

## THE BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY AWARDS 2024 – RESULTS

### HAIKU SECTION *The David Cobb Haiku Award*

*Judges – Ikuyo Yoshimura and Maeve O’Sullivan*

The winners are Elliott Simons (USA) and Meera Rehm (England)  
The runners-up are D W Brydon (UK) and Sharon Martina (USA)

#### **Ikuyo Yoshimura writes:**

Thank you for the opportunity to be a judge for the haiku category of the BHS Haiku Contest 2024.

#### Winner – *Elliott Simons (USA)*

cracked bricks  
laced with moss  
kintsugi

I was surprised to see Japanese words appearing in the haiku this year. The entries included the one I chose as first place “cracked bricks/ laced with moss/ kintsugi” as well as ‘komorebi, enso, origami, and torii’ all of which play an important part in the work. I’m interested to know how these Japanese words ended up in English haiku. The piece has a pleasing impact of sound and meaning: a pleasing sound of 2-3-4 syllables, the pitiful state of the cracked bricks described in the first line, the bricks described as bordered with moss in the second line. And in the third line, ‘kintsugi’ appears. The cracked bricks are bordered with moss, and the author says that it looks like gold repair. This haiku only makes sense if you know the meaning of the Japanese word ‘kintsugi’. In other words, as a Japanese, I am surprised that the original meaning of ‘kintsugi’ has taken root in the West. ‘Kintsugi’ is a traditional Japanese technique for repairing chipped or broken pieces of pottery using mainly lacquer and gold powder. Author of this haiku applied the repair technique of ‘kintsugi’ to edging broken bricks with moss. Not only does ‘kintsugi’ restore the old and damaged, but the moss edging around the cracks in the wall creates a new world. The reason why the spirit of ‘kintsugi’ has been accepted by so many people is that it shows how to accept the past, repair oneself, and move forward into the future. The fusion of the piece’s pleasant sound of 2-3-4 syllables and the meaning of the vocabulary itself is wonderful. It also reminds me of Alfred Tennyson’s poem, *Flower in the Crannied Wall*.

#### Runner-up – *D W Brydon (UK)*

in his memory  
she waltzes in the garden  
with snowflakes

This haiku can be described as a beautiful, heart-stirring lyric poem. Thinking of the time gone by and remembering her now departed friend, she dances the waltz in a snow-dancing garden, but her heart is by no means lonely. Memories of the past make her life shine. At first glance,

she uses romantic vocabulary such as ‘memory’, ‘waltzes’, ‘garden’, and ‘snowflake’ in a melodramatic style to create a work of elegance.

Honourable Mention – *Owen Bullock (Australia)*

Mother’s Day—  
her bunch of flowers  
made of lego

This haiku has the characteristic of a two-subject shock. It is the shocking fun of an unexpected encounter between two subjects. In other words, the two subjects Mother’s Day and lego appear in the work with the same power. The bouquet of lego, which is mainly a children’s toy, is probably a gift from a child to his mother. It’s natural to send flowers to mother on Mother’s Day, but the bouquet made of lego seen in this haiku is unique.

**Maeve O’Sullivan writes:**

I’m something of a purist when it comes to haiku and senryu. I seek out work which has strong imagery, effective use of language, engaging sensations and interesting sound patterns. I’m impressed by integrity and authenticity, in other words poems which offer a fresh view of nature, a meaningful connection between nature and human nature, or an original insight into humankind. I’m drawn to haiku which are economical, written mainly with nouns and verbs. But I also want a sprinkling of the literary magic that the late Martin Lucas described so eloquently in his seminal essay ‘*Haiku as Poetic Spell*’.

I brought these criteria to bear when judging this award. There were many fine haiku and senryu in the mix: ones that I found charming, relaxing, stimulating and/or moving. Haiku that didn’t work as well were those which used titles, stuck too rigidly to 5-7-5, used the past tense, included aphoristic third lines or engaged in too much ‘telling’ and not enough ‘showing’. Additionally, there were quite a lot of ‘so what’ verses. Of the better haiku, there were five which stood out from all the others, and these are the ones to which I’ve awarded the top five places in this competition.

Winner – *Meera Rehm (England)*

spring arrives  
for my blind sister too  
white-eye’s song

I kept coming back to this haiku, to its simple language and imagery, its seasonal positioning and the connection between the speaker’s sister and the songbird. I was pleased by the fact that the word ‘eye’ appears in the bird’s name, so ingeniously linked to the woman who can’t see hers. I was also very moved by the tone of the haiku, which is such a caring, loving one.

Runner-up – *Sharon Martina (USA)*

song sparrow  
my newborn’s lungs  
filling with air

This haiku also took my breath away, if this pun can be pardoned. In just eleven syllables, the poet has made a simple but profound association – at the dramatic moment of becoming a parent – between the infant’s first gasp and a bird singing outside. A sublime example of interconnectedness.

