

Journal of
The British Haiku Society

Blithe Spirit



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Journal Of The British Haiku Society

Blithe Spirit

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Blithe Spirit welcomes, and exists as a forum for, diverse statements about the writing and appreciation of haiku and kindred forms of verse. The Editor takes entire responsibility for the selection of items for publication and the layout of the magazine, but wishes it to be known that opinions expressed in articles and letters do not necessarily reflect that of the Editor. **Blithe Spirit** is published four times a year, cover-dated March, June, September and December.

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Cover design by David Walker

Editorial

This issue of Blithe Spirit pays tribute to the life and work of R.H. Blyth who was born a hundred years ago this month. We are fortunate to be able to mark this occasion with three memoirs written by people who worked with him and knew him personally. For this, many thanks to David Friend who has gone to considerable trouble to collect together these reminiscences and to Bruce Leeming for sending them; through the eyes of their authors we catch a glimpse, not so much of Blyth the scholar and writer, but of Blyth the warmly human, honest, humorous and sometimes inconsistent man.

Blithe Spirit 8/4 also sees the end of my first year as Editor and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for your encouraging responses; you certainly helped to keep me going on days when the submission pile was mounting and the computer had gone on the blink. Apart from the pleasure of reading your letters, knowing what you like (and also what you don't like) helps to keep me in touch. Concern has been expressed that the advent of longer articles are in danger of sidelining haiku; I am very anxious that this does not happen and we are currently exploring the possibility of bringing out an annual BS Supplement magazine that can carry articles upwards of 2,000 words.

The season for this next issue is *Winter*; deadline for submissions Feb. 6th and - it seems to need saying again - no more than twelve haiku at a time, *please*.

Errata

Apologies to the following whose haiku should have read:

water trough ...
a horse
drinking sky

ai li

miles off
the train stops
here

Leo Lavery

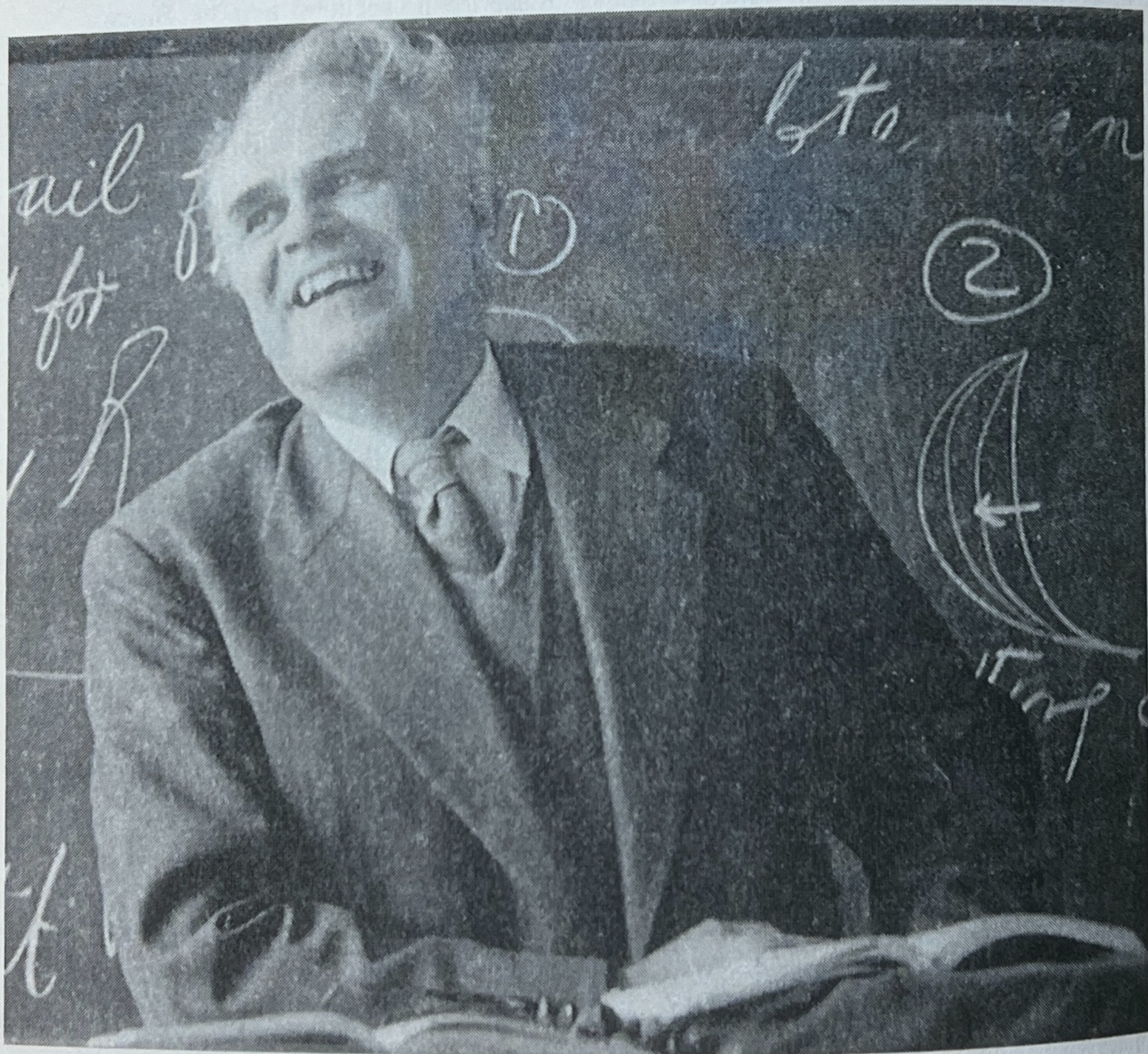
cicada welcome
in the evening twilight
ancestral voices

Bill Wyatt (Haibun)

R. H. BLYTH

(1898 - 1964)

A Tribute



Ever since my arrival in Japan in 1957 to take up a teaching position in the Faculty of Literature at Waseda University, I have considered myself to have been doubly fortunate in finding on my arrival not only was R.H. Blyth teaching in the Graduate Faculty, but his house, which was on the Campus of the Gakushūin University (the former Peer's School), was in fact less than ten minutes walk from the house I had been lucky enough to rent in Mejiro. So began what became a cherished friendship that lasted for seven years until his death in 1964. Despite his modesty, he presented an imposing figure, with his clear blue eyes, always kindly, surmounted by a great shock of silvery-gray hair which was already showing signs of turning white.

During those years, unlike today, there were only a handful of Englishmen teaching in the Japanese universities in Tokyo and the Kanto area. I soon found his friendship to be a source of towering strength, always the personification of kindness, giving freely of his time, knowledge and advice to anyone who sought it, all of which greatly eased my way into what for me was then the bewildering world of academic life in Japan.

He would invite me to meetings of the Gakushūin English-Speaking Society as he wished to give his students every opportunity to meet as many English people as possible. Every year we would serve as judges at inter-university speech, debating and drama contests held in various universities in Tokyo and the Kanto area.

What may not be generally known in the West is the important role he played during the early years of the occupation. In 1946 when Akihito, the present Emperor, was a twelve-year-old schoolboy at the Middle School of the Gakushūin, he was engaged on the recommendation of Mr. Yamanishi, the President of the Gakushūin, to tutor the young Emperor in English. This began his association, not only with the Crown Prince as a student, but also with the Imperial Family itself. By the time I arrived, of course, the Crown Prince had already graduated from the Gakushūin. Their friendship remained, and it was at Blyth's invitation that I first met the present Emperor, when in 1958 as Crown Prince he visited the Gakūshuin.

It is not surprising to find that at the present moment there are three senior Japanese professors, all former colleagues of mine, who are now teaching in the

Faculty of Literature and the Graduate Faculty, who were students of Blyth. This bears witness to the fact that Blyth's influence as a teacher is still alive in Japan today; I have taken the liberty of asking one or two of them to share some of their memories with the readers of *Blithe Spirit*.

Just to hear him talk about Japanese poetry, Zen Buddhism, or for that matter any aspect of Japanese history and culture, was an education in itself. Anyone who had the privilege of knowing him as I did during those seven years will have had their lives enriched. I have never met anyone who knew him who did not regard him with the greatest respect and affection.

R. H. Blyth

Misako Himuro

He made his bicycle look smaller and more frail under him than it actually was. He was by no means a big or bulky man, but there was something like a solid weight of existence about him. He was a vegetarian, but he said he was strongly built 'thanks to my ancestors who lived on meat'. He used to come to my university to deliver lectures once a week. From his home on the hill of Mejiro he always came riding on a bike, with his books wrapped up in a *furoshiki* of a sombre colour. He had in his eyes a somewhat childlike or even mischievous look, which indicated that he was in a good humour. But he was hardly ever in a bad temper as far as I can remember.

I was then a graduate student. Over one Easter vacation he asked me to come to his house and help him to finalise one of his books. It was a pleasure to see him in his study where the walls were closely lined with books and check translations of *senryu* and *kobanashi*. The latter required a little knowledge of palaeography, for he used to buy reprints of early illustrated woodblock editions at secondhand bookshops and take them home in his *furoshiki*.

He used to say he would like to combine work with pleasure. In between our work he showed me paintings of Sōtatsu, Brueghel or Klee and opened my eyes to these artists. He never failed to comment on my dress and thus I learned from him how to take care in the combination of colours and shades. Anything sentimental was 'bad' to him, while good taste consisted in being restrained.

