

Blithe Spirit



Journal of
The British Haiku Society

Volume 6 Number 3 August 1996

Blithe Spirit Volume 6 Number 3

August 1996

Contents

Editorial		3
Beetles		4
A Brief History of T....	Richard Goring	6
Tanka		11
Haiku		13
Museum of Haiku Literature Award		15
Thoughts on English		
	Tanka Form	Richard Goring (Ed.) 16
Senryu		18
Tanka Strings and Sequences	Richard Goring (Ed.)	20
A Tanka String (untitled)	Dee Evetts	21
Her: a Tanka String	Kenneth Tanemura	22
Tanka		23
The Pathway		24
Spring		25
Letter to the Editor		27
Reviews		28

Blithe Spirit

Journal of the British Haiku Society

Editor: Jackie Hardy

Submissions for all but **The Pathway** section to:-
Jackie Hardy,

Submissions for **The Pathway** section only to:-
David Cobb,

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,

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.

Blithe Spirit is published four times a year, cover-dated February, May, August, November.

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

Editorial

It has been an interesting experience occupying the editorial chair once again. Longer-standing members will recall that I edited or co-edited *Blithe Spirit* through volumes 2 and 3 (1991-92) and it was in *BS* 2/1 that I introduced the tanka form to readers and subsequently a regular section, *Time for Tanka*, to publish members' submissions. In the intervening years the form has begun to gain wider acceptance in Britain and is now taken very seriously in North America. My understanding has, I believe, broadened and deepened, along with my enthusiasm, and so I am most glad of this opportunity to promote the genre once again. My hope now is that you will be interested by and pleased with the results herein.

Those looking for detailed history and examples of the classical tanka (waka) form will look in vain. For me, tanka means poetry of the last one hundred years (and I barely have sufficient space to begin to cover that) and an emphasis upon and encouragement of English-language tanka. That is what you will find here.

The regular haiku and senryu pages are present also. I have tried to retain the overall numbers of such poems while having to reduce the number of pages which they occupy, so please forgive me if their presentation is a little cramped this time. One thing about them that struck me was the higher number of 'good' poems submitted as compared to four years ago. I did not have space for them all, so I have included as many submitters as possible (which means you may have sent several 'good' poems but only one or two have been selected).

It must also be said that not too many haiku/senryu submissions were 'excellent' and that quite a number, including some from members who have been around a few years, were what Susan Rowley dubs 'hardlya' or even 'neverahopeofa' haiku. Perhaps it would do none of us any harm to chew over our brand new (soon to come if not yet received) copy of *On the Nature of English Haiku* (or even the old*Consensus*.....) and to really study the winning entries in the more respected Awards and Contests!

One or two people commented on the recent lack of any published submission closing date. Now *Blithe Spirit* is more or less back on schedule, you should assume it is the first Saturday of the month *prior to* the cover date.

The next-issue haiku theme is birds and the season will be Summer.

Richard Goring

A haiku by Paul Seto, published as far back as *BS* 5/1, had several typos. The correct rendering should have been

Reviewing my life:
a maple tree yellowing,
falling leaf by leaf.

Beetles

from the bath
on my finger
a dry beetle

Byron Jackson

never colliding
dodging all over the pond -
whirligig beetles

loathing beetles
crawling along her arm
a cute ladybird

John Shimmin

A ladybird
as beaty spot
on the Venus

Klaus-Dieter Wirth

almost anonymous
yellow ladybird
in sun-dried grass

no rain
but a shower
of ladybirds

Matthew Paul

Ruth Robinson

behind the cobwebs
warmed by the spring sunshine
a ladybird moves

Jack Hill

under the vast dome
blue with the heat of summer
- this ladybird

David Steele

straight up, ladybird
climbs the stalk -
comes back down in a spiral

autumn sunlight :
a vivid blue beetle
scurries along the sand

Keith Coleman

Shrill heat: a beetle
runs over furrows of sand
to the temple's shadow

James W Hackett

A glossy beetle
on its back in mud: white lice
eating it alive

shiny black beetle
out of the washing machine
dead clean

Edward D Glover

Richard Goring

A stag beetle crawls
with a chestnut flower
caught on one antler

Patricia V Dawson

after a near collision
with a gold bug,
I watch it into the distance

Tsunehiko Hoshino

on each stalk
of flowering meadowgrass
mating ochre beetles

Matt Morden

Tanka is at least as old as Japan's recorded history. *Kojiki* (The Record of Ancient Matters), Japan's oldest book, completed in 712 AD, contains a 31-syllable poem, believed to be a communal song celebrating the building of a house. Poems in this form are also found in other documents of the same era. In the first great anthology of Japanese verse, *Manyōshū* (The Collection of 10,000 Leaves), compiled only a couple of generations after *Kojiki*, close on 90% of the 4,500+ poems are 31-syllable. Over the following six centuries that form so dominated that all others went into actual or virtual extinction, leaving it to become synonymous with waka (Japanese poetry).

Why the tanka/waka form became so popular is not known, but is likely to have been connected with the nature of Japanese speech. This had developed into a repeating pattern of 12-syllable units, each usually with a brief break after the fifth or seventh syllable. In poetry, the accepted convention employed units with a fifth-syllable break and ended the poem with an additional phrase of seven syllables (so waka basic phrasing was 5-7-5-7-7=31). As many readers will know, a Japanese 'syllable', called an onji, is not really a syllable as native English-speakers understand such. It nowadays comprises a vowel, optionally preceded by a consonant and/or semi-vowel. These are (nearly) all of a uniform length in speech, that length being very short (shorter even than English 'at', for example). The vowel, whether alone or preceded, is sometimes pronounced double-length or as a diphthong and counted as one or two 'syllables'. There is also a single onji, 'n', of varying length but counted as one syllable. In ancient times, the language structure was even simpler than this. Japanese is also an unstressed speech and the nature of onji severely limits rhyming possibilities. Tanka is usually read aloud slowly and evenly in a semi-chant. A long poem could thus easily become monotonous and this factor may also have contributed to the rise of the 'short poem'.

