

THE BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY AWARDS 2021 - RESULTS

HAIKU SECTION *The David Cobb Haiku Award*

Judges – Judy Kendall and Ron C. Moss

The winners are Simon Chard, UK and Frank Hooven, USA
The runners-up are Joanna Ashwell, UK and Joanna Ashwell, UK

Judy Kendall writes:

Winner – Simon Chard, UK

with me all day the green-veined white

And here is how I got there.

As I read through the 462 haiku, several things become clear. I appreciate minimalist economy. Repetition must earn its place. Explanatory lines diminish a haiku's effect. Titles are often a sign of over-repetition and over-explanation. A haiku needs space.

I was looking for poems that draw back from telling us what to feel or what to think; that limit information-giving, that avoid a muddle of focus, that make me work. I was drawn in by openness and scantiness, as in Yoni Noguchi's definition of a haiku: '*a tiny star carrying the whole large sky at its back*.'¹ I wanted to be surprised, for my perceptions to change, for new places, new horizons.

Any haiku that didn't achieve even one of these elements quickly bit the dust. Sadly this was a horrifyingly significant number. Far too many people are wasting their money. Other haiku that fell included those that repeated, rather than built on, effects I had seen elsewhere or that tried too hard.

My preference for slightness and subtlety meant I had to read carefully, since these by their very nature easily evade attention. I read through all 462 once, and then slowly in batches, noting the ones I felt stood out. By this means the contenders shrank to 29, all of which had some of the elements I have itemised above, although only four had sufficient to make it into this report.

My final choices excel in shifts of perspective and perception, and a touch of numinous mystery.

Lack of predictability led me to select

with me all day the green-veined white

as my winner. Skilful, smooth, packed without seeming so, and yet full of space, it helps that 'white' can be read as adjectival colour. It is as if the butterfly itself is floating far from a grammatical grasp, while also being still 'with me all day'. A clever, subtle, light human-butterfly poem.

A poem almost as light as air that worked very well for me is the runner-up:

¹ *OED*, IV (1961), 48; *English Writings*, II, 69.

Runner-up – Joanna Ashwell, UK

*snow hare
slipping through
our memories*

This poem kept slipping through my mind and was often nearly missed on my rereads of the submissions. It is so very deftly done. The poem, and hare, might be slipping through but they never leave – the process is never quite fixed, and never quite over.

Honourable Mentions:

Two other near winners deserve Honourable Mentions. I enjoyed the double take of

*fieldfares
I clamber over
into winter*
--- Simon Chard, UK

The field fence is not mentioned, but is physically present because of the act of clambering over it. The field too is only legible as part of the bird's name, but we can see it. It's a great little poem and I enjoyed it heartily.

Another that stood the test of several reads was

*sunset—
a toddler scatters
the gulls*
--- Greg Schwartz, USA

I am a sucker for reversals (and toddlers) and the switch from scattering gulls or scattering bread to the toddler as scatterer in this closely-observed and endearing piece is a lovely move.

Ron C. Moss writes:

I would like to thank the BHS and the organising committee for this year's competition. I enjoyed very much perusing the entries over many successive readings. The winner's group evolved from selecting haiku that resonated with imagery that evoked layers of interest and intrigue. Above all I was looking for common language with elements of nature and that poetic magic. I feel that judging competitions is a deeply personal experience and finding what for me makes a successful haiku.

Winner – Frank Hooven, USA

*longest night
the paperwhite bends
through its scent*

I'm pleased to present the first place winning haiku contained many of those qualities that resonate with me as a winning haiku. The first line sets the time and suggests many layers in two words. In line

two we have the stunning little star-like image of *paperwhites* with a suggestion of a bowing reverence into the evocative scent. Such an image is about just being totally in the moment and the passage of time. The sense of smell is an evocative one to have in a haiku. This haiku has elements of nature that demonstrate qualities that many of us still hold dear.

Runner-up – Joanna Ashwell, UK

nightfall
the scrape of boots
the chime of stars

A fine haiku and with the first line the scene is set and then there's the unexpected shift to a mundane scrapping of boots. What struck me right away was the repetition of the article on line three which showed the repetitive rhythm of the act of cleaning the boots. More surprises were in store as the poet has stunningly aligned the sound with the mysterious *chime of stars*. This haiku achieves an outstanding sense of musicality and the mysterious.