We also listened to music — mostly Bach — if time allowed. He was a good musician himself; I think he had tried to play almost every instrument. At the time we worked together he was interested in the clarinet. One day he handed me *The Art of Fugue*, Bach's organ work in four parts, and told me, again for homework, to transcribe the first part for his clarinet with a necessary change of key, and the other three for the organist. He hummed the theme happily and played the first three bars on the harmonium, a handsome instrument with many stops, on the landing just outside his study. Bach was all but a divine being to him. His *Musical Offering* was also among the music I transcribed for him. Later he bought two small harmoniums in a junk shop and, like a magician, combined them together to build up an organ with two manuals. Japan was still poor in those days and there were few organs in Tokyo. Later in England I thought that in Japan he must have missed the roaring organ, whose sound filled a chapel or a cathedral, echoing round and vibrating between the ancient walls. But he never told me what he missed in all those years away from his own country.

As a graduate student I attended his lectures on Milton. A few years later I somehow lost touch with him and time passed without my seeing him. I didn't know that he was ill and then one autumn evening I read of his death in a newspaper. I thought of him with fond memories; he had certainly made an impact on me in my formative years. Some of the things he believed in still remain with me — in the form of my love of Bach and organ music and my distrust, if not total rejection, of sentimentalism. His funeral was held at Gakushūin, the university where he taught during his years in Tokyo. It was a very windy day, early in November; joining a long queue of mourners, I walked up to the altar to bid my last farewell to him.

Misako Himuro is Professor at Waseda University, Tokyo.

Mr. Blyth on a Bicycle

Ryo Nonaka

I cannot be sure of the period when Mr. Blyth began to teach at Waseda University as a part-time professor; but in the early 1950s, when I was a student of the English Literature department, we often saw him coming into the campus at the north gates, riding a bicycle rather speedily in a stately posture. I clearly remember it was a new bicycle, with the rims and spokes of the wheels shining silver.

He let it lean against the wall of a building, nodded at us with an almost imperceptible smile, and promptly disappeared through the door. He looked energetic. In his late fifties he was not so tall — I should say middle-sized, but his frame was sturdy, with a beautiful head, powerful neck, broad shoulders, nimble and strong legs.

I attended Mr. Blyth's lectures on the History of English Literature in 1953. They were most impressive and stimulating. He used to reach the door of our classroom just ten minutes past the fixed hour on Wednesday mornings and stood erect between the teacher's desk and the large blackboard behind him on the wall. He did not say 'Good morning' or take the roll-call, but with his smiling eyes, looked around the room as if counting the number of his audience. About thirty students were constantly present. His one hundred-minute lecture usually consisted of three distinct parts: 1) student's reports, questions and answers 2) interlude of humorous tales, episodes, jokes 3) eloquent exposition of literary theories and criticisms.

During the first part he tried to make us speak in English, but we were all extremely shy. He would have given us some assignments the week before and once I was obliged to speak on D.H. Lawrence's character descriptions, relating them to Freud's theory of Repression and the Unconscious. When Mr. Blyth asked me what I thought 'repression' meant, I could only reply "Control, sir — self-control or restraint." "Right so far," he nodded, "but do you think any control of the unconscious desire is wrong?" "Well, I should say 'no, but ...' I faltered, almost at a loss, "first I want to know exactly what you mean by 'wrong'?"

We had learned by then that it was the best policy to respond to his question with another question, then he would close his eyes for a moment, as if considering how much he should explain to these young, impressionable students. He once admitted that he had sometimes felt a strong desire to go to Hibiya cinema to see John Ford's Western films, but thought he really ought to go straight home and quietly enjoy reading one of Shakespeare's plays. "We often do what we really do not want to do and we do not do what we really want to do," he said.

In the interlude, Mr. Blyth tried to make us laugh — simply and joyfully, telling us humorous episodes of events that had happened to him in the previous week. I remember how cheerfully he talked about 'a nice little restaurant' just outside the north gates. Once he dropped in to it on the way home and as it was a very hot day he ordered an icecream. It came in a pretty glass bowl; the portion was small,

but the taste was delicious — so delicious that he could not refrain from ordering another bowl and then another bowl and then another ... When he had nine empty glass bowls neatly before him on the table he was satisfied. The old hostess, hiding her mouth behind her sleeve and struggling not to laugh, asked payment for only seven bowls of icecream. “I told her ‘nine’,” he said, “but she insisted on seven — a preposterous miscalculation!”

Then Mr. Blyth moved into the final stage of his lecture. I think we could understand his view on literature very well, and it was very interesting and peculiarly original, because it seemed to us a traditional view formulated, paradoxically, with the logic of Western thinking. He once wrote on the blackboard two short sentences from Blake. ‘Every minute particular is holy’. And ‘Without contraries there is no progression.’ These ideas may be radically Romantic, but they are also essentially Japanese — the emphasis on the importance of small things and on the potential of paradox. Blake saw a sportive fly suddenly brushed away by a thoughtless hand; Issa watched an innocent fly earnestly praying before receiving a fatal blow.

In Mr. Blyth’s words, haiku can be defined as ‘poetry that gives you a mild shock.’ The more trivial the subject, the more powerful and persistent the shock it produces. The shock is not only a pleasure, but also a stimulus that brings about a transformation of the reader’s knowledge of the world. The man of letters, therefore, must hold this purpose in view: to renew our estimation of reality — that is, to discover something new in the reality and so give it fresh value.

We never showed our feelings openly, but we all respected Mr. Blyth with mild but warm love mingled with awe. I should say we were always deeply grateful for his wonderful influence, his intellectual capacity and personal generosity. It was really the time when the teacher treated his students as gentlemen and ladies and the students respected their teacher in silence. And our mind’s eye can see him leaving the campus, pushing his brand new bicycle towards the north gates.

I first met Professor Blyth just after I entered the Graduate Faculty of Waseda University. By then I had read several authors, both English and American, but otherwise my knowledge of the literature of both countries was quite rudimentary; I had never read Shakespeare in the original. So, to me, it was a challenge to read Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Professor Blyth's seminar. But, thanks to his interesting and inspiring talks on the author and the book, I soon found his seminar and the book most fascinating and appealing. I found in the book the same problem as in some of the more important plays of Tennessee Williams; essentially a religious problem in the deepest sense of the word and I still feel deeply indebted to Professor Blyth in that his talks and the subject matter he chose for us were the sources of inspiration for my M.A. thesis on Tennessee Williams. It was the best seminar for me at the Graduate Faculty.

I learned later from my friends that he was an authority on Zen Buddhism and very fond of haiku, but in the seminar he never touched on either subject. I feel bound to add that once in a seminar he told us, with some bitterness, that people at the British Embassy thought of him or treated him as a white Japanese. This, in spite of his great achievement in Japanese studies, or, perhaps because of it! He had gone native in the eyes of the British Embassy people who, I imagine, tended to disdain or disapprove of it. But to us he was an English gentleman in every way and in the best sense of the word, who loved Japan with a deep understanding of Buddhism, our culture and our way of life, which could be acquired only through hard work, intuition and above all, sympathy.

He told us how moved he was when, soon after arriving in Japan, he saw Mount Fuji from the train window. The eyes of the young Englishman filled with tears only to discover that it was not Mount Fuji after all. A little later he saw the real Mount Fuji, snow-capped in all its ethereal beauty. I still remember the half-embarrassed, half-amused expression on his face when he told the story, his clear blue eyes and distinguished gray hair.

Yoshitaka Usui is Professor of English Literature at Waseda University.

A modest number of copies of *The Genius of Haiku: Readings from R.H.Blyth* are still available and may be purchased from the Society, price £7.50, post paid.

David Cobb

HAIKU

Paul Quayle

Pear blossoms
on the coalyard floor —
the yardman struggles on

Stonecarvings
ornate the cathedral;
the old gardener smiles

The forecast rain
arrives just as soon
as I get up

Rich neighbour:
even you must limp
when injured

ai li

alone
in london
sinatra's death
on the
radio

your tenderness
as a night
unloads
its stars

Colin Maxwell-Charters

novice-monk
unable to stop stroking
the new habit

senryu

the abbot
smiling at the joke
long forgotten

Gary Hotham

nobody
to overtake —
the mountain path

where we were
where we weren't —
the fireflies disappear

George Marsh

the swollen Aire
flows through the branches
— rolling clouds

watching a cat
decide not to jump —
little gust of grief

Michael Rubinstein

an old body
growing shorter
enjoys longer trousers

senryu

waiting
old flame overdue
pick at scabs

senryu

Stephen Bone

in the subway steps
specks of
stardust

no one
to wave to
as the train pulls out

loose on her finger
her father's
signet ring

Matthew Paul

a half-hour soak
listening to the bubbles
burst

L.A. Davidson

prairie wind
chasing patterns of light
across foxtail

coast to coast trip,
across the Mesa highway
tumbleweeds

Frank Williams

the cat's eyes follow
the water droplet's journey
down the misty window

reflected in glass
the lady in pink
crosses the the road twice

Bill Wyatt

Through the fog, my dog
chases a bright yellow ball —
early morning sun

In the coolness
echo of a bell
crossing the sea

Alan Summers

garden wall —
a bristol cat
bends its shadow

Rod Treseder

sunset rainshower —
my infant daughter's
watery painting

Matt Morden

shards of a bottle —
our shouted warnings
filling the pool

compost heap —
a slug trail across
my cut hair

interview room —
withered leaves of a pot plant
between the questions

Brian Thompson

starling horde bathing —
beneath the bird-bath,
sparrows shower

Martin Lucas

at the end of the road the sunset

on the park bench
a row
of raindrops

Geoffrey Daniel

abandoned apple —
seeing how long you've been gone
by the brown

Yasuhiko Shigemoto

Swallowing birds' eggs
a snake falls down
from the branch

How long
the little girl's tongue —
licking ice-cream

Fred Schofield

rain begins
the scent of escaped
lavatera

Keith Coleman

ink painting,
a magpie feather
spirals

widgeon race
past Lindisfarne —
the whistling wind

midnight
shell oozing along a snail

Alan Peat

Unfolding
a newspaper cutting
of yellowing snow.

Outside my window
a dog barks
the moon up.

Myra Wilkins

Outside
after brushing the cat
bluetits collect fur.

