

RESULTS OF THE BRITISH HAIKU AWARDS 2014

HAIKU SECTION

The adjudicators were Kim Richardson and Leo Lavery
The winners each receive £125. The runners-up each receive £50.

The winners are paul m. (USA) and Edward Beach (England)
The runners-up are Sheila Wild (England) and Tom Cunliffe (England)

Kim Richardson writes:

Judging a haiku competition was something new for me so first I just sat with the 374 entries and went through them quite quickly, hoping that some would be so striking on a first read that they would float to the surface readily. And they did; I pulled 11 out. Then I went through again, this time much more slowly, letting each entry speak to me. From this run emerged another 21 haiku, observing that, while some haiku have an immediate impact – a blow to the heart, I call it – others need time to work on us.

Over the next days I kept this 'long-list' of 32 haiku on my desk as I worked and went through it several times, keeping at the top the ones that struck me, letting others slip back to the main pile as their impact faded. Certain haiku kept nudging at my consciousness; I would find myself remembering them at odd moments. These became the shortlist out of which a winner and runner-up would emerge.

There were several haiku that were *nearly* beautiful, that with moving a line, or a word, could be transformed from lumps of coloured rock into sparkling jewels. But in the end the longlist 'shortened' to the last half-dozen or so, the ones that stayed with me through the process, and I would like to honour some of these haiku who made my shortlist:

rusty chain / nailed to the gate / eight dogs ago (Ernest J Berry, NZ),

after the sparrowhawk the silence of the wind (John Barlow, England)

and the visceral

operating theatre / the sound / the scalpel makes (Tom Cunliffe, England).

But there were, in the end, two haiku that kept on coming back to me, again and again. Little to choose between them but, on balance, the runner up for me was:

the hind so silent
that when she startles, you hear
the cold sound of frost

Sheila Wild

This moment, frozen – literally – in time nevertheless has movement: the startling of the hind. And sound; the use of the sense of hearing is masterful as is the implied season of winter with *cold*, and *frost*. A lovely, perfectly-crafted haiku in the *shasei* tradition.

My winner was:

a paperclip
holding the file together
winter hospice

paul m.

This took my breath away – for me always the sign of a good haiku – and haunts us, speaking as it does of the impermanence of our lives; held together by nothing more substantial than a paperclip. And the words 'winter' and 'hospice' – each of them strong with meanings in their own right – put together they make for a body-blow of a third line, as the poem moves from the day-to-day *paperclip* and *file* to the awesome and sad finality of, one assumes, someone's (and ours?) approaching and inevitable death.

Leo Lavery writes:

I finally got down to 20 or so, then a dozen. All of these I would like to encourage and commend. All could have been winners.

I was disappointed by much conformity and un-unexpectedness in many entries. Pictures were perhaps too pretty. Many could have cut out words. Few were very brief. Many were not original enough.

The winner and runner-up could have been reversed. I had to cut the child in two.

The winner

old pond . . .
the haiku writer
wades in

Edward Beach

harks back to Basho and that famous frog. Here is our hero physically and philosophically about to blunder in. Such chutzpah, such dash. Good for him. One grins.

Notice so little word-play needed. Just the eye-play of “writer” and “wade”. Short. Sweet.

The runner-up too dispenses with word-play. It’s all in the mind. World is crazier than we think it:

it started with cracks
first the flowers
then the pillow

Tom Cunliffe

I hope the line order was meant. It adds to the idea. What? Cracks-flowers? Cracks-pillow? What the Dali, man? Surrealism (just a bit) is good for us. Take away those flowers from my sickbed, sister! Look out! I'm about to spit out this tangerine pip!

I would have liked more odd-quirky, funny entries. I find nature (open-air style) predominates. It is sometimes somewhat sweet. Animals too tend to loom. Yet most haiku intensify our gazes to note the little unremarked things.

Nice to read (and re-read) the entries, to know the care it takes. Bravo to all! Bravo to sundry!

Now I must go and wash my blood-stained, child-unfriendly carving knife.

TANKA SECTION

The adjudicator was Katherine Gallagher.
The winner receives £125. The runner-up receives £50.

The winner is Linda Jeannette Ward (USA)
The runner-up is John Barlow (England)

The entries in this competition showed a considerable range of subject-matter and voices. Tanka (consisting of five lines with a syllable count of 5-7-5-7-7, or thirty one syllables in all) is an intriguing form, longer than haiku, allowing greater variations in syllable-count; also allowing variations in the possibilities for introducing the interplay of human emotions with seasonal references. Typical subjects were landscapes, the sea, love, memories of places and people, small creatures, pets, death, birds and mystery.

I sifted through the entries several times, reading each one aloud, making three piles which I eventually whittled down to eleven. Finally, I arrived at my choices of winner and runner-up – poems that are haunting, distinctive, and without a hint of sentimentality.

As has sometimes been noted, the tanka form has varied greatly over time. In this year's competition, there were no entries adhering exactly to the strict form 5-7-5-7-7. Most were informal, evoking the senses in sharply-defined imagery. My first marker for each poem was that it had to be moving. Further, I was looking for clear imagery, assonance and sound-patterns to bring out the music in each – tanka is very akin to music.