Waka/tanka of old was also defined by content as well as form. Many early poems express appreciation of nature. In time, natural imagery became a vehicle for expressing human concerns. Waka also served as 'love(ers) poetry' for many later centuries, poems expressing desire and gratitude being written and exchanged by lovers. However, the waka of *Manyōshū* shows a wide variety of topics and sentiments, no doubt due to its authorships ranging from high nobility down to the lowliest peasant. The vocabulary is simple, with no foreign words (not even Chinese), heartfelt emotions and an 'artless' style.

Over the next several centuries, waka developed into court poetry, as literary and other cultural activities became centred on the emperor and the high aristocracy. Poets tried to hone their sensibilities, refine their language and achieve courtly types of beauty favouring elegance, harmony and subtle humour. They made effective use of metaphor and the caesura (the latter initially after the twelfth onji, making the waka 5-7 / 5-7-7, later after the seventeenth, making 5-7-5 / 7-7) and used headnotes to set the scene and compensate for the form's brevity.

All of this development is to be found in the next important anthology, *Kokinshū* (The Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) of 905 AD. Of some 1,100 poems, all but nine are waka. As nearly all the authors were from the aristocracy, the subject variety of *Manyōshū* is lacking, but the narrowed range had allowed poets to cultivate an 'art' of omission, conveying more than was actually stated. They showed ingenuity in treating subjects, dexterity in conveying emotion, and urbane wit in delivery. As Ivan Morris notes¹, "The composition, exchange and quotation of poems was central to the daily life of the Heian aristocracy and it is doubtful whether any other society in the world has ever attached such importance to the poetic versatility of its members".

Twenty more imperial anthologies were compiled over the next five-plus centuries, the overwhelming majority (more than 30,000 poems) of waka form. Even the changes of the twelfth century, which brought the warrior class to political power, had little effect, as samurai were expected to be skilled in the poetic as well as the martial arts. Waka continued to be exchanged between friends and lovers and even battlefield enemies.

The eighth imperial collection, *Shin Kokinshū* (The New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) became the most admired of all. Compiled in 1205 AD, its 1,978 poems are all in waka form. Restricted by the onji-count and centuries-established court poetry traditions, the poets had been driven to explore the furthest ends of possibilities. There is thus innovative use of classical allusion, where novel comparisons or contrasts expand meaning, wordplay, where disparate ideas or images are brought together or unusual associations evoked, and symbolism, with references to things remote or unearthly, to transport the reader's imagination.

Though not at all new, these techniques reached their peak of perfection in *Shin Kokinshū* and were never matched again. With nothing further to explore within the existing frame of reference, waka went into decline and renga took over in popularity during the 14th/15th centuries. In the 16th century, haiku emerged. Broader in sweep than waka or renga, it proved attractive to the common people and rising non-aristocrat literati and in turn became the most popular form of the 17th/18th centuries. Waka continued to be composed, but with a few honourable exceptions, where style was reminiscent of *Manyōshū*, these poems were lifeless imitations of what had gone before. When Western literature began to reach Japan in the late 19th century, the Japanese were quickly attracted by its relative richness, variety and freedom. In particular, the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron was much admired. Some predicted the early demise of waka and other forms, and it is true that renga did almost die.

Development of Modern Tanka

At the end of the 19th century a number of poets began to address this situation. All of them wished to revive and revitalise the waka form so that it would once again meet Japan's emotional needs in what they recognised as a newly emerging

modern era. Despite this common aim, they differed in ideas as to its achievement. Thus, a number of groups formed and different paths were followed. Perhaps this variety ultimately contributed to the overall vitality and survival of the 'new' form, which also acquired a new name - tanka. But one thing the poets were broadly agreed upon was that tanka may be composed on any subject, using any (even borrowed) words, and that it rejects traditional wordplays and figures of speech.

Yosano Tekkan (1873-1935) may be regarded as the founder of modern tanka, following a Tokyo newspaper article of 1894 in which he severely criticised the waka being written as mediocre, imitative and lacking originality. He wrote and advocated *jiga no shi* (poetry of the self), where the poet's individuality, embodied in the poem, gave it originality. In Yosano's approach, personal emotion blended with Western (particularly English) romanticism. His first book of poems was published in 1896 and he and his followers founded a magazine, *Myōjō* (Morning Star) in 1900, to promote their kind of tanka. *Myōjō* immediately became popular.

The group also introduced a remarkable young poet whose private life and poetry lived-out the 'romantic' ideals. Hō Shō fell in love with Tekkan and left her home to live with him (even though he was still married) and eventually became his third wife. As Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) her first collection, *Midaregami* (Tangled Hair), shocked and intrigued the nation by its uninhibited record of emotions and intimate desires. It was, and still is, brilliant, bold and sensual, and did much towards making *Myōjō* the most influential tanka magazine for several years.

Another group gathered around Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), who is probably better known as leader of the haiku modernisation movement. Shiki published a series of essays in 1898 in which he advocated the principle of *shasei* (sketch from life), which he had developed during his earlier efforts to reform haiku. Though Shiki's work bore little fruit during his lifetime, waning public enthusiasm for romanticism and a rise in enthusiasm for naturalistic realism encouraged his adherents to publish several magazines. One, *Araragi* (The Yew Tree) launched in 1908 (two months before *Myōjō* finally expired) became very popular and in time the most prestigious tanka journal.

The *Araragi* group included Saito Mokichi (1882-1953), a major influence in the 'modernisation' of tanka. His theory and practice, influenced by his profession as a doctor and psychiatrist, was much wider than the *Araragi* norm and he was associated with poets of other groups, including the *Myōjō* school. Similarly, Shaku Chōkū (1887-1953), although for a time editor of *Araragi*, found the group too restrictive to his vision and left in 1921. His tanka are notable for their focus on the pathos of the human condition.