Annie Bachini

after the spring clean
wishing I'd played the music box
one last time

Eric Speight

The empty bottle
just out of reach
of his extended arm.

senryu

Iridescence of dawn
on the sea
two boats glimmer out

Leo Lavery

the sea
suddenly part of
the arrangement

walking the hills
stumbling into
the sky

the old man
trying to catch up with
his walking stick

senryu

Dick Pettit

the old dog
turns his nose away
from a friendly hand

the baby's come at last —
grandpa congratulates
grandmother

Nora Leonard

blood in the kitchen
cutting the pomegranate:
sudden taste of tears

aftermath of rain:
wet wash of gardens,
a dog poised to shake

Hisashi Miyazaki

a cockroach
on the run
in Osaka station

a scorpion
creeping out to the desert
— summer moon

Joanna Ashwell

rose petals
down river
summer days
carried away

Jackie Hardy

side by side feeling the tension

the first move both of us making it

squirrels
loop after loop
along the fence

Reginald Massey

What immense pleasure —
Lolling on a silk carpet
Fondling a good book.

Grace Mathew

her lavender scent
grandfather still keeps
the window closed

POINTS OF DIFFERING VIEWS

The Stairway of Surprise

Gabriel Rosenstock

Reflections on Poetry and Haiku

Somebody said 'nobody writes poetry about parsnips.' Haikuists may — and can and must if they are alive to the moment-to-moment reality of the world. The freedom of haiku is precisely this aesthetic governance in which the subject can never be in bad taste, given it is informed and inspired by the arresting quality of a haiku moment; in the words of Nadezhda Mandelstam, 'a vehicle of world harmony.'

Early Irish lyric poetry had a compressed form and a blessed, clear-eyed view of nature which makes writing haiku in that language a logical continuum of almost 2,000 years of poetry:

The small bird / let a chirp / from its beak: /
I heard / woodnotes, whin- / gold, sudden /
The Lagan / blackbird

(The Blackbird of Belfast Lough, trans. Seamus Heaney)

The Russian linguist, Viktor Kalygin, traces the Irish word *file* (poet) to the Indo-European *wel*, 'to see.' I believe that the art of the haiku teaches us to see. Without it I would not have 'seen' the following, or written this haiku / senryu:

Sop ina ghob / dá nead — / féasóg ar an éan!
A beakful of straw / for its nest — / the bird with whiskers!

Whether the haiku poet relates to all religions, one in particular - the warmth of Tantra or the coolness of Zen - or none, by 'seeing into the life of things' he makes his art sacred. Gabriel Mistral affirms this in *The Artist's Decalogue (IV)*: *Beauty will not be your excuse for luxury or vanity; it is a divine exercise ...* Rumi and Háfez affirm this truth in every line. As do Kabir, Tagore, Angelus Silesius ... But let us see how poets and haikuists tend to differ in their approach. The great Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, wrote:

The startling reality of things / Is my discovery every single day. / Everything is what it is.

The Irish poet, Seán O Ríordáin, wrote ‘Bhí gach rud nite ina nádúr féin...’
Everything was washed in its own nature.

But the haiku poet does not *tell* us this. He shows us. Pessoa goes on to say:

“I was once called a materialist poet and was surprised, because I didn’t imagine I could be called anything at all. I’m not even a poet. I see ...”

The haikuist doesn’t have to tell us this. He/she *sees* and *shows*. Haikuists are ‘Technicians of the Sacred’ — the phrase comes from an anthology from the University of California Press, edited by Jerome Rothenberg, *Poetry from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania*. The Shamanistic literature of native peoples is a recommended diet for haikuists and humbles us. We know so little of nature!

We may or may not agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson, but we cannot lightly dismiss his lecture of 1833, *The Uses of Natural History*, in which he stated that ‘The whole of nature is a metaphor or image of the human mind.’ And he says in his *Essays* (1841), ‘There is one mind common to all mankind.’ Emerson claimed that the insights of poets were truths and that poets use words that ‘mount to Paradise / by the stairway of surprise ...’ Haikuists perform this function more consistently than conventional poets, which is why I’m looking forward to Robert Bebek’s next book *Sanctum* more than I am looking forward to any new book by a living mainstream poet.

Rubén Dario wrote: ‘This is my curse. To dream. For poetry is an iron vest with a thousand cruel spikes that I wear around my soul. The bloody paints let fall the endless drops of my melancholy ...’ If Dario’s curse was to dream, the haikuist’s blessing is not needing to. Paul Celan wrote:

“I need a form that my style cannot discover, a bud of thought that wants to be a rose ...”

Might that form have been a haiku — for him and for hundreds of other poets? We’ll never know.

It may be a generalisation, but I’ll risk stating it anyway: poetry is very often in the business of skirting the issue, discursively and descriptively, while haiku gets to the point. Neruda is not quite getting to the point, in the way a haikuist does, when he writes:

“I copy out mountains, rivers clouds. I take my pen from my pocket. I note down a bird in its rising or a spider in its little silkworms. Nothing else crosses my mind. I am air ...”

The haikuists will notice that the word ‘I’ is used not once but four times in this passage. Such commentary on one’s own art seems to be an incessant behaviour pattern among mainstream poets, as in the Catalan poet’s declaration: ‘He donat la meva vida a les paraules ...’ *I have given my whole life to words...* (Salvador Espriu). Acceptable enough as the opening line of an autobiography, but of a twelve line lyric? A bit wearisome, I say. The haikuist shies away from such statements, eschewing self-indulgence, self-consciousness, self-everything. Rilke goes on a bit, does he not?

“To write poetry is to be alive. For a God that’s easy. When, however, are we really alive? And when does he turn the earth and the stars so they face us?”

No wonder Rodin told Rilke to go off to the zoo, to look and to see!

Marina Tsvetaeva says: ‘A poet’s speech begins a great way off’

The haikuist would disagree and bring the focus much nearer home. Poets who sing the sad obfuscations of interiority often project an image of the dying Chatterton. But unless we know them, we don’t have any image of J.W. Hackett, George Swede, Bruce Leeming, Marcel Smets, Alain Kervern, David Burleigh, David Cobb etc.? Why do we not find more haiku in mainstream anthologies? Is there a critical prejudice at work which believes haiku is water-colour, poetry is oil? If Buson can be compared to a water-colour Impressionist in the following remarkable haiku, then let’s hear it from the water-colourists:

the evening breeze / blows water to the blue heron / whose legs are rippled

To those reared on conventional poetry Buson’s haiku will have all the shock of *nouvelle cuisine* to a system used to generous portions of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes, veg and gravy, served in a familiar pub and washed down with real ale.

But we shouldn’t overstress the differences between haiku and conventional literature. If we wish to see what they have in common we will find that all types of literature are peppered with hidden haiku:

leafy island ... / flapping herons wake / the drowsy water-rats

This is an 'extracted' haiku from *The Stolen Child* by W.B. Yeats. With the minimum of editing — dropping a definite article or an adjective or two, and arranging the title text in a three-line format — you will be surprised how many hidden haiku exist, not only in conventional poetry, but in novels, plays, short stories, nature and travel sketches, letters, diaries and so on ...

frost broken up / gaslights reflected / on the wet pavement

No, you'll never guess where that hidden haiku came from — *Sketches by Boz*, Charles Dickens. And:

Silence; the last bird passes / in the copse / hazels cross the moon

from *The Widow in the Bye Street*, John Masefield. What a fantastic project it would be if haikuists in America, the Caribbean, Britain, Ireland and Australia began to explore the English-language literatures of their respective countries and produced an anthology of hidden haiku for the new millennium. Any takers?

I'll conclude these reflections with a conversation I had on this topic with the poet, Noel Griffin:

GR *If there is a Western prejudice against haiku, might this be due to the dominance of the epic tradition, Homer, Virgil, Milton, Dante, The Táin, Beowulf — to the displacement of the Celts in Europe and, latterly, the bourgeois fantasies and urban realism which colour contemporary prose and verse?*

NG Undoubtedly — but even more than that, the nature of the Western poetic tradition itself, which leans toward the discursive and narrative, the play of ideas, essentially. But ... not ideas but things, the plum in the fridge, the red wheelbarrow, as William Carlos Williams would have stated, he being a one-man revolution against the tendencies of Modernism as propounded by T.S. Eliot.

GR *Pound and the Imagists (1912-1917) also counteracted trends, being open to the ancient poetries of China, Greece and Japan, and published haiku and haiku-like verse.*

NG They had sympathies with what one might call oriental poetics, but then they had sympathies with almost every vital literary tradition — Italy, Provence etc. W.C. Williams was the only one who stuck to his guns and really did practise what he preached. He still remains a beacon in this respect.

GR *Let me read you something written as far back as 1920, by the American poet, Max Bodenheim. It's almost as if he anticipated the emergence of haiku in English: 'The old emotional eloquence, dramatic ecstasies of phraseology and suave oratory with which most poets have always addressed birds, trees, flowers and the lives of men, is disappearing, and in its place there has been a struggle on the part of the poet to wrestle with the concrete forms about him, and in the heat of this fight, suddenly awakes to find that he has been gripping different parts of himself ...' Good, eh? John Clare, G.M.Hopkins, and in our time Heaney and the late Hughes, celebrate the Anglo-Saxon thingness of things and a spiritual closeness to nature. Is it the Romantic influence and the temptation of Latinate grace that clothes the thingness of things?*

NG I fear we're opening a can of worms and many other things besides. Yes, there would definitely seem to be a great deal of truth in this. Western poetry since the Renaissance looked over its shoulder at the classical tradition as a kind of validation of its own worth. The consciousness was one of the State or the Empire or, put more simply, Society. In many respects this was inevitable and brings us to the question of complexity: complexity of society, complexity of consciousness, perception, inspiration...

GR *Simplify! Simplify! as Thoreau said ...*

NG Which brings us back to haiku.

