

# Blithe Spirit



Journal of  
The British Haiku Society

Volume 6 Number 2 May 1996

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May 1996

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# **Blithe Spirit**

## **Journal of the British Haiku Society**

Editor: Jackie Hardy

Submissions for all but **The Pathway** section to:-

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Submissions for **The Pathway** section only to:-

David Cobb,  
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Annual membership of the British Haiku Society (standard subscription in the UK £12.50, £9 concessionary; £15 overseas surface mail, or £18 airmail) includes four issues of **Blithe Spirit**. Subscriptions to magazine only - £7 a year UK, £9 overseas. Enquiries about subscriptions or membership to: The Membership Secretary, Hill House Farm, Knighton, Powys LD7 1NA.

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

**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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**Officers:** James Kirkup (President), Susan Rowley (Chair), David Cobb (General Secretary & Treasurer), Richard Goring (Librarian & Hackett Award), Martin Lucas (Events), Jackie Hardy (Editor, **Blithe Spirit**), Caroline Gourlay (Membership Secretary), Annie Bachini (Editor, **The Brief**).

## Editorial

Our Second National Conference, held last month, was a success. The venue was excellent: Daiwa House, in London, adjacent to Regents Park. The park, enticingly spring-clad, beckoned haijin. But our dedicated delegates resisted its overtures, except for the occasional lung-full of fresh air, in favour of some excellent papers and musical interludes by our distinguished members. It was a good opportunity to meet new faces and renew friendships. For those who were unable to attend the conference, copies of the papers can be obtained from Martin Lucas. Publication of some may occur in *Blithe Spirit* later.

Conference delegates gave me the mandate for some interesting ideas for *Blithe Spirit*. There will be a section focusing on contemporary Buddhist haiku; a non-member of BHS is to be commissioned to contribute some haiku; individual haiku will be explored in depth and there will be more guest editing. Anyone who wishes to submit names, haiku or articles will be welcomed.

The theme of the rat has not proved an inspiration to many. Next issue's theme will be beetles, which should offer a wider scope. Richard Goring has chosen this theme as part of his guest editorship. Do not forget to send your submissions of tanka, haiku, senryu and beetle poems to Richard directly. His address is 27 Park Street, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 7PA. I would like to wish Richard happy editing and look forward to his 'tanka special' issue.

The season for the next issue is Spring.

Jackie Hardy



## Winter

wintry evening -  
briefly the horses' breath  
whiter than the moon

*Bamboo Shoot*

Sand in the goal-mouth  
the long summer days recalled  
this winter twilight

*Dermot O'Brien*

a winter morning . . .  
burnt into a wisp of smoke  
withered raked leaves

*Kohjin Sakamoto*

snow falling  
every sunflower  
made of silk

*Byron Jackson*

December in the park  
everywhere you go  
mud on your shoes

*Dick Pettit*

First snow of winter -  
outside my window the moon  
climbs a solitary tree

*Bill Wyatt*

green wrapped in red,  
pushing aside winter snow -  
the first rhubarb shoot

*Charles Brien*

swollen fingers  
drawing the curtains early  
the shortest day

*John Shimmin*

the shortest day -  
really no time at all  
to have a shadow

Travel plans postponed:  
the pass out of the valley  
blocked by the snowstorm

*David Cobb*

*Tamaki Makoto*

frozen finger  
counting them  
winter stars

*ai li*

Kicking snow  
a dove leaves  
the A-bomb Dome

*Yasuhiko Shigemoto*

Siberian wind  
the tiniest wagtail  
hops

the only traffic  
in endless snowflakes  
speedy fox

*Matthew Paul*

no winter rain  
thick snow covers a city  
with tobogganing

*Alan J Summers*

Frozen sunlight -  
a dead badger on his back  
harder than my shoe

*Caroline Gourlay*

hugging the radiator -  
deciding to go out  
after all

*Katherine Gallagher*

winter walk  
holding hands  
through thick gloves

*Fred Schofield*

The pond's dark waters --  
only stepping stones covered  
with the first snowfall

*James Kirkup*

Snow blizzard birth  
in the derelict cottage  
two milky white kids

*Anne Patterson*

One chirp  
at a time  
winter morning sparrow

*Allan Jarrett*

a former capital, Kamakura;  
under fallen leaves  
steps carved on rock

*Tsunehiko Hoshino*

I encountered haiku for the first time early in 1995 and was immediately drawn to its paradoxically condensed yet infinitely expressive form. I liked the idea that haiku can have moods and textures, be like watercolours, or oil paintings or precise pen-and-ink drawings. As haiku's an art of enhancing a single image poetically, and I'm interested in the visual enhancement of poetic texts, it seemed the ideal genre for experimentation with multimedia (my day job) to explore Pound's statement from *Vorticism* that "The one image poem is a form of super-position; that is to say it is one idea set on top of another."

This seemed an interesting basis for on-screen poetry with visual and aural enhancement; dynamically intensifying the single image with pictures, music, symbols, ideograms; creating dreamy mindscapes or rapid image sequences superimposed one on top of another; a texture of mood created by computer graphics and hypertypography – multi-dimensional, interactive textwork ...

