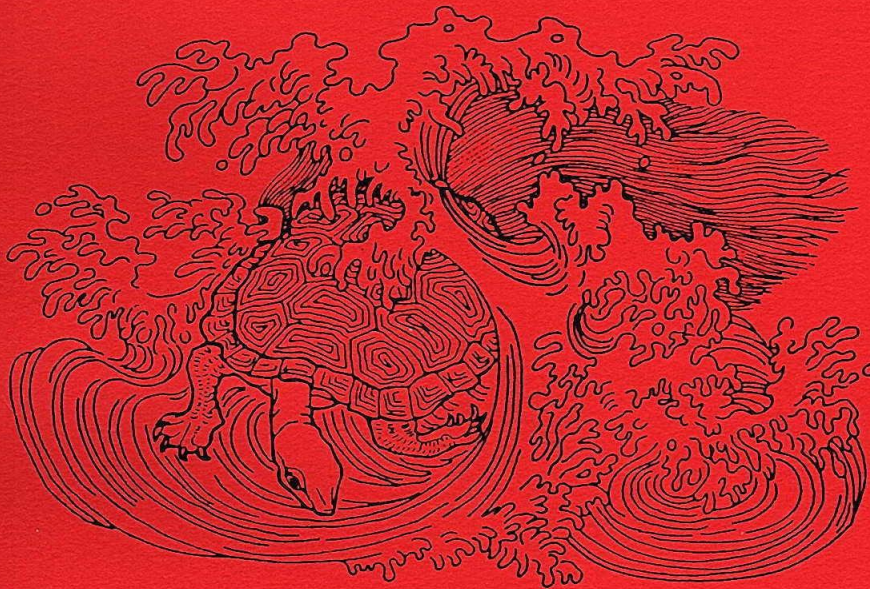


Blithe Spirit



Journal of
The British Haiku Society

Volume 2 Number 1 January 1992

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EDITORIAL

BHS Committee members meet in the sort of places where haiku/senryu simply ooze out of the woodwork - a pub in darkest Hampstead, an Italian restaurant, London railway termini eating places and windy corners here and there. Usually it is impossible to hear what anybody else is saying: this preserves the mental vacuum necessary for the production of pithy little poems; it was in just such circumstances that David Cobb handed us a bulging orange folder. We thought he said, "Would you like another piece of pizza?" but what he actually said, it turns out, was, "You're now in charge of the BHS Journal!"

The division between news items, articles and members' haikus which became pronounced in Newsletter 4 is now made explicit with the formal separation of immediate and, maybe, passing concern and those of more permanent interest. David will continue to edit the Newsletter and produce *Pathways* as a supplement to the Journal.

We hope that you will like the format of the Journal which will continue to come out on a quarterly basis. It is our intention to remain responsive to the needs and opinions of readers.

We aim to publish four or five articles each edition. We welcome articles on the theory and practice of haiku and related forms, on individual practitioners, ancient and modern, the historical

development of haiku, etc, haiku experiments, accounts of members' personal struggles with haiku, the psychology and philosophy of haiku and related forms, comparisons between Japanese and Western literature, Zen, and so on...

We reserve the right to shorten articles. A useful target length for articles is 1000 words in order to give as many members as possible a chance. Please keep the articles coming; articles in reply to those contained in this first issue of the Journal would be most welcome.

Haikus will continue to be published under the established sections - **Season Corner** and **Acorns**. In addition, we welcome haiku/senryu on any subject in any form to be printed under a heading which David Cobb has suggested - **Gorse Blooms**. We would also like to print tanka and, space permitting, renga.

In the absence of original art-work, we have decorated this issue with copyright-free 'clip-art'; we would like to be able to use members' art-work in future.

Richard Goring and Colin Blundell

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FIRST ANNUAL JAMES W HACKETT HAIKU AWARD 1991

I want to thank the many writers who have contributed to what Mr Cobb (with a nod to my Taoist spirit) informally termed this non-competition/haiku event. Of the verses submitted to me I have chosen five which appealed strongly, for different and the same reasons.

