



BARBED WIRE FLOSSOMS

THE MUSEUM OF HAIKU
LITERATURE AWARD
ANTHOLOGY
1992 - 2011

BARBED WIRE IN AMERICA

THE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN
LITERATURE
AND
ART
1880-1900



REVISED EDITION





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THE MUSEUM OF HAIKU LITERATURE AWARD ANTHOLOGY 1992 - 2011



EDITED BY GRAHAM HIGH



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This page is dedicated to the memory of
David Povey, a man of great talent and
character, who died in 2011.

The title of this book is a reference to the
fact that David Povey was a great lover of
music, and that he was a great friend of
mine.

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BARBED WIRE BLOSSOMS

INTRODUCTION

The British Haiku Society was launched in 1990. *Blithe Spirit*, its quarterly Journal, was begun at the same time. By 1993 the Museum of Haiku Literature in Tokyo had become aware of the Society and, in a recognition of fellow feeling and with a desire to encourage the spirit of haiku in other countries, the Museum offered to support the Society through an Award and, ever since the ninth issue of the Journal, has presented the Society with £200 per annum. It has continued to do so to the present day. The Society is very grateful for the Museum's continued support and its members' awareness of the honour thus conferred has, if anything, grown with the years.

The gift is divided into four individual £50 awards, one for each quarterly issue of the Journal, and is given to the particular selected writers. As well as receiving this monetary award the writers of the selected haiku also have their poem included in the Museum's archives in Japan and each remains there as an exemplary product of what the Journal and British poetry represents.

Here then are these winning haiku gathered together in an anthology. It is a collection of over eighty very varied haiku written by a broad spread of 58 different writers. Some poets have won the award twice or even three times but the general picture emerging from the selections is that of a Society that has strength in depth and that winning poems are not only to be found among a small cross-section of members.

By implication the Haiku *Literature* Award was intended to include more than just haiku. It will be seen that some of the chosen poems might be better classified as senryu; there is also a tanka and at least one haiku extracted from a haibun. Quality not classification was what the Award was about.

The poems are presented in chronological order up to the December 2011 issue. To this extent the anthology serves as a historical document. Has haiku practice changed or developed over that time? There has been much discussion about writing practices, style and content through those twenty years but, in general, I would say that the range and quality of the haiku has remained remarkably stable over the period. In the early 'learning curve' years of the society there were already practitioners who had a sophisticated and variegated understanding of the genre and, in more recent years, there is no evidence of any staleness or predictability that might have emerged from the Society had its boundaries tended to harden with increasing years.

The haiku in this Anthology are satisfyingly varied. Each successive editor of *Blithe Spirit* has tried to select for publication with the broadest definitions of what qualities and verbal strategies are available to haiku; what emotions and images can be released by those few, very balanced words. The selectors of the individual poems have been as diverse as the poems themselves.

As to selection, the decision-making process was as simple and transparent as it could be. Each winning haiku was selected by another member of the Society, pretty much a different person each time, as being the one that seemed to

them the most striking, or the most interesting, or the most outstanding in some other way and therefore the one most worthy of being singled out among all the haiku which appear in each issue of *Blithe Spirit*.

Because haiku is such a short form *Blithe Spirit* is able to publish a great number of representative poems by its members. The current issue (21.4), for example, includes over 300 poems: haiku, senryu and tanka.. These published poems have themselves been selected by the Journal's editor-at-the-time from a large number of submissions from the Society's members. It is clear therefore, that to have been selected for the Museum of Haiku Literature Award is something to be very much valued.

Are they then the best poems that the Society has produced? 'Best', like all superlatives, is a word likely to invite controversy, especially in a writing environment which is largely uncompetitive and mutually appreciative. Each selector has exercised their own subjective taste and, in their accompanying comments, they make it clear why their chosen poem had a special resonance for them.

All that can be said is that each of these haiku stood out in the mind of its selector as being most worthy to represent British haiku in the Museum in Japan. It is hoped that the variety, breadth and depth of haiku in the anthology as a whole will provide inspiration as well as enjoyment to haiku lovers and that the anthology will take its place as a representative collection of some of the liveliest and most original haiku produced in Britain over the last two decades.

Graham High January 2012

JACKIE HARDY

chosen by James Kirkup

in a passing car
just time to see
the batsman, out

The first award of the £50 prize for a haiku chosen from the previous issue of October 1992 went to Jackie Hardy.

James Kirkup, the first president of the BHS, chose the poem without comment. It was only several issues later that the protocol developed that each selector would also give a brief indication as to what particularly appealed in the chosen haiku to make it the selected poem. This written appraisal gradually grew in scope until it settled down to about a third of a page of exposition.

The editor of the Journal did however comment that the above poem *"is rather more senryu than haiku and could hardly be more English"*.

DAVID COBB

chosen by Colin Blundell

**on the fixture list
the name of the groundsman
we buried last week**

By chance this senryu in issue 3.1 maintained the cricketing theme begun by the first prize-winner, Jackie Hardy. However, there were no cricket poems in issue 3.2, for which the selector was going to be Dee Evetts and so there was no chance of a hat trick.

At this stage in the Museum Award the selectors were themselves selected, fairly much at random, from among the first wave of haiku enthusiasts who came together when the Society was first formed. Later the convention that the last winner should choose the next was followed for a while but was later abandoned because it was felt it might have a homogenising effect.

JACKIE HARDY

chosen by Dee Evetts

startled in tall grass
the pheasant's wings
beat faster than my heart

Dee Evetts commented:

Jackie Hardy's haiku is a triumph of compression, the first line skillfully applicable to both poet and bird, the whole poem conveying a sense of mutual shock and at the same time of unity. This experience could so easily have been sentimentalized or intellectualized.

KOHJIN SAKAMOTO

chosen by Jim Norton

a cake of ice
leaves the shore
at the touch of my finger

Jim Norton commented:

I resolved to allow a hovering attention to be pulled in by a freshness of image, completeness of expression and a touch of ordinary magic.

