

# THE BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY AWARDS 2017 - RESULTS

## HAIKU SECTION

Judges – Vanessa Proctor and Robert Moyer

The winners are Clare McCotter (UK) and Chen-ou Liu (Canada)  
The runners-up are Jay Friedenbergs (USA) and David Jacobs (UK)

### Vanessa Proctor writes:

I was delighted to be asked to be one of the two judges for the BHS Haiku Awards this year. It was quite a task – each judge was asked to whittle down the field of 549 entries to just 5 which meant choosing less than 1% of entries as winners. With such odds, it was inevitable that some excellent haiku would have to be left out of the winners' list. After much reading and reading of the entries over a period of weeks, I arrived at a longlist which contained roughly 10% of the field. Then the task became much harder as all the haiku in the longlist were of publishable quality. In the process of judging, I learnt some new words, such as the wonderful muskeg (bogs seemed to be a popular subject this year) and experienced a range of emotions elicited by the haiku themselves. What I was looking for in the winning entries were haiku with freshness and depth, poems that took me beyond the merely observational to new levels of thought and experience.

### Winner

*late evening an old mare's tail striking dandelion clocks*

Clare McCotter, UK

This one-line haiku or monostich stood out for me straight away. It is a strongly visual haiku which describes a pastoral scene. The light is fading and the mare is in her paddock, swishing her long tail, perhaps due to irritation from flies. At the same time she is releasing seeds from dandelions. The sense of movement here is appealing with the fluid motion of the horse's tail 'striking' (hitting, but also striking like a clock) the white dandelion seeds causing them to drift into the air. In addition to these images, we are offered deeper layers of meaning – it is 'late evening' and the mare is 'old' suggesting that time is fading for the horse. Yet, time itself is not finite. It continues with the cycle of nature which is represented by the dandelion seeds drifting away in order to take root and produce more dandelions. In just nine words we are offered a thought-provoking and resonant haiku.

### Runner-Up

*firefly flashes  
the world beyond  
Boolean logic*

Jay Friedenbergs, USA

The haiku begins with a strong natural image of the flashing of fireflies, the alliteration echoing the quick pulses of light these creatures create. The poet then takes us to another realm entirely with the reference to 'Boolean logic' which is associated with the binary values of computer operating

systems. We often see things in black and white; they are either true or false, logical or illogical, but the fireflies open our minds and our way of thinking to give us a new and magical way of viewing the world.

Honourable Mentions:

*ashes sealed and buried a meadowlark sings to the sunrise*

Donald Skrivseth, USA

Despite the sadness and finality of the death of a loved one, the world carries on in its own startlingly beautiful way. Life is juxtaposed against death here to great effect.

*bronze heron  
how the lotus leaf grows  
into its mouth*

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

There have been innumerable haiku written about herons, but this heron is different, it's a sculpture. Nature is again in its ascendancy here, incorporating the man-made heron into its own plan.

*cycle paint shop  
on the touch-up man's hands  
every kid's bike*

Marietta McGregor, Australia

This is a wonderfully down to earth haiku and says much about the way people touch (sometimes literally) our lives and the lives of so many.

Congratulations to the winners and all the entrants. It was a pleasure and a privilege to read your haiku.

**Robert Moyer writes:**

Wow. Or, since this is the British Haiku Society, perhaps – egads. 549 haiku. Looking at them the first time, I thought “What have I got myself into?” After three weeks and 300 poems remaining, I had the answer—a learning experience par excellence. As in teaching and editing, judging elicits insight into the haiku process in ways otherwise not available. Here are the sketches inspired by Shiki, the animal kingdom of Issa, the birds and branches of Buson, ponds and deer of Basho, disjunctive insects that the scholar Richard Gilbert would appreciate—and multitudinous variations thereof. Awash in a sea of marvellous examples, I was finally able to fish out a final grouping, any of which would stand up as a winner. A very fine collection could be culled from these submissions; I culled many lessons forth from them. One lesson from my (formerly) biased position this side of the pond (the Atlantic, not Basho's) was the dynamic possibilities of the traditional 5-7-5—a good one doesn't call attention to its syllables. A number made it into my final grouping. Another lesson emerged when I learned where the five poets I selected lived—four different countries. English language haiku is a robust, world-wide phenomenon.

