

John Parsons studied painting and printmaking at Hornsey School of Art 1959-62, then taught printmaking at St Martin's School of Art and life drawing at other major art schools. He has exhibited widely and has been a songwriter, restorer, fabric designer and illustrator.

In the sixties he was designer, typographer and part editor for Advent Books and Trigram Press.

He has had ten books of poetry published, the last four being haiku.

'In this beautiful collection John Parsons offers a sharp eye for detail, a skillful sense of cadence and an adept command of poetic possibilities. He has an astute engagement with themes such as seasons, nature and human nature. ...This is a rich and rewarding collection resonant with Parsons carefully wrought language and imagery, so often surprising and memorable.'

Patricia Prime, *Kokako*

'John Parsons does an interesting experiment with haiku. He places a blank space in the middle of a line. This is so unusual that at first I doubted its effectiveness, but now I am convinced that this technique heightens the poetic quality of his haiku. It works mainly in two ways: first it gives psychological and emotional depth to his haiku, and second it frees his haiku from rigidity. His technique performs the role which traditionally *kireji* is expected to do, only more quietly and with greater subtlety.'

Prof. Noboyuki Yuasa

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In a New Garden

haiku

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For Mary, Catherine, Little John and Sandra

Preface

I made my first attempts at writing haiku, as distinct from writing other forms of poetry, in 1967, after buying a copy of R.H. Blythe's *History of Haiku*. I've experimented with various forms since then, including concrete poetry, song writing and word sonnets. I returned to haiku full-time some sixteen years ago.

This book is largely extracted from work over the past year, a time of upheaval and resettlement.

As an artist, I work in the moment, and have always considered the mark as a sum total of the whole, an awareness of the smallest element in order to allow the unconscious to speak. This understanding of refinement is closely mirrored by my approach to the written word.