CICELY HILL

chosen by George Marsh

**Still unopened
The greenish hydrangea flowers:
The taste of tea**

George Marsh writes:

I am giving the first place to the tea-ceremony poem by Cicely Hill. Although it might be sketchier and less skillfully finished than some others it has hit upon mysteriously fascinating relationships beyond my grasp. The expectation and innocence of the tight flowers, which are like green tea before it opens in soaking, are held in balance with the fulfillment and experience of the fragrance and the flavour of the tea. The whole poem renders an atmosphere of special hushed attention to the reality of the moment which seems to me to give the reader a sense of the tranquility and alertness the tea ceremony aims to produce.

MARTIN LUCAS

chosen by Stephen Gill

evening hush...
a tabby cat
slips through the railings

cars race noisily
into
the gentleness of drizzle

Stephen Gill happened to have a final shortlist of two poems, both by Martin Lucas. He asked himself the question:

which of these two haiku is better? The answer that comes is neither; both are technically impeccable and effervesce that rare 'quality' of awe and mystery - yugen - one finds in the works of Bashō, Buson and Kyōshi. And why bother to choose, anyway... for both poems are the work of a single poet!

TITO

chosen by Cicely Hill

**In the tiny purplish mushroom,
All of the dampness,
All of the twilight,
Of some distant forest floor.**

Cicely Hill writes:-

I have chosen this haiku partly for the sound of the words, the imagery and the sense of season. 'Purplish', exact where the dampness and twilight are more vague, contrasts the tiny mushroom with the forest it evokes and whose essence it contains. This purplishness reminds us of the texture, the fleshiness and particularly the scale of the mysterious little object - that it is small; that we are small and the damp, twilight forest is great.

DAVID STEELE

chosen by Susan Rowley

**Outside the classroom
the bicycles stand all day
in spring rain**

Susan Rowley wrote:

This has a subtlety I enjoy very much, the steadily falling rain matched by the persistence of the bicycles and the reason for their being there; the point of balance between the call of the season (and the bicycles) and the fact that it's raining (although Spring rain has a call all its own, so maybe that should be on the first side of the balance!) and that the owners are in the classroom - a place with its own qualities of time and restriction. This creates a strong sense of stasis within which other strands of tension can move.

I like the atmosphere it creates and the way it does so, the words simple and measured, the line breaks natural and effective, the fact that however much I talk about it I still can't explain the space it creates in my mind - I just have to read it again.

RUTH ROBINSON

chosen by Tsunehiko Hoshino

estuary
the artist's brush
catches the hot sun

Professor Hoshino commented:

I recommend the dynamism of this haiku. The words 'estuary' and 'hot' are quite effective in offering the scene and I felt happy to be reminded of Bashō's famous haiku:

Mogami River
it has plunged the hot sun
into the sea.

(trans. Helen C McCullough)

MARTIN LUCAS

chosen by Fred Schofield

after the goodbye kiss
the sweetness
of a russet apple

Fred Schofield added:

There is a great sensitivity to exactly which part of the incident held the haiku moment. The poet, dwelling on 'the sweetness' of the apple, tempts the reader to supply thoughts and feelings associated with the 'kiss'. The assonance coupled with the apparent simplicity of the language entices us to let images form without effort.

JACK HILL

chosen by Martin Lucas

in winter silence
oystercatchers swoop down
on the cold sand

Martin Lucas commented:

A haiku does not need to be an attempt to 'create' meaning; the poet only needs to be aware enough to respond to the inherent meaning of the moment. Jack Hill has done this. You can breathe the fresh air in this poem.

JANICE M BOSTOCK

chosen by David Cobb

smell of last year's fire
down the chimney
with each autumn gust

David Cobb wrote:

This haiku seems to find a way up the nose and into the heart, just as the smoke and flames, which once went up the chimney, now come down again as nostalgia. There is still a sort of glow in last year's fire - but really, was it ever warm enough? In this battle of the elements, it is chill air (the autumn gust), and not fire, which seems to get the upper hand.

It hardly matters whether we sense the smell as an accumulation of a whole winter of fires, or whether we guess that only the last-lit fire, probably one in spring, is still pungent. Either way we are not only reminded of all the fires we lit last year, but also forewarned of the long series we are about to embark on again as winter draws near. In this respect the human lot has a striking similarity to the toils of Sisyphus.

Oh, come now, I hear some pyrophile object: this haiku is all about joyous anticipation of a jolly heap of coals and sizzling chestnuts! Well, maybe it is. But that's why it hits the mark so successfully - it is so open-ended. Interesting, too, how this haiku sounds perfectly balanced with a second line that is shorter than the first or third.

NIKA

chosen by Jackie Hardy

this winter night
my only company
an unknown star

Jackie Hardy expanded:

Although it is far from essential, there is something particularly satisfying about a balanced haiku - in this case 4/6/4 syllables. Look at the work the vowels do. Each 't' in 'this winter night' is tight enough to make you hunch your shoulders against the cold. Followed by the expansiveness of the 'o', 'a' and 'y' sounds in line two, until we have reached the limits of the cosmos with the long 'a', 'o' and 'u' of line three. In this haiku of splendid isolation the irony of 'an unknown star' for 'company' is masterful.

EDWARD D. GLOVER

chosen by Kohjin Sakamoto

Wind tears an old web
insects' husks spin off
in a last brief flight

Kohjin Sakamoto ruminates:

I remember hearing a tale from an old man when I was a child: in the wood near our village there lived a big spider that ate children. When I saw a web across the path into the wood I would feel an urge to approach the web, while at the same time feeling scared and chilled. How do insects feel when they see a web? Do they see it, I wonder? Or do they perhaps see another world beyond the web? Whatever, they are caught.