Honourable Mentions:

skylark  
high enough to be nothing  
but song  
— *Alan Peat (UK)*

How perfectly this haiku evokes the common experience of only hearing but not seeing a skylark! The ‘high enough’ in the second line is teasingly accurate, underlining how out of reach the bird is, visually, while still being audible.

burning the hive  
the blind beekeeper’s  
vivid apron  
— *Tom Cunliffe (UK)*

Another striking haiku featuring a blind person, coincidentally. The hint of danger at the burning activity adds to the drama of the poem, also the irony of the apron being ‘vivid’: its intensely bright colours not being visible to the wearer.

tatami floor  
the tea master bows  
to a toddler  
— *Shiva Bhusal (USA)*

What a delightful scene this senryu evokes: the specificity of the floor materials, the humility of the master honouring another spirit, albeit one much younger. Whether or not the ‘haiku moment’ took place in Japan, there is a Zen-like quality to this verse.

**TANKA SECTION**

***The Linda Jeannette Ward Tanka Award***

*Judges – Lorraine A Padden and Marilyn Humbert*

The winners are Alan Peat (UK) and Debbie Strange (Canada)

The runners-up are Joshua St. Claire (USA) and an’ya (USA)

**Lorraine A Padden writes:**

What a joy and privilege to be offered the opportunity to plunge into these splendid tanka. With such an abundant offering, the task of selecting just a few winning poems was indeed a challenge. I was particularly drawn to poems with evocative juxtapositions, creative word choices, and rich imagery. Holding much wisdom, these small poems convey something

poignantly universal about us, our place in communion with the natural world and of course, with each other. Thank you for the chance to savor it all.

Winner – *Alan Peat (UK)*

slowing now  
each of your  
feather-light breaths —  
owl in the pin drop hours  
before dawn

This is an intimate portrait of bearing witness to a life gradually slipping away. We are invited into what might be imagined as a vigil, holding our collective breath as we discern each shift in an inevitable building of silence that might reach its peak *in the pin-drop hours*. As breath dissolves, the presence of an owl is juxtaposed, whose eyes we might imagine as slowly widening, taking in the reality of the impending loss. This brief poem immerses us in such a deep quiet that time takes on its own woven texture—a synesthetic sensibility of touch, sight and barely perceptible sound knit together, moment by moment.

Runner-up – *Joshua St. Claire (USA)*

foxfire  
a slant rhyme  
unfolding  
into the scent  
of approaching rain

Runner-up this year is another tanka offering meaning far beyond its five brief lines. It too evokes multiple-sense awareness. Starting with *foxfire*, a bioluminescent fungus, the poet expands our view beyond what's perhaps seen glowing in a rotting log at our feet in order to evoke a much larger energy on the horizon, one perceptible through scent.

Then, skillful juxtaposition calls our attention to the craft of writing itself, a third sensibility informing this piece. We step outside the poem to perceive how two lines end in similar but not identical sounds. *Rhyme* and *rain* – a creative act of poetic license that adds another layer of nuance to an already rich, loamy experience.

Honourable Mentions:

loneliness  
pelts down  
my windowpane  
the call of a blackbird  
dissolves into rain  
— *Jenny Polstra (New Zealand)*

Careful not to define what loneliness means, this tanka earns an honorable mention for its fresh and poignant word choice that *shows* without *telling*. Solitude here is *pelting*, quite an assertive stance for a state of being often conveyed as somber or understated. Its clatter drowns out everything, including what might be rejuvenating birdsong. Rather than announce a simile to

describe the depth of feeling, the poet skillfully aligns disparate elements to convey a felt sense of overwhelming dissolution.

looking out  
from the room's  
one window  
the loose-fitting leaves  
of a winter tree  
—Alan Peat (UK)

Redolent of mystery with the inclusion of just that *one* window, this tanka also excels in its fresh treatment of cold and desolation. What might be an all-too-familiar icon is not stripped bare by the season but has a *loose-fitting* relationship with its adornment, suggesting we might also have flexible expectations regarding what constitutes an effective tanka about winter. A tempting invitation!

### Marilyn Humbert writes:

It was an honour to read the 252 entries. I enjoy work that leads me on a journey that stirs my imagination and resonates long after the first reading. After multiple readings 45 tanka were longlisted. I set each of them aside for a few days before reconsidering and eliminating those falling short of my subjective criteria. The top 10 poems exhibited some, if not all, of the following qualities:

- An understanding of the genre;
- Memorable content, and an authentic story;
- Tanka rhythm (close to a s/l/s/l/1 song-like melody);
- A human element;
- A nature element;
- A pivot.