My first choice for the haiku poem that best expresses Zen qualities is:-

Almost unnoticed
the dying bee on the path
scatters its pollen

Brian Wells

Here the focus is upon nature, as in haiku it should be. An admirable close attention is shown to another form of life in the throes of death. The unpersonalized excellence of the first line creates a marvellous mystical ambiguity and suggestiveness; no mind-colored sentimentality here, but a compassionate attention is given another living creature, however small and seemingly insignificant. The haiku moment is directly suggested and simply expressed. To have accomplished this in 17 syllables (without a superfluity of words) shows the effort and care that were given to

the expression of the initial haiku experience. While I feel approximately 17 syllables is a good norm for haiku in English, it should not be regarded as a kind of Procrustean bed. Many haiku experiences can be well expressed in 17 syllables, but some cannot. In any event, my choice did not hinge upon form. The spiritual-aesthetic qualities of haiku are infinitely more important to me.

The following poems are well deserving of honorable mention:-

Morning sneeze -
the guitar in the corner
resonates

Dee Evetts

Chimney swept -
on the hearth small white bones
mixed with soot

Patricia Neubauer

Spring night rain -
a snail's crunching
under foot

Richard Goring

Autumn evening
the silence of this canyon
reaches to the stars

Wilma Erwin

All five verses are very good indeed, and together they exemplify several qualities essential to haiku:-

- **an acute observation of the world of nature** (In haiku the poet, if present at all, is suffused with the natural object)
- **immediacy or thusness**
- **lifeliness**
- **suchness** (a sensuous awareness of the thing-in-itself)

Certainly there are other important qualities of haiku poetry. I plan to discuss them all in "The Way of Haiku," an in-process essay I hope to share with the readers of Blithe Spirit.

In closing I want to express my appreciation to the authors of these fine poems that help to show the way into haiku's mystical landscape.

James W Hackett, 12 Nov 1991



A note from David Cobb:-

A short list of 50 haiku were chosen by me, of which almost half were 'additional' submissions, i.e. not by members of BHS and not previously printed in Blithe Spirit. These 50 were sent to James W Hackett anonymously. The names of the winner and honorable mentions have been added by me subsequently.

SEASON CORNER AUTUMN

across the field of stubble
flame stalks flame
David Cobb
C.P. James

on the axe-head
split the smell
out of kindling
Geoffrey Daniel
Kenneth Vye Bailey

stubble field:
a squad of crows
stalks the ruins of
yet another year
James Kirkup

Geoffrey Daniel
No cattle or sheep
tread the frost-hard saltings
ducks sit on the ice.
Eric Speight

Failing light -
cataracts or bleak
November days?
Cy Patterson
Eric Speight

chilled hands miss hard ball:
never mind, fallen leaves play
goalie just in time
steve sneyd
Under the rimed hedge
lies the dried corpse of a thrush
feather light to lift.
Eric Speight

kicking my feet
half buried by leaves
a seed catalogue

Michael Gunton

From each burning bush
birds proclaim the end of fall
and are not consumed

James Kirkup

Heavy night fog makes
one stilled explosion of light
diffused from wet streets

James Kirkup

In autumn woods
green uniformity's refined
to red, russet and gold

Edward Glover

Sudden showers
beat down the feathered seeds:
angel-flights expelled from heaven

Edward Glover

the wheelbarrow
still in December full
of unemptied leaves

Kobu

after the fall
seeing the rooks wheel round
behind the poplars

Kobu

The misty moon, a memory -
The day has brought
Damp gargoyles, red ivy;
Autumn walls.