In Edward's haiku, both are gone: the catcher and the caught. Only the husks of the latter remain to hint at the tales of this old web, though none can tell any longer to whom these broken segments once belonged. The husks' last flight will be their very first since they were caught. The torn web of this haiku allows the reader to weave a new web in his/her own mind. The haiku is both the ending and the beginning of a tale which every reader can weave as he/she likes.

TSUNEHIKO HOSHINO

chosen by Annie Bachini

four legs outstretched,
a turtle floats –
first cherry blossoms

Annie Bachini adds:

This haiku makes me feel at one with the world, it reminds me of my bond with other matter, and that life goes on after death.

Tsunehiko Hoshino skillfully evokes the feeling that the turtle and the cherry blossoms are separate from each other yet linked by his use of 'four', 'floats' and 'first'. Alliteration, used in this way, also enhances the recreation of the haiku moment.

JACKIE HARDY

chosen by George Swede

evening -
the herd heads gatewards
the traffic thins

George Swede comments:

Jackie Hardy's haiku evokes two rural evening occurrences recognizable the world over: cows returning to the barn and roads emptying. These two events are linked in a way that effortlessly elicits in the reader the poet's experience of awe and wonder. Furthermore, it does so with an admirable economy of words involving just eleven syllables.

Hardy's haiku is also identifiably British because it includes the word 'gatewards' which is partly responsible for the brevity of the piece. In North America, we would use the more clumsy "towards the gate" which involves four syllables instead of two.

The subtle alliteration of "herd heads" is also admirable, as is the spacing.

MAGGIE WEST

Selected by Bill Wyatt

**Herb Robert
growing by the tracks
rust on the rails**

Bill Wyatt comments:

I bet this is the "flower in the crannied wall" of Tennyson. Maggie has used her eyes, capturing in summer that little wild geranium named after Abbot Robert, a French Cistercian monk. Its local names conjure up images - Dog's Toe, Dragons Blood, Jenny Wren, Poor Robin and Red Robin being just a few. It has small purplish-pink flowers with a hairy red stem. Often in dry conditions the leaves take on a deep rusty colour. The organic Herb Robert and the non-organic rusty rails come together, their colours blending in the sun, creating that haiku moment.

YASUHIKO SHIGEMOTO

chosen by Richard Goring

**The Bon moon
shining over the Tower
of London**

Richard Goring comments:

The Bon festival, a definitely Japanese event which takes place annually in August, is a celebration to welcome the spirits of the dead. The Tower of London is, of course, a definitely British structure which, with its often violent history (the young princes imprisoned, Traitor's Gate, etc.) may be the home of many long-dead spirits. This haiku embraces two widely separated cultures and places, through the same moon that shines upon them, cycle upon cycle. It helps draw together poets from both countries in a gesture of goodwill, which surely is one of the great blessings of haiku. I also particularly like the unstated caesura which neatly breaks up the phrase 'Tower of London'. It is especially effective when the poem is read aloud.

MIRKO VIDOVIC

chosen by Caroline Gourlay

virile young men
shooting their semen
out in the trenches

Caroline Gourlay writes:

This haiku/senryu is not so simple as at first it might seem. Indeed, though its strength is in the very ordinariness of the narrative statement, behind it lie layers of subtlety that hint at different possible interpretations and levels of meaning. The word 'shooting', for instance, with its intended irony, contrasts with the almost flat delivery sharpening the focus and heightening the tension. That these are 'virile' young men emphasises how trapped they are by their situation.

Many have emphasised the shock and horror of war, but few so graphically and succinctly the sheer pointlessness of it. In fourteen syllables Vidovic has captured its stupidity and futility - the discarded sperm an apt metaphor for wasted lives: routine masturbation is a lonely affair - how effectively in this context does it reflect the deeper loneliness of dying.

Can one not sense also an element of black humour here? Soldiers, aware of their situation, gesturing defiance - their act an expression of scorn aimed at those they feel have cynically manipulated them?

GILLES FABRE

chosen by Susumu Takiguchi

even in my pocket
it is everywhere
this morning's spring wind

Susumu Takiguchi writes:

This writer has admirably cultivated his own distinct style - deceptively easy language, a good flow with each word familiar in isolation but combined and arranged producing a magic.

The last two lines reflect an experience familiar to us all. It is the first line and the fact that it is there that makes the haiku original and universal.

GARY HOTHAM

chosen by ai li

our bare feet
next to each other
next to the ocean

ai li comments:

Hotham's haiku is mellifluous on the tongue and a delight to read. The simplicity of his words conjures up warm, balmy days and do-nothing summers.

Was it just a brief romance or are they two people comfortable with each other, enjoying the majesty of Nature? We will never know, but as I write this on a wet, damp and cold January morning, Gary's words bring the sunshine back into my study.

DAVID STEELE

chosen by Dick Pettit

clouds scudding
fast birds
blown over trees

Dick Pettit discussed his selection method, concluding:

Originally 25 of 8.1 were picked and then reduced to 7. Many of the discards were turned down with the greatest reluctance. Already regretful at eliminating so many fine pieces, choice now became painful. The final winner was one of the 'outsiders'.

DAVID LEATHER

chosen by Fred Schofield

Willy-nilly
through her ashes
mother's daffodils

Fred Schofield adds:

This poem has directness, subtlety, depth, music and humour - with no excess words to get in the way. Initially, it seems that nothing happens except in the poet's mind. Yet the slowness and the haphazardness of the event hint at something both particular and general about the way we relate to death. In my experience it's rare to find such strong, unadorned images suggesting such a fundamental and ultimately indescribable dimension of human existence.

CLAIRE BUGLER HEWITT

chosen by Keith Coleman

can't sleep tonight –
I love the baby
too much

Keith Coleman writes:

This haiku is a delight. Bursting with life, it transmits the deepest of feelings. Genuine and direct, it is simple without being trite. Stating little, the poet evokes so much: we picture the fond gaze, as lovely as our own vision of beauty, feel the sweet pangs of love, exquisite as our own heart's truest wish.