Winner – *Debbie Strange (Canada)*

lady's tresses  
speckling the downs  
this autumn night  
your fingers untangle  
what's left of my hair

The winning tanka is well crafted in the characteristic s/l/s/l/1 style, displaying a thorough knowledge of form, with economy of words and careful line breaks. The pivot line *this autumn night* encourages imagining rare white orchids dotting the downs beneath autumn stars. I see stars above and stars below. And *autumn* links with L4 & 5, to build the story, where an older couple, share a tender moment, *fingers untangle* the partner's sparse hair. Line 5 *what's left of my hair* loops back to line 1 & 2 *lady's tresses / speckling the downs* to complete this gentle and intimate scene which we can all relate too.

Runner-up – *an'ya (USA)*

dance recital  
on a dimly lit stage  
our first-born child  
with the luminescence  
of a blue-green glowworm

This tanka has the feel of authentic experience. The first 3 lines setting the scene for *our first-born child* on stage. The poem continues to build in line 4 & 5 *with the luminescence / of a blue-green glowworm*, inviting us to feel the parents' joy and wonder and see through the parents' eyes their child among class peers shining on stage. A tanka to make us smile remembering our own kids performing.

**Honourable Mentions:**

my scuffed boots  
scatter fallen leaves  
each step  
an echo of endings  
I still carry  
— *C.X. Turner (UK)*

The alliteration of 's' sounds in - *scuffed, scatter, boots, steps, leaves, endings, and still* bring a pensive motion of feet rustling leaves. *each step* builds to final lines and evokes our emotions. The careful word choice of *scuffed boots, fallen leaves, endings, still carry*, combine to enhance a story we can all relate to.

a new mark  
on the height chart  
knowing  
I'll never measure up  
to my sister  
— *Susan Burch (USA)*

This tanka of 18 syllables starts simply, *a new mark / on the height chart*. The next 3 lines bring the aha moment, and a gut-punch. A powerful tanka about family and sibling dynamics and perhaps our own insecurities.

orchard moon  
the firmament aflame  
at swansong  
we rendezvous beneath  
ripening freestone peaches  
— *an'ya (USA)*

Colour abounds in this tanka: the sunset, the peach orchard and love beneath the moon. I enjoyed the sounds in the word combinations: *firmament aflame, at swansong, we rendezvous, ripening freestone peaches*.

**HAIBUN SECTION**  
*The Ken and Noragh Jones Haibun Award*

*Judge – Kim Richardson*

The winner is David Bingham (UK)

The runner-up is Diana Webb (UK)

**Kim Richardson writes:**

To whittle the 103 entries down, I applied the criteria that I apply when considering haibun for publication.

First, the haiku. Are they haiku? Many were ‘two-liners’, artificially pushed over into a third line, using poetic enjambment. Others were eliminated for being too short, some lines having only one syllable. This goes against the idea that haiku should have the rhythm that arises naturally from the ‘three separate utterances’ that constitute the poem, and the vocal ‘shape,’ of 5-7-5. And the other usual considerations applied: no *clichés*, no ‘thinking mind,’ ‘show, don’t tell’...

Having reduced the number to around 30, I asked, is the prose well-written, and does it integrate well with the haiku? Here I believe there should be a natural rhythm of contraction and expansion between the prose and the haiku.

The final question was: ‘Is there emotional resonance?’ If there is no emotional resonance, writing is simply describing, painting a picture. But when a haibun touches us, something has resonated in, and with, us.

It is not always possible to say *what* it is that has touched us, *why* we resonate emotionally with the work. Sometimes it is clear, as with Kobayashi Issa’s famous haibun on the death of his daughter – we can all identify with grief. But sometimes it is inexplicable, as if the unknown in the author reaches the unknown in us, the reader, and we experience the gasp of recognition of something we, with our ‘surface mind’, cannot name.

Finally, there is personal preference. The previous criteria are more or less measurable and can therefore be agreed on (although they are not always) but personal preference is, well, personal. If this has eliminated otherwise good haibun, my apologies, but my final choices are necessarily coloured by what I resonate with.

Winner – *David Bingham (UK)*

**In a Church Stretton Tea Shop**

As I paid the bill, the waitress looked at me disapprovingly and I wanted to say, ‘Her tears, they had nothing to do with me.’

Though, I knew, deep down, in a strange, unrelated sort of way, they did.

*all the sad things  
she told me ... a blue suitcase  
by her chair*

This packs a punch in just 53 words of sparse prose and a delicate haiku full of implications with no explanations, just ‘that which is implied’. The colour of the suitcase gives ‘vertical axis’ or cultural resonance: ‘blue’ = sadness/melancholy. The poet has used poetic enjambment to break line 2 to line 3. However, here it works, as there is a natural pause after ‘suitcase’ before, in the third line, we learn the suitcase is, ‘by her chair’, ready for her departure to...where? Finally, the use of ellipsis to create *ma*, or space, in the second line is masterful.