However, this is something for later: first I needed to read and research and begin to learn what haiku was all about and find my own path within it. Primarily, I needed to be writing, and writing about what's informing my development at this point in my life – which happens to be computers and information technology. Technology, against all odds, is a creative stimulant, an endlessly fascinating resource, and probably the single most influential factor on my creative production at the moment is the Internet.

### The Internet

Deciding to use the Internet for research and feedback was a turning point. Choosing at random one of the many searchable indexes supplied by the World Wide Web (the graphical, user-friendly major highway of the 'Net') and typing in the keyword 'haiku' turned up 109 matching responses within two minutes. Following up several that looked promising, within minutes I'd located some excellent haiku 'sites', and found a body of people around the world writing haiku, corresponding with each other about haiku, composing renga-on-the-fly and generally having a good time in an artform they love.

Suddenly, the texts I'd been reading and struggling to make sense of came alive. Instantly, I had access to a body of current, contemporary work (a month, a week, a day old) as well as recourse to archival material from all ages and locations. Haiku publications, discussion groups, individuals' pages and mailing lists, all encouraging submissions in the form of original work, critiques, discussions and short articles. I half expected that the anarchic,



unregulated nature of the Internet would necessitate wading through much bad work to find something worth reading, but instead found most sites functioning in the best way as nurseries for new talent, with good editorial control, erudite argument and positive, supportive criticism.

I find this very exciting. Far from being the isolating, dehumanizing monster its detractors babble about, the Internet is a nurturing environment, a communication technology turned mass medium, a global meeting-place for like minds. Things are changing at lightning speed: reality has taken on the shape of a William Gibson or Bruce Sterling novel.

This opens up all sorts of new possibilities regarding audience/readership: a writer no longer has to 'arrive' in the poetry world to get published; authoring a 'Web' page affords self-publication with little overheads. With a little research and effort, it's possible to reach a large, real-time audience keen to read one's work, even contribute to it. Games of *maekuzuke* ('joining to a previous verse') may be played, where *maeku* ('previous verses') are thrown to the winds of hyperspace and *tsukeku* ('joined verses') added by others – perhaps the same day, certainly within the week.

A new poetic backwater exists in cyberspace, peopled by a virtual community of writers and critics who inhabit this curious hybrid world of man and machine. With the internationalization of haiku, the geographical, religious and cultural associations that function to make a haiku are subject to multicultural conversions: the influence of the Japanese masters is becoming diluted. This is what Bashō wished for. He always encouraged his students to cultivate their individual talents rather than follow him with blind faith. Informed by the eclectic exchange of ideas fostered by the Internet, the art of haiku can only grow and benefit.

### Form and Process

The first material I read about haiku dealt only with the Japanese traditional form – the necessary inclusion of a *kigo* (season word), the strict form of 3 lines of 17 syllables, arranged 5-7-5. Being drawn to tradition and feeling that more intellectual rigour would obtain in adhering to those rules, I made my first haiku conform accordingly. It didn't work, and resulted in first attempts that were too ambiguous, metaphorical, not concise enough, because I was trying to make them fit the pattern. Once I'd done some research via the Internet and other sources, I came to understand that the Japanese and English languages have inherent differences, that the best haiku in English tend *not* to be 5-7-5, that there are many schools and styles of haiku, and that the debate goes on. The British Haiku Society's statement that "it proves elusive to reach a description of haiku which all those fascinated by the genre can accept without reservation" sums it up neatly!

It seems to me that the Japanese view of life may be so foreign to the westerner that it's difficult for us – maybe impossible – to write 'true' haiku. I'm comfortable with the idea that the non-negotiable criteria of haiku apply to spirit and content and not to form; that an unwaivable syllable count is less important than good syntax, lineation and rhythm. It's been said (on the Net, and probably elsewhere) that most haiku beginners, both western and Japanese, start with good form (ie 5-7-5) and poor content. In the west, they then find the content and shed the form, while Japanese poets find the content and keep the form. I'd like to achieve both, with the proviso that if HAIKU (the international kind) works best within some other form better suited to the characteristics of the English language (Blyth thought the English equivalent is 2 stressed syllables plus 3 stressed syllables plus 2 stressed syllables), then that should be aimed for, rather than 5-7-5. As far as I can see at the moment, the 'organic' style, where form is reinvented for each new poem/experience, seems best for haiku, enabling form and content to reflect each other. I want to learn from the richness of Japanese haiku, ground myself firmly in the tradition, but, with respect and knowledge thus gained, find an equally valid approach appropriate to the culture I live in.

Worrying at first that I didn't have time for the relaxed mind required of the haikin, I realised eventually that it can be induced. In the West, we haven't the Japanese mindset, the Zen orientation of meditation and contemplation, by nature, but we can observe, concentrate anywhere in our hectic urban lives and create the necessary conditions. We have no idea when the haiku moment will find us but can be prepared for it. As someone said "Carry a notebook with you at all times, but forget why you have it"! The voice of nature is everywhere – in the city we just have to listen for different things. Instead of wolves howling or frogs croaking, there's the roar of traffic or the sound of the tv.

After April rain  
– in puddles of oil  
city rainbows.