RUNNER-UP - David Jacobs, UK

*freezing moor  
crows spread out  
across the search area*

Here we see the power of a single syllable to effect a total change in the poem, the word “search” linking to the moor, and shifting from the unremarkable natural scene to the large screen of our imagination by the time we get to the end of the third line—policemen, volunteers, dogs making their way across the moor, perhaps a helicopter hovering, a “murder” of crows now present, harbingers, perhaps witnesses to a crime and/or evidence we are not sure of. We are only sure of one thing—the crows will be there when everyone leaves. David Jacobs, a veteran British poet, should try his hand at one of those atmospheric British series.

WINNER - Chen-ou Liu, Canada

*job hunting  
a curl of birch bark  
edged with sunlight*

This poem is just another in the long list of prizes won by Canadian poet Chen-ou Liu. The seeming artlessness of this poem belies its impact, both immediately and upon repeated return. Wordsworth’s sonnet “The world is too much with us; Late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,” references itself upon first reading. Then, the poem emerges from the space between the two images—the drain of the daily search for work, the sometimes demeaning results, relieved by the exquisite appearance of a piece of birch. Where did the poet find it? Walking from one interview to another, stopped at an intersection, perhaps a memory of the moment while seated in a waiting room? The common language of the second part produces an uncommon image, resisting the effort to even remember it. I was surprised by the image each time I approached it. I was surprised by this poem.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

*rimed fence  
the cattle and wind  
change direction*

The Canadian poet Debbie Strange has lived with cattle, or spent just enough time watching them to intuit this simplest of poems. She observes a simple reflex of nature—on a cold day, cattle face away from the wind. Anyone who has spent time with them knows this. When the wind changes, they move. It only takes 11 syllables for the poet to teach us a lesson—move, don’t agonize.

*fenlands the farmer’s toes leaking mud*

I have no idea what “fenlands” are, but the poet makes that a moot point. As in many of the best one-liners, every part of this poem propels the reader forward into the final picture, from the boglike selection of the first word, to the farmer standing barefoot--why barefoot, what a shock--to the actual movement in the word “leaking” to the mud he/she obviously has settled into, both in this moment, and his/her life. There’s probably a grin in this poem as well. Cynthia Rowe, an Australian poet, uses, while transcending, regional terminology.

*leaving no trace  
on the snow  
his absent gaze*

Scott Mason is the author of the recent book, THE WONDER CODE, in which he talks about the poem happening in the space between the two parts of a haiku, a prime quality of the poem I picked for first place. Scott is no slacker himself, and practices what he preaches in this poem. He sets us up to expect something physically so light that it doesn't break the snow's surface, but shifts literally inside a quiet space, a house, a head, where thoughts behind the "absent gaze" might be heavy enough to break that surface. The poet seems surprised that it doesn't. The poem, the scene, is indeed heavy with contemplation.

## TANKA SECTION

Judges – Carole MacRury and A A Marcoff

The winners are Susan Burch (USA) and Linda Jeannette Ward (USA)  
The runners-up are David Terelinck (Australia) and Frank Dietrich (Germany)

### **Carole MacRury writes:**

I would like to thank Iliyana Stoyanova, BHS Awards Administrator, for the opportunity to read and choose the winners for this year's contest. My thanks also, to each contributor, for the enjoyable task of immersing myself with your poems over many weeks. From 170 poems I assembled a shortlist of 15. I look forward to seeing many of these poems in future publications.

I can say with certainty that my own tastes in tanka are as wide and varied as the many definitions of tanka currently available to us. All five of my choices offer a range of tanka styles and experiences. I enjoy both minimalist and fuller poems. For me, content reigns over form; freshness over tired themes; subtlety over overt emotion. Above all, I enjoy tanka that speak to the human condition, to our existential loneliness.

I look for the careful use of poetic techniques. Unfortunately, the overuse of alliteration in one poem turned it into a bit of a tongue-twister. I look for evocative juxtapositions, pivots, figurative language and metaphor. But these are only tools at our disposal and rarely do you find them all in one tanka. And if you do, it still doesn't guarantee a winning poem. In the end, it comes down to the relationship immediately formed between the poem and the reader. Both of my top poems immediately took my breath away and then opened themselves to speculation. I find subtlety a strength in tanka over spelling out the whole story.