Another group also accepted the *shasei* principle, but interpreted 'life' rather differently, seeing it as social reality outside the individual - society as it really is. Again, their views were inspired and influenced by naturalistic literary theories received from Europe. The group's best-known poet was Ishikawa Takuboku

(1886-1912), who was possessed of a deeply romantic (and often impractical) spirit. Early in his poetic career, he dropped the age-old custom of writing his tanka/waka in one continuous line, instead publishing in three lines.

There were other groups and poets. There were socialist and outright left-wing movements, a modernist movement and even an unsuccessful attempt to promote free-verse tanka. Much of all the effort died or was suspended during the militarism and controls which culminated in the Second World War, but afterwards there emerged another generation of poets dissatisfied with previous theory and practice. As ever, new groups were formed and new magazines appeared, while *Araragi* continued after a brief late-war suspension and *Myōjō* was relaunched in 1947. A Society of New Tanka Poets was founded in 1946. Its two leading members were Kondō Yoshimi (bn. 1913), a pre-war *Araragi* poet and supporter of 'poetry for social change' and whose work is often ideological, and Miya Shūji (1911-86), some of whose poetry also deals with political situations, but is generally ideology-free. In later years his poems grew more personal.

Further national tanka magazines appeared in later years and one, *Cosmos*, is currently second in national sales volume. Many of the tanka clubs and societies also publish small-circulation journals and the nineties have seen the launch of the English-language *The Tanka Journal*. 1980-81 saw publication of *Gendai tanka zenshu* (The Grand Collection of Modern Tanka) in 15 volumes, making available virtually all the major tanka poems from the beginning of the modern era. A new modernist movement has also arisen, its principle exponent being Tsukamoto Kunio (bn. 1922). Then in 1987 a new voice burst dramatically upon the scene. Tawara Machi (bn. 1962) published her first collection, *Sarada kinenbi* (Salad Anniversary), and it promptly became a best-seller, with two million copies in the first six months. Sales now total around six million and the collection has spawned a musical revue, a TV drama serial and a full-length commercial film. Tawara's tanka affirm humanity using everyday subject-matter and down-to-earth language. Critics claim her poems are too 'light' and superficial, but supporters (pointing to the sales figures) say they precisely capture the needs of the modern nation, especially its younger generation, whose attitude to life is that any deep analysis is in the end futile, a waste of time.

Tanka in the West

As for tanka in the West, the form is only relatively recently making a noticeable impact. It may be that, for many people, tanka apparently lacked the radical, intriguing differences in style and content which marked haiku. At first look, there are several established short Western forms that seem to serve equally well as lyrical poetry. And tanka has lacked a Blyth or Henderson to 'explain' and promote it. But there have been a few pioneers persevering over the years. The Americans Sanford Goldstein and Neal Henry Lawrence were amongst them, Goldstein having been writing tanka around 30 years and aiming to compose ten a day! He has had three collections published and has co-translated English-language versions of

collections by Takuboku, Saito and Yosano Akiko. Goldstein's tanka range widely in subject-matter and, for the same reasons that many English-language haiku poets ignore 'syllable count', are invariably free-form. Lawrence on the other hand, who has been writing since 1976 and has also had three collections published, writes in strict 5-7-5-7-7 form and, perhaps because he is a priest, avoids all vulgarity.

Another American, Jane Reichhold, has also promoted tanka through her publishing house, AHA Books, and most especially through the annual Mirrors International *Tanka Splendor* Award. Instituted in 1990, this draws 500-600 entries from across the world, 31 of them being selected for a slim anthology by a guest judge, who adds an essay and one tanka of his/her own. In addition, several North American magazines, including *Frogpond* and *Woodnotes*, although primarily haiku journals, now regularly include a tanka section. And in 1994 Sanford Goldstein and Kenneth Tanemura launched North America's first tanka-only journal, the twice-yearly *Five Lines Down*.

In Britain too, a handful of poets have kept the tanka fire burning. Best known is Brian Tasker, whose Bare Bones Press has published several of Brian's own collections, as well as eight issues of *Bare Bones* magazine containing many tanka by other poets. Tasker invariably writes free-form, whereas fellow-countryman Anthony Knight not only adheres to 5-7-5-7-7 but also tends to follow classical waka themes, yet both have featured in past *Tanka Splendor* anthologies. *Blithe Spirit* has also promoted tanka, regularly publishing members' work since 1992.

The countries from which entries to *Tanka Splendor* and the Japanese-published *Tanka Journal* emanate, indicate that the form is establishing itself as a viable genre throughout the English-speaking world (and also where English is a 'second' language, eg. Netherlands). In many ways its development in the West and in English is following patterns already established by haiku and senryu, but tanka is moving forward much more quickly. So, English-language composers are defining a 'Western' form which has recognisable allegiance to the Japanese parent but is setting, redefining and expanding its own norms and bounds. The existence of *The Tanka Journal* implies Japanese acceptance and support for these trends, as does the increasing volume of tanka written in English by Japanese (together with publication of more and more English translations of both classical waka and modern tanka). The Tawara-phenomenon, the many clubs and magazines, even the continuing popularity of the annual 'contest' to write a tanka and have the honour of being selected to read it before the Emperor and his family on New Year's Day, show that tanka is in the best of health in its country of origin, while it is clear that it is now firmly on the way to emulating haiku in acceptance and assimilation throughout much of the rest of the world.

This essay draws extensively (sometimes more or less verbatim) from Prof. Makoto Ueda, *Modern Japanese Tanka: an Anthology*, Columbia U P, 1996. Other sources are Atsuo Nakagawa, *Tanka in English: in Pursuit of World Tanka*, New Currents International, 1990, and chapters 5 & 13 of William J Higginson & Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*, Kodansha, 1985. My Grateful Thanks to them all.

