



Blithe Spirit

Newsletter of The British Haiku Society

number 2

spring 1991

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Easter, 1991

Dear member,

I'm pleased to tell you that in the last three months you've sent in more material than we can print in one issue. Don't stop - it's good to be in a position to be selective. Some articles are being held over for a later newsletter. One or two are more doubtful - but even rejects are helpful as benchmarks for choosing - or commissioning - others. With time and experience we may hope to develop commissioning as a way of getting articles; so please write in with requests.

We have now held two successful workshops, and your committee feels it is an urgent matter to extend the benefits of these to members living in parts of the country well away from London and the South-east (where we have so far found it easiest to operate). Using the enclosed Membership List 1991, it would be wonderful if leaders could come forward in different regions, and make contact with those living around them within, say, a 30-40 miles radius. With this in mind, we've put together some ideas for organising workshops (see Articles section). If you really feel you'd be at a loss without a "guru", write to me, and we'll see if anything can be done to help.

Further enclosures with this issue are: the BHS/JAL/Iron Haiku Event 1991 leaflet (if you have not already had one); a Select Reading List; and a leaflet from Broken Moon Press, who specialise in filling orders for some of the books haiku buffs most desire. (A propos: Richard Goring reports on a tour of London bookshops: in Charing Cross Road, only Foyles seem to stock any Japanese poetry (go to room on the ground floor, back, and look for an unmarked bookcase); but Japan Centre, Brewer St, nr. Piccadilly Circus, also have titles from the Kodansha, Tuttle and Penguin lists (though pricey).)

Membership, you will see, has jumped splendidly as a result of advertising the Event. And the Charity Commissioners have accorded us status as a registered charity (No. 1002064). We now have to work on the benefit to be gained by asking for covenants.

We have made contact and plans for exchanges of information with our nearest haiku neighbours, the Haiku Kring Nederland and Haikoe Centrum Vlaanderen.

Finally, we welcome the launch of Kevin Bailey's Haiku Quarterly: the first issue, in December, was a powerful thrust in the direction of making minimalist poetry better known and appreciated, and we are proud that no fewer than 8 of our members had poems appearing in it.

David Cobb

Enjoy the Spring! David Cobb

- * The editor (Gerald England) of New Hope International ([REDACTED]) invites submissions of articles of max. 2000 words (shorter welcome) on "all aspects of haiku-writing" for "a special issue devoted to the art of haiku". Submissions only between October-December 1991, please. Send with sae or IRC.

- * The Haiku Society of America announces the Annual Harold G. Henderson Awards for best unpublished haiku. Deadline: 1 August 1991. Prizes: 1 \$100 2 \$50 3 \$20. Entry fee \$1.00 per haiku (money order to Haiku Society of America). Limit: 5 unpublished haiku, not submitted for publication or to any other contest. Each haiku on 3 separate 3" x 5" cards, two with the haiku only, the third with the haiku and author's name and address in the upper left-hand corner. Submit to: V B Young, 44 Currier Place, Cheshire CT 06410. Winning haiku published in Frogpond; send IRC for list of winners. No entries returned. Rights return to authors on publication. Open to non-members of HSA.

- * HSA also announce the Annual Gerald Brady Awards for the best unpublished senryu. Deadline: 1 July 1991. All other details as for the Henderson Awards, except entries should be sent to: Lee Gurga, 514 Pekin St, Lincoln, IL 62656.

- * Thanks to the generosity of James W. Hackett, the British Haiku Society is delighted to announce that it is setting up its own annual open award, to be known as the James W. Hackett Haiku Award for the haiku "which best exhibits Zen qualities" and which has not been published at any time prior to the year of the award. The single annual prize of £30 will be funded, at least initially, out of the proceeds of privilege sales by the Society of "The Zen Haiku and other Zen Poems of J.W.Hackett", pub. Japan Publications, 1983 (copies available from the BHS secretary, price £12.00, postage paid). Funds already exist to keep the award going for several years, starting December 1991. Submissions to the BHS secretary. Deadline: 31 October 1991. No entry fee (for the timebeing). Limit: 5 haiku per person, each on a separate card, with name and address of entrant on back. Haiku published in Blithe Spirit will be considered automatically (i.e. no need to re-submit) unless the author requests otherwise. BHS committee will prepare a short list of 20 entries, from which James W. Hackett himself has agreed to make the final selection. The BHS committee reserves the right not to make an award in any year when there are no submissions of sufficient standard or in the appropriate spirit. Winner to be announced in the spring issue of Blithe Spirit.

