

Haiku in Britain
Theory, Practice, Context

by
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April 2001

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed.....Martin Lucas..... (candidate)

Date.....9 April 2001.....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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Acknowledgements and Dedications

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Stephen Gill, Fred Schofield and Brian Tasker

that I dedicate this work.

There are two final things to mention. The first is to put on record the profound debt that I, and all poets writing haiku in English, owe to R.H.Blyth. I never met the man – he died on my second birthday – but whenever I read his work I sense an intense spiritual proximity. His interpretation of haiku to the West has been invaluable. The second thing to say is that, as I come to the close of writing this thesis, I have an uncanny sense that my true understanding of haiku is only beginning. Perhaps what I sense now I would have expressed in a different way, but that sense could never have developed without the experience of this research project. To sum up the feeling, I can do no better than to quote a poem by Shiki, which I have always taken to be a haiku about haiku:

rowing a small boat
past a big boat
this long spring day

Summary

The subject of this thesis is the haiku poem, which is now established as a viable form in English. The possibilities of the form – and its kindred forms of tanka, renga and haibun – are exemplified by my own creative writing, presented in Chapter Seven. This presentation is supported by nine further chapters dealing successively with haiku history, theory, practice and context. The chapters on haiku history offer an outline of the development of the form in Japan, together with discussion of its initial adaptation to the English-language context in North America. Chapter Four, on haiku theory, brings together a series of diverse essays which combine into a detailed analysis of the key requirements of haiku, both in terms of form and content. The chapters on haiku practice focus attention on the poets and publications that have pioneered the development of haiku in Britain during the decade of the 1990s. The three concluding chapters analyse haiku in the context of renga (linked verse), haibun (haiku prose), and in relation to other forms of artistic presentation, not least other forms of poetry. The entire thesis is intended to constitute a thorough grounding in the specific demands and values of haiku in English.

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Haiku: the Background

1.1 Preliminary information and Definitions

During the decade of the 1990s haiku established itself as a viable and energetic sector of the Small Press poetry scene in Britain. In the light of this development this thesis has three central aims: to present my own creative work, as an active member of the haiku writing community; to present, and discuss, a selection of the work of other haiku poets active during this period; and to examine this creative work against its historical and theoretical foundations, as haiku developed in Japan and as it has been understood and interpreted by readers and writers in the West. The thesis is divided into four parts. Part One (Chapters One to Three) offers historical and other essential background information. Part Two (Chapter Four) examines haiku from various theoretical perspectives. Part Three (Chapters Five to Seven) presents haiku practice as it actually unfolded in Britain during the years 1990-2000. (Chapter Seven, my own creative work, is, in essence, the centrepiece of the thesis.) Finally, Part Four (Chapters Eight to Ten) examines haiku in a variety of contexts which exist to support the otherwise potentially fragile poem structure. The entire presentation is conducted according to one central claim: haiku in English is possible; it has been tried, it has succeeded and it can only grow. Whether this growth will tend towards consolidation or diversification remains to be seen. Perhaps, in ten more years time, we will know.

We cannot approach any discussion of haiku unprepared. This brief opening chapter is therefore devoted entirely to providing necessary background information. In this section I provide definitions of the most basic terms of haiku literature, together with an outline of what is meant by 'syllables' and 'lines' when discussing haiku. The next section summarises four areas in which this thesis is necessarily limited in scope: issues that are raised but cannot be dealt with more thoroughly without straying too far from my main concern, the theory and practice of haiku in Britain.

'Ultimately haiku eludes definition,' states Cor van den Heuvel in the preface to the second edition of *The Haiku Anthology*. One of the aims of this thesis is to articulate my own 'feel' for haiku and to develop some indications as to how to respond to haiku intuitively. If we can do this, the question of definitions will recede from view; but to begin with it may be helpful to equip ourselves with some preliminary information. These definitions are taken, paradoxically enough, from Appendix B to van den Heuvel's anthology. They closely correspond to definitions prepared for the Haiku Society of America in 1973 by Harold G Henderson, William J Higginson and Anita Virgil.¹ These are the best succinct summaries that have been achieved thus far, although I would suggest that they should be taken as approximate rather than absolute.

Haiku

[1] An unrhymed Japanese poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived in which nature is linked with human nature. It usually consists of 17 *onji* (Japanese sound-symbols) in three parts of 5-7-5 *onji* each.