(author unknown)

In cyberspace, there's no sound but that which one creates oneself - a limitless reality.

## **Audience**

Using the Internet had various profound effects, not least being the discovery of a new type of audience. The relationship between writing and readership becomes much more immediate, much more personal, much more interactive, when publishing takes place on-line. If a haiku publication were to be printed in the usual way, it would probably be read by a small constituency of poets and haiku enthusiasts in its country of origin. With an Internet presence, it

would be accessible to a large international readership with direct communication with the author (if s/he so desired). Using this medium for renga etc provides an immediacy often lost by the intervention of postal delays. Constructive feedback and discourse, thus generated, enables new ideas and revisions – and because Net-published material can be changed, updated at a moment's notice without need for prohibitively expensive reprints, a constant flow of energy is possible.

This conduit for rapid interchange generates an intensely fecund arena for poetry. It also, of course, undermines copyright protection and renders intellectual property free to all with access, but many authors and artists are already embracing the Internet spirit of freedom of information by publishing on the Net; these issues are being dealt with and creative ways forward will be found.

For the writer of the nineties, the Internet is becoming one of the sharpest tools in the shed. The Net provides access to other writers, editors and readers through e-mail critique groups, USENET newsgroups and newsletters about writing. Writers can enjoy access to countless small-press publications, literary journals and a chaotic and eclectic mix of electronic magazines. These markets can prove more receptive to unpublished writers than the major markets. For those of you who are 'wired', the following are some interesting on-line haiku sites, most with more links connecting to other haiku sites. (Addresses checked and current at time of writing, but things on the Net change fast!)

The Shiki Internet Haiku Salon

Matsuyama University's haiku site

URL: <http://mikan.cc.matsuyama-u.ac.jp/~shiki/>

Dogwood Blossoms

US haiku publication

URL: <http://glwarner.samford.edu/haiku.htm>

Interactive Haiku Page

Contribute to global renga

URL: <http://www.sfc.keio.ac.jp/~t93502yy/haiku.shtml>

Dhugal J Lindsey's Haiku Universe

URL: <http://www.ori.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~dhugal/haikuhome.html>

This article is based upon Mel McClellan's 'Critical Commentary' work for an MA. A version of the article has previously appeared in *Sheffield Thursday*, Summer 1995. Mel's e-mail address is: [mel@ledgard.demon.co.uk](mailto:mel@ledgard.demon.co.uk) or [m.mcclellan@shu.ac.uk](mailto:m.mcclellan@shu.ac.uk)

## Haiku

The scent of pinewoods -  
autumn shadows lengthen  
as the days shorten

*Brian H Wells*

power cut  
the regular music  
of clocks

*Ruth Robinson*

by the gate-post  
withered petals -  
scent of wet dust on the breeze

*Keith Coleman*

A stone-grown thistle  
halfway up the Great Wall . . .  
resting butterflies

*James W Hackett*

packed in crevices  
at the opened Tombs of Kings -  
flowering cyclamen

*John Shimmin*

Nightfall -  
waterboatmen  
skating

*Bruce Leeming*

between my hands  
the moon  
on your face

*Frank Dullaghan*

making birdhouses  
a neighbour sawing  
into the night

*Byron Jackson*

Partly hidden  
by broken cloud -  
Easter moon

*Anita Packwood*

the autumn evening  
filling the railway carriage  
with a dug beet smell

*Colin Blundell*

In eclipse  
moon still faintly visible  
glaze on a teabowl

*David Platt*

smooth new pavement  
now suddenly undulating  
in the headlight beam

breakwater posts  
the sea so calm  
on the other side

*Richard Goring*

four legs outstretched,  
a turtle floats -  
first cherry blossoms

*Tsunehiko Hoshino*

Full moon  
In the playground  
Dance of silhouettes

*Humberto Gatica*

Bass Rock  
at the end of the rainbow  
buttoning my mac

*Jade*

## The Visit

Richard Goring

Saturday; time for the children of our deceased daughter to visit with us. It is a fine February day, so after feeding them their second breakfast, we all take a walk to 'the Cliffs'. These are actually moderately steep slopes of around 150 feet down to the dual carriageway that runs along the shore at the town's southern boundary. These slopes are covered in grass, trees, bushes and formal flower beds, and are criss-crossed by paths and flights of steps - making the whole a stretched-out public park. The municipal gardeners have clearly been at work.

cutting back hard  
in the public park  
opens new views

We adults eventually select a bench to rest and enjoy the view across the river mouth, some three miles wide here. We also keep an eye on the children, marvelling at their seemingly boundless energy, especially that of the youngest, who appears incapable of keeping still more than ten seconds.

just watching  
the hyperactive child  
so wearing

The deciduous trees are completely bare after winter cold and snow and winds off the sea, but their former foliage is still abundant, lying under and particularly within the close set and intertwined branches of the many bushes.

here and there  
last year's leaves  
still linger

We rested and the children finally beginning to tire, we begin to climb steps back to the top. My wife points out a small rock, one of many set in cement along both sides of the steps. This one is different from most of the others and especially from its neighbour, even though the cement indicates they were both placed there at the same time.

side by side  
one moss-smothered stone  
and one stark

Finally reaching the top, we begin walking the footpath and soon notice the effect of last night's gales.

scattered  
across the tarmac path  
red berries

We walk back home through side streets. Passing the local Roman Catholic church, my eldest grand-daughter notices a niche up in the apex of the end wall, above the stained-glass east window. It contains a statue of the Virgin and somehow a pigeon has made a landing on the statue's head and now stands motionless, apparently sheltering from the chilly wind.