Honourable Mentions:

white frost in the moonlight the silence of ferns
--- Clare McCotter, UK

Here we have a one-line haiku with images that shine and glint with frosty moonlight. Maybe the late master of contemporary one-line haiku, Stuart Quine would give a knowing nod to such imagery and the way it has been written. You will also note that there's a swing motion of two parts. You can feel the silence all through this moment.

the smell
of wood shavings
honing the blades
--- Joan Chaput, USA

What could be more powerful in haiku than once again in the winner's list the sense of smell? I was immediately taken to a place where I smelled the freshness of wood shavings. There's a subtle and effective break from the first two lines and shows the task at hand with the aroma of those shavings.

mizzle
on the old mare's back
thin winter moon
--- Clare McCotter, UK

What can one say about such a wondrous word such as *mizzle*, an accepted term for mist and drizzle. Using it in an opening line is a brave but skilful way of putting us directly into the scene. Another layer happens with a *thin winter moon*, which suggests the sharp angles or ribs of the animal's back, perhaps from age.

TANKA SECTION
The Linda Jeannette Ward Tanka Award

Judges – Margaret Chula and Neal Whitman

The winners are Christine L. Villa, USA and an'ya, USA

The runners-up are Mircea Moldovan, Romania and Richard L. Matta, USA

Margaret Chula writes:

Thank you Iliyana and the BHS for inviting me to judge this year's tanka competition. Tanka is an intimate form, inviting us (in just five lines) to share our feelings about moments in our lives. Offering your poems to be read and judged by another is an act of courage.

I read each of the 176 submissions several times—first for emotional resonance and then for craft. Things I looked for included: specificity of word choice, strong verbs and adjectives, uniqueness of expression, juxtaposition, conveying emotion through images, and musicality. After highlighting ones that stood out, I winnowed the list down to about thirty.

Not surprisingly, the majority of entries were about seclusion, loneliness and uncertainty, and physical and mental decline. In the twenty-first century, as in tenth-century Japan, poets serve as truthsayers. Poet Donald Hall put it succinctly when he stated: "Poetry is the unsayable said."

Winner – Christine L. Villa, USA

*wiping down
this soup bowl with bread
what could I
have done better
at his final moments*

This heart-wrenching tanka begins with a simple action, which shows us that the caretaker has been diligent and done everything possible to give comfort to the dying man. We can imagine him/her wiping the forehead of the beloved with the same attention. And yet, there remains the nagging doubt that more could have been done. The contrast of the opening gesture ending with a feeling of inadequacy makes this an exceptional tanka.

Runner-up – Mircea Moldovan, Romania

*hanging from branches
white ribbons
in the palliative ward
grandpa is waiting for me
to tell him a fairy tale*

The first two lines offer a strong visual to welcome us into the scene. White ribbons are symbols of hope to lift the spirits of both patients and front-line medical staff. How deftly, the writer cinematically transports us from the outdoors, into the hospital, and finally to grandpa's bedside. "In the palliative ward" shows that grandpa has an illness with no cure. "Hanging from branches" suggests "hanging on",

which is what grandpa is doing. The matter-of-fact tone belies the experience of being with the dying and is the driving force behind this tanka.

Honorable Mentions:

*at Hemmingway's house
a six-toed cat
yawns at me...
and here I thought
I was something special
--- Susan Burch, USA*

Finally, some humor. Nowadays, it's unusual to find lighthearted moments when we can laugh at our own sense of importance. Here we have an exotic location, a rare specimen of a cat, and the visitor who realizes how ordinary she/he is through a cat's indifference.

*a blank space
where the donor's signature
is meant to be—
all the ways you felt
you had nothing to give
--- David Terelinck, Australia*

This unsettling tanka begins with three one-syllable words, which give us pause. "A blank space" as in "full of potential" or "empty?" The sudden shift in the last two lines breaks our hearts.

*just when we thought
we knew where we were heading . . .
great vees of geese
blown sideways
across the sky
--- John Barlow, UK*

This feels like an In the Time of Covid tanka, but could be any unexpected obstacle that blows us off course. It begins with assurance, a lyrical musicality moving us forward, and ends with the stark image of "blown sideways"—veering us off our path across an uncertain expanse.

Neal Whitman writes:

Winner – an'ya, USA

*come to me
if only on these nights
of dreaming
for without you will be
no chapters and verses*

It's been said that a tanka should cast a "poetic spell." This tanka reminds me of a line in the song, *Witchcraft* – "It's such an ancient pitch." Those three iambs suggest a lover casting a spell. Likewise, in this tanka, the poet harkens a dream-world also making use of three iambs in line 2 that allow lines

1 - 3 to flow nicely. In lines 4 & 5, it is left to the reader to imagine if the poet is invoking The Muse for literary inspiration or for inspiration to “write” his or her Book of Life.

Runner-up – Richard L. Matta, USA

*in the muck
of autumn low tide
two mudlarkers
sharing memories
after a chance meeting*

A mudlarker is an archaic term for someone who scavenges in river or tidal mud for items of value. The “m” sound of muck and mudlarkers is carried into memories and meeting, which gives this tanka heft. I liked the juxtaposition of the odd-chance of finding something valuable and odd-chance of making a new acquaintance, even for a brief encounter. It left me wondering what objects they may have found and what things these two folks had in common.