(Ely, Cambridgeshire 10/88)

Tito

Putting the clocks back -
last days fading
faster

Joan Daniels

In the pagan corn
a fiesta of flowers
celebrates the sun

Denise Bennett

SOME THOUGHTS ON TANKA

One of the Society's stated aims is promotion of the tanka form, yet the tanka has been notable for its absence from these pages. A check back through the first four issues of *Bliethe Spirit* reveals one solitary contender for the label 'tanka', that being Jim Norton's submission in the last issue (p12). I use the word 'contender' because Jim's piece does not quite fit the usually stated definition of the form, namely that it "is a poem of five lines containing thirty-one syllables. The first three lines are exactly like those of the haiku, and there are two additional lines of seven syllables each" (Frances Stillman, *The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary*, 1966 edition).

Jim's poem misses the definition in that it is 5-5-5-7-7 - twenty-nine syllables rather than thirty-one. However, we are well used to English-language haiku which are not 5-7-5 and which total less than 17 syllables. The arguments for abandoning strict counts in English, based on the variations in English syllable lengths and those lengths relative to Japanese onji, have been aired in earlier issues of *Bliethe Spirit*. I believe the reasoning to be applicable to tanka, though the form seems to be viewed in Britain (and North America?) as more lyrical, less terse, than the haiku. I want to suggest that while we should not expect rigid adherence to 5-7-5-7-7, there should not be a wide variation, perhaps not less than 24 syllables and not more than 32, allowing a line to be two

or even three syllables short but seldom more than one over. On that basis, and considering also its content, Jim's offering stands as a valid tanka (but, by the way, I cannot see the dusk/dawn link he asks me to find).

Stillman has little else to say about the tanka, except to note that "in translating tankas into English, poets sometimes, almost in spite of themselves, add the elements of meter and rhyme. However...the originals of these poems are without either." He then gives two of his own translations, the first of which contains both rhyme and meter!

Why was it fated
That in one brief night of love
Your heart was sated
While mine was made your captive
For as long as I shall live?

Empress Kwokamu-Innobetto (12 Cent)

Personally, I quite like this. However, Stillman's second seems to be a rather better example of how an English-language tanka ought to read

Since I have loved you
I compare my former thoughts
To those I have now,
And realize that I then
Had no ideas at all.

Atsutada (10 Cent)

Our own Bill Higginson has rather more to say about tankas - and provides some splendid examples - in his 'Haiku Handbook'. Many of you have a copy and I commend you to read the early pages of chapters 8 and 13. Here you will see how the tanka stands as roughly comparable to the English sonnet. Bill reveals that love, human emotions and nature have consistently been the themes in both Japanese and Western tankas. Indeed, the tanka was at one time used as a form of love letter.

I should like to see tankas regularly grace these pages and your views on the genre are also welcome - for instance, do you agree with my thoughts on syllables and line lengths in English? In the meantime, here are three of mine to chew over (comments also welcome). These were a successful entry in a competition which required a group of three with a connecting theme - and where they had to be strictly 5-7-5-7-7!

Autumn's waning warmth
fades birch-tree leaves to mustard,
cotoneaster
red and purple tints, until
bitter winds strip branches bare.

Moon and frost combine
to paint a shimmering scene
in silver-white rime.
My breath drifts in steamy clouds,
while grass crunches underfoot.

In silent stillness
of a clouded cold grey dawn
a single thrush sings,
high in the leafless maple
and fills the air with sweet sound.

Richard Goring

TANKA

This huge sycamore
has defied hill-wind and frost
for two hundred years
outlasting generations
in its attendant stone house

Eric Speight

Spider's Web

Abseiling on air
he weaves a circular orb,
lets out the drag line
and with the radial skein
makes a safety net for flies

Denise Bennett

One lantern glows with five colours.
Falling asleep, as owls scream,
he sees no colours -
only a face whose eyes that night
would not meet his.