- * Those wishing to enter for this Award may like to reflect on the following rationale which accompanied James W. Hackett's offer: "For years my cynicism has kept me from writing my views regarding how important Tao-Zen is to the Way of haiku - this as distinct from the art of the same. I do not mean to imply by this distinction that the latter has no value (far from it). But the former is nothing less than a level of consciousness and Way of life, one that can reveal a breadth and depth of

values quite unknown to the dilettante, and to even the devotee of poetry ... I contend that in essence the haiku of Basho (and Hackett!) are more Tao-Zen expressions than they are poetic or literary creations. Sharings, if you will, of special moments of intuition which quite mysteriously allow us to experience (often unconsciously) a sense of oneness with nature. A prime example of this Tao-Zen influence on aesthetics is the predominance in oriental art and poetry of nature (including animals and even insects) ... by transcending walls of mind, a life-reverencing view accrues, one which engenders an intuition of Oneness. Such is the existential base for the "interpenetration with all things" that characterizes the souls and poems of those who live the Way of haiku."

(Note: We would like members to understand that the Society exists to encourage both writers who believe their haiku are generated by Zen, and equally those who believe their inspiration comes from somewhere else. Ed.)

- * The Japan Festival Education Officer asked Stephen Gill to produce a short document to guide teachers who might wish to involve their pupils in writing haiku. This will be made available to local and regional education officers throughout the country, as well as interested teachers.
- * David Cobb has won the first prize for "free style" haiku in the 1990 haiku contest run by Mainichi Daily News of Tokyo, for his:

a moment between
lighthouse flashes -
cold smell of fish

He also has an article on "poetcraft aspects" of haiku-writing in the current issue of Quartos magazine.

- * Some members will have heard a rumour that Japan Airlines was to organise its own haiku contest (quite separately from our Event which they are sponsoring) as part of the Japan Festival 1991. We understand this will not now happen.
- * Doris Corti has a misleading piece on haiku in Writers News, March 1991.

MEETINGS

With the exception of number 1, the following programme is provisional:

- 1) Open workshop on 12 May 1991, at Newcastle Arts Centre, during morning, as part of the Poets and Small Press Convention, organised by Iron Press. Leader: David Cobb.
- 2) probably in July, and at the Miura Anjin Kai premises (2nd Floor, 75 Kenton St, London WC1N 1NN). Leader: Stephen Gill.
- 3) probably in November, in or near Swindon. Leader: Kevin Bailey.
- 4) spring 1992: in the newly re-furbished Kyoto Garden, Holland Park, London. Leader: Colin Blundell.

SEASON CORNER

Entries for Season Corner (by members of BHS only) should contain an image which evokes unmistakably the season previous to the current issue (in Blithe Spirit 2 this is Christmas, New Year and winter). Feel free to "invent" season words e.g. mistletoe, pulling crackers, which are not (could not be) in the Japanese list. (You can find the Japanese list in the Reference Section of William J. Higginson's "The Haiku Handbook", pub. Kodansha, 1985). Entries for the Season Corner of Blithe Spirit 3 (covering Easter and spring) to the editor no later than 31 May, please.

Treading the virgin snow
Going out;
Meeting my own footprints
Coming back again.

Heavy snow -
The morning after,
The chef on the roof
Is a snowman.

"Tito"

The moon stares -
The woman's fingers
warm her wineglass.

Richard Martin

 throwing frozen sticks
(long haul of war)
 the dog never looks back

John Hartley

Snow outside -
Indoors the smell
Of hyacinths

Winter -
Berries of the cotoneaster
Glow against the wall

Cy Paterson

Tramping down the snow,
making garden pathways for
my reluctant cat

Redbreast perching
framed in berried holly
Heartwarming colours

Richard Goring

A stealth of snow, stalks
and crouching like a white cat
pounces in the night.