Honourable Mentions:

*on the way home
after the first day of class
the clatter
of a latchkey boy’s stick
against a row of picket fences*
--- Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Though line 5 is a bit long, my heart goes out to this boy, as I wonder with his stick is he (a) asking a question or (b) making a statement?

*nowhere to go
encountering
no one
my solitude
is blossoming*
--- Stefanie Bucifal, Germany

This short diction prompted me to wonder about solitude as a two-sided coin: on one side, loneliness, but on the other finding one’s own voice.

*caught
in a cobweb?
another word
that used to reside
on the tip of my tongue*
--- Susan Burch, USA

Some days, many of us are stuck on a word... is this an early sign of dementia or do we just need a good dusting?

I began with the basics that tanka are short songs in poetical forms that should be lyrical. It could be said that all poetry is organized sound, but with its five lines, tanka poems have their own special form to convey thoughts and feelings.

I did a first pass-through of 178 submitted tanka, placing a check mark next to 33 that struck a chord. On a second pass-through two days later, I added 14 more check marks, but subtracted none. Now with these 47 tanka, I recited each one and selected 10 that for me hit all the right notes. I took one day "off" and recited those tanka, choosing the 5 best. Another one-day break, one more recital. The winning tanka shined most with the other four deserving recognition.

HAIBUN SECTION

The Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award

Judge – Amanda Bell

The winner is Pekka Keränen, Finland

The runner-up is Alan Peat, UK

Amanda Bell writes:

The 75 entries showcased a wide range of subject matter and style. Submissions included prose ending with a single haiku (*jikai*) and prose with haiku at the beginning (*jiku*) as well as more extended pieces with multiple haiku or haiku sequences. I assessed the anonymous entries according to four criteria: haiku, prose, title, and juxtaposition, in search of haibun where each of these components was working hard towards a unity.

I wanted haiku which were capable of standing alone, with good rhythm, and I tended to favour more classical three-line haiku over monostichs or senryu. I was looking for polished, sparse, well-structured prose, and a relationship between the prose and haiku which combined to create more than the sum of these parts. It's easy to overlook the importance of a title, but the triangulation possible between prose, haiku and title leads to a tightly achieved piece; I particularly admire haibun in which the title takes on enhanced significance when you reach the end. Using these criteria produced a longlist of fourteen, after which selection became more challenging. A haibun with a good title, stylish prose, and well-constructed haiku may tick all the boxes, but still lack the 'x factor' – that indefinable quality which makes a piece leap from the page, and which is fundamentally subjective.

Winner – Pekka Keränen, Finland

Airfix

Visiting Claude Monet's place in Giverny, Normandy. The house, paintings, gardens, and the pond. After lunch strolling through the village center. Next to the church, I spot a WWII memorial to RAF pilots, displaying a Lancaster bomber propeller blade. The blade looks small for a heavy bomber plane. Back to my childhood in the early 70's, the Lancaster was one of my favourite model aircrafts. In my ten-year-old imagination its many rotating gun turrets, especially the tail turret with four machine guns, were an impenetrable shield of flaming firepower. I walk past the family grave of the painter and climb the steps to the churchyard. There a headstone, marked by three British flags, says, "These seven airmen fell and were buried together." A tail gunner, and his six crew comrades.

*June drizzle
through a weeping willow
water lilies*

The winner, 'Airfix', is a thoughtful haibun in which a visit to a war memorial in the churchyard adjacent to Monet's Normandy home prompts childhood memories of model aircraft building. The haiku is nicely balanced, with an evocative kigo, and the title brings in a poignant suggestion of repair and reparation.

Runner-up – Alan Peat, UK

No map for this

My favourite dog walk is in the country park close to our home; it's good not to have to use the car. If the first field doesn't have cows in, that's where our walk begins. It's a long, narrow field, full of dandelions in the summer, more yellow than green at that time of year. The field slopes gently eastward toward a stream edged with wild garlic and bladder champions. Sometimes we play in the stream. Labradors love water, so I throw the ball in the deeper pools and he splashes about.

After the field and stream comes the forest. It's mainly planted with beech, but there is the odd, gnarled oak to play hide and seek behind. He likes the spring in the forest floor in autumn. He bounces across it.

You get to know most of the other dog walkers and so, inevitably, when they see me by myself they ask me. Then, one by one I have to tell them all the same thing.

Sometimes I see a stick and think it's just the right length and shape for him. And I know he'd have carried it along for the whole walk... and I'm lost; lost on this familiar path.

*winter thaw
our tracks turn
to water*

The runner-up, 'No map for this', takes the reader from a quite upbeat description of a regular walk in the countryside into a restrained and finely balanced depiction of grief. The turn in the final paragraph is beautifully achieved, and contrasts skilfully with the chilly closing haiku, the very brevity of which conveys a heart-breaking sense of something missing. The double meaning of the title comes into focus at the end of the piece.

