



Blithe Spirit

Newsletter of The British Haiku Society

4

Autumn 1991

NEWS FROM THE SECRETARY

IMMEDIATELY! READ IMMEDIATELY! READ IMMEDIATELY! READ IMMEDIATELY

BBC Radio 3: Portraits of life in 19th and modern Japan, by Stephen Gill, with senryu and haiku (tanka only in the third programme) as follows: "Street Hawkers", Tues 8 Oct, 20.20-20.40; "Meiji Fair", Weds 9 Oct, 20.15-20.35; "Tokai Bubble", Sat 19 Oct, 22.25-22.55. I've read the scripts. Brilliant!

Separation of newsletter and journal is more apparent with this issue, preparing the way for a printed journal which we hope to achieve next year. From issue 5, Colin Blundell and Richard Goring take over responsibility for the journal, whilst the newsletter will remain in my hands. This division of work has become vital as the scope of our activities increases. For the same reason, Stephen Gill is taking charge of the workshop programme; this should mean more of them in more places, reaching out into areas we have not so far visited.

Next workshop is on Saturday, 16 November, at Jolliffe Studios, Wyvern Theatre, Swindon, 10.00-16.00. Coordinator: Kevin Bailey. Minimal charge for room. All those interested please send s.a.e. for directions and final programme, to reach Kevin Bailey, 39 Exmouth St, Swindon, Wilts. SN1 3PU, no later than 4 November.

The division of editorial duties prefigures a proposal from your committee. Under our rules, a new committee must be elected to take office in January 1992. This time the election will be by post (though we hope that a general meeting may be possible in 1993). The committee proposes its own re-election en bloc (not from a belief in its own invincibility, but because continuity is desirable at this stage). The existing committee, as the result of coptions during the year, is now: President - James Kirkup; Secretary-Treasurer - David Cobb; Editors of Blithe Spirit - Colin Blundell and Richard Goring; Workshops and meetings coordinator - Stephen Gill; Liaison with North America - Dee Evetts. (From 1992 Dee Evetts would become a coopted committee member.) Would you please let me have any counter-nominations for the committee by 20 December 1991? In the event of rival nominations for any post a ballot paper will be enclosed with Blithe Spirit 5 and voting will take place by mid-January.

"Season Corner" and (with some reservations) "Acorns" have now become established features of Blithe Spirit. We now launch a new section, which we call The Pathway. This will give us an international (or at least, interlingual) dimension. The main aim will be to publish English, French or German translations of haiku originally written in languages which are not widely spoken, but which have an equal claim to be shared. This means not only other languages within the British Isles (Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Irish, Bengali, Gujerati, etc.) but also European languages, such as Romanian, Hungarian, Dutch, Portuguese. Translation and original will be published side-by-side.

Nearly 250 people have now sent in entries for the BHS/JAL/Iron Haiku Event, but astonishingly few of these are BHS members! What are you all waiting for - the angelus to ring? Remember, the deadline for entries is 30 November.

After making contact with the haiku societies in America, Canada, Germany, Holland and Flemish-speaking Belgium, we are now glad to report informal contacts with the Romanian society (founded 1960, 60 members), via Ion Codrescu.

At the launches of the Japan Festival in Cardiff and London we were present with a haiku information stand, and made contact with the notable graphic artist, Paul Pieter Piech, whose stunning posters based on English translations of famous Japanese haiku are something you might like to watch out for.

Plans for a BHS contribution to Garden Festival Wales 1992 and the King's Lynn Festival (exhibition of artworks inspired by haiku) have advanced promisingly. We are also in touch now with the Polka Theatre for Children, Wimbledon, who plan a haiku event. Stephen Gill and I went along to a meeting of 30 Japanese poetesses just flown in to a London hotel at the end of August, expecting to tell them about BHS and haiku life in Britain; but instead were put on the spot to compose five - yes, five - instant haiku in Japanese. With the essential assistance of the General Manager of JAL, I managed one, running in its English version as follows: the Kensington air/ flutters this summer evening/ with Japanese fans. Bilingual Stephen Gill did better. We both claimed a prize for originality; there was a steady conformity about the 150 Japanese haiku, which nearly all began "London-no", "Kew Gardens-no" or "Big Ben-no" (NB all of these lines read as a full 5-onji line in Japanese).