Denise Bennett

Twelfth Night:
postponing the climb-down
with the tinsel star

David Cobb

tea time again: more
sparrow tracks in icing, wedged
from an inch-high fir

incredibly, these
bells, this red-coated elder
sleighting overhead

C.P. James

saturday morning
in the demolition yard -
flames fanned by cold hands

Colin Blundell

On the snowy waste
a birch writes a one-line poem
with one long shadow

Mokuo Nagayama

cards now avalanche
smothering chill icicles --
of indifference

B.D. Thompson

Ice on the puddles -
children going to school -
crack crack crack!

Joan Daniels

Hogmanay's wee dram
apprehensive offering
to the new-born one

Ken Ellison

The thought of old age
crosses my mind: I pile logs
on the sinking fire

W.M. Tidmarsh

DOOR KNOCK BEFORE LIGHT

don't get up; cat won't
like heat leaving bed to get
cold looks from postman

steve sneyd

Frost city
seagulls skim the crossing:
hands clutching the wheel

Adele Davide

Like a rosary
the blood-red berries are beads
held in hollied hands

Denise Bennett

acorns



Acorns is a section in which members try out their "nervous work" and solicit reactions from other members, by post, direct. It will help if you add questions, so that readers know what you are "nervous" about. I've tried to give an example of this.

ah! a rare sight
ducks in line astern, quacking
over the town

Richard Goring

breeze in the moonlight -
its tender touch on my cheeks
but where has it gone?

Susumu Tanaka

an early close:
the school grounds populate
with children, snowmen

Pearl Gardner

EDEN

An old garden where
a snake sidles away from
apple left-over

Ken Ellison

Focused; a heron
anglepoised to snap
reflection of pensive fish

Ken Ellison

Twilight deepens -
bird twitterings fall silent -
listen to the hush.

Joan Daniels

The mouth of a cripple writes a one-line poem

Mokuo Nagayama

young fans at a rock star's grave
beneath black earphones
still he sings and plays

John Hartley

Spreading meat paste
On the sandwiches
I slice one for the dog

Cy Patterson

sip by sip
a dove is filling the pool
with toe-tipped pebbles

David Cobb

I want to know if you agree with my hope that this is a good example of the "paradox resolved" type of haiku, i.e. sip by sip the dove should be emptying the pool; but the final line solves the riddle, and in fact the pool is being reduced in two ways simultaneously - by sipping, and by tipping pebbles in. Do I need to mention the dove's toes; would "tipped-in" be better than "toe-tipped"?

members write

(As long as one person combines the duties of editor and secretary, please make it clear whether you wish your letter to be considered for publication in the newsletter, or whether a private response is preferred. On this occasion I've taken the liberty - without permission! - of excerpting one or two bits from letters which are likely to be of general interest. Ed.)

"I don't like reading very long circulars. I urge something short and frequent." (Roy Batt)

"My own preference (finance and a high degree of interest on the part of the membership permitting) would have been for three or four issues per year of a magazine concentrating on what might be called "the spirit and practice of haiku". This could have been combined with the distribution of a more frequent Newsletter disseminating notices and information. Such a magazine could form the launch-pad for an annual or bi-annual anthology of the best examples of true haiku." (Ernest Sheppard) (I agree that newsletterish and magazinish content don't blend very well. The former is ephemeral; the latter you may like to keep. At the end of 1991 we hope to separate the posts of secretary-treasurer and editor, and this will be a good moment to consider the suggestions made by Roy and Ernest. We do have to bear in mind, however, that separate, as well as more frequent, mailings will breed higher postage costs, which already eat up a frightening fraction of our income. Ed.)

"I don't think we should pay too much deference to the Japanese haiku. Their culture, their spiritual background, their conventions are so very different. By all means admire them for what they are in their own right, then go away and do something different - our own thing. The form has got to work for us in a way natural to us or it's a fad that will die out very quickly. I think we have to be bold enough not to be intimidated by Japanese masters. They can't write our haiku, we can't write theirs. That's that. We must try to push the form to its limits, to see what we can do with it." (Eric Speight)

"It was with misgivings that I read Colin Blundell's advice to 'find' haiku in the work of other writers. Plunder rather than plagiarism I would call it. And even if the 'rearranger' acknowledges his source (and the haiku could easily come adrift from such moorings in a subsequent printing) I doubt whether any literary writer would look kindly on such borrowings.