Mary's statue  
high on the church wall  
a pigeon perching



### Favourite Haiku 1

twilight mist -  
horse remembers the gap  
in the bridge

*Issa*

I find this moving because of the implicit relationship between man and animal. An inherent humour arises from the poet's world - a world which isn't in a hurry and which helps me reclaim a sense of calm. Not that I wish to live in the past, just maintain some equilibrium by feeling some harmony with nature.

Fred Schofield



**Senryu**

eye contact  
an old friend promises  
to keep in touch

*Susan Rowley*

As he dismisses  
the gardner, he praises  
his delphiniums

*Patricia V Dawson*

Through the window  
Crowds of monotonous people -  
I glance in the mirror

*Peter Spencer*

running  
from the dog  
new postman

spots of caviar  
stain the tuxedo  
of the honoured guest

*ai li*

*Barry Atkinson*

Old soldier-gardener  
indisposed for a season:  
now the battle begins

*Frank Williams*

electronic mail  
one click - her love message gone  
to the wrong address

*Frank Dullaghan*

family album -  
in the centre of each snap  
grandma's fingerprint

*David Cobb*

briefing his successor  
he struggles to remember  
how he did it

*Dick Pettit*

bleak day -  
correcting the spelling  
on the beggar's sign

*Jade*

turning grotesque  
in the Hall of Mirrors -  
her trim figure

*Colin Maxwell-Charters*

Two selfish cold feet  
have just trampled over  
my cosy dream

*Edward D Glover*

touching  
the smaller sizes in silks,  
while his wife  
looks at 'eighteens'

*Bamboo Shoot*

out in the garden  
my wife tells me her new plans -  
another bird bath

*Matthew Blaine*

## 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 writing in widely spoken and less-widely-spoken languages.

### *Horst Ludwig (German and English)*

Morgenschulweg -  
die Strassenlichter gehen aus  
eins nach dem andern.

On the way to school  
lights in the street go out  
one by one.

Mal mir den Kopf so,  
dass der Abendsonnenball  
dahinter versinkt.

Paint my head so  
that the evening sun ball  
is right behind it.

Im Park zwei Männer  
beim Schach. Über den Köpfen  
tanzende Mücken.

Two men in the park  
playing chess. Above their heads  
dancing mosquitoes.

### *Ai Li Chia (Malay and English)*

musim hujan  
tanglong tokong  
liar menari

monsoon season  
a temple lantern  
wildly dances

### *Mihael Stebih (Croat and English)*

I zodijaku  
treba reći laku noć.  
Barem jednom.

One should say goodnight  
even to the zodiac  
at least once.

Opet kosilice!  
Čitavo ljeto u gradu  
samo kosilice!

Mowers again!  
All summer long  
just mowers in town!

Gledam oblake.  
Služe vinom i jelom -  
i Baudelairea.

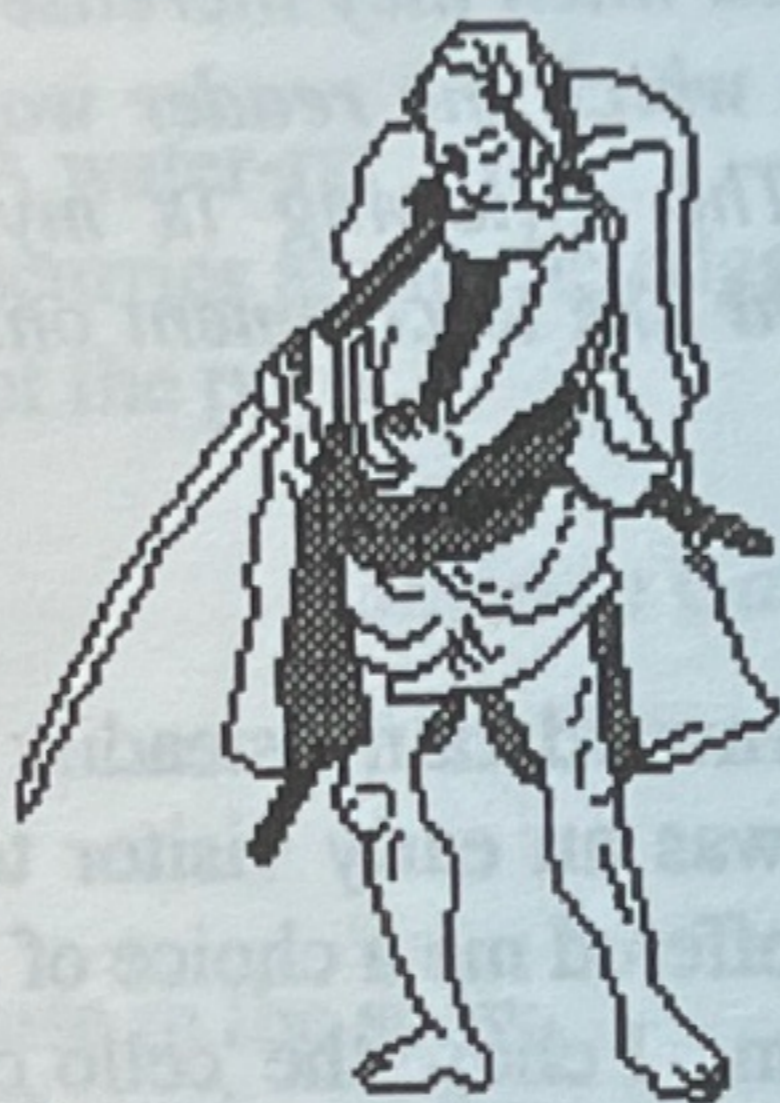
Watching the clouds  
Offering wine and a snack  
to Baudelaire too.