John Parsons,
Aylsham, North Norfolk
December 2012

Spring



sense of belonging
snowdrops open
in a new garden

delicate pinkness
about to leave apple trees
for garden air

dawn light
young trees slender shadows
grow down hill

first day
after illness at her feet
pale primroses

somewhere
lost in mist the robin
finds a song

baby dunnocks
speckled earth from
such sky blue eggs

magnolia buds
she searches dreams
for the perfect flowers

hollow way
bracken mitres unfurl
 beneath bluebells

her book of symptoms
 tulips writhe
 against cut glass

morning mist
 grain silo
 becomes a church

his dog waits
by the ball resigned eyes
 chance mine

pigeons clap wings
white plum blossom falls
 across Buddha

tête à tête she loved
still nod together
 amongst celandines

over hedges
unseen switchbacks
of birds

snowdrops slow spread
her mysteries veiled
beneath housework

armed with jonquils
I run over
the zebra

dressing table
her hyacinths unfold
soft pink buds

before dawn
lustrous moonlight cupped
in her abalone

authority housing
worn out banks bear
last primroses

in watery light
the whole meadow
webbed

map of the woods
I let my stick rest
with the others

doctor's garden
magnolia petals
impaled on thorns

water irises
 such clarity amongst
 clouded thought

caged pheasant chicks
 watched over
 by a hawk

garden section
 pussy willows weep
 over dying primroses

I arrange snowdrops
upstairs in birthday clothes
she chooses pearls

ungainly nests
in crack willows young rooks
find the hard way

winter's end
cat's velvet ear
springs back

no more cuckoos
the mournful chorus
of collared doves

into the mower's void
earth stars
leave as dust

wagtails catch flies
through sloe blossom
another wicket

eastern skies glow pink
persian speedwell
draws it close

her love of tulips
how they still grow
in the vase

faded daffodils
become ochres
two clocks out of time

heart ward window
ripe sorrel flushes hills
oxide-red

her train heads south
a grey heron lifts
from the whiteness of gulls

coin for the busker
he drops a receipt
into song

Summer



under the surface
of a drop of dew
finger whorls

released lacewing
slow slant of glitter
lost in light

iron age fort
amongst shattered flints
purple loosestrife

weeping willows
every day fresh leaf
her changing moods

bank
of the disused railway
smoke drifts of violets

sunlight slides
curves of a reed
full weight of the wren

june dawn
white mare
lit from within

sea's edge
waves
take us deeper

caught in a thermal
buzzard snagged
by rooks

north sea
children
all shades of pink

finch remora
trail a lone rook
the surface of clouds

city backyard
old trampoline
gently bounced petals

patch of moonlight
slips from her robe
the midnight room

amongst corn flowers
that faded pink
grandfather's phlox

summer heat
mackerel skies
trawled by swallows

wings beat faster
the darter
places her egg

great black backs
slow lift off bob at rest
on the flat slick

deep in forests
of sedge and reed moist black
eruptions of moles

dry beech mast
pin prick awareness
of a baby toad

derelict house
through tangled undergrowth
flight path of bees

silent journey
all the white undersides
of leaves gently seething

all corners
of the garden small cherries
 passed by birds

sleep mask
 her fingers feel
 the coming dawn

still morning
down the lavender path
 spring of bees

stoat in a green lane
its bow wave
of rabbits

gull meets its shadow
at the floating point
of bread

cliff top gardens
in the concrete rill
wagtails make do

seaside lodgings
embossed fire doors
flare with grain

lonely chapel
humming a few notes
to wake echoes

scent garden
for the blind roses feel ways
over the path

dawn woven light
before Buddha
silver pathways of snails

pigeon drinks
iridescence flows
down its throat

white blind
shadows of bamboos
fashioned by wind

everywhere on walls
of the old convent
maidenhair ferns

daughter returns
a goldfinch alights
on wizened marguerites

bee fly's proboscis
a moment stilled
in the mouth of thyme

flickering through
sun shot honeysuckle
the fleckery of wrens

wild geese whiffle
lose height
the osprey's shadow

deserted farmyard
a cockerel ekes it out
on spent dung

ear-shaped shell
a small child holds out
to the sea

dragon fly
as it banks
a glimpse of gold

on the way
to open up I pick her
false orange blossom

eagle kite
dad shows him how
to land in a tree

drying day
her shadow pegged
between sheets

walking on waves
in black suits disciples
from the school of surf

turquoise becomes jade
old men stare
into deeper water

perennial leeks
continual drip drip
of random thoughts

church path
gravel slowly born aloft
by worms

waste bin
a spider
crumpled

friendly fire
his name
cut sharp

hospital
dementia wing
caught in a flap

garden birds
what do they peck
so small

little used car
new variety of lichen
on wipers

tears by the sea
her heart blurts out
waves roll in

charity store
worn out ted
loved bald

new pond
by placid waters
old stone frog

churchyard limes
as the rook banks
a lustre cross

something dead
in the pampas
I fix the gate

top windows
of the Co-op painted out
we pass in silence

old man's garden
nothing eats
the rancid fat ball

june heat
a blind friend's card
of snowdrops

sensing rain
dandelions close how little
we know each other

mystery illness
runs its course weeding
black meddick

bus shelter zen
stones come to rest
on cushions of moss

anglers
all keep nets
point to the sea

mail box
snails
devour the post

church weather vane
a rook swings
with father time

cleaning off soil
the toad's grip
lengthens a worm

new town
so many people know me
as somebody else

return journey
 bus driver checks
 her perfume sample

new house
 in a vacuum
 ash keys from the old

dawn in the new house
 mother's quilt becomes
 rose window

wind of change
in the empty room
she unties chimes

small town bank
through a grill
the teller's eyes

bleaching the sink
all that's gone down
between us

empty schoolyard
robins spar
over hopscotch

heated words
in the car
hail becomes rain

so many years
yet still I
recognise her dog

her *Guide To The Stars*
under crescent moons
of coffee

still using the tools
he left me
that his father left him

early hours
an old Harley clears its throat
down the bypass

affordable housing
path round the back
goes nowhere

hearse in lay-by
driver puffs smoke rings
bearers straighten ties

hanging round
a wind-rocked rotary
four old teds

burns his paintings
says she has more
irons in the fire

junk shop
dealer picks up
my tune

car boot
so many oversize people
downsizing

aged skinhead
bald
at last

TV pundit
fly in one ear