GR *Many mainstream poets have lost the gift of perception. The Candamaharoshana-tantra states:*

When you see form, look!
Similarly, listen to sounds,
Inhale scents,
Taste delicious flavours,
And feel textures.

This wisdom is being lived by haikuists. Our craft is spiritual. You can argue about syllables, rhythm, season words, the influence of Zen and so on, but the fact remains that haiku are being written today in dozens of languages, which elate one, which chill one, which bring one back to the awful mystery of being and our relationship to natural phenomenon.

Gabriel Rosentock, poet and translator, is widely published in Ireland and has played a key role in the revival of Gaelic literature; he also translates from Croatian. He writes for children as well as adults and has an international haiku column in the Belfast newspaper, LÁ.

Museum Of Haiku Literature Award.

Keith Coleman has chosen Claire Bugler Hewitt's:

can't sleep tonight —
I love the baby
too much

This haiku is a delight. Bursting with life, it transmits the deepest of feelings. Genuine and direct, it is simple without being trite. Stating little, the poet evokes so much: we picture the fond gaze, as lovely as our own vision of beauty, feel the sweet pangs of love, exquisite as our own heart's truest wish.

I also especially enjoyed Susan Rowley's *Eid market*. It is worth mentioning in relation to this haiku that while William Higginson's *saijiki, Haiku World*, mentions Eid al-Fitr, *The Feast of Breaking the Fast* (of Ramadan), it omits the other great feast of the Islamic calendar, Eid al-Adhã. This *Feast of the Sacrifice* commemorates Abraham's sacrifice of the ram as a divine dispensation, releasing him from the ordained sacrifice of his son. On this day a ritual slaughter of sheep, goats, camels and oxen is performed.

THE PATHWAY

This section welcomes haiku and senryu from anyone - members of BHS or not. Each poem should be in two different languages - *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.

Milenko D. Cirovic Ljuticki (Serbian and English)

Plete baka
obiću. U krilu joj
klupco mjeseca.

Granny knits socks
on the woolball in her lap
the moon.

John McDonald (English, Irish and Scots)

Jigs and reels
from untutored fingers
sparks from a peat fire.

Poirt is ríleanna
ó mhéara neamhoilte
splancacha ón tine mhóna.

Jigs an reels
frae a plooman's haun
sparks frae lowin peat.

He mends boots
by lamplight — shadows
leaping around him.

Ag deisiú buataisí
faoi sholas as lampa — scáthanna
ag preabadh ina thimpeall.

The soutar dargs
i the blinterin licht —
sheddaes lowpin roun.

Qurat al Islam (attrib.) Bengali) and Dick Pettit (English) via Mahmoodul Haque.

with whom now
my thought is free, my love
is also

jor shonge male
monon tar shonge ee mani
ni shorta mulon

AUTUMN

Helen Robinson

copper butterfly —
only the field maple
a brighter orange

old man, old woman
arm in arm
holding on

scraping dry leaves
on bare tarmac
autumn wind

Maurice Tasnier

collecting for homeless
in shop doorway
a huddle of leaves

sound of trains
tracks parting
first chill night

the gum tree's
red leaves fluttered
by a Camberwell Beauty

Janice Fixter

across the sky
autumn clouds scud
towing swallows

after the rain
snails
pebbledash the path

Tsunehiko Hoshino

the statue mimer's
coat-tails sometimes flap —
the autumn wind

David Leather

Moorland adder
soaks in the autumn sun
my boot misses a beat

Little boy looks
beneath horsechestnut trees
his bulging pocket

Roberta Davis

Bent almost double
old couple
collecting conkers

David Walker

opening
full of seed ...
your wild iris

suddenly
your life wrapped —
October fog

grey autumn morning
entering my space ...
your open grave

black coal smell ...
chrysanthemums
damp paper

J. R. Wilson

my windfall apple —
cold from the wet grass, but dense
with summer sweetness

Sue Schraer

Closing the window
breeze on the window
September on my fingers

Allan Jarrett

A pause
in our conversation
— leaves run with the wind

David Rollins

A chill evening
in a prussian sky
the first star

Focusing my eyes
mist
still lingers

At his funeral
he's the only one
not getting wet

senryu

October moon
a breath
between clouds

Michael Rubinstein

Dandy gossamer
Floating on autumn breezes
Pregnant with a seed

Wayne Henderson

no clouds
new clothes
— first day at school

Pamela Hewitt

woman sweeping leaves
from garden pathway into
the path of the wind

John Capp

in the garden pond
a silver fish swimming through
October's new moon

church aisle —
my footsteps walking
above me

Arwyn Evans

Through mist, a single bell —
A single droplet on your nose

Bare island —
Lone larch tree
fingering the moon

ZEN AND THE ART OF HAIKU

Ken Jones

dedicated to Jim Norton

*such a sky
the ache of loss is answered
and returned entire*

*" We know in our bones that there is something odd, something queer, about everything, and when this contradictoriness has a deep, religious, poetical quality, when the whole thing stands revealed and we see right through it to this side, we weep with uncontrollable joy, or laugh with irrepressible grief."
— R.H. Blyth 1*

What is it about haiku that imparts that mysterious little whiff of insight, so difficult to describe and yet so strangely satisfying? I would like to offer some pointers from my experience as a long term Zen Buddhist for whom the Way of Haiku has become a valued part of my practice.

Characteristically we endeavour to secure and console our fragile self-identity by processing, shaping and colouring the raw experience of existence. Even — or especially — in the face of discouraging external circumstances, our mind strives to maximise the "feel good" factor both emotionally and intellectually, helped and amplified by a social culture which includes plenty of imaginative literature. The worst of this offers temporary escape from who we really are; the best offers a sometimes magnificent creative and cathartic treatment of our existential evasion. However, as *imaginative* literature it remains ultimately subjective in the sense used by Blyth as "the state of mind in which a man looks at the outside world, or at himself, as he would like it to be".² The example he quotes from Byron would be hard to beat:

And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,
Dewy with nature's tear-drops as they pass,
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,
Over the unreturning brave.

For Buddhism our root unease originates in the countless and subtle ways in which we try to evade, by action, thought and emotion, the totally open experience of just how it is and how we are. Trying to make it otherwise has been described as a lifelong lawsuit against reality, which we can never win. Spirituality itself, even Zen Buddhism, may be expropriated by the needy ego as the ultimate evasion. Here is a beautiful warning from the eighteenth century Zen Master Hakuin:-

At the north window, icy draughts whistle through the cracks,
At the south pond, wild geese huddle in snowy reeds.
Above, the mountain moon is pinched thin with cold,
Freezing clouds threaten to plunge from the sky.
Buddhas might descend to this world by the thousands,
I hey couldn't add or subtract one thing. 3

Ultimately the only effective remedy is, in Blake's words, to learn to "cleanse the doors of perception" and let reality flood in. As all the spiritual traditions affirm, this brings a sense of joy and release and an ability to live more fully and freely in the world — and in the moment. Zen is a school of Buddhism concerned with the cultivation of a profound down-to-earth awareness of this "suchness", unmediated by doctrine or other concepts. Haiku are the most thoroughgoing expression of literary Zen. They are also one of the several meditative "Ways" (like calligraphy and the minimal ink paintings, *zenga* and *haiga*) whose form both gives expression to insight and helps to deepen it. The "haiku moment" is thus no less than a tiny flash of an ultimate reality which in fact is just what is under our noses. Haiku which most clearly embody "suchness" as the ground of our being I shall, in the Blyth tradition, call "Zen haiku" and it is with these that I am particularly concerned. Exceptionally they may be quite didactic, like this from George Swede (which sums up the argument so far):

After the search for meaning
bills in the mail

Empty of self-need

It follows that haiku must spring from a mind open and unobstructed by any urge to make something of the reality that has come to the poet's attention. Those who go searching after haiku will find them shy and few and far between. Look for them and you will not find them. Don't look for them, and

they are not to be found. Of subjective meddling the 13th century Zen Master Dogen observed, "When the self withdraws, the ten thousand things advance; when the self advances, the ten thousand things withdraw." And Bashō advised that "When composing a verse let there not be a hair's breadth separating your mind from what you write; composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy." 4

Just washed / how chill / the white leeks!

Contrariwise, Bruce Ross identifies a "tendency in the fourth generation of American haiku writers of the late seventies, eighties and early nineties unfortunately to frequently offer catchy moments of sensibility that often rely on obvious metaphoric figures. These American poets desire to create 'haiku moments'. But a subjective ego, call it sentiment or call it imagination, intrudes upon their perception of the object." 5 Typical is the poem by Steve Sanfield quoted later in this paper in another context.

"How it is" doesn't come with meanings and explanations attached to give us the illusion of a more secure grip on it. Allusive brevity is one invariable characteristic of the haiku form. We have an itch to add in order — as we fondly suppose — to clarify. Too much verbiage muffles the spark; the shorter the poem, the more space for the reader. And the reader, too, may have an itch to explain. Thirty long lines to kill three short ones! A haiku derails rationality; why try to put it back on the rails? Bashō (through Lucien Stryk) makes the point:

Bird of time / in Kyoto, pining / for Kyoto

If haiku were no more than a reflection of how it is ("so what?") they would not engage our attention as they do. But they express how it is *as experienced by a human being, within our shared humanity*. These two elements are precisely set out in this verse from the *Zenrinkushu* 6: "Rain of no sorrow falls on banana leaves ... A man, hearing its pattering, feels his bowels cut". Haiku, in Martin Lucas's words, are "open metaphors" for our human condition and resonate with that condition. They offer a glancing opportunity, without the poetic prompting of another, to accept for ourselves how it is. Such pure acceptance has qualities of compassion, release, quiet joy, subtle humour. It is well known to the mystics, like Julian of Norwich: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well". Haiku moments offer a little bit of existential therapy shared between writer and reader, a little bit of mutual compassion. In

David Cobb's words (borrowed from Gustav Holst and Paul Nash) they combine "tender austerity and the mystery of clarity." Of all literary forms haiku are, in the current tell-tale slang, the least "in your face"; they have the least "attitude". Indeed, they may leave us momentarily suspended in an emptiness which nevertheless feels authentic and moving, as with Shiki:

The long night / a light passes along / the *shoji* [screen]

At the other extreme the reader may just occasionally be prodded with a question, as in this example from Bashō:

In the dense mist / what is being shouted / between hill and boat?