В росната трева  
встрани от пътеката  
самотна стъпка.

Дъждовна вечер.  
По трамвайните релси  
тече светлина.

On the dewy grass  
to one side of the path  
a single footprint.

A rainy evening -  
along the tram rails  
flows light.



## **Favourite Haiku 2**

Autumn night  
Orion's bow releasing  
arrows of geese

*Anna Holley*

Time and again I revisit this marvellous poem to stand with Anna Holley in the cold crystalline night, sky-watching. There is my childhood friend Orion with his bow. Suddenly migratory geese are traversing the heavens, honking occasionally in the awesome silence. How perfectly the haiku catches the moment. Its concision is delicious. I find the metaphor too perfect to criticise.

Bruce Leeming

*Apart from the explanations of context which Bashō achieved by including haiku in haibun prose narratives, he also sometimes wrote short introductions to his haiku, which Makoto Ueda refers to as 'headnotes'. (Some headnotes are so short as to resemble titles. What a thought!)*

*So far we British haiku poets seem to have shied away from headnotes, although they are increasingly common in some American magazines. I think myself they should only be used when they increase the potential impact of the haiku by adding a dimension which the reader would be unlikely to imagine without such assistance. The following is my first experiment with a headnote, which readers might like to comment on. I'd be glad to hear their views.*

One morning of steadily downward rain ('steadily downward' as opposed to wind-driven and slanting) I was an early visitor to Elgar's childhood home near Worcester. The curator offered me a choice of Elgar music to listen to as I wandered from room to room. I chose the 'cello concerto, and listened to it from beginning to end; with the rain falling outside I was in no hurry to be on my way. No other visitor came all the time I was in the cottage. As I left the garden and walked out into the lane, I noticed a clue that confirmed this: although the gravel path was drenched, the strip of ground immediately beneath the gate was still completely dry.

This was an interesting observation in its own right. Later, after I had finished 'capturing' it in words, I began to reflect whether it wasn't also in some way relevant to the act of composition, as poets and composers know it, subject even to the vagaries of weather. The difficulties Elgar had with composition before and after the 'cello concerto are, of course, legendary.

the composer's house -  
rain on the path all morning,  
beneath the gate still dry

## Rats et al

Twelve more lists  
of lapsed resolutions  
- year of the rat

*Susan Rowley*

A water-rat  
scurries along the edge  
of the pond

*Katherine Gallagher*

Dead mouse in the snow.  
Stooping I touch wet fur.  
More snow in the wind . . .

*Caroline Gourlay*

boasting of his dog  
he counts  
rats' tails

*Frank Dullaghan*

Inside the temple  
the cold, the damp, the rats  
but the chanting . . .

*John Shimmin*

pitilessly caged,  
sick laboratory rats  
- a dying breed

*Charles Brien*

Unused birthday card  
A black cat, fluffy and cute  
Dead rat in its jaws

*Linda Marshall*

Broken rear legs  
squeaking in circles  
Coal shovel

*Ken Jones*

guileless rat  
after the poison  
the body

*Ruth Robinson*

blatters the window,  
gusted rain -  
rats in the ceiling scabble

*Keith Coleman*

## The James W Hackett Haiku Award 1995

The adjudicator, James W Hackett himself, wrote to us:

"Two haiku are so good, I wish it were possible to give them both awards."

The BHS committee decided to honour this wish, and so we are happy to announce TWO prizes of £100 this year. (We are also glad to announce that in future there will be up to three prizes, each of £70, instead of the single prize of £100 which we have advertised in previous years. Notice 'up to'; the maximum of three prizes will depend on the quality of the entries, though the award of one prize is guaranteed in any event.)

If there had been only one prize in 1995 it would have gone to Caroline Gourlay's poem, so we give that one pride of place.

### Winners

in the small gap  
between quivering nettles -  
a rabbit's still eye

*Caroline Gourlay, UK*

between fishing rods  
on the seawall a heron  
stalks the bait pail

*L A Davidson, USA*

Mr Hackett continued: "The following sensitive and excellent haiku are highly commended. Their order of presentation does not imply ranking.":

In front of an inn  
the cows in the truck waiting  
for the driver's drink.