The entire point (and fun) of a found poem resides in the fact that the original subject matter was not intended to serve a literary purpose ... But hands off anything, please, that was intended to be a work of art in the first place. The only literary work you can legitimately cannibalize is your own. I once reworked one of my poems as follows:

for a minute or two about what it wishes to achieve. Pairs or groups of 3-4 sit then forward, and ideas are shared. They try to reach a consensus, but don't have to. One from each pair/group then reports to the plenary.

AT NIGHT IN THE LAUNDRETTE

I sit in the laundrette
Watch my reflection sitting
On the chequered pavement

The black wet street reflects
Moonmilk, primroses
A bus sails by, a boat
Festooned with lanterns

My shadow warms itself
By a red puddle
Hell's fire flickers there
Stirred by drops of rain

And, yes, the first, longer, version is the better one. (Gerda Mayer)

AT NIGHT IN THE LAUNDRETTE

My reflection sits
On the pavement. Warms itself
By a red puddle.

ARTICLES

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SOME IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES IN HAIKU WORKSHOPS by David Cobb

1. Ask everyone to come to the workshop with one haiku PRINTED on a card, anonymously, and on arrival pop it into a hat. All take turns to draw one card out of the hat, write it up on a board, and read it aloud. It is then "open season" for comments, suggestions, criticisms. The author tries to keep his/her identity a secret by joining in the discussion. When all contributions have been discussed there may, optionally, be a vote for "the best of the bunch" (the cards are laid out - on stairs works well - and each member votes for a best and a second-best). Second-best votes are used only as tie-breakers. The "winning" haiku is read aloud and, if it is everybody's wish, the "winner" is asked to divulge his/her identity. This format was used at the Finchley meeting with success, but with 15 present occupied best part of 3 hours, which some thought was rather too much of a good thing; so don't allow more than one haiku per person, and for preference don't try this if you've got more than a dozen participants. (Incidentally, the "best of bunch" at Finchley was Brian Wells.)
2. A speedier variant of the above is to form groups of 4-5 and share out the contents of the bag between them. Each group discusses its own handful and chooses the one or two "best" for later presentation to the whole group. With a small number present this might make it possible to allow more than one entry per person.
3. The leader hands out copies of a haiku which he/she has chosen in advance. Each member reads it silently and thinks for a minute or two about what it evokes in him/her. Pairs or groups of 3-4 are then formed, and ideas are shared. They try to reach a consensus, but don't have to. One from each pair/group then reports to the plenary.

4. If some members of the group are still uncertain what makes a haiku, the leader can hand out a sheet on which are printed about a dozen poems, as different in form, content and mood as possible, but all purporting to be haiku (a suitable collection is available from the BHS secretary, on request with sae). Working individually, members are asked to tick those that they personally regard as being haiku, and to think of the criteria they used in making their choices. Choices and criteria are then pooled and discussed.
5. Members may offer for discussion handouts which contain a number of different versions of the same haiku, showing its evolution towards its "best" form. He/she may like to scramble the chronology, so that he/she can hear from the other participants which they consider to be the most successful version. The writer needs to be prepared with clear ideas about why various changes were made, and these will be discussed.
6. The group may wish for some kind of "after-life", especially if geography prevents its meeting very often. At Finchley virtually everyone volunteered to join a postal group aiming to produce something on renga lines, but with much simplified rules. (Stephen Gill wrote the starter verse and the "rules" and posted them to the next person in the chain, and so on. This is still going the rounds. If it proves a success, the "rules" and maybe the resulting "renga" will be published in Blithe Spirit 3.)

Maybe other members can enlarge on this range of activities - especially our Japanese members? The following article by Colin Blundell captures the flavour of haiku workshops.

THE SEARCH FOR PERFECTION by Colin Blundell

It's a curious thing that conversations about haiku contain things that no conversation about 'normal' poetry would ever stoop to; it's a curious thing that conversations about haiku stir passions of one sort or another - preservation of traditional approaches, purity of form and content, syllabification, "almost a haiku", "not a haiku", "too Zen", "not Zen enough", "too much philosophy", "merely descriptive", "not poetical", "too poetical", and so on.