Here are my choices for winner, runner-up and honorable mention. For me, all five are excellent poems in craft and handling of subject matter.

### Winner

*putting on  
my stained apron—  
when  
did my happiness  
stop mattering*

Susan Burch, USA

In eleven words, this poet invites an immediate leap between an object-based action and a state of being. Its introspective mood grows deeper with repeated readings. How can an apron say so much? The apron becomes a metaphor for any task that has taken over one's life, either through self-sacrifice in raising a family, to fast food or factory employment. Aprons need not be thought of as exclusive to women in the kitchen. The poet's one adjective 'stained' is itself connotative of too much time spent working and too little time left for pursuing one's own happiness. The tone suggests the weariness of repetitive tasks. The assonance in 'stained apron', 'happiness, mattering' brought music to a poem whose freshness and magnetism remained with each reading.

#### Runner-up

*the shape and feel  
of a sun-ripened pear  
was it simply  
in small moments like this  
Rubens found his muse?*

David Terelinck, Australia

A sensual tanka that opens with a strong tactile image. It succeeds without any need for the personal pronoun. The poet's presence is found in the holding of a pear and the question it inspires. It invites us to also feel the warmth and softness of a sun-ripened pear, setting us up for our own reflections on the question. The leap from the image in the first two lines to the suggested image of a full-figured woman in the final line is both subtle and surprising. I've long admired Ruben's work yet find this poem isn't just about Rubens. To me, it speaks to the laws of attraction. To those small epiphanic moments sparked by our muse where our passion becomes clear, whether it be a painting, poetry, sculpture, or simply falling in love.

#### Honorable Mention

*year on year  
the effects of small changes . . .  
the slightest tilt  
of a buzzard's wings  
this New Year's Day*

John Barlow, UK

*a short season  
for blossoms and fruit—  
this ache  
from milk-laden breasts  
that never nursed*

David Terelinck, Australia

*I look away  
from his intense gaze ...  
this homeless man  
speaks English*

*with an accent like mine*

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

The tanka I chose for honorable mention represent a mix of themes from the traditional to the contemporary. "year on year" shows the passage of time and its effect on our lives and how the slightest change in angle (buzzards wings) can be perceived as an omen for the year to come. "a short season" is a well-crafted tanka with a poignant juxtaposition. It speaks to the traditional theme of spring blossoms as reminder of the transience of life, in this poem, the loss of a newborn. "I look away" is a contemporary poem that speaks to what is happening worldwide as streets and cities are flooded with the homeless. This intimate moment between two countrymen who had quite different outcomes in their lives suggests a survivor's guilt that many of us feel when coming across the homeless.

Respectfully submitted,  
Carole MacRury

**A A Marcoff writes:**

It was not at first easy to find poems with the level of accomplishment necessary for an award, that organic, coherent magic I was searching for: but a shortlist of 21 emerged after 3 readings.

There were many moving poems; some expressed whole lifetimes, some were clinical, others were about relationship pain, childbirth, even the comedy of life; I read existential poems, ones that celebrated love, and some that were utterly devastating. Here are three:

Honourable mentions

*alone  
on the edge  
of a cliff...  
behind my back  
the shadow*

Chen-ou Liu (Canada)

Reading this was almost unbearable. It came with bleak, stark, shock. Another was:

*until your ECG  
I never questioned your heart  
a murmuration  
of migrating swallows  
darkens the sky*

David Terelinck (Australia)

This had deep emotional truth and sadness, so economically expressed. I understand swallows have murmurations as well as starlings, in Florida for example. Finally:

*as if my whole life*

*were ever ahead of me...  
the lake's salver  
planished  
by a swallow's wing*

Claire Everett (UK)

It captures beautiful astonishment, in striking vocabulary. 'As if' is a resonating philosophical construction (Vaihinger).