Would any member who feels he/she might be able to help with workshops/lessons on haiku for schoolchildren/teachers please get in touch with Stephen Gill, who - as a result of his role in the Japan Festival educational programme - is getting more requests than he can handle?

Stephen also organised a successful workshop in Covent Garden on 26 July. 16 present, roughly half of us members. The mood of haiku known as "sabi" (roughly, melancholy acceptance of things as they are) was exemplified with haiku about scarecrows. We discussed the scarecrow image in English literature; with the possible exception of Wurzel Gummidge, scarecrows seemed more figures of fun and derision to the British. What could we offer instead? Snowmen? Ex-servicemen? Car park attendants? Any ideas? Autumn is a great season for "sabi" - may Season Corner benefit!

James Kirkup wishes to correct two spelling mistakes in his article in BS 4: kireji (not kireiji); and kiru should be in the infinitive form, kireru.



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FEATURES SECTION

BEYOND THE HAIKU ...?

Geoff Daniel

Orthodoxy suggests that a haiku is self-sufficient - a minimalist grouping of syllables, structured to a principle either conventional or organic. Here is the poem, with no title, little punctuation or capitalisation, if any - it is what it says. And being orthodox at heart, I revel in this: the toughness and clarity, the utter reality of it, unencumbered. I accept, too, that much of its potential comes from its isolation, the space about it. (Cor van den Heuvel* was right to print his single word 'tundra' on one page, rainforests notwithstanding. Or have we merely crossed the divide into the concrete? I digress.)(* "The Haiku Anthology", ed. Cor van den Heuvel, Simon and Schuster, 1986)

But I wonder how many other writers find themselves wanting to write more about a subject, but in the same way, finding facets each of which has the appeal to the conscious, the spirit of haiku? I find myself naturally writing in sequences of haiku, either developmental - the course of a relationship, the progress of a rainstorm, getting drunk - or more eclectic - the various possible views of a piece of wood as they occur; almost as if the haiku alone were not enough.

This would not seem unreasonable, since consciousness may be experienced as a linear event, a string of perceptions one after the other; equally, events themselves involve development, from inception through growth to resolution. What more natural than a chain of verses, each self-sufficient, but moving from and leading to another? Consider the sonnet sequence - the sonnet is a marvellous vehicle of containment, but is used very effectively in sequence by poets from Spenser to Edwin Morgan. No one sonnet is diminished, but a greater whole is achieved.

I realise this is not in the Japanese tradition (nor is it in any way an original development) but I must agree wholeheartedly with Eric Speight ("Members Write", B.S. No.3) who pointed out that "We must try to push the form to its limits, to see what we can do with it."

In this spirit, then, may I offer a further plea for the limited use of title (banned from every competition I have ever seen). One sequence I wrote concerned a wedge of redwood pine, reflecting on different aspects of its substance and life. By

SEARCH CORNER

using the general title "History in a section of redwood" I defined the subject and area once and for all, to point the reader and avoid repetition. For each haiku I then had a sub-title which allowed for extra layers of meaning. For instance, four ways of looking at the grain of the wood were rendered:

Plan view

It is a hard map - round
these gradients packed and bare -
the long haul up from seed.

The title views the grain as an abstract, schematised as a map, and a 'paper and pencil' attitude to life. James

Vicious Circles

No Minotaur stalks
these pathways: we hunt alone
in the perfect maze.

This uses mythology, modifying it to a paradox of unknowing self-pursuit, infinitely trapped. 'Vicious Circles' guides the reader to a psychological and human problem, then.

A Guided Tour

Queen Victoria
here took tea. There is Verdun.
And we are, yes, here.

This poem uses the title to add to the detached view of history, which sees our position as merely another point in the juxtapositions that make up the past - it conditions the tone of voice. Finally

Like the late summer grasses,
High but dry, - until now
Our plans
Crackle These lines say it all,
a diary of the thick and thin
you went through, survived.