DICK PETTIT

Chosen by Cicely Hill

the baby's come at last –
grandpa congratulates
grandmother

Cicely Hill comments:

This moment would seem to have taken place in a culture where ancestors are revered and elder relatives respected and so, naturally, has quite a Japanese flavour. A sense of pure generosity is conveyed only because no hint of the poet's ego intrudes.

ARWYN EVANS

chosen by Stuart Quine

**Hoar frost –
barbed wire
blossoms**

Stuart Quine writes:

Successful haiku are, I believe, the product of the active engagement of writer and reader with publication being in effect an invitation to participate in this process. Having defined the context of the haiku, two sharply contrasting elements are presented in the plainest of terms, thereby allowing the broadest possible range of interpretations which a fuller description would tend to exclude.

FRANK DULLAGHAN

chosen by Matthew Paul

helicopter –
poets glance at the ceiling

Matthew Paul comments:

Only six words, but what a marvelous haiku/senryu! Simplicity and deprecatory humour combine in a child-like, collective reaction to an unseen machine: a curious contingency, deftly and beautifully expressed.

DAVID ROLLINS

chosen by Patricia V. Dawson

absently
getting up to answer
next door's phone

Patricia Dawson comments:

This haiku has all the qualities that I look for - a sense of the solitary poet responding to his environment. It draws me into his experience and resonates, leaving an image in my head.

ARWYN EVANS

chosen by Helen Robinson

Shaking old leaves
the crow perches
in a low moon

Helen Robinson adds:

By the literal idea that the crow is perching in the low moon we are shocked into realising the whole event. The surprise of the final line also communicates the sudden awareness which made the haiku happen, sharing it with us. It's one of those rare haiku that gives me the thrill of really seeing something for the first time.

W.M.TIDMARSH

chosen by Ernest J. Berry

Still there
the hills of childhood
still unclimbed.

Ernest Berry comments:

The not-so-subtle metaphor of hills as goals and burdens of life may challenge the haiku establishment, but this poem's reverberations and layers of speculative meaning spoke to me.

**Those new glasses
make her eyes look brighter
dog-eared Rubaiyat**

Ken Jones comments:

The two opening lines put us off guard with a banal kind of conversation opener. Then comes the double jolt of the cutting line. The Rubaiyat is one of those poems for which publishers seem to favour beautiful or lavish editions; the very title has those overtones. So "dog-eared" sounds all the more shocking, or at least disorientating. What's going on here? For me the image is of a withdrawn and obsessive reader (she's already gone through at least one pair of glasses.) But the humanity which distinguishes the haiku lies with the observer. He or she must often have passed by the reader, poring away as usual and always over that same book. The new glasses, however, prompt a momentary speculation. Are her eyes really brighter than previously supposed? Is there something more important going on between her and her book than had been assumed in passing? And, in short, has the observer perhaps been underestimating this woman, and thereby doing her an injustice? There's the suggestion that the passer-by, for the first time, may have paused and tentatively sensed the humanity of this closed-off reader. But there is no more than the light mystery of the glance - and maybe second glance.

ARWYN EVANS

chosen by David Steele

Singing the storm
our words hurl
in the spinning drift

David Steele expanded:

This haiku stood out for its sheer power to evoke an experience through excellent choice of words. 'Singing the storm' has no literal meaning, but is very clear and fresh, with perhaps a touch of magic - conjuring the forces. The single word 'hurl' is perfect anyway and in this context also recalls Hopkins' windhover rebuffing the big wind. Even the space before 'hurl' implies a brief space of calm before the next buffet and 'spinning drift' wonderfully describes the way the rain is shaped and swirled by the gusts.

I find it a joy to read a haiku that has two meanings and to know both meanings at the same time. I can't remember who described it first, but I can verify the experience: at that instant time stops. The layers of meaning and allusion in Arwyn Evans' haiku will keep me happy for quite a while!

KIM PAUL RICHARDSON

chosen by Janet Blundell

**The fiddler's wife
watching his fingers move
knits him a scarf**

Janet Blundell adds:

To me, this haiku captures beautifully the kind of moment when, as in life, two separate but juxtaposed incidents are merged into one. The fiddler, dexterously using his fingers, is focusing on his music (one supposes) while at the same time his wife, who is knitting him a scarf, is dexterously moving hers. As a knitter myself, I know that knitting is an activity than can be done at the same time as something else: listening and looking. The fact that she is knitting him a scarf suggests another link: like music, a scarf both encompasses and warms.

Some may argue that the haiku contains a hidden simile, that one action is being compared to another, but I would argue differently. All life is carried on simultaneously. Only occasionally can we witness two things happening at the same time. There is a certain challenging allusiveness in the haiku that arouses association in the reader's mind, demanding to be unraveled, like knitting.

AMA BOLTON

chosen by D. J. Peel

frost underfoot
and a ring round the moon
light-years wide

D. J. Peel asks himself:

Why does this haiku work for me? After the first perception, there is a turning away to the second in line two, and a humanising addition of thought in line three. The sequence follows a natural action, and movement is felt through implication. The diction sounds English, and a syllabic temptation to say 'around the moon' has been resisted. There is no redundancy of imagery - the second line simply reinforces the sense of season. And 'light-years wide' I take to be artistic license - a visual effect: if the Milky Way can be described as filling a valley, then the moon's halo might be measured against the stars? It hardly matters, this haiku represents a universal experience and there is a strong feeling of presence. Overall, no great insight or desperately sought cleverness - just simple spontaneity well presented.

KEN JONES

chosen by Ama Bolton

**From lamp to lamp
a rakish fellow
striding forward, falling back**

Ama Bolton adds:

I found this haiku embedded in Ken Jones' haibun 'High Water at Dublin Bar'. The whole piece is a gem, the prose spare and lucid, relaxed without being sloppy, and importantly it held my interest. All five haiku in the haibun are clean, perceptive and very satisfying to read aloud.