Note that for Japanese poets I have followed the old convention of family name first, followed by given name.

1 As quoted in Higginson & Harter, *The Haiku Handbook* (see the paragraph above)

Tanka 1

Returning alone
to the chill, the silence:
braving the stairs ...
her favourite turquoise slippers
tidily beside our bed

John Shimmin

sad thoughts
after a happy
weekend ...
i need a shave
as well

winters here
& i should get
some shoes - but
i buy a book of poems
& wear them instead

i light the fire
with some
old poems -
but its just
as cold

Bill Wyatt

A full frontal view
through the wide-open door:
a naked woman
old shrunken and pitiable
waits for someone to dress her

In the cathedral
vast and untenanted
I sit alone: as its dead Christ
fades away in the gloom
I ponder his absence

Edward D Glover

pensioner
in a dark room
listening to the wind
wrapping round
the flagpole

ai li

two swans
preen after mating ...
this Valentine's Day
my gift -
crisp air, crossing the lake

futile task
shuffling information
i face a screen
with the news of your dying
and nowhere to file it

[for Chris]

Martin Lucas

At a used bookstore
I bought a worn-out book
once owned by my friend
His words on its pages
better than the author's

At a used bookstore
I bought a book
and came home to see it
in the old desk drawer
well thumbed years before

Mokuo Nagayama

we knew this place
these sky-reflecting puddles
once a well-loved walk
bare branches casting shadows
arum berries piercing dead leaves

Ruth Robinson

after all the years
the names of your old boyfriends
sometimes come to mind
though i know that you love me
they still cause me discomfort

years ago
on the banks on lake sardis
we rolled in the leaves
made passionate love -
it still makes me smile

F Matthew Blaine

Seen from the slow train
during dull drizzle:
yellow forsythia; each bush
like a warm fire glowing
in the leafless gardens

Frank Williams

Haiku

strollers kiss
the clash of antlers
awkwardly locking

Matthew Paul

sudden wind
a butterfly's shadow
blows across the path

just for a second
a fox stares down
my headlights

Frank Dullaghan

Waiting in the heat,
the faint *click* of pine cones
just as we parted

Jim Norton

Just before I woke
from spring sleep, we exchanged vows
of eternal love

Waiting for someone
in the land of mañana --
days getting longer

Makoto Tamaki

bedsheets
frozen
on the moonlit line

riverside jazz pub
arriving for the gig
sunset on the water

David Cobb

Byron Jackson

O miracle !
the frog sitting on
Bashō's tomb

Yasuhiko Shigemoto

reflections
young anglers absorbed
tying knots

Ruth Robinson

from a passing train -
an anonymity of anglers
in heavy rain

Bamboo Shoot

After the shower,
bowed over concrete,
Peonies

Patricia V Dawson

through binoculars
the gleam of sunlight
a greenfinch's beak

unlacing the shoe
on his sole
mud from the gravesite

Alan J Summers

water dripping from
the low, heavy lilac tree
long after rain

Linda Marshall

Under the fountain's
curtain of water, a god
lies covered with moss

On the villa wall
sundial's moving shadow --
slow windscreen-wiper

James Kirkup

Snapping
black heather twigs --
the whiteness!

Guiding the way
heaped stones
of the dead

Ken Jones

in total blackness
the walls and furniture
seem too close

pheasant drumming
in time with the blood
pounding in my ears

janice m bostok

evening -
the herd heads gatewards
the traffic thins

High Force -
over the thunder of water
a cuckoo calls

Jackie Hardy

tissue paper kisses
melting
in the rain

Maggie West



Museum of Haiku Literature Award

Annie Bachini chooses Tsunehiko Hoshino's

four legs outstretched,
a turtle floats -
first cherry blossoms

This haiku makes me feel at one with the world; it reminds me of my bond with other matter, and that life goes on after 'death'.

Tsunehiko Hoshino skilfully evokes the feeling that the turtle and the cherry blossoms are separate from each other yet linked by his use of 'four', 'floats' and 'first'. Alliteration, used in this way, also enhances the recreation of the haiku moment.

I would like to thank Tsunehiko Hoshino for writing something which touches nature within me in such an incredibly deep way without feeling in the least bit heavy.

Thoughts on English Tanka Form

Richard Goring

Tanka is quite different from haiku. It is a lyric poem, usually with personal and subjective elements and meaning deriving from the interplay of a natural component and an emotional one, all set within a basic structure. Yet many of the considerations which have applied to haiku form during its development into English-language haiku are equally applicable to tanka. All the considerable structural differences between Japanese and English are applicable, as are the different cultural and historical backgrounds. It should come as no surprise then, that tanka in English, after a beginning in which most poems were written in five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, are now increasingly appearing in a much more 'free-form' style and with rather fewer than 31 syllables.

In a short article in the Summer 1995 issue of the U S published tanka journal, *Five Lines Down*, William J Higginson discusses issues of poem length, using a classical waka and two English translations of it to illustrate. Higginson writes, "Given the relative equivalence of a line of English pentameter and the unity of five-plus-seven sounds in traditional Japanese poetry, I might suggest lines with two and three accented beats to correspond to the five-sound and seven-sound units of Japanese tanka, respectively. This was proposed for haiku in English by the British scholar R H Blyth. Within that framework, for a tanka one might want to aim, loosely, for a total of twenty to twenty-five syllables in English." Higginson then gives his own suggested translation of the same waka, laid out according to this formula and totalling 24 syllables. It reads well, aided by his "preference for translations uncluttered with capitals [other than for proper names] and punctuation The lack of punctuation allows a free flow of meaning for readers to move around in, guided gently by line breaks".