It has been said that if you want to win an Oscar, make a film about the Holocaust. So here in second place I settled on a poem about just that. It is not easy to write on such an emotive subject, or to write something original about it. But this poem succeeds in ways that are quiet, yet simply stunning. I will never forget 'ashen sky' and the snow falling on fallen snow in this desolate place. That image for me describes the nature of memory itself, and the repetition of 'falling' is haunting, and haunted. With its simple language, it echoes right into the silence of eternity:

#### Runner-up

*Holocaust Memorial  
from an ashen sky  
snow keeps falling  
and falling  
on fallen snow*

Frank Dietrich (Germany)

For the winning poem, I chose one with biblical dimensions. This poem is an unabashed, joyful celebration of nature. Couched in playful imagery, four lines begin with verbs, strong verbs too, a device which makes it robust as a poem:

swing  
frolic  
kiss  
anoint

I think it captures the essence of 'The Song of Songs', a collection of love poems addressed by man to a woman, and vice versa: this is written in the language of the natural world, and is erotic. The tanka here has energy and is exuberant, sensuous and sensual. There is a oneness with nature and it is positive, vital and enjoyable to read. Rare to use a word like 'anoint' in a tanka. The poem is direct, immediate, and sings like a song, as tanka did long ago:

#### Winner

*wind songs  
swing down the mountain  
frolic in my hair  
kiss trees with sweetness  
anoint my lips with green*

Linda Jeannette Ward (USA)

It is an unusual poem, and I congratulate Linda, along with the others mentioned here, and all those who entered into the spirit of competition.

A A Marcoff

**HAIBUN SECTION**  
*“Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award”*

Judge – Stella Pierides

The winner is David Bingham (UK)

The runner-up is Jean James (UK)

**Stella Pierides writes:**

In reinstating the Haibun Awards, the BHS continues to encourage both, the creation of new work and the exploration of the possibilities offered by the form as it develops over time.

It was a great privilege to read the 50 haibun in a range of styles and lengths submitted to the British Haiku Society’s Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Contest 2017. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the work, and wish to thank the poets for their submissions and the Society for entrusting me with this task.

Winner: Sleight of Mind, by David Bingham, UK

Sleight of Mind refreshingly starts with placing the reader in the magician’s audience. Our minds’ eyes are glued to the shining light bulbs coming out of his mouth, his miraculously escaping from the straightjacket. The title, and the opening main clause, have warned us: this is a trick! Yet, in focusing on the ‘what,’ rather than the ‘how’ posed in the question, in a momentary suspension of disbelief, we fall for it, allowing the magic world centre stage.

How is it done? How does magic work, and how does the magic of haibun work to enable us to re-experience the writer’s epiphany and emotional truth? There is no answer here, only a question well put. Hopefully, there won’t be an answer anyway soon – though the poet, as well as we, know that there are perfectly ‘mundane explanations’ for the magician’s conjuring tricks and, to some extent, the haibuneer’s craft!

This is the haibun that kept me going back to read and re-read, finding new things as I followed its vertical axis. From the child-like awe (‘switching off the rational mind’) in the beginning of the prose, to nature brought in by the snowdrops in the haiku at the end, it leads the reader from illusion and mystery (the stage) to questioning and reflection (snowdrops and pondering what is) putting flesh on the bones of an old question about reality, perception and the mind. From associations to the Allegory of the Cave to reference (in the title) to wizardry as well as a neuroscience book on magic and perception, this brief haibun affords a variety of possible readings and stretches the reach of the form.

In having the narrator directly address the reader in short, sparse sentences the piece achieves immediacy, reinforcing the illusion of involvement. Weaving skilfully together the constituent elements of haibun (title, prose, haiku, content), it engages this reader on so many levels, and wins!



## **Sleight of Mind**

by David Bingham, UK

Some people need to know how he pulls the shining light bulbs from his mouth, levitates above the stage or escapes from a straightjacket.

Me, I like the mystery of it; the explanations are always so mundane. True magic lies in the imagination.

Switching off the rational mind. Letting yourself go and trusting the conjuror.

I do it with words. Like how I brought you here. Even if you asked me, I couldn't tell you how it's done.