I would never think of re-writing somebody's 'normal' poetry because, whilst I don't necessarily subscribe to the idea that poetry is 'purely personal', it does seem to me that 'normal' poetry comes from some deep well of experience and enters into existence as a private way of sorting out who and what you are in relation to the world out there; once a poem is in the public domain, though, it acquires, just as it is, as many meanings as there are readers.

But with haiku for some reason we feel free to tinker with what other people have written without thinking that they may be offended. Why is this? What about the following as some tentative answers?

(a) Haiku does not come from a 'deep well' - it is merely a surface gesture immediately in the public domain.

(b) Whilst its main feature is the sharp concrete imagery of the 'best' poetry, haiku-writing is not the same as writing ordinary poems; its disciplines derive from Zen; if you operate within these disciplines you feel obliged to challenge whatever you think does not fit.

(c) Haiku-writing is like doing a free-style jigsaw puzzle; there are often three pieces (frog/pond/plop; snail/Fuji/climb); if you think you can see a better way of arranging the pieces you say so.

(d) We know how much and how often we have tinkered with our own little efforts and the habit transfers to how we look at those of others.

(e) Zen demolishes dichotomies - especially that of observer and observed; it's not that the poet observes the frog plopping - it just happens and it's rather inconvenient to have to say so. Haiku is impersonal utterance; it is assumed that anybody writing haiku will accept that they, as writer, are unimportant.

(f) We have notions of preciousness; tinkering is an attempt to promote the idea that haiku, gem-like, is perfectible.

(g) We feel that we have to aim for the archetypal haiku (frog-plop) and that nothing else will do in terms of either content or form.

(h) Some people seem to have been able to set themselves up as haiku gurus and we feel, ardent authoritarians, that we have to go along with what they say about purity, etc. Choose your leader...

(i) Haiku is a social, rather than an individual, event - a coming together of like minds engaged in a common pursuit.

(j) Like the Autodidact in Sartre's 'Nausea' we are only content when we find that the thoughts we have are the same as those of others even if the words are different - so we feel inclined to change them to make the thought fit ours precisely.

Is the truth in some combination of the above or are there different possibilities?

WHAT IS A HAIKU? by Alain Kervern, trans. by James Kirkup from a recent article in "Le Monde"

Ever since the nineteenth century, when the Goncourt brothers introduced the haiku to the western world, the incredible fluctuations of reputation it suffered in the various attempts to transpose it into other languages soon made the West lose sight of the fact that even in present times it is one of the descendants of a classical tradition peculiar to the genius of the Japanese people. While this brief poetic composition of seventeen syllables incorporating a 'season word' is a poetic phenomenon that arouses controversies proceeding far beyond the cultural framework from which it emerged, the present vogue for haiku written in English, Breton, French or Flemish often irresistibly evokes the attitudes of those know-alls who dismiss an abstract painting derisively with: "I do that kind of doodle every day!"

Certain Westerners have played a part in gaining recognition for this poetic form through their translations - one thinks of Maurice Coyard, and above all of René Sieffert, who has translated Basho, the master of the genre - while others have undertaken a study of what this poetic form could become when employed in another language - and here one remembers the investigations of Etiemble.

But what do the Japanese think of this great wave of enthusiasm for the art of haiku? Several positions can be noted on this subject. First of all, surprise, amusement, then sometimes a certain appreciative feeling, as can be witnessed in a university professor's statements to the Mainichi newspaper: "All over the world there are people who, in their own language, compose poems they call 'haiku', in imitation of the Japanese haiku. The word 'haiku' can even be found in recent editions of British and American dictionaries ... for example, we find poets the length and breadth of America composing haiku with an elegiac tone ... It would appear that, parallel to the present enthusiasm for haiku in Japan, a similar phenomenon exists in other parts of the world ... It is very pleasant and indeed moving that Japanese haiku may serve as a friendly link between people who know nothing of Japan or of the Japanese language."

Overcoming their initial astonishment and passing to action, in a kind of reaction inspired by their legendary pragmatism, the Japanese have begun organizing international contests of 'foreign language haiku' such as the one organized by the Fifth National Culture Festival which took place in 1990 in the city of Matsuyama (in Ehime Prefecture).