The sense of metaphor may be particularly strong when the poet has his own feelings in mind. In this example, old age is deeply felt by Shiseki. He acknowledges the self-pity that comes with it, but he does not massage this feeling with the any expressions of consolation:

My old thighs / how thin / by firelight

However, these "open metaphors" retain their power only so long as readers leave them open and do not hasten to fill them with their own meanings. R H Blyth warns:- "Where Bashō is at his greatest is where he seems most insignificant, the neck of a firefly, hailstones in the sun, the chirp of an insect... these are full of meaning, interest, value, that is, poetry, but *not as symbols of the Infinite, not as types of Eternity, but in themselves*. Their meaning is just as direct, as clear, as unmistakable, as complete and perfect, as devoid of reference to other things, as dipping the hand suddenly into boiling water." 7 Explicit symbolism narrows the metaphor, takes space from the reader and leadens the lightness. Some Japanese regard it as a peculiarly Western haiku vice, and it is very seductive, as in this from Scott Montgomery:

her silence at dinner
sediment
hanging in the wine

Traditionally haiku poets have taken nature as their subject matter, as being more contemplatively accessible. But when nature turns dramatic only the best haiku poets can both express the drama and retain the haiku spirit without

tipping over into subjective melodrama. In such highly tuned haiku the translator also will be put to the test. Here are two examples from Bashō, translated by Lucien Stryk, with all the dramatic down-to-earth energy of Zen:

Mogami river, yanking
the burning sky
into the sea

Shrieking plovers
calling darkness
around Hoshizaki Cape

Perhaps human affairs were assumed to be more likely to excite the poet's impulse to comment. But this is not necessarily so, as the growing number of "social haiku" bear witness. The left one is by an American, Donald McLeod, and the other, by Peter Finch, is from an industrially depressed Welsh valley:

Unemployment office / a metal chair/ scrapes across linoleum

Through dense firs / light of a wrecked car / burning

Varieties of awareness

Undistorted by self-need, reality displays characteristics of transience and insubstantiality which, deeply experienced (as at times of lifetime crisis) may feel very threatening. Meditation enables a gradually prepared opening to them and joyful release from the lifetime effort of denying them at a deep existential level. When "how it is" ("suchness", *sono-mama*) is "empty" of the weight of self-need we feel a sense of release, of lightness of spirit. This is the *karumi* experienced in miniature in haiku, many of which give intimations of this "emptiness". In some instances it may move us very deeply: *yugen* — profound awareness to which we cannot put words. In Japanese culture certain mood responses, of elusive and overlapping meaning, have been identified. Unless appreciated in the spiritual context of Zen these easily become no more than haiku conventions or "values", or Japanese mannerisms. "Willow pattern haiku", haiku *à la Japonaise*, may result. Thus Bruce Ross refers to "the stylistically self-conscious underscoring of Zen-like experiences" to be found in many contemporary American haiku poets. 8

Sabi is an acceptance of the "emptiness", insubstantiality and vulnerability of phenomena (including oneself). But it is an acceptance coloured with a gentle, compassionate sadness, a delicate frisson, and not of stoic indifference. In Brian Tasker's words, "*Sabi* is a kind of pure and sublime melancholy and

detached emotion which is not received in a self-centred way but simply honoured for what it is a symptom of the human condition. *Sabi* is the existential aloneness that can only be resolved by acknowledging its inevitability coupled with the joy and gratitude that can arise from its acceptance."⁹ Consider the following haunting example from Bashō (loneliness, deserted, aged, wild):

The loneliness
of this deserted mountain
the aged farmer
digging wild potatoes

On a more superficial view *sabi* can refer to anything that is old, worn, tranquil, mellow and dignified. Like the other haiku "moods", in the absence of real insight it can all too easily lend itself to tired and well worn "oriental" haiku.

Wabi essentially demotes respect for the ordinary, the commonplace as opposed to the sensational. Simplicity, restraint, austerity are related meanings, with "rustic solitude" as a rather more mannered expression. Here is a nice contemporary example from Garry Hotham:

coffee / in a paper cup — / a long way from home

When the self withdraws its confirming sharpness and specificity of perception it leaves space for a more subtle, subdued, low key beauty to manifest. This is *shibui*, as in the following from Martin Lucas (silent, white, empty):

first darkness of dusk / silently a white owl flies / in the empty lane

Aware is the mood of transience, defined by Makoto Ueda as "sadness or melancholy arising from a deep, empathetic appreciation of the ephemeral beauty manifested in nature, human life, or a work of art."¹⁰ It commonly translates as a nostalgic sadness connected with autumn, as with Marlene Mountain:

faded flowers on the bed sheet / autumn night

Finally, another very Zenny haiku mood is that of understated humour, sometimes black or tinged with irony — especially irony. It typically arises

when one of our cherished delusions impacts with reality, and life momentarily lives us with a wry grin. Here Alexis Rotella and I respectively face a new day:

Undressed —
today's role dangles
from a metal hanger

Worn old feet
in worn old slippers —
really mine?

And the gentle ironies of matrimony seem to make for better haiku, in the Zen sense than breathless passion. These two, from Karen Klein (left) and George Swede, were close together in the September 1997 *Frogpond*:

too hot to make love
too hot
not to

A sigh from her
a sigh from me —
two pages turn

The Zen of the cutting line

The majority of haiku achieve their main effect through a device called "the cutting line" or 'eye opener". Some Zen preliminaries may help us to understand more profoundly how this device works. In order to free their students from the conventional self-assuring perceptual patterns, Zen teachers commonly resort to mutually contradictory words and phrases: iron women give birth; the sun rises at midnight, or, in this verse by the C15th. Master Ikkyu:

Hearing a crow with no mouth
cry in the darkness of the night
I feel a longing for
my father before he was born. 11

So characteristic of all spirituality, paradox is only baffling, only paradoxical, to a mind unable to step out of a logically structured world of *this* defining *that*. In all spiritual traditions, what is is the same as what is not; one thing is all things and all things are one thing. There is all the solidity of the world of **form** in "a wooden hen sits on a coffin warming an egg" (Hakuin again). But it is **empty** of "sense" — "pure nonsense" — in that the self cannot confirm the self by *making* any sense of it. In Buddhist terminology, **form** is in fact "empty" — of the order, solidity and permanence we need to attribute to it. In this by Bashō, both time (spring) and place (a hill) exist in *suchness*, empty of conceptual referencing. The hill is "nameless" and it is the "thin mist" shrouding it which makes spring time.

Spring has come / a nameless hill / is shrouded in thin mist 12

In Buddhist terminology, the power of Zen haiku lies in their embodiment of form-and-emptiness. The best of them come to us out of the moment in an insight so right, yet so beyond our ordinary habitual perception, as to dumbfound us. We find ourselves saying more than we mean and more than we know.

Two lines set the scene and a third, cutting line throws them out of gear by switching attention to a different perception, sparking across the gap between the phrases and momentarily illuminating the whole poem in a fresh light. Our customary — and solidified — perceptual associations are fractured. Self momentarily loses its foothold. Selfless space ("emptiness") opens for an instant of naked clarity. We have been caught off balance. Trying to figure it out is like figuring out a joke: we miss the point. Occasionally the cutting line is wholly contradictory. Thus Sodō (1641-1715), expressing *sabishisa* (spiritual poverty):

In my hut this spring
there is nothing —
there is everything 13

Faced with such paradoxes Blyth advises "some vivacity of energy lest the intellect arrive and split hairs." They must be "swallowed in one gulp", like Yamei's pheasant:

In one shrill cry / the pheasant has swallowed / the broad field 13

It would be possible to attempt a classification of different uses of the cutting line. There is, for example, the double cutting line, where the second line magicks the third into being as a throw back illumination of the first. R H Blyth (in a different connection) quotes Kikaku:

The beggar wears / Heaven and Earth / as his summer clothes 13

The cutting line provides a ready, specific device in haiku-making and lends itself to the cleverness of what I call "artful haiku" which lie at the opposite end of a continuum from "insightful haiku". This doesn't make them "better" or "worse", even as a genre, let alone individually. Most haijin probably write and

FEATURED HAIKU WRITER

Ernest J. Berry

1929 was known for model A Fords, the stock market crash, the St. Valentine Massacre, *Farewell to Arms* and Trotsky's exile, which explains why my birth (and subsequent adventure) went largely unreported.

From an early age I enjoyed writing poetry which occasionally got published &/or won minor prizes. When I returned to Mexico I developed a style of unrhymed three-liners which I call 'vertizontals' because I devised them while jogging the wide beaches near my wilderness home & committed them to paper while reclining on the lazy sands —

into the silence
between crashing waves
a curlew

In 1993, when I unretired back to New Zealand I discovered that the world had been enjoying vertizontals for half a millenium under the name 'haiku' - oh well, I consoled myself, nothing new under the sun, I might as well join 'em ...

first snow
the haiku
thick & fast

My first re-labelled vertizontals were accepted for publication mid '95.

nibbling on a leaf
a yellow caterpillar
letting in the sun

In the last four years I've won a fair thicket of prizes and had nearly 400 haiku published from Corfu to China to Croatia to Canada to California and many other alphabeticolations,

ground fog
the top half of a kangaroo
occasionally

silent rain
i stop to listen
to the lake

our wisteria
flowering well
next door

on her kimono
billowing in the moonlight
a heron in flight

keeping low sidling along jenny craigs

L.A.X.
a cool wind stirs
her paper lei

evening stillness
a kookaburra's laugh
follows the ridgeline

norwester
turning the corner
to autumn

old craftsman
french polishing
his walnut face

Favourite Haiku

My skin is so new
it has asked for silk clothing
to wear without you.

