

# endgrain

Dee Evetts



# endgrain

Dee Evetts

haiku &  
senryu  
1988-1997

Red Moon Press  
1997

# endgrain

© 1997 Dee Evetts

ISBN 0-9657818-1-X

Red Moon Press  
P. O. Box 2461  
Winchester VA 22604

Editorial assistance from Anthony J. Pupello.  
Photograph of the author by Alyson Pou.

Some of these poems have previously appeared in the following periodicals and books: *The Alchemist*, *Blithe Spirit*, *frogpond*, *Mainichi Daily News*, *Modern Haiku*, *Raw NervZ*, *South by Southeast*, *Wind Chimes*, *Woodnotes*; and *Haiku Moment* (ed. Bruce Ross, Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc., Boston 1993), *Haiku World* (William J. Higginson, Kodansha International, Tokyo 1996), *The Red Moon Anthology 1996* (ed. Jim Kacian *et. al.*, Red Moon Press, Winchester VA 1996).



“We write to taste life twice,  
in the moment and in retrospection.”

*Anais Nin*  
“*The New Woman*”



## FOREWORD

A haiku poet recognizes that writing haiku is only the beginning of the creative process. In order for a haiku to be successful, it must evoke in the reader a response—most often intuitive—wherein the reader completes the haiku moment by becoming a part of that very moment. *endgrain* is a collection of work from Dee Evetts, who has been a traveller and a wanderer, a teacher and carpenter, a haijin whose work reflects the essence of haiku: the resonance of a moment experienced among the minutiae of everyday life. In the following pages we are treated to a remarkably consistent collection of English-language haiku—consistent in their ability to draw the reader time and again into the haiku moment.

Evetts' work has a quietness: subtle shadings wrapped in fine nuances. It does not insist on itself, nor does it demand an audience. Indeed, it “abhors egoism in any form of assertion”, as D. T. Suzuki has declared true haiku should. This poet's craftsmanship results in the kind of gem that he is so fond of finding in the work of

others. And they are equally brilliant whether captured in the sadness or the utter comedy of the moment. Evetts has the gift of bringing the essential out of the very ordinariness of life.

I commend the following pages to you with as much pleasure as I took in co-editing them.

*Anthony J. Pupello*  
*New York, July 1997*

## INTRODUCTION

**D**uring the English summer of 1963 I was discovering Zen Buddhism through the writings of Alan Watts. One of his books has a chapter on Zen in oriental poetry, and it was here that I first encountered haiku. I was sufficiently intrigued to go searching for more examples, and soon found a collection from Peter Pauper Press of New York. I learned later that the translations were execrable, though not worse than most available at that time. One poem by Onitsura, here rendered without embellishment by Henderson, made an enormous impression on me:

There is no place  
to throw the used bathwater.  
Insect cries!

I had only recently left school, having endured substantial overdoses of Wordsworth and Milton. It was a revelation to me that dirty bathwater could be the subject of a poem, and that a poem could be so brief and yet have such resonance. My

response at the time was a feeling of having been born was a feeling of having been born into the wrong literary tradition. And such convictions no doubt played a role in the decision, later that year, to abandon my university education.

Be that as it may, I was certainly hooked on haiku, and during the years that followed made hundreds of what I would now call haiku-attempts. Like most beginners, I counted syllables diligently, and labored under the illusion that any idea or observation couched in the prescribed form must by definition be haiku. This apprenticeship was prolonged by a lack of teachers or peers with whom to rub shoulders. There were no visible haiku poets in Britain at that time, and I was still unaware of the emerging haiku movement in North America. The works of R. H. Blyth gave me an inkling of which way to go, but since I was still looking exclusively at translations from the Japanese, I was ignorant of what strength and originality was possible in English-language haiku.

Twenty-five years on, how different a scene. There is now a vigorous British Haiku Society, and a whole generation of North American poets has matured, while new voices abound. Links have been forged

with contemporaries in Japan, and this is to say nothing of other countries and languages. Haiku and its related forms can truly be said to have become an international phenomenon.

Amid such proliferation it sometimes seems difficult to hoe a straight row in your own backyard. Special-interest groups and individuals have bent haiku to their own ends. There has always been a significant minority who see haiku as an expression of Zen, and who regard their writing as a meditative practice. We find poets who use their work to advance feminist views, and others who specialize in depicting the plight of prisoners or abused children. Such poems are claimed to be more realistic than those in the mainstream of haiku—what might be termed the grittier-than-thou fallacy. My difficulty with most of this work is not that the themes are inappropriate to haiku. The problem is that nine-tenths of such efforts are heavy-handed, and come across as mere tub-thumping. If a poem gives off “the stink of Zen”, or the stink of anything else, then for me it has failed twice—as a poem, and as an effective message.