Higginson concludes by noting that the Japanese tanka is a formal poem of "relatively set length and relatively normal metrical units, [and] it is insulting to the Japanese tradition to suggest that any English lyric poem in five lines, however long, may be called a tanka." Last year's *Tanka Splendor* judge, Larry Gross, also dwelt upon form in his Comments, opening with a quote from Jane Reichhold, "[tanka] seems to have tremendous elasticity to change and grow in content while remaining basically the same in form and technique for over 1,300 years." (from the Introduction to *Wind Five Folded*, AHA Books, 1994). Gross suggests that, if aspects of established form are sacrificed to innovation and originality, "we must compensate the careful reader with abundance in other areas."

Both Gross and Higginson seek to warn against accepting any five-line English lyric poem as 'tanka in English'. No doubt they have in mind the current situation where some magazine and anthology editors publish all manner of unlikely three-liners as 'haiku'. But one particular tanka trend, remarked upon by Gross (who

then selected some examples for *Tanka Splendor 1995*) and which poses a few problems of its own, is the emergence of a highly 'compressed' form. Some of these are comparable with haiku in syllable count and overall length and it is only the emotional content which immediately distinguishes them (conversely, one must beware the 'expanded haiku' pretending to be a tanka). Gross reflects, "It is not so much a question of whether the tanka should shrink to accommodate the thought as it is that a thought should grow to take advantage of what a tanka can do."

Returning to Summer 1995 *Five Lines Down*, Sanford Goldstein weighs-in with a short article on the subject of form. Goldstein acknowledges the validity of Higginson's approach, but also notes "Edward Seidensticker's assertion that two-line tanka in iambics with a total of twenty-three or twenty-four syllables may also be possible." He further remarks on Fr. Neal Henry Lawrence's preference for strict 5-7-5-7-7 syllable form in English and concludes, "All of these approaches may result in good tanka. Tanka remains for me an open form."

Professor Goldstein also considers rhythm, noting the established three/two division of traditional tanka, with the first three lines 'responded to' by the last two lines. While acknowledging the "enormous good sense" of this, he would not want to restrict tanka rhythm to that pattern. He then gives several examples of other splits (and of none) from Akiko Yosano's *Midaregami* (Tangled Hair), as translated by himself and Professor Shinoda (Tuttle, 1987). I am indebted to Professor Goldstein for his permission to reproduce those examples here:

- 3/2: Only the sculptor's fame / Attracted me / When young, / But how
exquisite now / The Buddha's face! (#162)
- 2/3: Sleeves raised / As if to strike her love, / She tries to turn the gesture /
Into / A dance! (#129)
- 1/4: How can I meet him? / Four years ago / His tears fell / On this hand /
That now beats a dancer's drum (#131)
- 4/1: Purple my shadow / On the grass / As I walk the fields / This
morning, / My hair combed in the spring breeze (#22)
- 5 lines down: Do you know / Who bit her sleeve / At the Osaka inn /
Reading your poem / That cold autumn day? (#41)

All the foregoing suggests that variety in approach to form in English-language tanka is certainly acceptable, yet we should not stray too far from the basic pattern of the Japanese original. As Larry Gross remarks, "A form evolves and persists over time because it does certain things exceedingly well." Such a philosophy has held for many haiku poets over many years, yet has not prevented the evolution of a number of distinctively 'Western English-language' sub-forms. If 'English' tanka develops similarly, then the genre has a likely future in the West, alongside and additional to the 'home-grown' englyn, cinquain, limerick, sonnet, and others.

Senryu

the graveyard -
last year's mourners
now here

ai li

dog checking scents
at the end of his lead
a man waits patiently

David Steele

last guitar lesson
the boy who practised least
brings me two Mars bars

answering the phone
I swallow
half my toothpaste

Fred Schofield

stranger on the 'phone
but not selling anything
stranger still

Douglas M Henly

before the icon
incense smoke touches
the Orthodox beard

Alzheimers' room -
a thin light disperses
through Venetian blinds

David Cobb

Proud housewife
before dry cleaning
washing the clothes

Paul Amphlett

Erie Canal trip
A mountain around the bend -
Man made of garbage

F Matthew Blaine

village veterans
tapping around the square
signal coffee time

white at her temples
delivering papers
from a secondhand pram

John Shimmin

Matthew Paul

seeing afresh
the child in the school photograph
- a gap in her teeth

Annie Bachini

At Omaha beach :
from bunkers of Nazi gall,
the stench of relief

As the Brit haijin
reads out his latest haiku,
a Japanese smiles

James W Hackett

Patricia V Dawson

When I'm in one
cat's in the other --
easy chairs!

last spoonful
in the coffee jar escapes
as usual

Ken Jones

Ruth Robinson

after the slow dance
her breasts' impression
on my mind

Frank Dullaghan

In his explanatory essay in *This Tanka World of Strings*¹, Sanford Goldstein distinguishes three types of linked tanka presentation. First is the tanka string - poems tied to a single subject. Professor Goldstein writes, "Ideally all poems in a tanka string are connected at every point in the same way a string is connected infinitely by minuscule atoms." He notes that Japanese tanka poets have been writing strings for many years and cites poems 124-134 on the *maiko* (dancing girls) of Kyoto in Akiko Yosano's *Midaregami* (Tangled Hair) of 1901 and poems 35-49 on the New Year in Takuboku's *Kanashiki gangu* (Sad Toys) of 1912. A detailed analysis of the latter string forms a major part of the essay.

"A key assertion I want to make is that each tanka in a string is connected to the preceding tanka and provides the impetus for the tanka following." Each has a "transitional pull". The tanka in a string are connected merely thematically, while those in the second type, the tanka sequence, are connected both thematically and, invariably, chronologically - they are "organic". Goldstein also states that sequences "end with some dramatic change, some dramatic awareness, realized by the poet" and this may or may not be found in a tanka string. He gives as a sequence example, Mokichi Saitō's 'The Dying Mother' in *Shakkō* (Red Lights) of 1913, suggesting it may be the longest sequence (59 poems) in Japanese tanka (Goldstein's own *At the Hut of the Small Mind*² is probably the longest sequence in English, at 120 tanka). The essay then looks in detail at another *Shakkō* sequence, the five-tanka long 'Whistling'. Incidentally, Goldstein states that Japanese themselves do not distinguish between string and sequence, *rensaku* being applied to any unitary group of tanka, the word is said to have first been used by Sachio Ito in his 1902 essay, *Rensaku no shumi* (a Taste for Tanka Sequence).