Above and beyond the many questions that might be raised from the point of view of occidental sensibility regarding the validity of foreign language haiku, and notwithstanding certain formula definitions that are in themselves as brilliant as certain poetic examples -- 'the seizing of fleeting emotion', 'living natural source of immutable verities', 'catching the lightning' -- what is haiku?

First and foremost it is a social activity. It is a genre that emerged from poetry meetings (uta-awase) that took place in the Japanese imperial court during the Middle Ages. During these poetic joustings collective works were created, the renga or chain verses from which haiku were born. Basho himself presided over writing groups, confronting his poetic experiences with those of others, discussing his technique with disciples. All cultural activity, especially that of poetry, is a social activity in Japan. Today in the archipelago the art of haiku has its schools, its followers, its magazines (eight hundred of them in a recent count), its tendencies, its contests and its millions of adepts.

In the haiku clubs, where members meet once a month, the poems written by each of the members become the objects of discussion, argument, commentaries and are finally put to the vote, thus bearing witness to an authentic 'literary democracy'. Everything is organized along competitive lines, each contestant seeking absolute perfection. Other characteristics root the haiku even more firmly in the specificity of the native culture and demonstrate an epiphenomenon embracing profounder realities that propound essences related to fundamental preoccupations in the history of mankind.

The classic haiku, in the form in which it has been handed down to us, is structured on a rhythm of seventeen syllables. This number was not arrived at by accident. In fact, the most ancient Japanese poems, the 'katauta', were constructed according to this rhythm at the beginning of our era, reproducing the respiratory mode upon which oral literature was then based, before the introduction of transcriptions in Chinese characters. These rhythmic formulations, with a 'question-answer' balance that was to be found later in the poetry contests of the Middle Ages, possessed a deep religious connotation. The fact that the haiku appears initially as a poetic act should not make us forget that the Japanese have from the earliest times developed relationships with poetry in which there was always a preoccupation with the invisible world. This is proved by historical data.

Certain exalted personages in Japanese history were not averse to taking part in poetry meetings and seizing the opportunity to compose poems before a battle, in order to gain the favour of the gods. Akechi Mitsuhide, he who was to assassinate the famous general Oda Nobunaga in 1582, participated on the eve of his encounter in a renga contest. An eighteenth-century philosopher, Fujitani Mitsue, declared in a treatise on the art of poetry that one must break the yoke of words that hold the gods captive. So the gods are present at the moment of the 'overthrow of words' (togo), a phenomenon which consists in inverting the order of words or syllables in order to accentuate the meaning or to disguise it. So the Shinto gods are assimilated to 'the spirit of words' (kotodama).

Numerous poems in popular tradition align themselves with magical formulae in which this 'spirit of words' is liberated by the simple recitation of the poems. Used for therapeutic purposes, these rhymed chants of thirty-one syllables (seventeen plus fourteen, i.e. 5-7-5 plus 7-7) again recall this relationship between magic and poetry, whilst other traditional civilizations or cultures also claim that all poetry is medicine.

The seasonal reference that should be included in every genuine haiku is a sign that the writer is 'in harmony with nature'. That means that the necessary allusion to a season in a poem is a kind of explicit recognition of the place of man in relation to the universe, in which human events are not the concern only of men. In the course of centuries, the Japanese have collected, then classified, all the signs, all the characteristic moments of each season, and have gathered them into actual dictionaries that are added to as time goes by.

These dictionaries, which today include more than five thousand 'season words', are first of all used as practical manuals consulted by haiku amateurs before the composition of a poem. Veritable treasures of Japanese sensibility, these dictionaries are also poetic almanacs called saijiki, and are, according to the Japanese poet Inoue Teruo, 'a detailed collection of dates and customs commemorating our people'. These poetic almanacs form the basis of a creativity of which haiku are simply the visible results. Using fifteen thousand haiku by well-known authors as illustrations, they are the scale of reference for all

new compositions. The discovery and the study of these almanacs bring to the practice of haiku a fresh illumination and constitute a Japanese world-view.