*Tomislav Maretić, Croatia*

breeze sways the rushes -  
in a tail-switching silence  
donkies softly graze

*H F Noyes, Greece*

from a garbage bag  
a disheveled man picks out  
the least wilted rose

*L A Davidson, USA*



Our old charcoal grill  
Still cradling last year's cold ash -  
A sudden shiver. *Alan Maley, Singapore*

Low valley fog. . .  
the birth steam of a new calf  
in the morning light *Gary Gay, USA*

Invading the quay  
where battleships used to berth -  
red valerian *John Shimmin, UK*

James W Hackett remarks, "All of the chosen poems speak for themselves.....  
For, to paraphrase R H Blyth, comments here are not at all necessary, like legs  
to a snake."

## **Museum of Haiku Literature Award**

Kohjin Sakamoto chooses Edward D Glover's

Wind tears an old web  
insects' husks spin off  
in a last brief flight

I remember hearing a tale from an old man when I was a child: in the wood near our village there lived a big spider that ate children. When I saw a web across the path into the wood, I would feel an urge to approach the web, while at the same time feeling scared and chilled.

How do insects feel when they see a web? Do they see it, I wonder? Or, do they perhaps see another world beyond the web? Whatever, they are caught.

In Edward's haiku, both are gone: the catcher and the caught. Only the husks of the latter remain to hint at the tales of this old web, though none can tell any longer to whom these broken segments once belonged. The husks' last flight will be their very first since they were caught. The torn web of this haiku allows the reader to weave a new web in his/her own mind. The haiku is both the ending and the beginning of a tale which every reader can weave as he/she likes.

I wanted to ask why 17 syllables; later, having read about *onji* and the 'duration theory' of haiku - why 12 - 14? These are not the irreverent queries of some brash novice determined to destroy the system but the immediate response to a moment's 'intelligent' thought. One need not be a linguist or a computer person to realise that language is all about information transfer. If language A packs more information into its structure than language B, isn't B at some word-wise disadvantage to A when it comes to writing haiku - and if the semantic mechanics of Japanese are more efficient than those of English, shouldn't we be nudging toward the use of more rather than fewer syllables in English haiku? Further: if a haiku is to be more than a mere visuo-verbal embellishment to a sheet of white paper - a few pleasant vibrations on the breeze - shouldn't what is wanted to be said take some precedence over utterance? Mr Higginson<sup>1</sup> briefly mentions such things, but I am not aware of any further elaborations - backed up by (what seems to be essential) authoritative linguistic analysis. Meanwhile, we seem urged to simulate the *duration* of traditional Japanese haiku - perhaps even more than *content*? My curiosity was strengthened by the considerable translation variation that exists - not infrequently involving either 'syllabic increase or decrease', and the fact that Japanese itself has undergone relatively recent change; while other reading<sup>2,3</sup> still leads me to wonder if Japanese does indeed hold semantic advantage over English - if only in the subtle portmanteau conveyance of mood and tone. Consider the following range:

- |                 |                   |                            |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| i. old pond     | ii. The pond, ah  | iii. Breaking the silence  |
| a frog leaps in | A frog jumps in:  | Of an ancient pond         |
| water's sound   | The water's sound | A frog jumped into water - |
|                 |                   | A deep resonance           |

Mr Higginson's translation (i), finds an ambiguous enjambment not possible in the others - one might well wonder if it exists in the original? Professor Yuasa (iii) used a four-line, 17+ syllable form, considering it to more closely approximate the natural colloquialism that is the true spirit of haiku. Here, his last two lines are hardly colloquial English, but reasonably, Professor Yuasa was experiencing translation difficulties no less than those of others. My point is, that he may choose to use 17+ syllables to attempt to express overall meaning.

Japanese students told me that it takes a long time to learn how to read - let alone write - haiku. If (i) truly represents the compression of the original, and

others like it, I could well believe it; but does it? Or do such haiku encode in their language structure things that might be spelt out for us in English? It seems relevant to ask - and it might pertain differently to the old and modern Japanese - how does the diction of haiku compare to the everyday colloquial diction anyway? Ie., since Japanese has its origins in the uninflected characters of Chinese, has it always been - is it now - a more elliptical language than English? The matter touches on the problem of pidgin-English haiku and writers' feelings of syllabic restriction. I suppose all English *haijin* might prefer to avoid that unconvincing Charles Chan diction in favour of smooth eloquence. This is not to challenge the essential brevity of haiku.

Regarding metric, haiku are surely too short to establish any English metre against variation? Any mention of iambics seems to deny other usable rhythms, while I find the idea that 1.5 heroic couplets could give any meaningful sense to traditional haiku incompleteness a bit far-fetched. Haiku seem small enough for each overall metric to be judged as a piece.

Brian Tasker suggested once that we should write haiku 'in a foreign way but with a British accent' - but in seeking a Western aesthetic for haiku expression, might we not better attempt to parallel Eastern thought rather than imitate it? We all experience 'haiku moments', and I doubt that a 'temporary enlightenment' is much different from, say, the epiphanies of Joyce's Stephen Daedalus - but its expression might well be! The deep interaction of indigenous language and culture, and the way that this overlays perception and expression is very real. Sure, Westerners can experience *sabi* rather than just nostalgia - but East and West might have mutual problems in explaining to each other just what the experience was like. Here are four personal efforts - all record genuine 'haiku moments':

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

2. summer sun stings my head;  
winter drips through the thatch -  
telling me something

These two seem to me little more than stylistic forgeries; am I setting out on the Great North Road with my staff and flip-flops? Written in Birmingham. They seem spuriously stamped 'Made in Japan'.