[2] An adaptation in English of [1] usually written in one to three lines with no specific number of syllables. It rarely has more than 17 syllables. Sometimes written in three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables each.

¹ The story of the development of these definitions is told in L.A. Davidson et al, (eds.), *A Haiku Path* (New York: Haiku Society of America, 1994).

Hokku

- [1] The first stanza of a Japanese linked-verse poem (see *Haikai no renga*).
- [2] (Obsolete) A haiku.

Senryu

- [1] A Japanese poem with the same form as the haiku but concerned with human nature and human relationships. It is usually humorous or satiric.
- [2] An adaptation in English of [1] with the same form as the English language haiku. English language senryu can be serious, humorous or a mixture of both.²

Haibun

- [1] A Japanese prose piece by a haiku poet written in an elliptical and pithy style and in the spirit of haiku. It usually includes one or more haiku, and can be in length from a short sketch to a book-length diary.
- [2] An adaptation in English of [1].³

Van den Heuvel's definitions of *renga* and *haikai no renga* are potentially confusing, so I have relegated them to the footnotes.⁴ The definitions which follow are my own:

Haikai (no) renga, renga, renku, haikai

Haikai no renga, *renga* and *renku* are all terms for linked verse, of alternating stanzas of 17 and 14 sound-symbols, usually written by a group. *Renga* generally refers to the more serious form of the art, as perfected in the fifteenth century, typically 100 stanzas or more in length. *Haikai no renga* is a more lighthearted form, practised by Bashō and others in the seventeenth century (and since), typically 36 stanzas in length. *Renku* usually refers to *haikai no renga*, or linked verse of the modern period. The following quotation from William J Higginson may clarify the picture:

'As it is now understood in Japan, "renga" refers to the aristocratic *ushin renga* of Sōgi and others writing in the courtly tradition of the past. "Renku" means the more popular, intuitive style of linked verse based in the *haikai renga* of Bashō and his followers and flourishing in Japan today.'⁵

² Strictly, senryu should be written senryū, with the macron indicating a doubled final vowel, but I am treating it as a word which is naturalised into English.

³ Cor van den Heuvel, *The Haiku Anthology: Haiku and Senryu in English*, 2nd edn. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), pp.355-8

⁴ van den Heuvel's definitions (ibid., p.357) are:

Haikai no renga

A type of Japanese linked-verse poem, popular from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. *Haikai no renga* normally consist of 36, 50 or 100 stanzas, alternating 17 and 14 onji. Usually a small group of poets took turns composing the stanzas, whose content and grammar were governed by fairly complex rules.

Renga

An adaptation in English of the Japanese *haikai no renga*. It is usually written in 36 stanzas or less, alternating 3-line and 2-line stanzas of no specific syllable length.

⁵ William J Higginson, *The Haiku Seasons: Poetry of the Natural World* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), p.63

When used to describe English-language adaptations of these linked verse forms, *renga* and *renku* are practically synonymous and usage is guided only by the poets' habitual preference. (*Renga* appears to be more widespread, whereas *renku* is held by some, including Higginson, to be more correct.) The term *haikai*, on its own, is used as occasional shorthand for *haikai no renga*, but can also be used as a synonym for haiku or as an umbrella term to cover the full breadth of haiku and related genres, including *senryu*, *renku* and *haibun*, but not *tanka*. When a work is described as *haikai* it is being located in the haiku family.

A few other terms for Japanese genres will be used in this thesis. These are:

Haiga

Haiku painting: an artwork drawn to accompany a haiku. The relationship to the text may be direct - an illustration - or oblique.

Tanka

The most ancient form of Japanese short poem, frequently, but not always, a love poem. It usually consists of 31 sound-symbols in five parts: 5-7-5-7-7.

Waka

Practically synonymous with *tanka*. Strictly speaking, *waka* refers to 'five-line' poetry of ancient times, while *tanka* is used for similar work in the modern period. However, it is usual to extend the term *tanka* back into the past, as it were, to cover both ancient and modern poems in the five-line form. As such, the two terms are interchangeable.⁶

There are two terms used to describe essential features of Japanese haiku which may be helpful:

Kigo, or 'season word': a word or phrase used to indicate the season in a haiku. It may be obvious ('autumn evening'; or 'snow' for winter) or relatively obscure ('sparrow' for spring; 'red dragonfly' for autumn).

Kireji, or 'cutting word': a grammatical particle which marks a pause or syntactical break and is used for emphasis. In translation, it is usually replaced by punctuation.⁷

One final preliminary note is necessary to outline what is meant by 'syllables' and 'lines' when discussing haiku.