Jane Whittle

I keep coming back to this haiku in the June edition of *Blithe Spirit* and although it is quite subjective and straightforward with no tension, yet all the same it resonates for me. It is almost tanka-like and reminds me of both the excellent haiku and tanka in *a long rainy season* edited by Leza Lowitz, of contemporary Japanese women poets. I will continue to enjoy Jane Whittle's striking haiku with their smoothness and subtle underlayers and will look forward to reading even more.

Alan Summers

HAIKU SEQUENCE

Butterfly House

Diana Webb

entrance — hands cupped
a small boy slips one past
into the gift shop

matching the jacket
tweedy patterned wings held
hovering on your shirt

planted to allure
bright kitchen pads scour air
wings linger

play of a fountain
drowns the sounds of flight
alighting

sky — laid — on leaf

dark eye — on wing — on wood

butterfly on my hand
holds me
motionless

dark trees white sky breeze
look at the lady
children stare

exit — souvenir
sheet on metamorphosis
the light in your eyes

TANKA

A.A.Marcoff

talk of moons.
so how can I sit still
like a Buddha
now that I sense
full spring?

the sea
like a screen of blue,
shows forth a whale
as the deep triumph
of the dream of water.

The Mountain

temple bell
on a damp summer morning:
the memory
of something ancient
in youth

Paul Quayle

Trying to remember
the drunken love poem
I spurted out
for her, last night
in the pub toilet

Blithe Spirit has emerged from its chrysalis as a journal which can hold its own among the very best the haiku world has to offer. My congratulations to the new editor on a flying start. Please do not take it amiss if I express dissatisfaction with one of the new features: the branding of certain poems as *senryu* - a more tyrannical practice than the previous separate section - has helped me focus my thoughts on an issue which has concerned me for some time.

It goes without saying that this is an area in which each of us has our own ideas, but for what it's worth my own analysis of the poems identified as *senryu* in BS 8/1 is as follows:

1. Poems which are *senryu* by any definition:
at his funeral (Cobb)
Cleaner on holiday (Dawson)
2. Poems that are close to *senryu* but expressed with a poetic colour or mildness more characteristic of haiku:
their share (Hotham)
netting nothing (Hackett)
3. Poems which are close to *senryu* but with a focus on self which gives them an un-*senryu*-like reflectivity:
The last guest leaves (Hill)
exchanging glances (Spencer)
a rival dies (Cobb)
A ettil sum day (Purves)
4. Poems which are quirky or comic, place no emphasis on nature, and have some lighthearted psychological focus, but otherwise show no characteristics of *senryu*:
Sightless in bright sun (Bamboo Shoot)
Just watching; Rodding the drain (Jones)
5. A poem that begins as a *senryu* but ends with a modulation which takes it deep into haiku territory:
those faithless years (Coleman)
6. A poem which is simply a haiku which got misdirected because it was wonderfully funny:
standing up (Tasnier)

In addition to this exhaustive list, I also note:

1. One senryu of the first category, ie. unmistakably so, which somehow didn't get tagged:

the Christmas present (Shimmin)

2. One other poem which has all the pointedness of senryu, but which might have escaped the tag by virtue of its ambiguity:

through (Jarrett)

3. Others too numerous to mention which have a foot in both camps, and as good a claim to the label as some of those in the later categories above.

I acknowledge that this is a difficult area and whatever way we choose to present senryu, we have to square a circle. On the one hand, as Dee Evetts has said, we are dealing with a 'spectrum' and, if I may muddle Dee's metaphor, it is a spectrum with broad grey areas in the middle of it. (Since I also identify a spectrum between haiku and tanka, and indeed between haiku and conventional poetry, my own policy in *Presence* is to admit the existence of the pigeonholes, but to avoid placing anything in them - let the readers work it out for themselves). Yet, the other side of the - er - coin is that the Japanese genres are, in their characteristic spirit, clearly distinct, and our attempts at imitation ought to recognise this fact.

Ideally, I would prefer to see the term *senryu* restricted to the poems which can demonstrate direct succession to the ancient title, which means stuff which is witty, ironic, brutally honest about social idiocies and/or moral inadequacies (only implicating the author as an accessory) and which - to be blunt - borders on the insult. Cobb's *at his funeral* and Shimmin's *the Christmas present* achieve this. Most of the others labelled as such do, indeed, fall on the senryu side of the watershed with haiku, and if we are to have any sectioning off then it is with the senryu they belong. But my fear is that such generosity with the term may allow a complacency to creep in. There is more to it than just 'haiku on the human condition'.

We need senryu theorists to come forward now and tell us more. (The Temple Monkey had a good stab at it back in BS 4/1 // 4/2 and got booted off stage. Why?) In particular, I think we need an awareness of the clear special case which justifies the Blundellian label 'haisen', where some harsh senryu-like content is soothed by a natural image which allows a gentler resolution. Coleman's *seeds of honesty* is a perfect example - the fundamental honesty (quality) of honesty (the plant) offers a triumph of optimism over the human niggles. A wonderful

effect - but a haiku effect, an anti-senryu effect, and not such a rare effect within these pages.

Let us also admit that poems such as Tasnier's *standing up* are destroyed by the label - for the crime of being funny, with a purely haiku humour. Haiku is actually a lighter kind of poetry than senryu, and Bashō's huge achievement was not that he attached weights to the dead body of haiku and sank it in a sea of profundity, but that he called it into life, and it bore him on its back and carried him lightly away wherever he wanted to go. It is the paradox of haiku that in its lightness it nevertheless encompasses the vastness of experience. So please let's allow it to be light and not feel that we have to slap a 'senryu' sticker on it as some kind of punishment for making us laugh.

How do we set about sorting all this? Well, I don't know. Just now I'm more interested in being realistic about the complications. But my main point is that all these complications are at the same time fascinations, and that both the denial of all distinctions and the crude and ineffective application of distinctions are equally unsatisfactory answers. Let's work on it!

Dying and Journeying

Ken Jones

In Memory of Tom Bennett, died 2nd March 1998

Noragh struggles out of sleep to answer the call. Tom, my brother-in-law has been taken into intensive care. A hundred miles through Wales and another fifty across the Irish Sea ...

Shaded lamps
over empty seats
night ferry

We pass over the scary border on the hundred mile drive from Dublin to Belfast. The signs telling us when we're in a Republic and when in a Kingdom have long been destroyed, and we have only our ears to rely on.

Above the *swish* of wipers
a different road rumble —
we're over!

Arriving at the Royal, on the lower Falls, we find Tom unconscious and festooned with coloured plastic tubes, winking lights and electronic hums. On some of the dials, high figures mean dying, and on others it's the low figures. After his brain damaged fall, Tom is still a big man.

Pink-faced and barrel-chested
my breaths follow his
intensive care

Breathing his breaths, holding his hand - this is a good time together. He has surprisingly fine fingers, with pale fingernails - a genealogist and art collector. That evening Noragh and I take time out to watch the sinking of the *Titanic* on a screen as big as a house.

No sooner back to Wales than we learn that Tom has died, never having recovered consciousness. After trying everything else the surgeon gradually withdrew the support system. Through the long hours of that winter afternoon his life ...fading away. We have a day to turn ourselves round again.

Between
the dying
and the burying
the housekeeping

Through storm and flood we arrive late at St. Mary's, with only the
gravedigger to greet us.

Hollow thud
clods
strike the purple coffin

That night at Cousin Betsy's, with reminiscence and gossip, we reassemble
Tom and his life. Next morning we make another early start, Belfast stretched
out before us. After days of rain, the sun highlights its vast cemetery beside the
motorway.

On a thousand wet tombstones
the rising sun
sparkling city of the dead.

The School Christmas Show

David Cobb

Six-thirty in the evening. Wisps of raw weather creep from the playground
following people through the doors into the school hall.

a child blows
into a balloon ...
the balloon blows back

Parents remove their scarves, reduce themselves on to infant-size chairs,
suppress their seasonal coughs and sneezes as the head teacher comes to the
front and haw-hums for attention. Some announcements, he says, and drawing

a long forefinger out of his trousers pocket points to a bucket. Hopes no-one will feel sick like last year, but ... Please also look out for the Class 6 children by the door when leaving. They'll be holding out basins. This year's collection is for a hospice for elderly people bewildered by Alzheimer's disease.

trapped by a girder
above the 'Exit' sign
a shuttlecock

Some parents not too shy to draw attention to their favourite bits in the hand-made programmes, 'Isn't that a lovely drawing my Dot's done of Santa Claus?'; he looks like a figure made with matchsticks and a potato. We note that the classes will perform in ascending order, Reception Class first.

Mrs. Cavendish lifts the piano lid, removes a sweetie stuck to middle C and begins to play *While Shepherds Watch*. A small child with a fringe climbs onto a makeshift stage and says we're in the fields near Beffliam. The fields creak as the flock plod in. One of the shepherds sneezes on a sheep.

nativity play —
red face of the angel
coming on too soon

Later things are made better for the tearful angel. When Mary gets into difficulties extracting the baby from the folds of her dress, the angel helps an ox to deliver the immaculate birth.

Joseph takes the Jesus doll from Mary's lap and plonks it firmly in a cardboard box, but one of the Kings thinks it may suffocate and parts the straw.

Joseph, shepherds, sheep, angels, kings, an ass and oxen unite under Mrs. Cavendish's direction and sing *Away in a Manger*. Mary turns her toes in and keeps her thoughts to herself.

On the way home:

blurred walls —
glimpses through the mist
of fairy lights

REVIEWS

Traces of Dreams. Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Bashō. Haruo Shirane, Stanford University Press, 1998, ISBN 0-8047-3099-7 (paperback) 381 pp.