The title is integral, a continuation of the poem, but must be divorced from the poem itself in order to make the irony work - here in the wood is a record of survival and varying growth, but it is only accessible to us as a result of the tree's death, an end only it could not foresee.

I make no claims for the quality of this as poetry, of course, and I'm sure many better examples can be found of haiku working with titles - I offer it only towards the discussion of sequence and/or title. Any reactions? I should be glad to exchange sequences with other interested writers. Ard Glover

SEASON CORNER

Even after providing an extra page for your seasonal haiku this time, we had to leave out far more than we could fit in. Apologies to anyone who feels disappointed.

two naked children -
a boy, girl - hand-in-hand round
the bay's yellow arc

six: the child's bent stick
in a garden pool stencils
its long shadow east

C.P. James
Brian Tasker

on my desk
a pile of foreign coins
beach at sunset

my open window -
an incoming ferry
fairground music

Michael Gunton
Eric Speight

Watching paddlers -
my supporting wheelchair
becomes my burden

B.D. Thompson

Return to the little room :
The pack of biscuits
Completely colonized -
Victory to the ants.

Ikuyo Yoshimura

Like the late summer grasses,
High but dry,
Our plans
Crackle in the wind ...

Doris Pidgeon
Tito

this summer's
season words include
snow ..

Cy Patterson
Jon Longden

As she pegs washing
a sly breeze caresses
her flimsy knickers

Seven young nuns bathe
screaming as the sea fondles
their warm sacred thighs

Kenneth Bailey
Edward Glover

Toddler's paddling pool
waters the lavender
bucket by bucket.

Twilight deepens
fluting birdsong
into hush

Joan Daniels

hidden at night
among the crickets
a typist!

mosquitoes
in the zendo
the frogs stopped biting freely

Brian Tasker

A buzzard circles
upon nothingness so high
he slides through thin cloud.

The field is frost-white
with dew, early mornings long
shadows' half asleep

Eric Speight

No words on the notepaper
I keep them in my heart still
late summer night

Cathie Gill

A freshly baked apple
on the white cloth
remindful of my first love
stripped to one white sheet

Ikuyo Yoshimura

David Blaber

Green-brown bladder-wrack
flaccid and still: I, too, wait
for the tide to turn.
not by the handle.

Doris Pidgeon

Adam Bass

No cones
but a swarm of wasps
emerge from the conifer.
scatters its pollen.

Cy Patterson

Brian Wells

these sultry dog-days
shroud our furthest headlands:
gulls glide through sea fog
scarlet pimpernels
dotting Leo's arena,
clawed spots of earth blood
burning.

Kenneth Bailey

too sick for a shower
 taking
 a sun bath

his voice came out
 between his teeth
 a black cigar

Diane Albertina

The plane tree's peeling
 armpits, in the dappled shade --
 the passing tourists.

I switched off the light
 over the kitchen sink, and
 the frogs stopped croaking.

James Kirkup

Summer cold:
 my greedy son recycles
 granules of dry snot.

Aircraft overhead -
 and down on this hot plain
 poppies nod in the wind.

Billy Watt

Yugoslavia,
 twenty-four pieces in one
 summer offensive.

Cathie Gill

no breeze, blaze for blue,
 no cloud, brown for lawn, the bed
 stripped to one white sheet

David Blaber

Cold fingertips hold
 the cup of tea on the lawn
 not by the handle.

Adam Bass

Almost unnoticed
 the dying bee on the path
 scatters its pollen.

Brian Wells

Entries for Season Corner (by members of BHS only) should contain an image or images which evoke the season previous to the current issue (in Blithe Spirit 5 this will be Autumn). Feel free to invent or experiment with "season words", e.g. Guy Fawkes Night (unknown to the Japanese), conkers, stubble burning.