The first line sketches an urban or suburban landscape; the second populates it, perhaps an amiable, aimless drunk? The third line brings a smile of recognition - this stranger is myself! I know this is a haiku that will come to mind whenever I walk home after dark and will be with me long after many others have been forgotten.

DAVID COBB

chosen by Ken Jones

in a darker wind
hands in each other's pockets –
rhododendron leaves

Ken Jones commented:

I settled for a haiku which positively stretched my imagination, even at the risk of mystification: there is clearly an autumnal sadness here. The second line suggests a familiar intimacy, rather than a new and passionate one, and perhaps cold hands too. Rhododendron leaves are large and mournful. I recall them bordering the avenues and rides of unkempt estates. Perhaps the couple have been taking a melancholy turn in some such solitary place. For romantics this may be the final episode in a grande affaire. Or maybe they are a well bonded couple facing some tribulation together.

Thanks to the poet's skilful hospitality each of us may make something different of this haiku from out of our own personality and experience, and the reading may therefore be the stronger and more cathartic.

JOHN McDONALD

chosen by David Cobb

**Concave
against the baby's head:
the mother's cheek.**

David Cobb simply adds:

John McDonald warms us with humanity.

DAVID WALKER

chosen by John McDonald

sound of drizzle
between power lines
a fuzzy moon

John McDonald comments:

A brooding little haiku that worked on many levels for me: the onomatopoeia of those xxx's crackled and fixxed in my mind like static long after a first reading; they also seemed to imply in their appearance some threat, some danger. The moon's fuzziness added and heightened the tenseness, with its implied quivering. A mysterious and brooding piece that displays an artist's ability to delight and stimulate ALL the senses with carefully chosen words.

CLAIRE BUGLER HEWITT

chosen by David Walker

fallen leaves
have narrowed the road
to a pram's width

David Walker comments:

The gentle rhythm of late autumn flows through familiar opening lines, converging in a surprising 'pram's width', - a final line that opens up to the widest horizons. There is space for the reader to reflect, recall and share in this special moment that alludes to so much. Autumn, the season of winding down, the fall of the year towards winter, contrasts with a new beginning in the security of the pram's width.

Grand themes of life and death explored, making connections in a quiet, natural way, focused on the pram. Through the irregular patterns of fallen leaves the pram wheels mark a journey, making the most of shorter days that indulge the senses in prescribing the release from the confines of home to find some personal space or perhaps trusting the movement will soothe a fractious child - parenthood and the season are one.

HEATHER KIRK

chosen by Claire Bugler Hewitt

on the birdbath's rim
a hesitant blackbird –
at last the tears

Claire Bugler Hewitt commented:

A very simple and honest haiku, it captures a moment of contact between the inner life and the outer life, a subtle thing, the presence of a blackbird (or perhaps its hesitancy) which acts rather like a lightning conductor. Why is it important? Is it about being brave? Ever since I first read this I couldn't shake off the feeling that this haiku would be my final choice.

KLAUS-DIETER WIRTH

chosen by Heather Kirk

So great the silence
the mime's rowing through, he rolls
without any boat

Heather Kirk wrote:

For me this had an almost mantra-like quality in which sound as much as picture leads one into reflection without intellectualising. This enigmatic haiku seemed to have come easily touching on questions at levels that are just out of reach. Perhaps it was this elusiveness that intrigued me and made it my eventual choice.

GRAHAM HIGH

chosen by Klaus-Dieter Wirth

after the avalanche
kisses
like snowflakes

pink fissure of dawn
the sky slowly lifts
from the land

Klaus-Dieter Wirth remarks:

A short list of two. But what a surprise – both by the same person! So by pure chance there wasn't any need for me to take another step. Both haiku have a strong reference to nature, the first skillfully making man an integrated part of it. Yet what impressed me most is the masterly manner of pulling out all the stops of language itself. Even kitschy words such as 'kisses' and 'pink' are easily brought back to their rudimentary origins -- daring moreover in the case of 'kisses' to give the word a line of its own. The deprecated comparison by means of 'like' is quite effortlessly given a new dimension. And what a delicate and vigorous choice of words there is in the second haiku to convey the magic of the moment to make it unique again for the reader. Last but not least, it's the impact of rhythm in both cases. They are rare examples that have given me the thrill of getting drawn immediately into the situations, awe-inspiring, cheering, uplifting.

JEAN MICHEL GUILLAUMOND

chosen by Graham High

in the land
of the blue sun
eyes closed

Graham High commented:

I was struck by the invocation of the optical effect of the sun's after-image upon the retina, blue replacing its complementary colour, orange, behind closed eyes, expressing how a small physical perception can open up a whole magical alternative reality.

Lying in the sun with the equally sensuous play of daydreams streaming through one's mind, one is in two worlds at once and in a reality where the sun could indeed be blue. It is a state of mind expressed in Gaston Bachelard's Poetics of Reverie, where in the state of a waking dream one is simultaneously aware of one's bodily external sensations as well as one's interior impulses. It is close to the Buddhist mindfulness but also allows full play of the unfettered imagination giving access to thoughts of myth, memory and intuition where 'reverse and opposite sensations come into view' (Bachelard)

Jean Michel's haiku reminds us, pleasurably, and incredibly economically, of a primordial sensation which we have all had, which is experienced as both simple and profound, thinking some of our most free and intense thoughts while enjoying the caress of the sun.

ANDREW DETHERIDGE

chosen by Jean Michel Guillaumond

blue sky:
so full of mountain
so full of silence

Jean Michel Guillaumond comments:

The sky is blue, like an ocean. And the mountain is an island. The yogi, after having crossed the sea of passions, is united with the tranquility and owns the Unity in its fullness.' The island of serenity is a 'state without noise and without agitation'.