Lastly, Goldstein names the double tanka string, a form which he created with Kenneth Tanemura and first described in *Frogpond*, Spring 1994. It "is not an organic sequence but a string between two poets", each in turn writing a tanka. Two short double tanka strings by Goldstein and Tanemura are included in the booklet, along with five individual strings by each of them.

It is, of course, possible to extend this concept and attempt triple (and more) tanka strings and even (a **real** challenge, this) double (and more) tanka sequences. Goldstein and others have produced further multi-author strings, but I am unaware of any such sequences to date. Are there any BHS tanka poets interested in rising to these challenges? If so, please do contact me.

1 *This Tanka World of Strings*, Sanford Goldstein & Kenneth Tanemura, self-published, 1995. Available from Sanford Goldstein, Maison Dankuro #602, 11-28 Megumi-cho, Sekiya, Niigata-shi 951, Japan. \$6.00 in USA, \$8.00 elsewhere, post-paid.

2 *At the Hut of the Small Mind*, Sanford Goldstein, AHA Books, 1992. Out-of-print, but text available free via the Internet on web site: <http://www.Faximum.com/AHA!POETRY>

To illustrate the foregoing notes, there follows a tanka string from the pen of BHS founder member Dee Evetts, while overleaf is a string from guest contributor Kenneth Tanemura. Both works are concerned with long-standing tanka themes of love and desire. Enjoy!

a tanka string

I dress myself
in a very discreet sulk
until the pillow
you hurl catches me
behind the knees

my concentration
ruined by your sucking
on a vitamin tablet
until I'm inspired
to have one myself

for your birthday
I could give you
your very own stapler
but then would you
still visit my desk?

dispute at work
let's sleep on it I say
thinking we will probably
talk it over
with our wives

all out of T-shirts
I put on that gift
you never wore
and five years on
it ends in laughter

Dee Evetts

Her: a tanka string

just when I thought
yesterday's stranger
captured my heart
this girl standing under gray clouds
fills my world with light

thought I'd fill up
a page of poems
for her,
but only one
does justice to her beauty

she gazes upward
though the stars
have not yet appeared
I imagine they anticipate
her pretty, watchful eyes

so beautiful
I pretended
not to look at her
my pretense as thin
as onion-skin paper

I could not help
drinking in her beauty
as the parched garden soil
absorbs this
late-winter rain

this stranger
in a flower-printed dress
I admired for only moments
I struggle to reconcile
that I will never see her again

seeing her outside
the restaurant
intoxicated by her beauty
I no longer notice the effects
of two glasses of champagne

Kenneth Tanemura 3/3/96

Tanka 2

Time was when I asked
"Do you see me in your dreams?"
Now I keep silent,
I know that I am living
within someone else's head

Patricia V Dawson

under my beret
I'm bald,
a cold slice
of moon
beyond the bus stop sign

that road
with only a single man
on it--
how long the silence,
how extended the shadow

Sanford Goldstein

this evening
all the birds are singing late -
so this is spring :
at last she is a woman -
the change has set her free

Honour Thomasin Stedman

ignoring "Bonsai"
in the garden centre,
with half closed eyes
the old man studies a shrub
- looking into the future

drawing the curtains
on the day the clocks go back
she bathes in sunlight
and once again my heart moves
- spring morning in autumn

David Steele

the taste of mist
in my mouth as we talk
and your body
slowly dissolving
like a shadow in the night

summer clover
crushed beneath our bodies
honeybee flies on
no nectar here for him
all the sweetness is for us

Annie Bachini

John W Hadler

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.

Martin Berner (German) and David Cobb (English)

zwei Igelstacheln
kleben noch
am rechten Vorderrad

two hedgehog prickles
still stuck to
my right front wheel

solang ihre Hand
noch warm ist
berichte ich vom Pilzesuchen

so long as her hand
retains any warmth, I talk
about the mushroom hunt

noch macht der Schlitten
eine Rostspur
den Hang hinauf

still a trace of rust
scribbled by the toboggan
on the slope

Nobuyuki Yuasa (Japanese and English)

nanimo sezu
kokoroto asobu
oraga haru

Freed from all duties,
I frolicked with my own heart -
Best of my New Years.

Zoran Doderović (Serbo-Croat and English)

Prolećni vetar
gle, i u rukavima
malog deteta.

The wind of spring -
there it is, in the sleeves
of a small child, too.

Poslednji grumen
uglja stavljam u peć i
molim se Bogu.

The last lump of coal.
I'm putting it on the stove
with a prayer to God.

Humberto Gatica (Spanish and English)

Cielo azul
En la colina verde
Una casa roja.

Blue sky
On the green hill
A brick house.