Edward Glover

Hand sounding drum-skin
Dragonfly descends in Spring
Catch her in your hand
She'll drop dead upon the ground
Shedding silver scales behind

John Roy

ACORNS

Hand-in-hand, two old people
throw long shadows at sunset:
where bodies
once were [loud with voices] or [clamorous]
fingers now [quietly speak] or [gently communicate]

Are the polysyllables better?

Edward Glover

the tinkle of wind chimes falling maple leaves

What part of speech do you take 'chimes' to be?

David Cobb

BETWEEN MOMENTS

Some of us have a feeling that the purest "haiku moments" are the ones that just occur, unprovoked. The signal is picked up in a flash by one or more of our senses and relayed to some mysteriously deep part of our brain (some will call it 'intuition', some 'inspiration', others 'intellect'), and then expressed instantly in a statement which has the succinct brevity and maybe even the exact form of haiku.

We are fortunate if "moments" of this peerless quality come to us, as almost involuntary receivers, very often. Between such moments it is only human, and to my mind no error, to feel "in the mood for haiku", and to wish to stimulate one's receptivity. "Ask, and ye shall find".

But how does one "ask"?

I was once on a writing course and one afternoon our tutor told us to take a long walk, meanwhile "surrendering" ourselves, i.e. tuning in our consciousness, to our surroundings. Each of us drew from a hat a different phrase which would help us to focus our non-thoughts. Mine was "the space between".

In half-an-hour I was able to scribble down about a dozen haiku or proto-haiku, of which two (more or less as I wrote them down

originally) have survived the "test of time", i.e. I'm still glad to have been the medium by which they came into the world.

These two are:-

between the cow's legs
grazing the hill crest
snips of blue sky

stepping stones:
in the middle of next stride
a wasp at rest

Though I have been brought up to try to please teachers, I didn't allow myself to include any of my previously-written "between" haiku, though I recollected several, e.g.

between shrew and cat
set to time the moment
a dandelion clock

a moment between
lighthouse flashes
cold smell of fish

But later, a quick check through my "extant works" revealed how many contained this, or some other preposition, usually as a key word in the whole. (23 of the 140 haiku in my book "A Leap in the Light" have "strong" prepositions, i.e. prepositions which have a real sense of movement or position: **above** 2, **against** 2, **below** 1, **beneath** 1, **beside** 1, **between** 5, **outside** 2, **over** 1, **past** 1, **round** 2,

through 2, under 2, within 1. I exclude from the count the prepositions in, on, at, to, from, with, which generally have a much weaker effect. I notice the conjunction of time, before, is also prominent.)

Prepositions seem therefore to be at the heart of haiku creativity. Perhaps I may recommend them to you as a focussing device.

David Cobb

Cusop Dingle's mud
track twists through stripped trees, the brook
visible again

Eric Speight

Interesting quote from Paul Bowles' short story 'If I Should Open My Mouth': "It seems to me that if one could accept existence as it is, partake of it fully, the world would be magical. The cricket on my balcony at the moment piercing the night repeatedly with its hurried needle of sound, would be welcome merely because it is there, rather than an annoyance because it disturbs me from what I am trying to do." That seems to me to be an essential part of the haiku spirit, for which no smallest thing is significant, because it contains the possibility of 'magic'. That is, haiku perception and creation.

James Kirkup

GORSE BLOSSOMS

*when gorse is out of bloom,
kissing's out of fashion*

*all-season, no-season,
haiku, senryu, haibun, kuryu -
neither seasonal nor experimental...*

Ticking the cheque stubs,
Balancing a March statement,
She closes her books.

Doris Husband

minding robots:
technicians shift their weight
from foot to foot

Kobu

any second now
the hole in the road will sprout
a blue tattoo

Kobu

Imported eels
slip through
the customs

Mokuo Nagayama

sudden rainspots?
in the sagging gutter
starlings bathing

Richard Goring

sky pink in
on the old gardener
stifling a yawn

Adrian Keefe

I laughed I cried
sharp distinctions
smudged to grey

Adrian Keefe

Sudden rain
makes me put on
a scarecrow's hat

Mokuo Nagayama

Diseased dog
his dinner eaten up
by sparrows

Mokuo Nagayama

THOMAS MERTON

Last year I found, in one of Boscombe's second hand bookshops, 'The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton', 1030 pages! I don't get on too well with his own poems but his versions of Chuang Tzu really set me going.