It may be that the mountain is 'immutable' and the silence is 'ephemeral'. It may be that mountain and silence represent the entire cosmos. The mountain attracts the spirit that looks for spiritual elevation because this spiritual elevation is the principle of the mountain. And it is by the silence that the spirit is raised.

F. MATTHEW BLAINE

chosen by Andrew Detheridge

silence –
after the diagnosis
silence

Andrew Detheridge commented:

Everyone has an opinion of what makes a successful haiku and Blithe Spirit has, over a number of issues, published various articles attempting to define the 'haiku moment' and categorise the various 'types' of haiku and senryu that may, or may not, exist. However, the unmistakable reality of a quality haiku is that it is the one that speaks to us directly; that falls within our combined semantic fields of experience; that makes us turn back to it, when we have moved many pages on. The haiku in the December issue that drew me back again were the ones that awakened experiences I had once shared and relived them beautifully.

I chose this issue's winner for the poignant simplicity that made it stand out and forced me to ponder the five solitary words of it, over and over.

FRANCES ANGELA

chosen by Janet Blundell

toy shop
little girl
eyeing what I buy

Janet Blundell commented:

On second reading a haiku may recreate a memory which may be full of wonder and expectation like when a child is looking out for the first sight of the sea. So there's an ambiguity of content which works for me.

Angela's haiku offers a brief sideways glance which captures and maybe identifies with the little girl's look of wishfulness or surprise? There's a similar childish feeling of longing.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

chosen by frances angela

**almost hidden
behind the house –
an ancient orchard in flower**

frances angela wrote:

I love to find solitary places I can make my own. The river path along the Thames from Hampton Court to Kew Gardens in winter, a quiet beach, a corner of Bunhill Fields graveyard in the early morning (before work) give me special pleasure. The quiet beauty of the blossom in brief snow earlier this year was wonderful, and the long empty path along the river past some moored barges filled me with contentment and peace of mind, and so I want to visit the half hidden orchard in Katherine's haiku. It might be a place I can make my own. I would want to be there to enjoy the flowers but also to return when the flowers have gone and the orchard is barer because change can make a place even lovelier. I wonder who planted and cultivated the orchard. The haiku moves through time and links me to the past as well as to the future; it evokes something mysterious and ephemeral. The orchard is a place perhaps easily missed or it requires being sought out, a place I could visit to repair the sometime stresses of day to day living in a city I love but which can be frenetic.

RUZICA MOKOS MATUKA

chosen by Katherine Gallagher

swaying yet unbroken
over the hidden land-mine
a spider's web

Katherine Gallagher commented:

As with all poetry, I'm looking for the spirit of the piece, for interesting juxtapositions and that flash of recognition - something that moves me. I also look for the use of sound-assonance, internal rhymes, alliteration - aspects of craft that can make for striking effects and music.

My final choice, for its simplicity, suggestibility and poignancy, and for its suggestive power goes to the haiku by Ruzica Mokos Matuka .

ROSS FIGGINS

chosen by Martin Lucas

white fish bones
scattered among the rocks
winter sunrise

Martin Lucas comments:

I like its simplicity, in terms of image (it can be clearly seen), mood (it gives a cool feeling), and expression (there is nothing that is not essential). The understated patterning that links "white" with "winter" and "scattered" with "sunrise" is also very effective. Beyond this, there is no sense of the writer getting in the way of the poem, of a writer trying to make a point or trying to write a haiku. The poem makes itself felt, and the writer's role seems to be to listen to it, and receive it, rather than to construct it. This is probably an illusion, but it is precisely the simplicity of the construction that tempts us to believe it.

JOHN McDONALD

chosen by Andrew Shimield

lower and lower,
the daffodils' heads
in the rain

Andrew Shimield writes:

This haiku captures beautifully the sort of moment that we all know, but don't know that we know until we read the poem. The poet doesn't intrude into the verse at all. - But who is out there with the rain dripping down the back of their neck? - you, the reader.

MARTIN LUCAS

chosen by John McDonald

a rusting ladder
down to the river
autumn clouds

John McDonald adds:

The clouds, the river and the (orange spotted) time-worn artefact that connects them – connecting heaven and earth – and the artificer nowhere to be found. Sadness . . . loneliness . . . mystery . . . the meditation continues.

DIANA WEBB

chosen by Martin Lucas

behind the beach hut
my everlasting world
of pebbles

Martin Lucas expands:

There is both innocence and wonder in this haiku. The over-statement in the second line might make this a poor model, but here it is just right: convincing, original and deeply felt. At the same time, the beach hut and the pebbles 'earth' the haiku, and the final effect is a delight.

LEO LAVERY

chosen by Diana Webb

birthday
always Autumn
always leaves falling

Diana Webb adds:

I found this haiku most haunting and memorable despite being deceptively simple. It shares an awareness of eternity in the experience of one day; a sense that the time between this special day last year and all the birthdays before that and this day now has passed in a flash. The occasion repeated regularly time after time at the same season seems continuous.

BASEM FARID

chosen by Leo Lavery

**forty years on
in a different continent
a smell from childhood**

Leo Lavery reminisced:

Being a sentimental gent, my Irish sense of sad exile inclined me to select Basem Farid's haiku of Space and Time and Heart and Home.

CAROLINE ROBSON

chosen by Basem Farid

two weeks on the geriatric ward
my elderly aunt
now identical to all the rest

Basem Farid expands:

This haiku beautifully conveys the ease with which all can change in such a little time. All that can be done about it is what Caroline Robson has expressed. See it, understand it and with a little sadness, accept it.

ANDREW DETHERIDGE

chosen by Caroline Robson

how quickly it's been...
from the shared taxi, to you
pairing up my socks.

Caroline Robson enlarged on her responses:

At times this haiku feels to me warm and intimate whilst at others it seems so sad that this is all it has come to. It's a haiku that leaves me gazing into space, lost in imagining the background and details. It's a haiku that gives me pleasure in the richness and impermanence of my own reactions.