I have been thinking about some of the questions concerning authorship that have been raised in recent issues of *Blithe Spirit*. In "The Search for Perfection" (B.S. No 2, Spring 1991) Colin Blundell invites us to ponder why it is that haiku seem to be considered fair game for comment and suggested improvements, in contrast to the reverential attitude that prevails with regard to other forms of poetry.

This difference can easily be overstated. I have had longer poems of mine subjected to critique by friends and editors, and have on occasion performed the same service for others. Conversely, I come across haiku (published and unpublished) that I find as aptly worded as I can imagine, and perfectly complete--and I also write a small number about which I feel this way.

These reservations notwithstanding, I am very willing to go along with Colin's general premise: among haiku poets there is a greater readiness to invite and to volunteer participation. And I find something in each of the possibilities that he puts forward to explain the phenomenon. If any could be added, it is the very brevity of haiku that might be taken into account, as well as its seeming simplicity. These make it the least daunting of literary forms, and account for its great appeal to children and adults alike. Many are willing to attempt writing haiku who do not otherwise regard themselves as writers at all. By the same token, this willingness to 'have a go' extends into the areas of appreciation and criticism.

I welcome and enjoy this attitude--the relative lack of a closed shop, and notions of some exclusive knowledge or skill. Along with this goes the risk that an over-facile idea of haiku will prevail, that dilution will be proportionate to popularisation. I hope and expect the converse to be true: that the more who discover haiku, the more will go on to explore for themselves the most and the best that the form can encompass.

In the following issue (B.S. No 3, Summer 1991) Richard Goring addresses a particular aspect of the haiku poet's openness to comment and suggestion. Who gets credit for the final version of a poem that is modified after discussion? He takes as an example a haiku by David Cobb, the published version of which differed significantly from the original as a result of suggestions made by Bill Higginson. He rightly (if rather tentatively) argues that authorship remains with the person who had the original experience--however much help or advice is accepted.

Rather surprisingly he jumps from here to the assertion that if David had declined the proposed revision then it would be acceptable for Bill to publish it as his own. "Not acceptable to this Bill." writes Higginson in reply (letter of 4/7/91, a copy of which I received with permission to quote). "Even if David had declined some or all of the suggestions derived from step (3) [submitting work for critical examination by others],

and therefore chose some other version as his final version, the fact is that ^{he/}still had the original experience (1), and took the initiative (2). If he did not give up completely on the poem, he also made a selection (4). So in three of the four possible steps of authorship, the poem is still firmly under his control, so to speak."

In a subsequent paragraph he wraps the matter up succinctly:

"For any poem, and perhaps even more intensely for haiku, the point of the poetical act is the recreation of that vision in the voice. And while one may accept help with the latter, the vision is the real point of the poem, its essence. And that, it must be acknowledged, belongs to the original poet."

My own view is that while it is vital that the above distinctions be clearly made and understood, the question of authorship remains a technicality (albeit an important one). I am far more interested in authenticity. What I mean by this will be clearer in the context of Richard Goring's second question, concerning 'found haiku'. Is it acceptable to find inspiration in the literary work of others, and to publish such derivatives as our own work?

For me this is not an ethical issue, but an artistic one. If you enjoy doing this, if it works for you, then go ahead. There is nothing new about it; literature and the arts generally abound with such borrowings. However, my experience is that the practice seems not to be viable as a source for haiku. I have yet to find a single example that can persuade me otherwise. The results that I have seen are uniformly tepid and unconvincing. They lack conviction, authenticity--that which makes me respond with a YES. The American poet H.F. Noyes has published (aside from much fine work of his own) a large number of such derived 'haiku'. All are innocuous, and spineless.

Why is this? I assume that there is a force and a vitality in our own immediate experience--in the moment of presence--that informs our expression of it and, at best, resonates for the reader of the finished poem.

Richard Goring seems to recognise this in an earlier article (B.S. No 2, Spring 1991), in which he presents several versions of a haiku that was prompted by reading a description of a kitten scampering on the frosty deck of a houseboat. With frankness he concludes: "Is my dissatisfaction with all these efforts due to the fact that I am attempting to relate an experience at second-hand, perhaps?"

Precisely so.

