

THE BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY AWARDS 2022 – RESULTS

HAIKU SECTION *The David Cobb Haiku Award*

Judges – Joanna Ashwell and Kelly Moyer

The winners are Sam Morris, UK and Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA
The runners-up are Richard L. Matta, USA and Debbie Strange, Canada

Joanna Ashwell writes:

Winner – Sam Morris, UK

*on the wing
the silent flight
of the nightjar*

I would like to begin by thanking the BHS for inviting me to select from this year's competition. It was a pleasure to read and select the final few. Selecting the winner and the runner up led me to consider what I look for and appreciate in fellow writers' work.

Reading through the 437 entries, my preferences for haiku that are rooted with an element of the natural world became very clear to me. I was drawn in by the rhythm and the depth of my shortlist, long after the initial first reading of all the entries.

The poems that made my shortlist of 14, all contained evidence that the writers were skilled at their craft. The haiku that contained layers of meaning, links to nature or that had a fresh image leading me to do more than just skim over the words but to re-read, interpret, visualise, and feel the lines were successful for me.

In the end, I couldn't escape the glide carried through the lines of the winning haiku's assonance, rhythm, and description of the nocturnal behaviour of the nightjar bird. I felt myself soaring along through this haiku. Deceptively simple, yet beautiful:

on the wing / the silent flight / of the nightjar

I loved the atmosphere created of evening, without it being stated. The silence permeates throughout the haiku, with the 'i' sounds of line 2, carrying to line 3 and the naming of the bird itself.

Runner-up – Richard L. Matta, USA

*prayer garden
how a mourning cloak's wings
color transition*

I found this haiku moving, butterflies are so often associated with life, rebirth, transition, grief, and loss. It is suggested that a mourning butterfly represents the cloak of people who mourn the loss of a loved one. The flow of this haiku where line 1 appears devoid of colour, yet by line 3 – transition shifts our perception to hope is heartfelt.

Honourable Mentions:

Three near winners that were worthy of honourable mentions.

This haiku appealed to my senses creating a fresh image. Arcus clouds flatten to create shapes and are associated with thunderstorms.

*the bend
of a broken fairy ring
arcus cloud*
--- Joshua St. Claire, USA

Containing assonance, the repetition of the 'b' sound, and the break of the 'c' sound in line 3, amplified the break of the fairy ring. I was intrigued by the element of fairy ring leaving the reader to wonder at a more literal break of something rather than a mythical suggestion.

*what I know of myself
mostly in metaphor
rivershore, pokeweed*
--- Rebecca Lilly, USA

I really enjoyed this haiku, feeling the final tangle of the poet in line 3 – rivershore, pokeweed. Again, this haiku had a rhythm, repeated consonance of 'w' in line 1, the link of 'm' from line 1 to 'line 2. The assonance in line 3 of the 'o' sound. My personal preference for a lyrical quality to haiku came through and I found this a wonderful example of a quality haiku.

*dingo moon
the call and echo
of a barking owl*
--- David Terelinck, Australia

I love this haiku. The dingo moon, associated in Australia with a full moon. I can sense and feel the darkness and then hear the calls of the owl. The way the writer has created the sense of sound with line 2 is beautifully done. This haiku appealed to me as it contains imagery that resonates with layers of poetic spell within the lines.

Kelly Moyer writes:

As I might have expected, choosing the top haiku was not an easy though a most enjoyable and enlightening task. Complex and apparently contrasting elements, including strong as well as subtle juxtaposition, clarity as well as ambiguity, were primary considerations. Yet, in the end, when all that remained was a list of the most well-crafted pieces, I turned to a felt-sense of what moved me. Indeed, the following works are those that touched me most deeply.

Winner – Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

*half-dressed
at the bedroom window
a red maple*

Identification with nature is, in my mind, one of the most transcendent aspects of both writing and reading haiku. In this haiku, the writer effectively blurs the line between the self and the red maple. Both find themselves in a vulnerable state, bearing witness to the same within the other. Yet, there is no shame in their near-nakedness. Rather, beauty and temporality resound. It is as though both the writer and the maple find pause within their own experience to take in the present moment, ripe with the fleetingness of the seasons.

Runner-up – Debbie Strange, Canada

skinny-dipping the moon snail's umbilicus

There is something so regenerative about stripping down for a skinny dip in the moonlight! Once again, we have identification with nature, this time carried out in a more disjunctive fashion. The mention of "umbilicus" alludes to the process of birth and, in its turn, rebirth. Experiencing this piece, I feel the night air and its magic, the snail as mother. Any piece able to elicit this kind of ecstasy within its reader is, in my estimation, an extremely well-crafted ku.