Runner-up – *Diana Webb (UK)*

### Connecting the Breaths

printed words scattered  
across a pale spread  
tree silhouettes

Towards the winter solstice, a window view in monochrome. From a low bleak sky, miniscule droplets. Moves through a journal’s A5 paper lull through the afternoon, with tiny echoes, glimmers through shadow, in threads of a shawl from a myriad fingers, each with its touch. Somewhere another’s page flicks in a whisper of synchronicity. She glances away at all that surrounds her and further towards the leafless horizon.

next year’s diary  
December  
lifetimes away

It arrives. The shortest day, which follows a long, long night. Under a threatening hover of sky she collects the wherewithal to celebrate the shift. A candle, a candleholder and yes, a pencil. She reaches for a solid surface on which to write. The maroon covered book with commitments completed, space at the end for notes still blank.

Alban Arthan  
a dark bird sweeps  
through stark stripped boughs

She looks at her window sill, now made ready with something old, something new and a charity shop purchase, borrowed from a different era, rimmed in blue.

unlit wick  
the luminous star  
of a grandson’s gift

The flame takes time to establish, before it flares to a tiny beacon there in the window.

drop of light  
out from the snuffer  
endless circles



She wraps herself in yarn from a spin of the raven-black, dove-grey, glint-tinted linger, until the call of sleep. As she rests her head, she recalls the sound of voices which sing through her dreams until dawn.

an aerial poised  
on a pillow of cloud  
unknown birds

This haibun is narrated in the third person, an unusual viewpoint that shows further that in haibun, there are many possibilities both of subject matter and treatment within the one form. It also demonstrates the ‘expansion and contraction’ of prose and haiku, flowing as the reader follows the poet’s thoughts. Finally, it gives us a flavour of *zuihitsu*.

Honourable Mentions:

**POST-MORTEM**

*by Earl R. Keener (USA)*

Once I saw a nighthawk swoop into a city street to capture a firefly at the very flash. It was dusk and I’d worked overtime and while I can’t tell you what was on my mind or even which track we’d worked on or what year it was I remember it like I’d remember a kiss. Maybe it isn’t so unusual. I’m sure such things happen a lot if we’d only notice.

What we re-member, the long anesthetic in between, makes memory an unreliable biopsy. I wonder what’s been left out. What’s been neglected, what’s been revised. For example: I can’t tell you what song I played on a locker-room guitar just before J.C. left for the night shift and got crushed between a t-bottle and an ore hopper

but I remember two or three springs later we found his wedding ring between the ties of a blast furnace switch. The other night I was trying to recall who the engineer was. Perhaps it’s not important. So much has happened. So much has been forgotten. At some point one realizes it might not have been instantaneous, but we were all victims.

changing ties  
the brakeman’s ring recovered  
from the thaw

A powerfully written haibun with strong emotional imagery, a gut punch.

**Shap**

*by John Barlow (UK)*

There’s little left of the walls, but the tower remains, its upper doorways, opening onto nothingness, darkened only by pairs of the jackdaws that otherwise swirl and chack the sunlit air. Beyond, below, the Lowther meanders its way through the centuries, its damselflies and minnows glinting as if ever there.

abbey swallows  
a small stone coffin  
empty of bones

In very few words, the poet paints, very skilfully, a picture of place, time and impermanence.

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

This was my first year as BHS Awards Administrator taking on the role from Iliyana Stoyanova. Thank you, Iliyana, for your support and assistance while I settled in.

On behalf of the British Haiku Society, I would like to express my gratitude to this year's judges Ikuyo Yoshimura, Maeve O'Sullivan, Lorraine A Padden, Marilyn Humbert and Kim Richardson for their time and efforts in selecting the best of the entries in each category as well as producing such insightful reports.

Warmest congratulations to the winning poets for their achievements! All winners, runners-up and honourable mentions have received BHS Awards certificates. The winners and runners-up have also received cash prizes.

The BHS is very grateful to all participants for supporting the contest and for helping to make it such a success, with record breaking numbers of submissions in all three categories. Compared to last year, haiku submissions increased by 58%, tanka by 24% and haibun by 53%.

We received 765 haiku, 252 tanka and 103 haibun from 22 countries: American Samoa, Australia, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malta, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Romania, South Africa, Spain, The Netherlands, Turkey, UK, and USA.

I look forward to receiving your entries for the BHS Awards 2025 when the contest opens in October.

*Nick Taylor*  
BHS Awards Administrator