Spring

Cockerel sings
In the echo...
Spring rain

Humberto Gatica

stray cherry petal -
before the approaching storm,
butterfly flutter

Keith Coleman

churchyard
in the chalk hills, snowdrops
whitening graves

the silence
of the beech wood
bluebells

Norman Barraclough

Sparrows
courting
in the A-bomb Dome

Yasuhiko Shigemoto

out of spring
into the U-bahn - each step
increasingly cool

scent of cut grass
coming across
the Health Clinic wall

Martin Lucas

Paschal sunshine:
through the bonfire's incense
new daffodils

between each cluster
of daffodils - deep cracks
in the earth

Bruce Leeming

Annie Bachini

a church among trees
yew and blossoming chestnut
the plain-glass windows

Dermot O'Brien

a rabbit
casting long shadows
on frosted grass

Ruth Robinson

a long March -
at two the clocks go forward
in the frost

Easter wedding -
among the orange blossom
spits of hail

David Cobb

A bone cold March morning -
on leaving the station I join
a sea of slapped faces

Sunday morning quiet -
in the empty car park's centre
a lone cherry blooms

Frank Williams

Under the cherry tree,
the empty market stall
offers petals

Jim Norton

Spring sunshine
last Autumn's sloes
still on the hedge

wind bent hawthorn
no blossom
windward side

Anita Packwood

Maggie West

wild mountain landscape -
refilling my painting jar
with spring meltwater

John Shimmin

early spring
winding up balsawood planes
with his son

between showers -
an umbrella dries
in a tea shop

Alan J Summers

ai li

Dear Editor

I'm not absolutely sure that I understand what Annie Bachini is saying in her letter on the subject of 'Zen-less Haiku', but here is a tentative response.

Clearly if 'essence' is regarded as a 'place' then it is as difficult to get to as 'paradise' or 'heaven'. We who are heirs to a lengthy tradition started by Plato all too easily fall into his trap of siting 'essence' in some obscure realm separate from life as we imagine we are living it. Indeed, I note that in my original article I unwittingly wrote, acknowledging the difficulty of getting to 'essence', 'sustain access to' it - a use of words which makes it into a place!

It's not so much a question of finding a 'place'; it's more about becoming aware of a process - now you see it, now [you are so engrossed in the endless piffle of life that] you don't. For me, this process is usefully represented by Ouspensky's pendulum metaphor. When applied to something like 'personality', the metaphor suggests that, far from 'annihilating ego' (Annie's phrase, not mine), the object of the exercise is to become very familiar with the proliferation of 'I's (source of Annie's "conscious" and "unconscious" 'stuff'?) that operate at either side of the pendulum swing and then engage in 'Inner [Mental] Stop' at its nadir.

In the full awareness that, before the day is out, you will inevitably *project* yourself again into one or other of the many 'I's that you choose to allow to run you there is also a paradoxical freedom to choose to self-remember. This way, far from 'bypassing all the influences... since... conception' you become more able to do a kind of circus act between them and thus reduce them to size - not very big compared with the flooding in of 'Third Force' that occurs at the base of the pendulum's swing where momentous haiku are born.

The difficulty of feeling 'essence' for me does not emanate from Annie's 'Protestant work ethic' (God forbid!) but from the way absorption into life as she is lived gets in the way of my being able to cue myself into the basically very simple matter of self-remembering - normally I just forget to do it! Forget to do 'Inner Stop'.

Colin Blundell, Wisbech, Cambs.

[This correspondence is now closed - Jackie Hardy, Editor]

Layout and Typesetting by

The Cat's Yawn Press

27 Park Street : Westcliff-on-Sea : Essex SS0 7PA

Reviews

Modern Japanese Tanka: an Anthology, Makoto Ueda (ed & trans), Columbia University Press, ISBN 0-231-10432-4 (pbk). £13.00

Makoto Ueda is Professor of Japanese at Stanford University and well-steeped in the English language and North American culture. He is already known to many BHS members as the author of Kodansha's classic, *Matsuo Bashō, the Master Haiku Poet*. Here he turns attention to tanka and begins with a 28-page Introduction that briefly outlines the history of classical waka, then moves to a more detailed account of the rise and development of modern tanka. In this he sets out the main phases and movements of the past 100 years, identifying some of the leading lights and their poetic visions. This is up-to-date to the point of mentioning the Kobe earthquake and the poetry that came out of it.

There are then twenty 'chapters', each devoted to a specific, prominent poet, and commencing with a page or two of biographic details followed by twenty of their tanka. These are given, two to a page, in English, with *romaji* transliterations (and occasional footnotes) below. I cannot vouch for the 'accuracy' of Professor Ueda's translations, but they are a joy to read and I sense that he has done his able best to "capture the distinct voices of individual poets" as the back-cover blurb puts it.

The poets range from Tekkan Yosano through Shiki, Takuboku, Miyazawa and Tsukamoto (and others who deserve to be better known) to Machi Tawara. There is also a very useful Bibliography detailing the works of each poet (and any biographical and critical studies) published in English. This even notes odd tanka in translation in magazines and other anthologies, etc.

Anyone remotely interested in modern tanka *must* have a personal copy of this important book. £13 for all that history, biography and 400 poems is a real snip!

RJG

the wind blown clouds, Brian Tasker, Bare Bones Press, [redacted]
[redacted] £5.00/\$10.00 post free

Brian Tasker is arguably the finest tanka poet in Britain today and this collection, drawn from his writings 1990-1995, serves to confirm that claim.

In two sections, the first contains 18 poems from one of Brian's previous booklets, *Housebound in Nirvana* (published 1993 and reviewed in *BS* 3/3). Some of these tanka have now been revised but the 18 still convey a 'love affair' story sequence. The second section of 20 poems include several from an even earlier booklet, *Notes from a Humdrum* (1991), as well as others of much more recent inspiration. Just as before, some of these tanka have been revised since original publication. As

already indicated, Brian's tanka cover the traditional theme of love, but they also dwell upon a range of other subjects. Many of the poems convey a sense of time slowly passing, of things evolving out of and towards 'nothing' - in other words they are steeped in *sabi-wabi*. At the same time, the style is generally thoroughly 'Western free-form'. Two examples from each section:

falling silent
lost in wonder, our faces gaze
at this moment now
slowed
to a heartbeat

a dead friend
buried
deep within
the year's first dream -
my forgotten grief

waking alone
3 a.m.
the night stripped bare
by the nakedness
of your absence

after all these years
only to feel it now;
my father's walk
in my walk
my son's walk

In addition to the poetry there is a two-page Introduction to the form, which is too short to do the subject justice but does seem to say quite a lot about Brian's personal approach to tanka.