3. deck-chairs face away  
from the sheen of sun on sand  
. . . and the fast tide turns

4. Fresh wind down inland streets,  
sea sky . . . miles away the surf  
crashes

Reasonably English in style and syntax - no written metaphor - some ambiguity and a hint of Hokusai in (4)? (3) attempts *sabi*: a deserted beach - that strange slack-tide of tourism when every Saturday morning becomes a temporary season's end - things left behind with their human imprint - the emptiness of absence, etc. (4) attempts nostalgia: back-home streets - evocation of past perceptions in another place - a stressless first-line gust, a sea-sky haiku moment, and reminiscence.

Compare:           Slow days passing, accumulating, -  
                          How distant they are,  
                          The things of the past!

Perhaps Buson had the advantage of 'k' sounds and a *kireji*, and the disadvantages of translation and my poor understanding; but good haiku solicit meditation (brevity and the nature of the Japanese language might encourage that) - a seemingly closed door must invite curious approach before it opens and grabs you; my English efforts, though objective, may seem too personal a reverie - the door lacks strangeness and stays shut perhaps? Which brings me back to syllables.

K V Bailey (*Blithe Spirit*, vol. 5 no. 2) hints at the curious case of minimal haiku. How can some scantily syntaxed haiku sometimes seduce our minds? The psychological process probably involves reintegration of the senses: we sense a stab of recognition and we move in to meditate around. No doubt the fuzziness of the old Japanese language (Blyth) helped - does it still?

Inaccessible Western poetry usually needs superficial attractiveness before we feel inclined to unravel it - but haiku aren't poems. Is an elliptical syntax our only road to achieving that attractive haiku-strangeness? Could we in the West make good use of extra syllables, or are the semantic nuances of (old?) Japanese best left as blank spaces in English haiku? It seems worth talking about. Maybe we could ask ourselves what minimalist form might best have expressed the English 'haiku moment' had the Japanese role-model not been there first? Certainly we should meditate a little over emergent alien forms, and not just wrinkle our noses. The *spirit* of haiku is perhaps the one true trans-cultural element - it might best be preserved by allowing it to find its own level in whatever language.

1. Higginson, W J, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Teach and Share Haiku*
2. Bownas, G, *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*
3. Yuasa, N (trans.), *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

## Reviews

**Jumping from Kiyomizu**, David Cobb, Iron Press, ISBN 0 906228565, £4.99

*Jumping from Kiyomizu* is David Cobb's third collection of haiku. It is an A6-sized book with 96 pages and nine interesting figure drawings by Charlotte Smith. Haiku/senryu come two to a page on attractive, textured paper.

In a preamble David explains the meaning of the title. *Jumping from Kiyomizu* is a Japanese euphemism for 'taking a risky decision', which David equates with the decision to begin writing haiku. It must have rung some bells for Peter Mortimer of Iron Press, too.

The blurb on the back cover tells us that David has run 'the gamut of human emotions in the life cycle of haiku'. The collection skilfully mingles human life cycle haiku - birth, marriage, death (divorce, illness, shopping and sex, too) - with nature haiku.

David's style when addressing creatures is distinctive:

your trickle of slime, slug, gives me a clue where your head will be	goldfinch, your fiery throat! yet the ants attend only to your glazed eye . . .
--	---

There are some haiku with that mysterious, pleasurable foreign quality associated with translations. This is highlighted because the poems have been written in other countries, cultures:

the rainbeat softens  
at the inn of paper walls  
how the pleased wives scream . . .

The extra syllable in the last line adds to the effect.

Most of the haiku in this collection are very good indeed. Some are brilliant:

daffodil morning -  
looking for something  
very blue to wear

has already become an admired favourite by many of those who have heard or read it. I'm sure it will become a classic; Bashō's 'old pond', Cobb's 'daffodil morning' . . .

As several versions of the haiku from the collection have already been published in *Blithe Spirit*, it is possible to see evolution in action:

in his menopause  
purchasing Valentines  
in packs of five  
(BS)

mid-life crisis,  
purchasing Valentines  
- three at a time!  
(JFK)

The later version from the collection is certainly improved. But what of ?:

evening class -  
the recent divorcee  
sculptures a kiss  
(BS)

evening class -  
as ever the divorcee  
sculpting embraces  
(JFK)

or ?:

leaves falling -  
the shared driveway  
suddenly all mine  
(BS)

neighbours in Spain -  
leaf-fall on the shared drive  
awaits my besom  
(JFK)

For me David has beringed the finger pointing at the moon. There is a loss of open-endedness and *karumi* in the *Jumping from Kiyomizu* versions. The diction has lost its simplicity and in 'neighbours in Spain' there are too many images telling me what to think.

I am, of course, nit-picking. But only when something is excellent is there any point in paying attention to its teeniest faults. Be sure to get it. You will not be disappointed.