*snowdrops ...  
mistaking 'what is'  
for 'what isn't'*

Runner-up: The Visit, by Jean James, UK

The haiku at the beginning of the poem, through the 'hare's cry,' warns us of painful content, getting the heart pounding. Yet in the prose the subject is handled delicately, drawing a picture of a family visiting the grandparents' grave. The mother fetches water for the flowers she brought and is arranging in a jug, the children lark about, the father waits outside in the car. Then the children come across the grave of baby, with violets in a jam jar under the inscription: 'Mary Millicent, only a year in this world.' The idyll is interrupted. Here lies the mystery of the poem. What happened, why? In the reader's mind, the associations branch out: an un-lived life, illness, suffering, poverty, the famine... From the individual to the social to the political dimension...

In the middle of what may be seen as a family idyll lies the dead baby, forever open to our interpretation. Yet life continues for the living. Hearing the crows' caws, the children 'come alive again' and start cawing back. Life, learning and death in a nutshell.

I enjoyed the consistent voice of the child narrator in the prose, and the parallels in the poem: the beech and the violets, the hare's cry and the soft murmur of voices, the bronze jug and the jam jar, the haiku in the beginning and the end – though the end haiku could have been stronger. I also liked the way the text, sandwiched between the haiku, moved the healing process between the beginning and end haiku: from the hare's cry to the soft voices murmuring to each other, we glimpse a real family in its encounters with death as it becomes a fact of life, part of the life cycle.

## **The Visit**

by Jean James, UK

in the heart  
a hare's cry  
quicken the beat

We are visiting our grandfather and grandmother; they lie together in the graveyard at Derraharney Church, where a huge copper beech shades them like a watchful guardian.

Our mother carries flowers, fresh from the garden – a drench of sweet pea and an apricot rose, still in bud. She stoops to empty the bronze jug and then heads to the tap for clean water. We lark around the graves, chasing each other until her look tells us to stop. This is not the place.

We begin to read the headstones instead, chanting names and ages out to each other, seeing who can find the oldest, until we come upon a granite cradle, its dark edges softened with moss. Someone has left a bunch of violets in a jam-jar. Their small heads are already wilting where they sit under the inscription: 'Mary Millicent, only a year in this world.'

For a fleeting moment we are still, but then the crows begin to caw to each other and we come alive again, cawing back to them. Our mother is ready now and she takes our hands, leading us down to the gate where our father sits patiently waiting.

under the soil  
soft voices murmur  
to each other

#### Honourable Mentions:

##### **Games People Play**

by Gautam Nadkarni, India

When I was a little savage of seven, one of the neighbourhood boys, with whom I played Catch-n-Cook, Hide and Seek and Lagori in the lane adjoining our apartment building, suggested we play Cricket. Mannu was all for it. So was I. It was another matter that we hadn't the foggiest idea about the game. Dinu procured a Cricket bat and a rubber ball. Mannu managed the stumps.

After considerable debate we decided that the bat was to be held by the broad end and swung out at the ball. But we couldn't find any use at all for the stumps. Bablu, the brightest amongst us, put forward the theory that the stumps were meant for driving away cattle unfortunate enough to wander onto our pitch. This made a good deal of sense.

Then Mom called out to me to come home and do my homework, and I excused myself leaving the rest playing at Cricket.

School begins...

Dad still recuperating from  
the vacations

**Games People Play**, by Gautam Nadkarni, India, describes a childhood memory of playing cricket without knowing anything about the game. The haibun works well in a light-hearted, good-humoured way, with local children attempting to make sense of unfamiliar objects, cricket stumps, by inventing a use for them based on their environment: keeping cattle from straying onto the pitch. At the same time, the choice of game in this haibun, cricket, connects to colonial themes. The title too points to layers of meaning.

## **Fake News**

by Marietta McGregor, Australia

Point, frame, focus. Kerchunk! The satisfyingly-solid clunk of an old-fashioned camera shutter. Of course you know the sound is an electronic trick cooked up by software nerds. Your digital Nikon is only pretending to be an analogue Leica. If you'd been there at the birth of alternative facts – fake eyelashes, lolly cigarettes, stick-on tattoos, real-hair switches, comb-overs – you'd know the fakery started out innocently. Then came the juggernaut. Pneumatic boobs, hair extensions, trout pouts, fake buttocks, tooth veneers, wrinkle-proof foreheads, blue-eyed contact lenses, E-fags, 'what I say is true' tweets. First Playboy airbrushed hair from the mons veneris, then lasers zapped genitals right back to prepubertal soft focus. Now cameras lie about the size of inaugural crowds and Oprah has three hands. Who cares if it's 'fake'? A camera click has to be real, doesn't it? Doesn't it?