Although some poems are stronger than others, as in most collections, there are none which 'fail'. And those who aspire to write tanka should not fail to obtain and study this collection.

The booklet itself is much as we have come to expect from Bare Bones - 15 x 10.5 cm, grey, slightly rough-textured pages, creamy card covers of rag, made in India, and green rag end-papers, all bound and tied in Japanese style with matching green ribbon. A pleasure to handle as well as a pleasure to read.

RJG

Drop-formed Islands: a Collection of Haiku in English, Kohjin Sakamoto, Eidsensha Co., £4.00 post-free from David Cobb

This is a specially imported book, obviously intended for Japanese English-speakers. Text in Japanese and Chinese characters appears at the beginning and end as well as with each poem. Occasionally there are insets in English which seem to be suggestions for alternative translation. I find this often throws light on the poems in question.

There is a wide variety of types of haiku in this book, plenty of implicit empathy and several exquisite moments:

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

So, despite various irritations, I strongly recommend it.

Each poem is accompanied by details of where it was first published or which prize it won (irritation number one), plus a photo relevant (usually) to the subject. At first I found the photos an attractive idea but in the longer term they become superfluous and even burden the reader by attempting to tie the poems down too specifically or providing something so obvious it's unnecessary. In:

evening crows
winging past
my jail window

who needs a picture of crows in flight? I'd rather imagine them and let the poem speak. Also, the fact that *each* of the 90-odd haiku has a photo is oppressive in itself.

The poems themselves are sometimes marred, often with one particularly clumsy technique:

swallowing
the fall dusk ...
carp

The carp is not swallowing the dusk, neither is anything or anybody else. In my view, the poetry of haiku is not that which the poet attempts to contrive but what he stimulates the reader to create for himself by way of a response. The above poem seems to set out to take over the reader's imagination. Optical illusions-cum-poetic conceits like this put too much stress on a haiku's brief form. Reading such efforts, I feel on the outside of a private joke. There are too many examples of this in Sakamoto's collection. There are also some arty-farty verses:

mon père aveugle
écoutant le son de la
première neige

my blind father
listening to the sound of the
first snow

(my English)

Less irritating but I find it too precious. Possibly all my criticisms are brought about by the poet trying too hard to *make a poem*. This in itself is not always a bad thing but I think a good deal of self-discipline is needed in deciding what one allows to be published.

Experimentation, however, is essential to keep any art form alive. The following opens up new possibilities without jarring against my sense of what a haiku is:

hearing aid off,
left in a forest
of whispers

Snakes in the Grass, Makoto Tamaki (with an Introduction by James Kirkup),
Hub Editions, ISBN 870653 48 3, £5.00

For Makoto Tamaki, snakes lurk in the underworld of his mind, and surface in this book between each of the four seasons.

A snake phobia -
suddenly a foreboding
makes the grass shiver

In medieval times the serpent was worshipped by Hermetists as Ouroboros, and the hermetic process of opposites meeting is apparent in Makoto Tamaki's love-hate relationship with snakes.

His golden eyes seem
to be full of pain - the snake
swallowing his prey

One of the horrors
of this world has disappeared -
snake hibernating

Despite the title, only a small proportion of the over 160 haiku in this book are about snakes. Each haiku contains a season word and 'snake' itself is a summer season word in the *saijiki*. All are composed in 5-7-5 form.

Makoto Tamaki is an extremely honest writer - none of his haiku are contrived and there are no attempts to be 'clever'. The haiku convey an emotional and/or physical closeness to whatever subject he is writing about, and in many cases this enables him to exhibit a deep empathy for the subject.

In some of his work I feel that he is projecting too much of himself onto the subject, but on the whole, even though his haiku often contain his thoughts, he manages not to do this.

He has the ability to see the significance of everyday events, and is also good at highlighting the mystical in natural phenomena.

Breaking a fresh fig
in my fingers - hundreds of
motionless maggots

This valley's heaven
is long enough to contain
all the Milky Way

Some people may not like the clusterings of different subjects in the book - this is not confined to 'snakes', it also happens in the season sections: perhaps a few haiku could have been left out.

I particularly like Makoto Tamaki's style, which I think is unique, and although I do not write in 5-7-5 form myself, I accept that it is important to him.

One haiku which stands out to me, partly because it is one of the few that he is distanced from, is:

Through cherry blossoms
I can see a hand writing
sums on the blackboard

It has a filmic quality, without being contrived.

I very much enjoyed this book, and hope that Makoto Tamaki will continue to be himself.

It is hard to be
oneself when one is a snake
dancing to a flute

AB

In Each Other's Footsteps. David Rice, available from the author at [redacted]
[redacted] \$11.00

"I have taken nine traditional Japanese tanka subjects, plus 'oak' (which I substituted for 'bamboo'), and for each one have written five tanka from five different stages of life." So says the opening sentence of David Rice's Preface, and that dictates the tall and thin format of this pleasing little 9 x 25.5 cm booklet.

The five life-cycle stages chosen are 'child', 'adolescent', 'young adult', 'middle-aged' and 'older', and so five tanka descend each right-hand page, whilst the left-hand carries a small drawing by Kay Anderson, plus the subject title. David, a psychologist by profession, writes pleasing tanka. Here are two examples, the adolescent on 'snow' and the middle-aged on 'sea route':

we were singing
with the radio
before the skid
now I hear how quietly
snow falls at night

just off the coast
a gray whale swims north
with her calf
some mornings the ocean sings
the way it used to

There are matt dark green card covers with silver ink title and drawing and two pages of quotes on tanka from various recent North American magazines and books. The whole makes enjoyable reading and is recommended. The price includes postage within the USA - UK purchasers should add a dollar for surface mailing, more for airmail.

RJG

head aching
from reading all those
thirty-ones
I pour a double malt
and call it a day

Richard Goring



Price £1.50

ISSN 1353-3320