Honourable Mentions:

*a trickle of sand
from a fold in the map
summer fling
--- Benedict Grant, Canada*

The nostalgia apparent within this haiku doesn't induce melancholy. Rather, the trickle of sand provides a sense of movement that keeps the fling alive, if not in the world, within the writer's memory. The concrete detail provides grounding to the more complex emotions inherent within a fondly-remembered tryst, allowing the unspeakable to forever remain unspoken.

*beach stones
in both pockets
kite weather
--- Scott Mason, USA*

Warm weather and sunshine tend to buoy even the most reticent of spirits and provide a backdrop to long-treasured pastimes. Yet, the joy in this piece is found in the tension between the loft of the kite and the weight of the stones, conjuring enough balance to create a moment that feels just right.

*hymns hanging in the valley's mist abandoned chapel
--- John Barlow, UK*

Though we each have our own perspectives on the spiritual, songs of praise tend to reverberate not only within the individual but the very air around us. For a believer, what lies beyond is not governed by the commonly-accepted laws of physics or parameters observed with the mundane world. Though the chapel may only be a shell of what it once was, the presence of the Divine remains.

TANKA SECTION
The Linda Jeannette Ward Tanka Award

Judges – Hazel Hall and Kath Abela Wilson

The winners are an'ya, USA and Debbie Strange, Canada
The runners-up are John Barlow, UK and Susan Burch, USA

Hazel Hall writes:

Winner – an'ya, USA

*peeling back time
with pop's old pocket knife
in my hands now
the continuous spiral
of a granny smith apple*

Filled with music, this finely crafted tanka stood out for me. The pocket knife is steely hard and sharp, like "Pop" himself. Is the poet similar in character? Mimicking the old man's actions, the apple is peeled in a "continuous spiral", like life itself. Perhaps this practice will continue through future generations. The pivot separates two thoughts perfectly. We guess that "Granny" was probably a sweet but crisp old woman who could fend for herself. Alliteration of the unvoiced sound "p" suggests the poet's softness for the couple. A subtle memoir on kinship.

Runner-up – John Barlow, UK

*all she'll learn
likely lost within a year
a goldfinch
gathers spider silk
for her apple-twig nest*

An unusual, beautifully structured poem exploring lost opportunities. The goldfinch instinctively chooses lasting materials to fasten its nest. Later, apple flesh and seeds will nourish the fledglings. They will quickly learn how to "gather". The young student, has yet to learn how to think ahead. Or was the "gold" she let fly away irrelevant to her needs? How will she fare with children of her own?

Honourable Mentions:

*twilight
riding a bike
for the first time
my father
letting go
--- Mark Gilbert, UK*

This fine tanka is filled with possibilities. Simply worded, the poet assonates the long "i" to stress key words. A perfect pivot leaves us wondering who is "letting go". Is it the father, conquering his demons?

Or a father spending time with a young child after work? Or, on the father's death, the poet embracing independence?

*a pale moon
clears the pines...
the evening air
where the hawk flew
still by a song*
--- John Barlow, UK

An exquisite, timely tanka examining the relentlessness of nature and showing how, in our complacency, we often fail to notice nature's nuances until it is too late.

*ten years later
back to my country of birth
an immigrant again
unmoored by longing
for a lost homeland*
--- Chen-ou Liu, Canada

We live in a state of flux. The poet examines how time changes our memories and expectations until they become at odds with the present. In discovering this we develop more empathy for others.

Thanks to The British Haiku Society Awards Committee for trusting me with this year's tanka selections. It was a challenging task to study 196 tanka, many of an extremely high standard. My deep appreciation to all poets for the opportunity to read their insightful works. I learned much from every poem. Popular themes were loss, climate change and human connections. I looked for an original approach; skilful use of ambiguity, careful crafting, melodic flow, unusual images and strong pivot. Heartiest congratulations to the winner, runner-up and three poets with honourable mentions.

Kath Abela Wilson writes:

Winner – Debbie Strange, Canada

*at the moment
I became motherless
something
brushed against me
softer than a feather*

This tanka shimmers with meaning. The essence of life hovers here, unspoken, unknown, implied, certain and resonant. This moment lingers, remains unforgettably, unexplained in our lives, our memory, touching us again and again, mothering us, and spurring on our creativity and a poetic sense of wonder. Beautifully shaped and expressed. This is what I wish for in tanka. Meaning, mystery and subtle magic.

Runner-up – Susan Burch, USA

*weird pains
in my shoulder blades*

*how disappointing
I'm not growing
wings*

We begin with an unknown, the anxiety we feel when something is not right. We can all identify with this situation, and have felt this kind of alarm. What could it be? Is it serious? We sometimes jump to conclusions or explain it away. Could it be growing pains? But what kind? We still don't know after this reading but we know what it isn't. The charming supposition is lovely, good natured, and a surprise. The final short line is effective, drawing our attention.