Through the season words compiled in these almanacs we are present at the permanent reconstitution of the universe by the inhabitants of this archipelago. For this reason too, the haiku is much more than a mere literary event. Because of its long history, and because of its high favour in present-day Japan, the haiku belongs rather to ethnopoetry than to poetry as the Occident understands it.

(Alain Kervern graduated from the Ecole Nationale de Langues Orientales Vivantes. He has published several collections of translations of Japanese poetry: *Le Montagnes, les rizières et la mer*, *La Lumière des bambous* (60 haiku by Basho and his school), and two volumes of essays on haiku, *Malgré le givre* and *Réveil de la loutre* (Editions Folle Avoine). He teaches Japanese at the Centre de Langues de l'Université de Bretagne Occidentale, and is at present doing research at The Japan Foundation's Language Institute at Saitama.)

DEVELOPMENT OF A HAIKU

Richard Goring

This haiku was sparked-off by a book's vivid descriptive passage. The author relates coming up on deck of a houseboat one night, to find the light of a full moon reflecting from the frost-covered, grassy riverbank and deck. The only sounds were the lap of water and the paws of the family kitten, lost in a world of its own, leaping and scampering over the deck. It is one of those unforgettable moments of beauty and pleasure. I set out to portray those images. Here is the initial result:

In the silent night,
frost delicately traces.
The kitten dances.

I quite like this and it is 5-7-5, though not until later do I realise there is no mention of moonlight. What frost traces, by the way, is not the kitten's dance, but

the edges of grass blades and the grain of deck planking. My first change is to make it more here-and-now by altering 'traces' to 'tracing'. Next I change 'silent' to 'moonlit' and leave the silence to be inferred. Then I decide to pin it to a season by changing the first line to 'Moonlit autumn night'. Next 'The' is changed to 'Our', which I feel makes the whole thing more specific. By now I am thinking that 'dances' personifies the kitten's behaviour, so I change that to produce version six as:

Moonlit autumn night,
frost delicately tracing.
Our kitten gambols.

This fails to strike me as markedly better than what I began with, and I am also being nagged by the lack of reference to silence, so a major revision now takes place:

Winter moonlight shines
on silent, sparkling frost.
Our kitten gambols.

This looks better (I think). I'm not now sure why I changed the season. But I don't like 'sparkling', which seems "precious" and anyway isn't accurate, so my first revision

substitutes 'glistening', which also has the virtue of restoring it to 5-7-5. I like this haiku, despite which I next change 'glistening' to 'silver-white'. It is the same syllable-count, but feels clumsy, as does the following version (number 10), where I change the first line to 'Full moon is shining' in another effort to make it more here-and-now. I am bothered that all of versions seven to ten have too many sibilants.

During these latter revisions I have been re-reading William Higginson's 'Haiku Handbook', especially the chapters on form and content. Also, the BHS 'Blithe Spirit' arrives and I read (several times) Dee Evett's review of the previous issue's haiku, along with Higginson's open letter and his leaflet on writing and teaching haiku. I believe my understanding of haiku takes a big step forward, although version 11 which all this reading provokes is not very radical. But I do feel compelled to attempt a 10-14 syllable (after Higginson) or 2-3-2 accented beats (after Blyth) version:

Full moon is shining
on silver-white frost silence;
our kitten gambols.

Full moon shines
on silent glist'ning frost;
our kitten gambols.

Later I consider changing 'frost' to 'rime' in version 10 and in the 10-14 version, also adding 'white' to the end of the latter's first line. That somehow prompts an even shorter version:

white moonlight
silver frost silence -
kitten gambols

It seems to me to read like transliteration from Japanese. Sometimes I read it and like it, other times not. Is my dissatisfaction with all these efforts due to the

fact that I am attempting to relate an experience at second-hand, perhaps?

The British Haiku Society

The British Haiku Society was founded in 1990 "to promote, principally within the British Isles, the appreciation and writing of the forms of poetry known as haiku, senryu, renga and tanka, by means of publications, tutorials and workshops, exchange of poems, critical comment and information, assistance to teachers of English in schools, as well as by advancing research and study in this field". A newsletter, Blithe Spirit, is published four times a year. This is included in subscription to the Society (£10, concessions £5). To apply for membership, write with s.a.e. to BHS, Sinodun, Shalford, Braintree, Essex CM7 5HN.