The author is Professor of Japanese literature at Columbia University and (in the best sense) it shows. These days there are too many turgid books from academia, but this one is different. Shirane's prose is a delight to read, his arguments are provocative without being dogmatic, and the area of his investigation is of seminal interest to haijin, poets, indeed, anyone interested in the creative process. I found the book absorbing all the way through to the appendices which contain discursive footnotes, immaculate sourcing and an excellently-selective, crystal-clear 90-word glossary (no more arguments about hokku-haiku-haikai-haikaika or renga-renju-renku).

Where does Shirane confirm or challenge conventional wisdom? Quoted below are six opinions which are a selection (not exclusive) of the topics covered. Shirane's evidence suggests that some of these statements are 'true' and some are 'false'. Which are which? If you are anything like me, your assessments could change dramatically after reading Shirane. He is very persuasive, though often at odds with other eminent authors.

Zen Buddhism pervades Bashō's poetry.

There is a strong Chinese influence on Bashō's work.

'The Narrow Road ...' is best seen as a kind of fiction, leaving out most of what actually happened

Bashō encouraged poetry to be written in isolated circumstances rather than communely.

There is plenty of metaphor buried deeply in Bashō's poetry.

Bashō despised those who graded haiku and gave prizes for 'the best'.

What did I learn from Shirane's study of Bashō? Firstly, a better appreciation of the context within which this particular genius operated. Great men subject to later canonisation often have their lives semi-fictionalised into an acceptable, appealing story. Shirane charts the fever-pitch of Bashō's deification in the century after his death which is likely to have distorted subsequent understanding of his work. So far as possible, Shirane presents us with comprehensive, unfiltered evidence from reliable sources.

Bashō emerges as a pioneer, determined to experiment, encouraging others to do likewise, caring little for the poetic hierarchy and its profitable teaching system of marking and grading. He was a brave man in abandoning a comfortable career to rely on the charity of his disciples. This is an heroic picture beloved of biographers. But Shirane cautions that this picture needs modification to take account of the social and environmental factors that channelled, even moulded, Bashō's genius.

Shirane puts great emphasis on Bashō the social animal, proselytising on his travels, absorbed in ritual communications, a leading participant in communal poetry, and falling out with many of his disciples who weren't willing to change with him. Shirane explains how these activities were intimately linked to a sizeable proportion of Bashō's writing which is riddled with coded messages to that effect, often lost on modern readers.

Today, apart from *Narrow Journey to the Deep North*, it is the free-standing haiku of Bashō's that are most frequently presented to the Western reader. This puts Bashō at a disadvantage, partly because of historical distance and partly because he could not anticipate the current Western obsession with the free-standing format and the rather narrow approach of readers to it. In these circumstances, and what with translation problems, it is fascinating to meditate on how Bashō has retained such an appeal. His unerring choice of word? his juxtapositions? his poetic madness? his lightness of touch? his subtlety? All these Shirane examines in great depth.

Beyond this, Shirane brings out how much more Bashō can be appreciated if the reader shares Bashō's rich cultural landscape, not just by reading about it, but by experiencing it. It is hard to go into more detail without reproducing the book. So I'll fall back on allegory. Suppose I wanted to convey the beauty of a Mozart symphony by playing the piano. Something would be lost, but what was left would still give some idea. Suppose I only had a clapperboard, people

would wonder what all the fuss was about. For all those who have lived with 'clapperboard Bashō', Shirane offers new horizons.

Mike Hayes

Transcribed Snapshots. Pearl Elizabeth Dell. Hub Editions. ISBN 1 870653 77 7 £2.50

Transcribed Snapshots gives us 50 three-line poems, one to a page, in landscape A6 (approx.). The £2.50 in exchange goes to The Children's Trust of Tadworth, Surrey.

Some of the poems are indeed snapshots

Patterns of winter —
tree silhouetted against dark
cloudscape horizon.

but others attempt philosophy

The lone cheetah
looks at me through her bars, or
do I look through mine?

Some explain too much

Lone swan
in a waterless field —
the hedge hides the stream.

Others contain more mystery

Pushing my finger
into the wedding ring —
the groom's hand trembles.

If the groom is her husband to be, then the wording makes him seem oddly distant. If he is not, then a stranger story is afoot! I quite enjoy this, but probably for reasons that the author never intended

In short the poems here are very varied; from snapshots to philosophy; from 5/7/5 to 2/1/1; from strange to simple, to too obvious. There are daffodils bowing their heads in sympathy and 'chestnut brown conker jewels', but there is also:

last gleam of sunset —
a green light flashes upward
from the shore's skyline

which has the ring of real experience, simply stated.

The Eternal Wine Tasting Itself. John McDonald. Hub Editions. ISBN 1 870653 73 4 £3.50.

The title goes with the brush-stroke cover illustration of bottles and glasses, but does not refer to any particular poem within. Like a haiku, however, it allows the reader to expand its meaning for h'self.

The external clues are few. No Fore or Afterword, one haiku by J. McD in the last five *Blithe Spirits* and none in the last three issues of four other haiku periodicals — I checked. One learns of John McDonald in the poems themselves. Here is a person confident with writing haiku based on real experience. He paints a good picture ...

Path to breakfast —
shaking jasmine blossom
from her hair.

and tells a good story ...

Furious mother
dressed only in a towel —
giggling from the woods.

A purist may say this is not a haiku, but it is certainly not a senryu in the Japanese sense. It deals with humans and some might call it 'serious senryu' — except the humour makes this label seem inappropriate. My own view is that it is a wonderful encapsulation of an event and set of emotions and I'm happy to include it as a widening of haiku subject matter. My only hesitation is that it may be a little too complete a narrative.

Here is a classic example of separate ingredients combining simply to form a single scene, while still allowing the reader space for development:

Jigs and reels
from untutored fingers —
sparks from a peat fire.

(I hear the echo of a rice planting song). His simple observations of nature are effective —

Cradled
in the thistle's topmost leaf —
a slug.

and he is at ease in his environment ...

Late guests ...
try my door ...
move on.

It would be possible to prune the selection to achieve a purer collection of poetry. Some of the poems do not work so well and I do not believe that a haiku is the appropriate vehicle for: *He breathes ... pumps... rests: it / snows onto her open eyes — / I eat my cold chips*. Is it real? - Real, but on T.V? - T.V. drama? On this depends the meaning of eating chips - and the first two lines would not make haiku at all. Generally, however, the subject matter is appropriate with interesting glimpses into the life of J.McD. Once or twice traditional subjects are dealt with in a rather standard way, but originality is also present. For example, I was surprised to enjoy: *Home ... / rainbow over the rooftops, / wife at the window*. The simplicity of wording gives it the primary colours of a child's book and manages, with humour, to avoid sentimentality.

David Steele

Tanka Splendor 1997. AHA Books, POB 767, Gualala, CA95445 USA \$7.00.

1997 was the eighth year of the *Tanka Splendor* contest, an annual event that this year attracted some 700 tanka and 40 sequences. It's an important event, primarily because it's one of the few places where the development and growth of tanka in the West can be assessed. The judge was George Swede who also judged the same contest in '91. In his Judge's comments I was somewhat concerned to read that he considers himself to 'have become expert in spotting a

flaw in a poem that disqualifies it from being published or a winner in a contest.' He then goes on to say how he would be moved and then he 'would notice the fatal flaw: an awkward phrase, an overstatement, an image that was out of context, or, in short, a loss in the poem's integrity.'

Oh, to live in such a perfect world. As it was, he only had to choose 31 out of 700 and 4 (instead of the expected 3) sequences out of the 40, so what would he have done if they had all been perfect - which, of course, is impossible. It's equally impossible that the remaining 670 odd poems were all fatally flawed which is what's implied. Actually, part of the beauty of short poems such as tanka and haiku, is their fallability, their imperfectness and it's that dynamic of fallability between writer and reader that makes the process so interesting, but of course that doesn't excuse sloppy writing.

So with George Swede having set himself up as an expert and by implication the poems that he chose being perfect, what did he choose? He chose imperfect poems, of course, many having the so-called 'fatal flaw', such as Margaret Chula's *returned manuscript / like a stillborn child / the padded envelop / shredded all over / my dark sweater*. If the contrasting images of a stillborn child and a shredded envelope aren't out of context, then what is? There is also the obscurity of Ann Cooper's *playing tag/on the telephone./The empty swing/creaks in the wind,/ autumn leaves drift*. Ho hum! I finally settled on the assumption that playing tag on the telephone might be to do with answering machines.

The selection overall is inconsistent and even my personal favourite, Caroline Gourlay's *loving you so much/ after thirty year's this/ marriage untitled,/this poem unread still/in your workshirt top pocket* reads awkwardly. Ending the second line with 'this' suggests a hands-on-hips 'this', instead of the intended softness of 'this marriage untitled'. Perhaps she was trying to avoid starting two consecutive lines with 'this' which illustrates the dilemma of constant revision that tanka and haiku often demand.

In her *Afterword*, series editor, Jane Reichold, writes about tanka being the place where feelings can be included, as opposed to haiku where they can only be implied. Nowhere is that more evident than in the work of ai li, who has a sequence included, *remembering a friend*, which was also published in *Blithe Spirit* 8/1. I can't get near ai li's haiku because they always seem so minimal and guarded. Yet this sequence is quite lovely in the way it describes the reading of a will and the loss of a friend. Jane Reichold also suggests that George Swede 'had

(consciously or unconsciously) made an attempt to seek out the poems describing new emotional situations, ie. those not handled in traditional Japanese tanka.' Maybe, but his thinking can't actually be deduced from the inconsistency of his choices. What is clear, though, is that if tanka is going to develop in the West, it will need more room than 31 poems a year to do it in.