Honourable Mentions:

*a sandcastle's
private wing
for the hermit crab
my sister's
do not enter sign*
--- Lorraine A Padden, USA

Unusual and personal. The hermit crab catches our attention. The intriguing layout of the castle and bedroom door shows the seriousness of privately held feelings.

*broken buckaroo
how my sister smashed it
when father left
I keep all the pieces
of our cut-short childhood*
--- Tracy Davidson, UK

I never knew this toy, or read a buckaroo tanka before. Feeling loss and the breaking of a cherished bond... We can salvage, and learn from the broken. What mosaic might be the result?

*in this night without moon
dusk fills the birch woods
where wild strawberries
ripen the white pelvic bone
of a deer*
--- Clare McCotter, UK

I questioned the unusual placement of "ripen". How to explain? With a little study, "pelvic ripening" indicates contractions of birth. What in this dark world can be brightly born? An unusual illustration of this, and striking. Is there hope?

Poets wrote on themes that are deeply pertinent to our world today. I appreciated the humor and playfulness of many of the entries, as a way to handle difficulty. Some poets even invented new words, and illustrated the meanings subtly by the shapes of their tanka. Illustrated here – a great sense of loss. A love and care for nature and ecology. Timeless family love. Lament for the difficulties in personal relationships. We yearn for freedom. Time flows through us, and nature and the seasons of human life are mirrored. We open ourselves to transformation and realizations. We question.

Grateful for tanka, a deeply emotional and beautifully shaped vessel for all of this – capable of elasticity in contour and weight, our lyrical heritage, our little songs. And grateful to these poets who wrote and sent these poems. It was an honor and pleasure to read your tanka and to learn from all of them.

HAIBUN SECTION

The Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award

Judge – Marietta McGregor

The winner is Clare McCotter, UK
The runner-up is Clare McCotter, UK

Marietta McGregor writes:

This year's 78 anonymous entries exhibit widely-varied styles, illustrating lively interest in the haibun form. Each element of haibun's framework – title, prose, haiku – contributes to a harmonious whole. In judging, I looked for allusive or descriptive titles (not afterthoughts), effective haiku which deepened the prose or created fresh negative space, and strong imagistic writing which moved or left me with questions.

Winner – Clare McCotter, UK

Expressing

the moon on my sheets is sweating milk, later I will rise and throw it in a crumpled laundry bag, but now, slipping into that other bed, I wait for her to be brought back washed and silky with talc: my still girl, quieter than the dawn, quieter than snow falling, quieter than the name I called her – in my arms her body is a lake, her skull lapping one hand, a small lilac foot the other, always my lips try to brush the dark from her cheeks, my fingers dribbling light on her tongue – some night, deep in this lucid dream, I will cut the cord, letting her drift out to a paddling pool of stars, but not tonight, my little fish, my little astronaut – tonight I need you near, these breasts weeping blue hibiscus tears

*the planets
moving silently in the dark
her cupped hand*

Read aloud, "Expressing" catches the heart with its aching evocation of recent loss. The gentle, detached prose shifts between dream, reality, present, past and future. Repetition is used to powerful effect in phrases beginning with 'quieter than', strung together in a lullaby-like refrain. The metaphoric language is beautiful; a tiny baby is a 'lake', 'little fish', and 'little astronaut', all symbolic of birth or transition. The moon, imbued with the feminine, is 'sweating milk' where its light touches the poet's body. Imagery evokes senses – touch, smell and sight – 'silky with talc' and 'blue hibiscus tears'. Title, prose and haiku weave powerful emotions around how, and when, we're able to let go of a loved one, resonating long after reading.

Runner-up – Clare McCotter, UK

Lughnasa

season of dusk and shadows, the light-half dimming, the dark-half not yet come, it is a lean time, a time of waiting – the bilberry on the bramble slow to sweeten, the fields melting slowly to gold and with last year's grains almost gone your grey mare has grown restless again – empty, the granary is a hinterland of echoes, a place of the between where an old voice, black and crooked, could easily slip in – waiting for the round white moon and the gathering she paces the stable yard, but before the ripening crop is touched we will wash our sickles at the mossy well, offering the smithing god a silent sunwise prayer and, cutting only an armful of stalks, offer another to the god of the harvest then weaving angelica, wild thyme, lady's bedstraw, plantain, and chamomile through the grey mare's mane we will take the stony path at dawn and with a sheaf of still green corn bury all our flowers on the mountain

*autumn twilight
a blossoming
of earthstars in leaf litter*

The title derives from a Celtic holiday of pagan origin at season's turn midway between summer solstice and autumn equinox, when it's traditional to take offerings to high places. The scene-setting title is amplified in the prose as we learn when rituals take place which once propitiated Lugh, an ancient harvest god. Language is rhythmic, reinforcing meaning through deft use of metaphor and assonance: an empty granary becomes 'a hinterland of echoes' to be safeguarded; a god receives 'a silent sunwise prayer'; 'path at dawn'... 'still green corn'. The haiku completes life's cycle, with fruiting bodies of earthstar fungi (*Geaster sp.*), perhaps where corn and flowers are buried.