Merton was an American Trappist monk and was, as such, bidden to silence but as he was already an artist and poet before his conversion, his Order had the wisdom to command him on holy obedience to go on writing. He was 27 years in Gethsemane Monastery in America but beside being Master of Novices there he studied Buddhism, Zen in particular, the Vedanta, Taoism and Tibetan Buddhism and wrote for Buddhist publications. He wrote pamphlets, booklets, poems, devotional books and scathing satires on the political and economic habits of wordlings.

He only once managed to travel to Asia - in 1968 - for a world conference of Catholic Orders to discuss the present monastic crisis. His Asian Journal is an account of those months in Asia. He travelled in India meeting Buddhists in Thailand, Catholics in India as well as the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Abbots - always wearing the habit of his Order but discussing meditation techniques and joining in actual practice. He made no bones about being a Trappist monk; he was accepted as such and everywhere he found complete friendly sharing and trust.

At the Conference itself he had delivered a key address on Marxism; after it he went into the shower-room and was later found dead, electrocuted by an electric fan lying across his body.

He was an extraordinary maverick type of saint. His Chuang Tzu seems to me to be his escape route. It is also the natural haiku climate:-

Action and Non-action

The non-action of the wise man is not inaction.
It is not studied. It is not shaken by anything.
The sage is quiet because he is not moved,
Not because he wills to be quiet.

Still water is like glass.
You can look in it and see the bristles on your chin.
It is a perfect level;
A carpenter could use it.

The heart of the wise man is tranquil.
It is the mirror of heaven and earth
The glass of everything.

Joy does everything without concern:
For emptiness, stillness, tranquility, tastelessness,
Silence and non-action
Are the root of all things.

Eric Speight

In the haunted house
the ghost of myself moves through
door after locked door

James Kirkup

At noon, I went to
the movies - came out at dusk -
the whole world had changed

James Kirkup
(after Paul Bowles: The Sheltering Sky)

in the night garden
down by the lawn you can see
lights behind curtains

we talked while outside
the sky changed from wintry blue
through green to black night

the black cat comes &
parks himself on me - a piece
of the purring night

Colin Blundell

On the stone walls of
the hut where cows are mooing
hang tobacco leaves

Tamaki Makoto

OCTOBER

Wet smoke shifts
Through shedding cherry
My true fall

Matt Morden

MEANING

Run through park
Shedding bitter tears
Hear raindrops falling

Matt Morden



LATE DISCOVERIES LATE ARRIVALS



HAIKU/SENRYU ORIGINATE IN YOUR RIGHT BRAIN

The brain comes ready-made in two interconnected parts: for 95% of people the left brain processes the universe by means of words, numbers, facts and detailed analysis; the right brain works with images, patterns and rhythms in holistic leaps - fantasy, good sex and word-play are examples of bits of human experience characteristically stage-managed by the right brain.

Writing in 1964, before research into brain functions had got off the ground, J G Bennett ("Creative Thinking", Coombe Springs Press) discusses what he calls 'real thinking' - "the spontaneous arising, in the inner awareness, of an image that gives us a contact with some part of reality. Such images take their own form and, being spontaneous, cannot be forced or produced artificially". He is discussing techniques for generating an inner vacuum ("empty receptiveness, unencumbered by words") that will positively demand to be filled by moments of enlightenment.

As we try to face up to the problem of successfully translating the evanescent 'haiku moment' into all-too-limiting and self-conscious words, we are in fact, perhaps, experiencing a wrestling match between left (needing to work with words in linear sequence) and right (inner vacuum, 'real thinking', insight, pattern-making) brains.