PHILIP ASHTON

chosen by Andrew Detheridge

in the autumn light
a prehistoric circle
- just bales of hay

money changes hands
when buying the newspaper –
but not eye contact

Andrew Detheridge added:

I chose two haiku by the same writer.

The archaeologist in me delighted in the first poem with its subtle unearthing. The second neatly encapsulated a sad truth.

KEN JONES

chosen by Annie Bachini

**Hollow ruins
the keep
filled with winter sun**

Annie Bachini comments:

This haiku embodies, for me, a number of contrasting qualities and moods simultaneously: depth and lightness; despair and hope; and anguish and comfort. It may, of course, also refer to age. Importantly, it works well on a literal level: I was not expecting the last line, and felt a warm glow after reading it.

MAX SCRAG

and

EDMUND GENTLE

chosen by David Steele

oppressively seasoned
a taste of Indian
summer

twilight mist
lingering in the valley
last train home

These poems were chosen from a section in the previous Blithe Spirit which featured the haiku of children. David Steele chose to make his selection only from the children's poems.

His comments were:

The first poem from Max does not tell too much, leaving space for interpretation and adoption by the reader. I can imagine a discussion between haiku poets where a large number of differing opinions on meaning would be put forward. Ultimately, this is a poem with an intriguing flavour - it will linger with this reader for quite a while.

The second poem by Edmund has a delightful simplicity and a classic pivot line. Without punctuation, the reader is free to apply the 'lingering' to the mist or to the train - or (as I like to do) to suspend syntax and hold both meanings in the mind at once. This poem also has its own flavour - lighter and perhaps a little wistful.

PATRICIA PRIME

chosen by Katherine Gallagher

southerly flow
the blue heron
hunches his shoulders

Katherine Gallagher comments:

I love this evocative poem firstly for its striking economy of image: the ease of flight suggested by the opening line 'southerly flow' developed in the next two lines to suggest grace and strength as the blue heron 'hunches his shoulders', readying for the take-off moment.

It is very visual - the unpunctuated, rhythmically smooth short lines and assonance/alliteration adding to the effect, presenting this loved and special bird in the vastness of sky.

HUMBERTO GATICA

chosen by Maggie West

Oh... the smell
Still a trace of summer
In the autumn night

Maggie West reminisced:

This haiku brought back strong memories of those flowering shrubs that give up their most intoxicating perfume in the evenings. Scents like this that take us by surprise are wonderful indeed.

RON WOOLLARD

chosen by Frank Williams

first snow
she runs to every window
just to check

Frank Williams expands:

In just thirteen syllables, and with a flawless rhythm, Ron paints an appealing picture of a child, almost certainly seeing snow for the first time. Her running to each window conjures up a mixture of excitement, apprehension and maybe even a little fear. What this child is experiencing is something universal to all humans; and that is the rush associated with discovering something new. In addition, for the reader, it can trigger a plethora of memories and emotions from their own childhood. Above all the poem makes me smile: it has the good-feel factor in abundance.

FELICITY BROOKESMITH

chosen by Graham High

mid-February –
if you were here
I know that you'd listen
and tell me it's true
that I can hear a song thrush

Graham High chose a tanka on this occasion:

This deceptively simple tanka seems to me to express the human need for others, not simply for love and companionship, but for a confirmation of all our experience and that beauty and joy are only truly complete when shared and communicated: awareness that the loss of that rapport with another person can be the hardest loss to bear.

The direct expression of emotion that characterises many tanka, and many of the best tanka, can also seem mawkish or sentimental if not well handled. This is not the case here. There is a clear concrete experience - hearing a thrush in February, alone in the garden, from which the feeling genuinely arises and is expressed, simply and movingly. It also has an ear for rhythm and for echoes and assonances supporting meaning - 'you - you'd - true'; 'here - hear'.

MARK RUTTER

chosen by Felicity Brookesmith

**rainy pavement –
our big umbrella
blooms every puddle**

Felicity Brookesmith enthuses:

What brilliance on a grey day! The 'big umbrella' illuminating every puddle is magical, the juxtaposition reminding me of "Singin' in the Rain." What a moment! With harmony in 'b' and 'p' – 'big', 'bloom' and 'umbrella' and 'p' in 'puddle' and 'pavement' - I am singing, sharing with the 'us' under the umbrella! A joyful haiku.

CLARE McCOTTER

chosen by Diana Webb

Dust motes
in a lexicon of light
the library's faded colours

Diana Webb added:

This haiku stood out for me with its daring use of the word 'lexicon' at the centre of the poem, bringing into focus the sense of wisdom and enlightenment being ultimately beyond words and books. I really shared the experience of someone in an old library, possibly bored with studying, or just bored, looking for a book to divert them, when suddenly this moment!

NATALIA L. RUDYCHEV

chosen by Mark Rutter

**Snow bent branches
moonlight
slides to the ground**

Mark Rutter speculated:

This haiku records a moment of beauty. I can imagine that upon this night there was a heavy snowfall, and everything was covered with snow. The moon was shining. The writer happened to see some branches bend due to the weight of snow and the snow fall, full of moonlight. The writer quickly caught the moment of truth which might have been overlooked if the witness had not been a poet of great insight. I admire the writer's haiku inspiration to grasp a moment of beauty.

GRAHAM HIGH

chosen by Clare McCotter

sickle moon -
the cat creeps along a wall
of broken bottles

Clare McCotter commented:

I admired this haiku for its urbanscape 'sickle moon'. Danger is present in this world of walls and broken bottles. It is a place of ragged edges; both moon and glass have a capacity to pierce. Creating a sense of urban threat in a haiku could easily result in a poem that is self-consciously outré, but High's danger is as quiet and well-paced as his creeping cat. And, of course, it is the cat which is the ultimate focus of the poem. Showing a sublime disregard for boundaries in a heavily demarcated space, it invokes an air of liberty and insouciance as it negotiates the broken glass.