out the other

short term let
vacuum full
of silver hairs

café society
next to us his wife's coffee
grows cold

unconsummated
a bed shared for life
dream lover

day of introspection
stone carried for years
falls on shingle

describing the vast
dark curve of a hill
a curlew's cry

quartering owl
shadow silent
as feathers

no moon on the lake
all the stars above
all the stars

her diagnosis
through a cut glass bowl
peonies fall

famine graves
undressed stones
bury themselves

discarded by her
dressing table tissue
of yesterday's lips

opticians
I focus
on her eye liner

Church St
above on the scaffold
his dread locks

between Co-op
and graveyard house
with a Juliet balcony

curled shavings
these tools all that remains
 pared memories

dentist's wall
 pennywort fills holes
 in decayed mortar

in her room
 silence
 of the wind-up radio

ancient pudding stone
corners The Cricketers
still marks a boundary

stonehenge
a jackdaw pecks
the trilithon

flooded sidings
floating lines
of iridescence

station notice
for the blind
press button for help

empty snail shell
asleep
a slug

her theory
garden birds see me
as a horse

holocaust memorial
stolen
for scrap

cliff top church
engraved on choir stalls
square riggers

rosemary in bloom
a last cold bee
stiffens with mist

Autumn



her study
 moonlight leafs silently
 through open books

 through chinks
moonbeams dance around
 standbys

after making love
 a taste of salt
 in the plover's cry

All Hallow's
slipping into fox's earth
a fallen angel

doctor's gardener
hoes between
patients

checking the screen
of his Kindle
a lost booklouse

envelope falls
in silence her letter
speaks volumes

daylight moon
thin as dust says she can
read his mind

old friend dies
of cirrhosis we all go
up the pub

temporary lodgings
he sends us
a compass

tea bowl
at his lips on its foot
the potter's thumb

washing up
day after all those
colours of lipstick

waiting for the right
light a shadow
crosses the moor

hospital waiting room
all that space
round a handcuffed man

end of the tour
the monk gives away
his paper flower

moonlight where she died
a ghost's weight
on my shadow

celebrant's address
at the lancer's peak
a chrysalis

trapped in a courtyard
circling wind
its body of leaves

rust coloured chrysanthus
in evening light
the separate chairs

shortening days
two old spider skins
catch late sun

white elephant stall
her unwrapped
prayer flags

summer's end
old heron circles
the dry pond

charity sack
by the door all the colours
from her past

at Buddha's feet
on a cushion of moss
the winged seed

passing the house
 their sideways glance
 as they round a word

turning over
 the plot my face reflects on
 hers at the sink

puddle shimmers
 a line of trees
 only child calls

shrivelled fronds
scorpionlike
those needle words

planting a cherry
under the floating moon
mindful of blossom

under pea towers
just enough warmth
to melt frost

rectory garden
all the fallen fruit
left to rot

through a circle
of willow a circle of sky
days turn

journey home
touched by gold
a maple amongst sloes

stripping the walnut
eyes in a silver skin
weep dark stains

beating heart
of silence a goldfinch
amongst cornflowers

allotment
scent of old man's chrysanthus
digs deep

damp evening
a touch of rust
in the robin's song

thick mist
no edge to land or sky
our boundaries fuse

I plant her hellebores
to open pink lips
in winter's heart

sombre evening
 only light
 blaze of a horse

autumn sun
 resting in the hammock
 a year's onions

old orchard
cruising islands of rotten apples
 red admirals

Winter



amongst her papers
under my name
the family plot

first frost
her lipstick smudges
bone china

pear tree
that gave all last year
now neatly stacked

deep frost
frozen in puddles
white soles of air

tears on a greeting
where does she start
to wrap up a life

her smart phone
searches mist
for a signal

stark against storm clouds
white ticks of gulls
above plough markers

powder blue
under waves of mist
a last periwinkle

white tissue
new gloves she kept for
winters long past

weaving bank to bank
across ice a glimpse
 of ermine

frozen bird bath
 graffiti
 of skids

whiteness of snow
 whiteness of birches
 our breath blends

her old garden fork
stuck in at an angle
the twisted tines

she has her tree
cut down
then a picture on it

on the bench
where they fell
shears lose their edge

winter jasmine
now and then about the house
we hug

a grey heron
folds its neck the slow
envelope of wings

frozen water meadows
an edge
to the great tit's rasp

she tells me
as I watch snow she will
 return for her books

ice shards spread
in the oxbow's curve cracks
 of a woodman's fire

climbing the ladder
to their old tree house
 wizened bindweed

frosted glass
impressions of magnolias
divert winter rain

family heirloom
in the unfinished quilt
her last faltering stitch

sliding from her
withered rose last night's
coverlet of snow

early snow
sweet scent of wood smoke
unseen

joints stiffen
every elbow of twisted hazel
a nodule of ice

snow fall on the beck
a lone snipe whirs
into chaos

crescent moon
 through pond ice
 a carp bellies up

 patio table
overnight cloth of snow
 set with leaves

trail on the wall
 as long
 as a snowball

lavender seeds
in snow fragrance
of a goldfinch's breath

just enough light
the robin's breast
gives dead nettles life

falling snow blurs trees
we try to focus on
a place to settle

inner nature
of a small snow man slowly
becomes Buddha

cold deepens
moorhen scuts jerk
into the beck

bronchitis
snow melt drips
from withered clematis

old folk in the café
tonal disharmonies
of catarrh

funeral
passing round
her smell of camphor

my winter coat
sleeves inside out
her faint perfume

her last rose
lets petals fall
bares a red hip

old graveyard
wedged in locked gates
junk mail

cold morning
a car runs
on the spot

bare hedge long wait
for a dead leaf
to not be a bird

value store
reduced for christmas
DIY bonsai

cold winter's night
the old mare
farts mist

winter sun
sparrows breasts bit by bit
down the hedge

cricket pitch
in snow rooks
 fielding

wood pile lowers
from whorls
snails snapping

christmas tree
child decorating it
my wife

daughter's christmas
call the frog
in my throat

two swans compress
cold evening air
into wood smoke

shadows of black trees
drip last snow
our silence thaws

piercing snow melt
at the feet of bare roses
purple heartsease

last of the snow
all talked out we scatter
wild iris seeds

inside the window
spider adjusts stillness
to the long wait

loneliness
evening sun on the seat
never sat on

fresh hazel catkins
dust snow I follow
her fading voice