Honourable mentions:

Alchemy
by Diana Webb

glint of a thrift shop earring watery sun

The long awaited coffee shop's grand opening day. A bob of gilded balloons outside. A chain of gilded links around the mayoral neck inside. Hubbub, hubbub. Pristine cushions. Polished tops.

pinwheel flash spark of a burned out cig

Beyond the window a wooden bench where self-labelled outcasts tend to congregate. Today the refuse collector takes a break.

ginkgos turning crab apple gold side up

'Alchemy' – possibly an ekphrasis, I loved this highly stylised depiction of sunshine transforming objects that it falls upon: a painterly exploration of yellow. Inspired choice of title.

The War Within
by Shalini Pattabiraman

Hands that resemble the knobby grooves of a veepu, cup Nila. He digs his feet into the soft banks and feels the first light from the east warm his bare skin. The water swirls around his feet, slowly rising to knee height. He splashes his face, his arms, his torso; gracefully bends his body until he gets the stretch in the spine. He feels the ageing knots unlock and then joins his palms together to bring his arms up facing skywards. Water anoints his frame. His mind spools into her shimmering length. Muscle and memory intimate with water read pain and pleasure from a single music sheet.

*water strider
the sound of a paddle
slicing the insect dream*

On the mud floor, his spine settles into its shape, growing roots. Solid trunk exposes the bare bark—gnarled, casting deep shadows in the hardened hollows of the body. Leaves sway with the wind. He focuses on a feeling—sorrow—the deer pierced by an arrow.

*nesting season
the trees bend
without bird chatter*

The chutti artist reaches for the paccha. Her hands smear the green paint and gently apply it to his face removing all traces of age and mortality. That's how God will emerge from man and he will become immortal.

*storm
someone always lifts
the fallen leaves*

His face overlit by an oil lamp, she works on the makeup. Carefully she arranges the rice paper on his face. She is familiar with nuance: the shift in his eyes, the flare in his nostrils, the quivering note of his cheeks that know how to navigate the nava rasas, bring the audience to a point of climax, a point of no return. All of human experience, reduced to a single point of expression in the body—the face.

*moth wings
the sizzle
in a burning candle*

Time becomes irrelevant to the two, as the long hours of preparation lead into the dance—the eternal battle of life losing balance and fighting for it. No matter whose story is being told, the world is always trying to find its way through grief.

*madallam and chenda
thunder and lightning
a tree in flames*

When the dance is over, he will no longer remain God. She will peel the chutti off his face, remove the paccha until he will become just a man. Transformed by loss and love, he will know her absence once her hands stop tending to his face.

*flames
even the candle's heart
so warm*

'The War Within' – an extended haibun interweaving six mainly nature-based haiku with shorter prose passages describing preparation for a ritual. A highly atmospheric piece.

Knots of May by John Barlow

Four bends to "home". Around this one the Pennines usually edge into view, low over the hedgerow. Today, there's nothing beyond the tightly furled buds of may blossom but rain.

*family gathering
a flash of yellowhammers
brightens the grey*

'Knots of May' – a remarkably economical haibun in which all components work hard to suggest a bigger story. Not a syllable out of place.

Administrator's Note:

As I am writing this note we have hardly recovered from the pandemic and now we are facing another war in Europe. Millions of people have been misplaced and thousands have died. In such times of hardship we should appreciate even more our families and friends, and we shouldn't take anything for granted. This year's judges have worked very hard to bring to you the best of the entries in each category and I hope that by reading their reports and discovering the winning haiku, tanka and haibun you will feel the healing power of poetry. Our gratitude goes to the judges Judy Kendall, Ron C. Moss, Margaret Chula, Neal Whitman, and Amanda Bell.

Congratulations to the winning poets! All winners, runners-up and honourable mentions will receive BHS Awards certificates. Living under challenging circumstances is never easy so we are very grateful to all participants for supporting the contest. 2021 turned out to be another very productive year with increase in the submissions in both tanka and haibun categories. We received 462 haiku, 178 tanka and 75 haibun from 20 countries: Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, UK, Ukraine, USA, and Wales. 48% of the poets were from UK, 22% from USA, 6% from Canada, 4% from Australia, Ireland, and Scotland, 2% from Romania, etc.

Linda Jeannette Ward, a long standing BHS member, talented and award-winning poet sadly died in October last year. So the BHS Committee decided to honour her by naming the award in the tanka section the "Linda Jeannette Ward Tanka Award".

on the lip
of this homeless woman
a chapped flake of skin
begging to be freed
as last darkness closes in

--- Linda Jeannette Ward (1947-2021)

Honourable mention in the 2020 BHS Awards

Looking forward to your entries for the BHS Awards 2022!

Iliyana Stoyanova
BHS Awards Administrator