Brian Tasker

Fresh Scent - Selected Haiku by Lee Gurga. Brooks Books, 4635 Hale Drive, Decatur, Illinois 62526 127pp Hardback \$20

This book is witness to Lee Gurga's consistent performance as a poet for more than 30 years; also to his integrity in the editorial process in which he took part — the 135 haiku here were selected from a proposed 350, we're told in the introduction. A few unworthy poems have still slipped through, but the vast majority are easily good enough to make up for the occasional bad judgement.

The Disney voice-over *Preface* aside, there is naturally a certain American flavour to the book (I don't just mean the American interpretation of what haiku is). For example, the preparedness to talk about anything and everything seems a particularly American trait and, possibly stemming from this mind set, Gurga is not afraid that the ordinary will fall short of evoking a haiku picture:

fishermen's cars / parked along the roadside — / cold rain at sunset

Some may question the absence of a 'haiku moment', but poems like this, by their very artlessness have an essential quietness and subtlety which the action implicit in a 'moment' would undermine. Also, the understatement in this haiku is an art its author excels at, which means there is a welcome scarcity of the kind of complacent cleverness to which English-language haijin often fall prey. Not that all the haiku in this book are about small or subtle events; there are 'scenes from the movies':

running with the car — / the black tip of the dog's tale / through knee-high corn

This could easily be a cliché if the reader is in that mood, but at least it's balanced on the page by something more oblique:

scenic overlook — / the whole Mississippi valley / hidden in mist

Perhaps not in total contrast to these relatively crude verses is:

darkness before dawn — / the way your legs sleep / not closed not open

Although the expression in lines 2 and 3 is bald and the symbolism of the first line is heavy, the strength of the poem lies in the acceptance of the unanswered question posed by the position of the legs. I don't know whether this is a particularly American type of utterance, but it seems to me that the following is:

Christmas pageant — / the one who had to get married / plays Mary

I can't imagine anyone English, at least, thinking they could get away with such a bad joke (in this form). However it's effectiveness results from the author's light touch and brevity.

A pleasing feature of this book as a whole is that, through it's diverse subject matter and varied techniques, there is an attempt to place the poems as if by renga sequence. It seems to have been done with a sense of delicacy and enjoyment. The connections are not insistent, but there's a gentle awareness of shifting moods and scenes.

At the back of the book the author appends a set of notes about haiku, in particular with reference to North American culture, which is generally informative and sound. Gurga uses his own poems to illustrate various points. The problem with this is that when it works you look like a Clever Dick and when it doesn't you look foolish — he manages both. But this is a minor irritation when seen in the light of this poet at his most daring and powerful:

his side of it. / her side of it. / winter silence

Fred Schofield

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Dear Editor,

Readers will be aware of the lamented death here in Scotland in October of Iain Crichton Smith. A consummate and international artist in words by any standard, his loss is perhaps most keenly felt in Gaeldom.

Smith began primary school in Lewes a monoglot, but, unlike some of his generation, quickly responded to the heritage of English literature. However, he never betrayed his linguistic origins and the huge corpus of his works bestrides the two languages of Scottish Gaelic and English with equal felicity.

What may not be so well known - yet a fact alluded to in Aonghas MacNeacail's *Scotsman* obituary - was that Smith was the first to attempt haiku in Gaelic. Two examples:

Cailleach a'nighe
steapaichean tigh-dhealbh —
os a cionn, Greta Garbo.

*An old woman washing
the steps of a cinema —
above her, Greta Garbo.*

Piano san fhàsach,
Beethoven aig céilidh —
Salvador Dali.

*A piano in the desert,
Beethoven at a ceilidh —
Salvador Dali.*

These lines first appeared in a Gaelic collection in 1974, followed by their translations in an English language publication a year later. The references in the poems suggest that they were originally composed a good deal earlier.

Bruce Leeming

Dear Editor,

The editorial in the last *Blithe Spirit* refers to traditional and avant-garde haiku, but doesn't give examples of either. For myself I haven't seen any examples of avant-garde haiku in English. I have seen some extremely good short haiku, for

example, Martin Lucas's *spring dawn- / watchstrap's / coolness*. Despite its brevity this haiku is 'traditional' to me because it embodies all the qualities that most haikai I talk to associate with traditional haiku, including the core principles of immediacy and particularness.

If there are avant-garde haiku in English can you give examples and explain why they're avant-garde and what qualities these haiku embody? I'd also like to know what the aesthetic principles behind them are. I was fortunate to meet Mr. Natsuishi when he was in London. Mr. Natsuishi is a Japanese avant-garde haiku poet and I was greatly impressed by the poem he translated for me. Unfortunately I don't have permission to quote it. But Mr. Natsuishi has clear aesthetic principles which inform his work and he hasn't abandoned the core principles.

I am also unhappy about the presentation of haiku in columns in *Blithe Spirit*. It changes the way haiku are read for the worse as far as I'm concerned. Everyone knows I'm really good at remembering other people's haiku and it's something I enjoy doing. I can't remember any haiku from the last three issues. Unless specified, haiku are not designed to be read as a sequence and I don't think subscribers should be forced to present their work in this way.

Annie Bachini

Editor's comment: The point of my editorial was not to discuss avant-garde English-language haiku, but to show that the 'traditional' and the new can be seen as two sides of the same coin. However, from Ezra Pound to A.A. Marcoff (and indeed, Iain Crichton Smith), there are no shortage of English-language haiku that break the mould.

Since Annie Bachini doesn't quote the haiku by Ban'ya Natsuishi in question it cannot usefully be discussed here. Natsuishi is a controversial writer, admired by some, criticised by others for having thrown the baby of haiku out with the bathwater. For example — *Each time I'm born / from a dragon's bone / I smile*. Most people would agree that it is highly questionable as to whether this haiku incorporates 'core principles'. I must say — and this is not a value judgement — they are not overwhelmingly apparent to me. A recent article by him, *The International Nature of Contemporary Haiku*, lies on my desk; in it he makes clear that neither he, nor some of his contemporaries, necessarily feel constrained by the original form, or even nature, of haiku. He closes his article with these words: 'The haiku was considered a dusty old thing coming from the Japanese feudal period, but we can also consider it from a universal point of view, as we live in a century which offers us unexpected possibilities'.

Your Editorial was timely. I've become very aware of a tension between those of a modernist 'Occidental-literary' outlook and those enamoured of Japanese aesthetic/spiritual tradition, with a certain scornful antipathy towards the 'traditionalists'. I feel these demarcations are over-simplistic and often pursued with a fair degree of intolerance, at times by folks who nevertheless allege themselves to be advocates of 'inclusive pluralism'; though in fairness to their outlook, there are definitely some individuals who parade their Zen affiliation with no small degree of affectation.

Keith Coleman

Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper was a superb example of subtle contextualisation and constructive criticism. The flexibility of which he speaks when considering great writers engaged in the destruction and recreation of literary forms is of importance for haiku. Contraries exist in relationship to each other — Yuasa explains this when stating "a literary form exists both to be observed and to be broken." The process is organic. It is only paradoxical if you subscribe to a philosophy where things are either black or white. This either/or perspective is limiting — it restricts the sensing of subtle shifts between these binary poles. Your editorial hints at this when noting that "the avant-garde and the traditional are, in fact, one and the same thing seen from different perspectives."

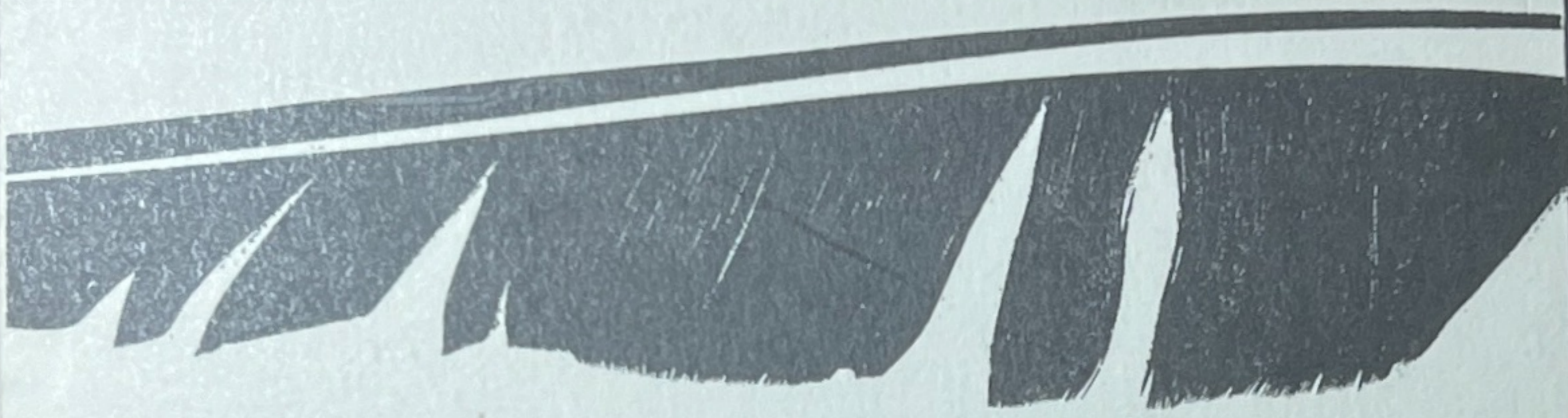
Haiku excites me because of the contrary aspects it encompasses and gives voice to. It is an expansive form, capable of merging the traditional and experimental, the conservative and radical, without losing its identity as haiku. Indeed, haiku invites such a merger of opposites in order to explode the myth of opposition. Haiku transcends these arguments by its sense of presence. In this way haiku can free such concepts as the Englishness of its English practitioners — without diminishing cultural relevance — in order to simultaneously merge Englishness with a more universal and more individual perspective, in harmony and at odds with its Japanese precursor.

Wayne Henderson

The magazine is fuller and more controversial — Great!

Katherine Gallagher

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