no flash!  
a basilica fills  
with kyrie eleison

**Fake News**, by Marietta McGregor, Australia, inserts a surprisingly modern take into the form, whisking the reader on a whirlwind journey of tracing how it all came to pass. The haiku at the end adds an interesting change of tone that helps contain the energy and drive in the prose. I liked the contrast between the 'mechanical' sounds in the beginning of the prose and the 'ethereal' song in the haiku at the end.

## **Last Autumn Apples**

by Marietta McGregor, Australia

Picture a ten-year-old child. Her mother is cook-housekeeper on an apple orchard in the south of the island. They share a high-ceilinged room in a white-painted weatherboard house beside a dead-end dirt road that winds through a valley between other orchards. The hallways of the house are lined with rough hessian to provide warmth and insulation against the bitterly-cold winters, when the sun leaves the valley at three in the afternoon. The child rarely sees the house owner. A semi-invalid in his eighties, he lies up the wooden stairs where she is forbidden to go. His grown son also lives in the house. Next door lives the younger son, a drinker, with a wild brood of children.

wind-up gramophone between each scratch an Irish ballad

She is quiet, this lonely child, and keeps to her make-believe world. The setting of the house between hills sloping gently to a narrow overgrown creek is magical, she thinks. But she needs to be on her guard. She's a city-slicker, bookish, so a perfect mark. The wild kids set out to toughen her up. Still, she loves it here. She bites into Cox's Orange Pippins and Ladies-in-the-Snow missed by the pickers, frost-sweetened on bare trees. She finds apple-scented corners in the packing shed, amidst pine boxes marked with the names of exotic ports. On cold mornings there's a squirt of warm milk from the Jersey's teats. Muscovy ducks and bedraggled yellow ducklings forage in the slush. Her mother makes duck-egg sponges, fresh-churned butter, apple pies with clotted cream.

in a cubby of crates the stencilled dreams of elsewhere

Then one year she and her mother leave for good. She starts high school in the city. Later she learns the owner of the orchard died soon after, and the first-born son shot himself in his bedroom. A new owner artistically restores the period features of the old weatherboard house. The room once home to a mother and her solitary child, with its bay window, mirrored fireplace over-mantle and pressed tin ceiling, becomes an elegant sitting room. The hessian-walled hallways are kept intact and the white-painted staircase still leads somewhere upstairs. In the 100-acre orchard someone long ago has grubbed out all the apple trees, the hills are smooth pasture. The apple-packing shed is in ruins.

obituary notice on an empty shelf dust of children's laughter

***Last Autumn Apples***, by Marietta McGregor, Australia, relates the story of a lonely ten-year old's memories of living in a house on an apple orchard where her mother worked, their moving to the city and eventually hearing about the place years later. This haibun – about place, belonging, and loss – has a sensuous, cinematic quality to it. I enjoying reading the monoku in this piece: two monoku in the middle read as if dividing the prose into 'chapters,' while a third, at the end, punctuates the theme of a lost childhood.

### **Administrator's Note:**

Our warmest congratulations to the winners and runners-up!

The British Haiku Society would like to thank all five judges for the hard work and careful consideration they have put into selecting the best of the entries in each category and into producing these insightful reports. As well as choosing a winner and a runner-up, each judge gave three honourable mentions and all winning poets will receive BHS Awards certificates. This year we brought back the haibun section and in honour of two incredible poets and long-standing BHS members we named it the "*Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award*".

We are also grateful to all participants in the BHS Awards. 2017 was a very productive year and we received a record breaking number of entries – 549 haiku, 170 tanka and 50 haibun from 19 countries: Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, The Netherlands, UK, and USA. 46% of the poets were from UK, 21 % from USA, 8% from Australia, 5% from Italy, 4 % India, etc. Looking forward to your entries for the BHS Awards 2018!

Iliyana Stoyanova  
BHS Awards Administrator