Without, as far as I know, the categories right and left brain being accessible to him, J G Bennett argues that "thinking with words cannot be creative thinking because words only give us contact with what is already there in our minds". Seeing something new in a new way (the essence of haiken) has to be accompanied by a quality of astonishment, the flash of insight, the burst of laughter, perhaps, when you see the point but 'can't put it into words'. But we are, of course, stuck with words (the left brain emphasis); words are simultaneously useful and a barrier to the spontaneous operation of the right brain: what is needed for life in general, not just for writing haiken(!), is an efficient and balanced relationship between left and right brain functions; as J G Bennett says, crucially, about creativity, "if words come in, they come in perhaps so quickly that we do not notice that the moment of seeing did not depend on words or images", but on the filling of a deliberately quiescent vacuum with urgency.

I find railway travel, committed vacuum, a fruitful state of suspension for producing haiken. It's taking a bit of a chance, since by quoting it I am saying that the following is a 'successful' haiken, but I can say that

twenty cows gather
round the one whose bum is propped
on a wee-column

occurred totally spontaneously in my right brain on a train journey somewhere between Leicester and Birmingham. My left brain merely

tinkered with the already patterned event to fit 5-7-5 through about six different versions; you can only have my word that the original 'aha' experience is preserved here for me - I relocate the haiku-moment whenever I now read the result. 'Successful' haiken start in the right brain and then move to the left for expression.

The knack of writing haiken depends on sustaining a balance between left and right brain input.

Colin Blundell

a last merriment
swirling leaves dance trees to sleep -
waiting snow blankets

Frank Dullaghan

The remaining leaves
hung motionless - in my hand
redundant kitestring

Brian Wells

REVIEW

WE ARE NOT MEN - Steve Sneyd (see List of Members for address) 10p - is a mini-booklet (4" by 2") containing 14 SF three-liners in a strict 5-7-5 syllable arrangement. It is a shame that the "m", "w" and "e" keys of the machine on which it was produced seem to have been clogged up with interstellar fluff; otherwise the production is worth every penny as a provocative experiment. Some of the pieces would work as senryu quite apart from their SF context:-

old marriage this: no
words wasted when it's time to
shut each other up

Others one could imagine being written spontaneously (and therefore within the spirit of haiku/senryu) by a BHS member marooned in space 3000 years hence:-

under the hundred
suns we wither: no starships
come to pull our ploughs

In 1991, however, they represent a fiction and one has to ask how much room there is for fiction in haiku/senryu.

Endorsing Geoff Daniels' plea in BS4 for experimentation with titles, Steve gives them to all his pieces. The above are called respectively ECLIPSING BINARY and SETTLERS AT THE CORE which, to me, seem superfluous except in so

far as they establish an SF flavour and create the feeling that the three-liners are crystallisations out of some long SF text. But do they not go beyond the immediacy and spontaneity that is at the heart of Zen?

It is possible to argue that Steve's justification for titles comes from a Western (un-Zen) approach to creativity: "The poetic experience..." he writes, "surely has two parts - the 'lightning flash' of the original event and then the subsequent search for comprehended or perceived meaning - and in that context, title, as a reflection of the subsequent 'organising' stage of the work, can act as a uniting or gestalt factor in the two halves of the process..."

The Western mind operates with dichotomies such as event/meaning but, as I understand it, in Zen the original event *is* the meaning. There is a succinct discussion of the difference between West and East in this respect in the first chapter of DT Suzuki's 'Studies in Zen' where Basho's

When I look carefully
I see the nazuna blooming
by the hedge!

is compared with Tennyson's plucking the eponymous 'flower in the crannied wall' in an intellectual effort to understand it 'root and all'. The meaning of Basho's little flower is implied in the looking. Steve's titles introduce an intellectual element that haiku writing perhaps attempts to eschew. Why not buy the book and judge for yourself!

CB