(At this point, shall we lay this issue to rest? - Ed.)

The englyn, like the classical haiku, is based on a fixed syllable count: thirty syllables arranged in four lines (10-6-7-7), as against seventeen syllables, typically arranged in English as three lines (5-7-5). And there perhaps the resemblance ends, for compared with the englyn's complexity, the haiku might even be considered an example of verbal and technical simplicity.

It was probably in the C9th that the englyn first appeared, in a three-line version, but that form was soon superseded by four-line versions. Of the twenty-four 'strict' ('bardic', 'classical') metres in Welsh poetry, eight were originally varieties of englyn, but one form soon came to dominate - the englyn unodl union ('straight monorhyme englyn') which has had a continuous existence since the C12th and still flourishes today. In this englyn the rhyme first appears in line one, after the 7th, 8th or 9th syllable, then ends the other three lines. Sometimes a rhyme carries no accent - there are rules regulating the practice.

All englynion, as with the other strict Welsh metres, are characterised by 'cynghanedd' ('harmony'), a device unique to Welsh literature, and probably originating in the late C6th: it involves the serial repetition of consonants in a line or lines, and may be accompanied by internal rhyme. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who had studied Welsh prosody, referred to cynghanedd as 'consonantal chiming' and to some extent attempted it in his own poetry. Cynghanedd has sometimes been translated in English as 'alliteration', but this is misleading: alliteration is incidental and selective, but cynghanedd is an integral part of the poem, in effect from the first line onwards.

It is obvious that the complexity of englynion cannot be reproduced with any exactness in translation without distorting or even destroying the force and beauty of the poetry; so the reader will find very few rhymed-verse translations.

The following three englynion, with plain translations, will give some idea of the range and style of this verse. The cynghanedd and internal rhymes are underlined and given again at the side, but readers (even those unable to pronounce Welsh) should be able to pick out further consonantal and vowel correspondences.

Y <u>gleisiad</u> , <u>difrad</u> yw ef, - o'i <u>ddichwain</u>	(ad/rad)	dd	chw
A <u>ddychwel</u> i'w addef;		dd	chw
'No! <u>blino</u> 'n <u>treiglo</u> pob <u>tref</u>		tr	tr
<u>Teg</u> <u>edrych</u> <u>tuag</u> <u>adref</u> .	t g dr	t g dr	

The salmon, loyal is he, from his dartings
 Will return to his own place;
 Having tired of wandering each town
 Fine (it is) to look towards home.

(Ieuan Llawdden 'of Machynlleth', writing 1450-80)

Dos ymaith hiraeth orig o'm calon (aith/aeth) th r th r c l
 cilia i ffwrdd ychydig c l
 dywed i'm gwen felenfrig (gwen/felen)
 fod dyn ac arno fyd dig. f d d f d d

Go away, longing, for an hour from my heart,
 withdraw a little;
 tell my yellow-topped girl
 that here is a man whose world is displeasing.

(Anon., C17th?)

Gwae'r gwan dan oedran nid edrych, (gwan/dran) gw gw d n d n
 ni chwardd n ch dd
 ni cherdda led y rych n ch dd the
 Gwae ni wyl yn gynilwyl g n w g n w
 Gwae ni chlyw organ a chlych. g n chl g n chl

Woe to the weak (one) under (the burden of) age, he sees not,
 neither laughs,
 He walks not the broad furrow.
 (O) Woe, he sees not acutely,
 (O) Woe, he hears not organ and bells.

(a typical C15th englyn)

Englynion can cover almost any mood - descriptive, eulogistic,
 hortatory, humorous, satiric or plain abusive, amatory,
 reflective, philosophic, elegiac, religious, etc.

I wish to thank my friend David Enoch for the above translations.