MALCOLM WILLIAMS

chosen by Graham High

mountain moon –
sheep's eyes glow in
the car headlights

Graham High comments:

I enjoyed the succinctness of the first line which evokes both place and time and conjures an atmospheric setting for the surprise of 'sheep's eyes' which gives such a different effect from the more familiar cat's or horse's eyes. An effect perhaps baleful or long suffering, certainly not malevolent, and which perhaps reflects the mood of the traveler, dulled and a little dislocated from his own life. A kind of meeting has taken place. Perhaps the driver has been stirred from the monotony of the journey to experience a glimmer of renewed self-awareness in the eyes of another creature.

FRED SCHOFIELD

chosen by Malcolm Williams

a lone swan's
loud wingbeats
half the river's width

Malcolm Williams adds:

*This haiku exudes restrained dignity and elegance, poignancy and precision.
I wish I'd conceived and delivered this one!*

KEITH J. COLEMAN

chosen by Fred Schofield

**meteor watch:
sailing down heaven in the wee hours,
a white gull**

Fred Schofield adds:

This seems to be both an intimate personal experience and a marvelling at the joyful vastness of the universe in one go - all brought about by the unexpected arrival of the 'white gull'. The poem is also deepened by its unselfconscious reference to Bashō's Sado Island haiku.

FRANCES ANGELA

chosen by Keith Coleman

summer opening hours
she reads her book
on the library steps

Keith Coleman comments:

In the end, it was the everyday simplicity of 'karumi' that shone through this exemplary haiku.

YASUHIKO SHIGEMOTO

chosen by frances angela

How long does this firefly
stay motionless
on my palm ?

frances angela comments:

'How long does this firefly' touched me bodily in that sense of evoking a feeling/feelings I cannot easily name. I chose the poem for what I feel is its haunting nature, a poem that touches on something almost mystical which for me is felt beyond language and so is transformative.

MAEVE O'SULLIVAN

chosen by Polly Joel

**I blow raspberries
into your tiny palm –
sleepy nephew**

Polly Joel adds:

This haiku evokes all that is simple and tender in life: the innocence of the small child and the aunt who perhaps wistfully remembers her own delight as a child when kisses could create such a sensation!

CLARE McCOTTER

chosen by Maeve O'Sullivan

in freezing fog
what might have been
a light

Maeve O'Sullivan comments:

This haiku is the one which etched itself most on to my consciousness. In just ten syllables, McCotter has conjured up a gorgeous yet intriguing vision of a winter fog and the tricks it can play. I love the ambiguity of line two which invites other interpretations.

GRAHAM DUFF

chosen by Clare McCotter

crimson tulips
beneath silver birch
the spaces she left

Clare McCotter adds:

A combination of striking visual imagery and reverberating ambiguity is created in the haiku as the poet contemplates what could be the spaces between flowers, the multitude of spaces left by a departure, the interminable spaces of unanswered questions, the spaces of longing.

KEN JONES

chosen by Graham Duff

Out there on the bar
a line of wild breakers
makes up my mind

Graham Duff comments:

This haiku is a psychological drama-scape of a decision-to-be-made. The dilemma, visually fixated on the horizon, is tossed and turned on the spit; the nuances and cadences of the argument blown around on a desolate shoreline. Should one take the risk and walk out to the tumultuous sea or return to safer ground, a more familiar rationale? As in all good endings, it is deliciously uncertain.

HUMBERTO GATICA

chosen by Ken Jones

slowly
moonlight moves
into her silence

Ken Jones adds

This poem offers us a magical open metaphor, all the way from the enjoyment of moonlight and silence to that which is unspoken between two people. What might that be?

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SOME BACKGROUND TO THE BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY

The British Haiku Society (BHS) was first formed in 1990 by individual enthusiasts of Japanese literature who came together to share and promote this interest. Since then the BHS has supported the appreciation and writing of haiku in the UK and has established links with other haiku societies internationally.

In the early period membership rose to between 200 and 300 members and has remained fairly stable around that number for some years. The membership is international and about one sixth of them are from other European countries, as well as from Japan, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The Society produces a quarterly journal, *Blithe Spirit*, which has featured, under a succession of volunteer editors, haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun, reviews and critical essays and a variety of other features. The Society also presents a quarterly newsletter, *The Brief*, which keeps members up-to date with events, competitions, awards, magazines and other national and international news. Besides this the Society organises events on both a regional and national basis.

Over the twenty years of the Society's existence there have been several thriving regional groups that have met regularly and organised readings, workshops and haiku walks. From time to time some media coverage of various events has been achieved. Public readings have been organized and a great many anthologies and individual collections have been published and promoted through the enthusiasm of individual members. Besides these regular group meetings other more informal gatherings between members occur around the country and include workshops, haiku walks, and collaborative writing.

The Society's national events include symposiums, haiku hikes, regular 'Spring Gathering' events and the Annual General Meeting/conference. The Society has administered a variety of awards including the prestigious *James W Hackett Haiku Award* and the *Nobuyuki Yuasa International Haibun Contest*, now both subsumed into the '*British Haiku Awards*'. The BHS maintains its own archives, two websites and runs its own library. Over the years the Society has been involved with several displays and exhibitions, for example the touring exhibition *Haiku and Glass*, in conjunction with the association of glass sculptors. Its services and resources are available to teachers, students and to poetry groups.

The BHS has been an active participant in the regularly occurring European haiku festivals (Romania, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, France) and in 1997 ourselves organised an international meeting of haiku poets from France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Japan, taking advantage of Eurotunnel sponsorship to go across to the Continent to collect our neighbours, and return with them for public and closed events in Folkestone.

For anyone interested in the Society and its activities further information may be found at the two BHS websites:

www.britishhaikusociety.org.uk and
www.anotherkindofpoetry.org.uk

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