Fundamentally, haiku is a literary genre. For all its brevity, it must ultimately be

assessed by the same standards as all other literature. That is, by its aptness, wit, accuracy, felicity of language, and by its lack of sentimentality and moralizing. The future of English-language haiku is unknowable, but there is no escaping that such criteria will continue to apply.

Most of my own writings can be described as celebratory. In one way or another they attempt “to taste life twice”, as Anaïs Nin has so vividly expressed it. Yet occasionally a piece emerges from what seems to be a quite different source. The sequence at the end of this book suggests some of the other experiences which have informed my work. While I have had my reservations about such sequences, having made this experiment I am less sure than ever about what haiku, at the end of the twentieth century, should or could be. The best I can do is to keep an open mind, and hoe my own row as straight as I am able.

*Dee Evetts  
New York City  
August 1997*

endgrain



morning sneeze  
the guitar in the corner  
resonates

under the trees  
a sudden shower  
yesterday's rain

early frost  
just splitting the kindling  
warms me enough

night of the meteors  
we come in  
with aching necks

dune pine  
the low branch  
sweeping sand

first frost  
city traffic lights  
out of synch

overnight bus  
the young mother  
sucks her thumb

cabinetmaker's shop  
the dial scotch-taped  
to NPR

heat of the day  
still in the brick wall  
of the liquor store

with a flourish  
the waitress leaves behind  
rearranged smears

his handkerchief  
ruined by children's paints  
a keepsake

first week of chemo  
he shaves his head and buys  
a jaunty cap

Immigration  
trying again to fingerprint  
the old carpenter

last grandchild  
asks if she remembers  
the dinosaurs

the limo drivers  
exchanging glossy photos  
of their children

on the freeway  
discussing the chocolate bar  
in the trunk

hotel dining room  
the dogshow crowd  
perfectly groomed

20,000 feet  
traces of masking tape  
on the jet engine

vegetable stand  
the owner sprinkling water  
with a bunch of kale

house for sale  
half-buried in the old elm  
a brass bell

leaning out  
trying to see  
the voices below

unexpected news  
she stands staring into  
the cutlery drawer

low clouds  
the long line  
for the Monet show

winter commute  
my hand finds a warm spot  
on the handrail

cigarette break  
a huddle of umbrellas  
on Fifth Avenue

in your absence  
the broom still collecting  
tangles of hair

spring sunshine  
the young cop aims  
her snowball

how desirable  
in the thrift store window  
my old Mah-Johng set

new underwear  
even my shoulders  
hang straighter

loud applause  
for the last speech  
before lunch

however close  
we push the beds together  
the gap between us

frozen laundry  
I bend her skirt  
over my arm

within the sunken punt still water

chill night  
after you the toilet seat  
slightly warm

house shadow  
leaving behind  
the frost outline

darkening road  
wind parts the fur  
of the dead cat

in my face  
the empty flour bag's  
last puff

new flypaper  
she waves her arms  
to get them going

careful movements  
making a business call  
from the bathtub

rainy night  
half the cat  
still indoors

slap of my hand  
raising dust  
from the pig's back

friends from the south  
a great bowl of strawberries  
in the midnight dusk

she dreams  
her hand fluttering  
within mine

bend in the footpath  
soap bubbles appear  
from a hidden garden

I set the alarm  
get out of bed to unpack  
her photograph

bitter night  
choosing the red side  
of the quilt

after the rain  
on my vegetable patch  
a new crop of stones

home from abroad  
halfway through my nap  
a familiar breeze

summer's end  
the quickening of hammers  
towards dusk

damp morning  
cash for a journey  
warm from the machine

passport control  
a bee's flight interweaves  
the chainlink fence

silent ride home  
she restrains her hair  
from brushing my face

how come  
whatshisname  
never speaks to me

“Welcome back, children”  
the principal  
with arms tightfolded

first weekend  
his wedding ring  
chafing a little

quarter to six  
in the alarm clock's glass  
treetops sway

October again  
my walk to the post office  
on the sunny side

after Christmas  
a flock of sparrows  
in the unsold trees

newly moved in  
washing the doorposts  
by moonlight

on the nude beach  
not noticing her until  
she puts on a blouse

repeating the lecture  
his eyes following  
the window-cleaner's blade

custody battle  
a bodyguard lifts the child  
to see the snow

home after dark  
through the window my family  
of strangers

coming home weary  
the broken tread announces  
my floor is next

his fury  
pulled up short  
by the payphone cord

behind the door  
their quarreling voices  
lapse into brogue

taking out garbage  
his face at the window  