Honourable mentions:

Mother and Child

by Colin Oliver, UK

Picture this fossil. It fits like a ball in the palm. I picked it from a wheelbarrow of stones as my brother mended a flint wall. Pinprick lines radiate from the crown in the shape of a star. Sometimes it reminds me of a small baked loaf. It's a sea urchin.

I have a sketch of a Bronze Age grave, a shallow grave, showing two skeletons. A mother on her side with a child in her lap. Her skull is tilted to the child and the bones of her fingers rest on his ribs. The two are surrounded in the grave by fossil urchins. An unbroken ring.

I think of the ritual. Someone with a basket at the graveside hands a fossil down. Someone ensures that the star is uppermost and presses it firmly to the earth.

*heads together
threading a daisy chain—
mother and child*

A protective circle of fossil echinoids, their star-patterned tests oriented heavenwards, and the haiku's daisy chain 'stars', evoke links binding us through centuries of shared humanity, sheltering loved ones even beyond death.

Polychromania

by Marion Clarke, Northern Ireland

Floating in petrol-slicked puddles, glistening in Australian opals, rising in a happy stream of soap bubbles, transported on the iridescent wings of dragonflies, teetering in a stack of multi-coloured macarons, flying high on the ribbon tail of a dragon kite, flashing from a spinning disco ball, filtered through a glass prism.

*grey morning...
ridiculously excited
about a rainbow*

Offering a romp through the spectrum, the poem's joyous, optimistic tone beguiles the reader, and the haiku's touch of dry humour is welcome in haibun.

In the Third Person

by Clare McCotter, UK

(in memory of John D)

coat collar turned up, cigarette lit from a butt, alone outside the nurse's station he keeps time to the beat of a chemical drum, shimmying on the spot, an old dancer unable to stop – thirty years since a visitor creased the corner of his magnolia days, their faces faded now like well-worn linen, his history two footprints in the heart of a meadow of snow – so many Johns admitted back then he became the first letter of his surname, slipping it on with too-short trousers and those hard as hell hospital shoes running endless earns for staff – twenty reds, on a good day get yourself ten, his whole life mapped out in a currency of cigarettes

*about your voices...
his hands plunge deeper
into his pockets*

years before at the Floral Hall he had waltzed her out to the wolves and the stars and the Barbary Lions, waltzing her across a dark summer sea till a wind with no name blew the attic door wide open and down they came – the old queen and the child with a horse on a string, the wise counsellor, the dark minister, a traveller in their country he knows boats, can glass the heavens, take the measure of tides and saying his say turn the word, then scorched earth policy brought him back to half-walk half-run these akathistic grounds – his tremulous hands bagging bolts, cadging fags, cadging lifts in rattly laundry vans, and through it all his smile: a tall ship crossing the forests of jasper

An elegiac, regretful epitaph tells the story of a man whose life descends into nervous disorder, shrinking the charmed world he once inhabited to the endless circling of an institution.

Administrator's Note:

Back in 2016 I took over the BHS Awards admin role from David Steele and since then I've had the pleasure of reading some excellent poems and working closely with a whole range of talented and dedicated judges. Along with the past ones, I would like to express my gratitude to this years' judges Joanna Ashwell, Kelly Moyer, Hazel Hall, Kath Abela Wilson, and Marietta McGregor for producing very insightful reports and taking the level of the contest to a new height!

Congratulations to the winning poets for their achievement! All winners, runners-up and honourable mentions will receive BHS Awards certificates. The BHS is very grateful to all participants for supporting the contest over the years. Poems submitted reflected not only personal experiences, but also various events throughout 2022 (removal of nearly all COVID-19 restrictions and the reopening of international borders in most countries; 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, China; the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II; the death of prominent figures incl. Queen Elizabeth II, Pope Benedict XVI, Mikhail Gorbachev, etc.) which had impact on our life and their consequences will be felt for a long time to come.

Like last year, 2022 saw increase in the submissions in both tanka and haibun categories. We received 437 haiku, 196 tanka and 78 haibun from 16 countries: Australia, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malta, Northern Ireland, Romania, Scotland, UK, USA, and Wales. 50% of the poets were from UK, 25% from USA, 6% from Canada, 4% from Australia and Ireland, 2% from India, etc.

We are looking forward to your entries for the BHS Awards 2023!

Iliyana Stoyanova
BHS Awards Administrator