The winning tanka:

trying to forget
I watch the moon drag the sea
pulling black streams
of cormorants
across its white pocked skull

Linda Jeannette Ward

Firstly, this poem is wonderfully visual, juxtaposing colour contrasts and skilfully using the metaphor of the 'white pocked' moon's dragging 'the sea' / pulling 'cormorants', (one can feel the difficult tug which seems to symbolise the attempted slow forgetting of the first line) – as these birds have become 'black streams' pulled by the moon 'across its white pocked skull.' The poet's risk-taking use of such striking imagery adds to the drama. All these consonants take their space in the line and explode into meaning, combining with the internal rhymes to make sensuous, musical echoes: viz. 'forget/cormorant', 'to/moon', 'sea/streams'; and so on. It's a pleasurable magical effect – complex, rugged and visual, all in five lines. Bravo.

The runner-up:

a birthday
without a birthday list . . .
the wing bars
of a woodpigeon
in bright morning sun

for ML, 28.10.14

John Barlow

This very fine tanka creates elegiac effects of music and absence; the slowly-paced opening two lines which set the mood are juxtaposed with pivotal, seasonal effects of distance, movement and colour evoking the woodpigeon so immediately there. The poet cleverly sets its 'wing-bars . . . in bright morning sun' -- quietly suggestive of its natural flight way into distance, into a welcoming 'morning sun'

This poem is a beautiful tribute to our late much-loved Martin Lucas.

HAIBUN SECTION

The adjudicator was John Parsons. The winner receives £100.
The winning haibun is "Sunday in the Office" by Peter Butler (England)

John Parsons writes:

I was rather disappointed to find the turnout was a meagre twenty three, far less to choose from than expected, however, having read each submission several times, I finally came up with the three below.

'Sunday in the Office' by Peter Butler, 'To Rookhope' by Claire Everett and 'Sun gets in your eyes' by Pamela Muller.

Out of these, my final choice was 'Sunday in the Office', a bitter tale, deliciously sardonic, of "a grey man with odd eyes" who was strangely cut from the staff photo.

Who is he, the author, or the author's alter ego? He visits the office when it's empty on a Sunday, how does he get the keys? As the haibun develops its list of intrigues, its boredom, its pointlessness and resentment, we are presented with a self deprecating man,

obviously misplaced, with no ability to change, but with a cruel sense of humour, no doubt unappreciated by colleagues.

His service award is flushed down the toilet, he snoops amongst other staff's desultory possessions, the unsigned good luck cards, empty sweet wrappers and games of 'hangman', all so essential to whiling away the boredom of office hours. The haibun is packed with that very British quality of observing the insignificant minutiae of the mundane, as he spins out a list of his solitary pleasures, such as etching the furniture and defacing the walls. Until finally, revenge exacted, the premises flooding and escape almost within his grasp, he is presumably arrested and sent to court.

Was he, after all, a person in charge? The whole piece seethes with ambiguity. Who absconded with the cash? Is he thanking someone or being thanked? Does he feel that life's like that, we pry behind the scenes, there is a form of trial, then it's all over. His ticket out, by plane, comes far too late, as with everything else, it seems, but then it could be an allegory for the banking situation, which side are you on?

The six haiku suit the prose extremely well; the first one has a touch of the fly on the wall, the 'lukewarm kisses' at the office party show the typist's suitable disregard.

I particularly enjoyed the flourish of his 'autograph, signed with a knife' and then, in the final haiku 'the pallor of a lifetime behind a desk' with its undertones of an etiolated plant, growing thinner and thinner, forever reaching towards the light.

Thank you Peter, well done.

Sunday in the Office

Peter Butler

on a wall
the calendar
waiting for Monday

Come into the office, please. Sundays are so dull. Sit in the boss's chair, the nearest you'll get to significance. Observe the doodles: 'hangman', a children's game, sometimes played for real. Why are you here? Nothing of importance is kept since the hole in accounts. Even the petty cash was emptied before your farewell. Tell me your plans. Walls retain their counsel.

office party
the kisses
lukewarm

He sits an age in a typist's chair, swivelling with the clock hand, a grey man with odd eyes, watching a weak sun glance at the pot plants, the staff photo that cut him out. Screens are silent, passwords denied him, waste bins emptied.

years of gossip
plastered to
office walls

Drawers unlocked respond with sweet packets, a biscuit tin, sandwich wrappers, a single, fresh condom, unrevealing private letters, a good luck card, unsigned. Outside, the car

park is empty. The thrush, for once, sings louder than the traffic, but for a lone vehicle with saucer eyes and two uniforms, growling at the kerb.

somewhere
in the sofa
a sharp edge

This is my genuine farewell. I have a date at the airport. Doors are open, taps running, my long-service award flushed, the lift disabled. Please admire my etchings on the furniture. There's a fireball crouching in the stairwell, primed for your arrival. Sorry about your smart walls, I couldn't resist that line from the Bard: "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Everything is different, you see. I hope you understand. Loyalty is for losers.

with a flourish
an autograph
signed with a knife

Thank you for coming, friend. A rare and exhilarating Sunday. Be courteous to the officers coming up the stairs. Nice evening.

in court
wearing the pallor
a lifetime behind a desk

Administrator's Note:

The British Haiku Society would like to thank the four judges for the time and careful consideration they have put into the task of selecting the best of the entries in each category. Their thoughtful comments are informative and instructive.

Thanks are also due to all those who took part in each of the categories of the British Haiku Awards. As usual, haiku was the most popular category attracting 373 entries from 11 countries. Tanka entries came from four countries, with Australia strongly represented, but haibun all came from England Ireland or Wales.