for the touchdown

midnight breeze  
at the jazz festival  
a rolling paper cup

a sudden squall  
my neighbor too  
rescuing laundry

morning moon  
the flock of pigeons turns  
above the town

departure lounge  
the inchworm from my lapel  
left on the potted fern

winter solstice  
at the frosted window  
I check my watch

a dusting of snow  
tire tracks grow visible  
in the road's soft edge

almost touching  
the second pantry shelf  
an onion's green shoot

freshening breeze  
the skillet softly chimes  
against another

her kitchen table  
at the place she offers me  
varnish worn away

pause from roof-raising  
my godson dwarfs  
the old nursing chair

hummingbird  
in the doorway for an instant  
my red socks

endgrain  
of the staircase  
drougths and seasons

thunder  
my woodshavings roll  
along the veranda



## Notes from the Other Side

The following sequence is based on the experience of spending six weeks in the psychiatric ward of Banbury Hospital. This was the low point of a battle with extreme depression, brought on by a series of life challenges that at the time seemed overwhelming. Although I entered treatment voluntarily, I was unprepared for the sense of shock and humiliation at finding myself in this kind of institution.

Ever a journal-writer, I used my notebooks as a kind of wailing wall, scribbling lengthy accounts of my symptoms and fears. Among these were occasional haiku-drafts, born in moments of relative freedom from this intense self-preoccupation. I recognise these as survival poems. It was five years before I was able to open those notebooks, but when I did so, the process of assembling this sequence was a significant step in acknowledging and moving on from that time of crisis.

road to the clinic  
a passing truck-driver  
taps his forehead

alone in the bathroom  
keeping my voice normal  
for the duty nurse

beaten at cards  
by the silent dwarf  
who smells of urine

hateful birdsong  
I fight against waking  
to another day

in the T.V. room  
the repairman pretending  
not to have heard me

occupational therapy  
even at Spot The Difference  
desperate to win

never mistaken  
guessing whose footsteps  
patient or staff

first day-pass  
the asylum charity box  
in the supermarket

the photocopy shop  
I try to imagine  
using one again

halfway home  
my sister-in-law asks  
“Do you want to drive?”



## COLOPHON

*endgrain* is set in 14/12 Hoefler Text, classical in its elegance; titles and numerals are in Pegasus, for inspiration. Cover stock is Classic Columns 80# Indigo; endpapers are Graphika Riblaid Natural 24# text; text stock is Cougar Opaque Natural, 60# with a smooth finish.



*Book Design:*

Jim Kacian & Dee Evetts

*Typesetting:*

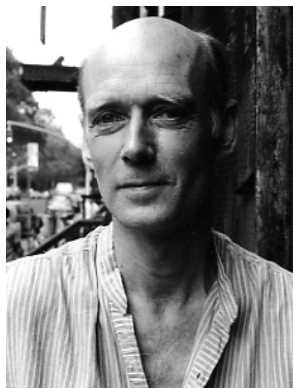
Red Moon Press, Winchester VA

*Printing & Binding:*

Piccadilly Printers, Winchester VA



## About the Author



DEE EVETTS was born in Hertfordshire, England in 1943, and has lived in the United States since 1991. He earns his living as a book-binder and carpenter, following an earlier career as a teacher of languages. He has written travel pieces for the *Times* and for the BBC, as well as a Thai language course for Voluntary Service Overseas (British Peace Corps). His work as a haiku poet first appeared in *Haiku Magazine* in 1970. A collection of haiku and longer poems was published by From Here Press in 1988 under the title *A Small Ceremony*.

Evetts co-founded the British Haiku Society in 1990, and started the Spring Street Haiku Group in New York the following year. In 1994 he curated the *Haiku on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street* installation for Creative Time. This featured the work of 26 area poets displayed on the marquees of vacant movie theaters, during a transitional phase of the city's 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Development Project. In 2002 his collection *Home After Dark* was published by Kings Road Press in its Hexagram Series.

Praise for *endgrain*

“Throughout this new collection, Dee Evetts skillfully demonstrates the wide range of poetic achievement possible in haiku. From the unforgettable comic moment when his waitress flourishes her washrag to that moment of insight into existence as his woodshavings roll along the veranda, the poet presents the reader with a panorama of haiku happenings that both delight and spark awareness. With *endgrain*, Mr. Evetts enters haiku’s front ranks.”

Cor van den Heuvel  
Editor, *The Haiku Anthology*

“In these haiku and senryu, Dee Evetts brings a world’s-eye-view to the great out-doors, the bedroom, and everything in between. Basho might have written these poems—had he settled in New York City toward the end of the twentieth century after travelling the globe for decades. Tenderness and wit run through *endgrain*; reading it we know the poet’s days and hours, and our own.”

William J. Higginson  
Author, *The Haiku Handbook*