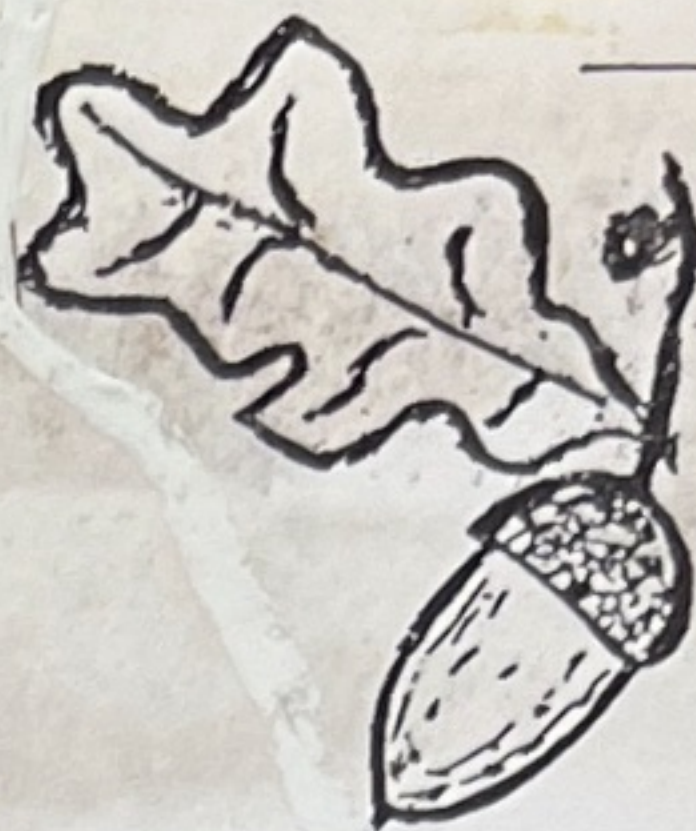
-----o-o-o-----

Editor's notes: The Welsh Academy recommends "Welsh Verse
 Translations" by Tony Conran, pub. Poetry Wales Press, 1986, as
 being "a good mixture of traditional and modern englynion
 translated by Wales's finest translator". It may also be of
 interest to our readers to learn that our president, James
 Kirkup, who was elected an Olave of the Order of Druids in the
 early '70s, has written the following englyn in English (the only
 one, he admits, that he has ever been able to write).

SLOWLY

Slowly floating, a kite of crimson cloud --
 the summer sunset light
 slowly deepens into night --
 slowly, a first star grows bright.

Depending on your reactions to this article, we hope to follow it
 from time to time with articles about other "short verse forms"
 native to the Western World.



Perhaps because in summer Acorns are not in season, the entries this time were not all that interesting or plentiful; though you did send in several good answers to last time's questions, of which the following is a good example:

"Every poet is interested in 'feedback' to his poems. Well, I much prefer the original "Between a cow's legs" to the "snip-less", "crest-less", reduced and impoverished "Between the legs". Either of Dee Evetts's 'Marquee' poems is good. It's simply a question of whether you want to emphasise with the last (lingering) line the 'treading' or the different 'look' of the grass. I liked Sheila Kay Crowson's 'A queue of petals'. Personification of a worthwhile nature." (Stephen Gill)

Can we please have more comments of this calibre, as well as haiku/senryu/tanka which present some problem to the writer, about which he/she would like to have comment?

under a dusk sky
such delicacy
the blue of this pool
a beautiful woman, blind,
holding a stringless guitar

Is this a tanka? Can
people see the immediate
dusk/dawn link?

Jim Norton

on-shore breeze
cold-wet on my leg
the spaniel's lick

Normally I reveal the caesura in a haiku by use of punctuation - either a dash or a colon. But in the above I've left the caesura unmarked, setting the reader a sort of puzzle. Where would you place the caesura? Does it annoy you to be put on the spot like this? Do you prefer me to nail my colours to the mast? As in:

on-shore breeze -
lick of the spaniel lingers
cold on my leg

David Cobb

END QUOTES

"The feather flew, not because of anything in itself, but because the air bore it along. Thus am I." (Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179)

"Truly engaged artistry, in Abbess Hildegard's words, consists in 'writing, seeing, hearing and knowing all in one manner'." (Christopher Page, notes on the sleeve of "A feather on the breath of God", pub. Hyperion Records)