushwood cutter is a movement from the depth to the height and the two S-links which follow each have a surprising feature: the hail and the call-girls. The poets are taking pleasure in seeing how far they can go, and taking time to appreciate their own artistry. This continues through the first half.

The second half is also in high spirits, focussing more on movement in itself:-

32 washing out the madder dye
in the white waves of the river

33 Nakatsuna
at the weir of Uji
seeing it all [T]

34 get word to the temple
the messenger's sent [S]

35 I'll ring the bell
for a joke — flowers
scatter on me [T]

36 a zany
and the musk of a March day [S]

*(Some liberties are taken with
HS's translations...)*

In this section, the washerwoman of 32 becomes the warriors who were washed up into a fishing weir (33) in a heroic battle. News of the battle's outcome is sent to a temple (34); but the messenger who arrives at the temple door in 35 is no battle courier, but a joker who clarifies as a recognised eccentric and buffoon.

The poets of Bashō's time must surely have been aware of 'speed' in range composition, and used it as one of the variables like 'love', 'religion' and the 'The Seasons', the changes into and out of which are elements of the variety of the form.

The S/P/T linkages are not watertight categories, but can be a useful rough guide when considering what kind of continuation to make when composing. To my mind, a renga without T-links will be insipid; one without P-links will be lacking in poetry and feeling.

(Sulaif 31st December 1994)

Dick Pettit is keen to correspond with other renga writers by post telephone or fax. Address as in members' list. Tel/fax Oman 489868

Reviews

bluegray, Martin Lucas, Hub Editions, 68pp, obtainable from Colin Blundell or Martin Lucas £3.50

Browning petals and the taste of lapsang; a fly walking through hairs and African jazz; a cobbled street and a mackerel sky — Martin Lucas has an instinct for the perfect complement. He does shapely designs with colour, light and form too: a starling's bright beak and dandelions; neon and the moon; a fountain and willow branches.

But this is more than Art School poetry. There is a generous humanity, capacious enough to appreciate cars, broken glass, tramps, boozers, weeds and discarded food. There is a sense of humour amused at the vanity of grandeur:-

topping
Glastonbury Tor
a mole hill

And there is a marvellous eye. Martin Lucas is a naturalist whose cast of characters, intimately known, includes mallow, deadnettle, alder and celandine, greenfinches in winter and yaffling woodpeckers.

His ear is also precise. We hear many rains: rain on melting snow and rain on sycamore leaves. Martin Lucas' ear does not fail him in the construction of haiku rhythms. He takes the pragmatic approach to form and uses whatever works for the subject. There is no weary sameness in reading many of his poems at a sitting; each one is different in syntax and lineation. He is a master of sound and movement, from the nimble, 'a hedgesparrow hops', to the ponderous 'crow follows crow'. GM

CLOUD BLUNT MOON: A SEQUENCE OF POEMS, Chris Mulhern, Iron Press, 78pp £3.50

The back cover of this small, handsomely produced collection states its theme: 'These bright haiku-like poems tell the story of two lovers and of how their love reflects the changing phases of the moon.' Let us be clear: the various love sequences in **COLD BLUNT MOON** are essentially erotic. Certainly interpenetrative, and tasteful to be sure, yet sensual enough to

warm the cockles of even the most staid...as evidenced by lines such as 'A silky film softens the crescent' and 'tang of licked scent'. The title itself might be taken to suggest what prurient pleasures await the reader.

However be not misled. This poetry is not anthropocentric nor is it more than artfully salacious. Most lines are given to a sensitive evocation of greater nature — wonderful moments all. Unfortunately these are sometimes presented on the page in all too sketchy fashion and bespeaks haiku's loss, and ours.

At this point an admission of bias is in order: a reverential regard for the continuation of haiku's spirit and tradition colours this review. It is of course more than a bit rum to take to task that which an author never intended. So with an apologetic bow to Mr Mulhern I state that this is done only because evidence of a rare haiku potential can be discerned in his writing.

So saying, I enjoyed reading this poetry when any similitude to the demanding and disciplined art of haiku was put aside. Many lines are distinguished by a rare sensibility to nature, a keen awareness of moment, and an impressive word craft — all qualities characteristic of haiku poetry. But true haiku is both more (and less) than is to be found in this 'haiku-like' sequence. Any adherence to even a loose haiku form is ignored. As is a respect for Suchness (or the is-ness of things) by the use of figures of speech antithetical to haiku's directness of expression. The rustic soul of haiku is not comfortable in the elegant ambience of the 'poetic'. And the mixing of such disparate genre seems unfair to both. Perhaps waka, or even a Chinese style of poetry might offer the poet formal possibilities.

More importantly, though many lines reflect acute observations of nature, most remain word pictures, the Zen quality of compassionate interpenetration generally absent — an important shortcoming shared by too many haiku poets. (Would that 'The Spiritual Origins of Haiku' and 'Zen, the State of Mind for Haiku' in Blyth's HAIKU Vol. 1 be perused as the essential counsel it is.) However, lines such as: 'morning sunshine: even the caged birds singing' admirably reflect haiku's especial spirit. Such capability reveals that only an absence of will, or perhaps a deeper commitment to haiku's interpenetrative spirit, prevents the poet's muse from finding haiku poetry worthy of his talent.

JWH

Into the Small Hours... Portsmouth in Haiku
Obtainable from George Marsh £1 + pp

George's introduction to this volume makes it sound as though haikai thrive on prohibition, which of course they don't. Sensitive editing makes it very pleasant indeed to follow 'Portsmouth' haiku-writers through their communal day; the flow, with its 'mysterious dimension' is beautifully coherent from dawn to dusk and through to another dawn of a seaside town which, apart from one reference to Southsea, could be anywhere but Portsmouth — New York, Llareggub... A 'day-watch' makes the cups of tea and restlessness of 24 hours into a strange mystery just as George predicts it will in his introduction. Perhaps a day-watch would be fun to do sometime for all of us...

Even counting the few haiku that exemplify the 'chopped worm syndrome', all the contributions are 'worthy'. Whilst a brave solution to the sparseness of type on a page, the brushed initial letter to each haiku is, for me, a great distraction. Equally annoying is the squeaky spine. But I'd pay a quid to George for this any time. CB

Monkey Puzzle Results

pouring
into tea
Easter Sun *Kohjin Sakamoto*

Readers were asked to supply a two-line or a three-line continuation to Kohjin's haiku. There were five entries from four members. Two-liners:-

the cup
has no bottom (E Sp)

but for hot cross buns
too poor to raise the dough (R R)

high windows - light
on smiling faces (R R)

A three-liner:-

K. S's haiku
such a storm in a tea-cup
such a brouhaha (Ch Br)

And one prose response from Anon:

words come to an end where tea is taken and Blyth himself it was who said the gospel's a cock and bull sort of yarn... The dance with the Easter Sun goes to an archaic tune. Temples can do odd things, like getting rent and raised — and both in the self-same instant.

Temple Monkey thanks all who entered and has awarded the £5 to E Sp.

From the British Haiku Society's 'Consensus' 2

No 1 The non-negotiable criteria of haiku apply to spirit and content and not to form...

Haiku is the poetry of meaningful touch, taste, sound, sight and smell. R.H.Blyth

The haiku poet does not give us meaning; he [or she] gives us the concrete objects which have meaning, because he [or she] has so experienced them. Kenneth Yasuda