JAH

**Tanka Splendor 1995**, Dr Larry Gross (ed), AHA Books, POB 767, Gualala, CA 95445, USA \$6.00

This sixth annual publication follows a now-established presentation (but with one new feature): extended Judge's comments followed by one of Larry's own tanka, then the 31 'winning' poems (from 521 entries) by 24 poets and an Afterword by series editor Jane Reichhold. The new feature is the inclusion of tanka sequences, of which four were chosen from 39 entries. These offer a further 19 poems, almost all of which are capable of standing on their own.

In his comments, Dr Gross remarks upon and welcomes the ever-widening range of English-language tanka subject matter evidenced by the entries and seen amongst his final selection. He also dwells upon form and structure and makes a plea for English-language tanka not to depart far from the 'traditional' patterns inherited from the Japanese original: "A form evolves and persists over time because it does certain things exceedingly well." However, Larry Gross accepts the emergence and growing strength of 'free-form', including the compressed lines of authors such as Kenneth Tanemura (one of whose tanka is included). His final selection therefore reveals some slightly startling examples, but the traditional themes such as love and relationships are plentiful enough, as are poems in strict 5-7-5-7-7 form. Four examples will illustrate the variety:

phone call home  
the voice of my dad  
as he chides me  
for wasting my talent -  
only this tanka tonight

*Cherie Hunter Day, USA*

Do you remember  
when we said goodbye outside  
behind your house?  
Afterwards, we spent two hours  
trying to find these earrings

*Thomas D Greer, USA*

"no more bonsai for me"  
father smiles  
weakly  
and gives me  
his pruning shears

*Keiko Imaoka, USA*

From the buddleia  
I bring a Red Admiral  
To your naked sleep,  
And cup my hands on your breast.  
Wings flutter. Your eyes open.

*Anthony Knight, England*

This booklet once again represents the 'sharp end' of Western English-language tanka development. The review copy has been added to the BHS Library stock (postage code 'c'), but no serious student of the genre should be without a personal copy. The 1994 edition is still available at \$6.00 and the 1993 and 1992 editions at \$5.00 each, but it is not known whether these prices include mailing, so check first.

RJG

## Dear Editor

I was interested to read James Kirkup's remarks in his review about the language used by Bruce Leeming in his 'Scots Haiku'.

The term 'Lallans' which he uses, was originally employed by Burns and Stevenson for Lowland Scots speech. However, it is now often used to describe the literary Scots used by contemporary poets. The language used by Bruce Leeming is an example of this. James Kirkup need not be surprised at the presence of English words, since about half the lexis is held in common with standard English. Nevertheless, the flavour is very different. As Hugh MacDiarmid pointed out, Scots has names for nameless things. The linguistic relationship with English is so close that Scots is in serious danger of being eroded away altogether as a result of being seen as a deviant form of English. That would be a loss to mankind. On the other hand, the fact that with a little effort, any English speaker can understand Scots, has the advantage that the substantial body of poetry in Scots is potentially accessible to the whole English-speaking world. Any English speaker can move through this door into the different world of perception and feeling which Scots represents.

*Aefauldlie.*

Dr David Purves, Edinburgh

With regard to Colin Blundell's article, 'Zen-less Haiku' (*BS* 6:1), I would just like to make the following comments.

1. I think Colin oversimplifies how easy it is to get to 'essence', if there is such a place.

Annihilating ego doesn't necessarily put you in touch with 'essence', it can put you in touch with aspects of the 'unconscious' which are just as likely, if not more likely, to project than 'conscious'.

Colin seems to be saying that it is possible to take a direct route to 'essence' which by-passes all the influences we have had since the point of conception. I don't believe this to be possible, but this may be my Protestant work ethic coming out which amounts to 'no gain without pain'.

I believe it is much more constructive to think about getting closer to 'essence' by becoming aware of both 'conscious' and 'unconscious' 'stuff', which may be influencing our perception: ie., to ask yourself why something affected you; where your ideas come from, etc.



## Dear Editor (continued)

Becoming aware of projection, if it is done 'unconsciously' gives you the opportunity to discover something about yourself. It doesn't help to deny or repress it. That doesn't mean that you have to publish haiku which project.

2. Folk tales and myths are full of projections.

3. My reasons for advocating consciousness of projection in haiku (Haiku and Projection, *BS* 5: 2) is primarily to encourage respect for the subject - this inevitably works dialectically.

4. Having said all this, I do think that many of Makoto Tamaki's haiku come from a dimension that few other contemporary haiku poets hit on - whether it's 'essence' I don't know.

Annie Bachini, London

## What is a Haiku?

Bill Wyatt

What is a haiku? Bashō said it is "made by combining things"! Toho, a disciple of Bashō wrote ... "the art of *hokku* is, philosophically, grasping the mind that goes off and returns". He quotes a haiku by Bashō to illustrate:

In the mountain village  
the New Year revellers are late -  
plum blossoms

Like the state of mind that says "in the mountain village the New Year revellers are late", he then goes on to observe that the plum blossoms are in bloom. The mind that goes off and returns is what makes a haiku.

Extract from an article previously published in *Haiku Spirit*.



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