⁶ My own definitions.

⁷ Again, my own definitions.

A haiku is counted in (usually seventeen) Japanese sound-symbols. These approximate to, but do not equate to, the English syllable. A word like 'tomato' is counted exactly the same in English as in Japanese: three syllables in each case, to-ma-to. But there are exceptions where the Japanese 'syllable' does not correspond to the English. There are three such instances: [1] doubled vowels. In Japanese, doubled vowels count two whereas in English they count one. For example, 'haiku' counts as two syllables in English but three in Japanese, ha-i-ku; [2] doubled consonants. Again, in Japanese these count two. So, for example, 'hokku' which counts as two syllables in English would be three in Japanese, ho-k-ku; [3] the single consonant, 'n'. Where this occurs on its own, rather than in combination with a vowel, it is given full value as a 'syllable'. So, 'tanka', which looks like two syllables in English, counts as three in Japanese, ta-n-ka.

It is also worth noting that whereas the English concept of a syllable is based on the spoken language, the Japanese sound-symbol is based on the written language. Thus, where contractions occur in spoken English, the poet has some choice when scanning the contracted word, e.g. 'memory' (=mem'ry) can be counted as two or three syllables as preference dictates. But a word which is contracted in spoken Japanese, e.g. 'matsu' (pine tree, pronounced *mats*'), is always counted according to its full written value in poetry. The final vowel, often dropped in speech, is never ignored when scanning; 'matsu' has to count as two 'syllables': ma-tsu.

For these reasons, it can be seen that the concept of a haiku as a poem in 5-7-5 syllables is an approximation at best. This is one reason why most English haiku poets no longer regard the 5-7-5 form as a requirement.⁸

⁸ For a fuller discussion of this question, see my short article, "The Japanese 'Syllable' " in *Bêthe Spirit Vol 7 No*

As for lines, Japanese haiku have most often been written in a single (vertical) line of text. The 'lines' of a haiku thus mark metrical divisions and appeal to the ear rather than the eye. Although it is entirely natural to transfer this concept into three separate lines of English text, once again these 'lines' should be understood as approximations only. An English-language poet writing one-line haiku might well be understood as reverting to tradition rather than indulging in something experimental or avant-garde.

1.2 The limitations of this thesis

In order to present an accurate outline of the scope of this thesis it is necessary to state the avenues of enquiry which remain unexplored.

I cannot give an adequate history of the haiku in Japan, much less of its various related forms, the senryu, tanka, renga and so forth. (My elementary-level grasp of Japanese is sufficient to translate perhaps 1-2% of any Japanese haiku that I encounter.) In Chapter Two I do give what I regard as an outline sketch necessary to establish the historical context, an indication perhaps of what a practitioner of haiku in English needs to know, to begin with, about the haiku in Japan.

In Chapter Four (section 4.5) I present a brief summary of attempts to relate haiku to the practice and inspiration of Zen, as presented to the Western audience for popular consumption. I am aware that the interpretation of haiku as a Zen art is limited and questionable. It is relevant not because it accurately describes the historical situation in Japan

4, (November 1997) pp. 5-6. For the counter argument, see James Kirkup, "A syllable is a syllable is a syllable",

but because, irrespective of its scholarly accuracy, it gave impetus to the movement to write haiku in English. A precise account of the relationship (if any) between haiku and Zen must be sought elsewhere.

In the same chapter (sub-section 4.4.6) I also give a few thoughts on metaphor in haiku. These revolve around the simple insight that a good haiku demonstrates simultaneous operation on both the literal and metaphorical level. What I am not competent to do is to provide any further exploration of the implications of this insight in terms of either linguistics or philosophical analysis. My aesthetic sense assures me that I have identified what works in haiku, but *why* it works is a question I can't answer. I am sure this can become a promising direction for further research.

I also give only a brief account of the interface between haiku and conventional poetry, centred on a discussion of the work of a particular poet, Chris Mulhern, who has demonstrated equal facility in both fields. (See Chapter Ten, section 10.5.) Such expertise as I have is not as a reader and writer of poetry, but specifically as a reader and writer of haiku. I am not convinced by Brian Tasker's assertion that haiku and poetry pursue contradictory goals, and 'never the twain shall meet.' My belief is that a certain amount of cross-border traffic would be beneficial to the vitality of both. But my focus is on haiku and its intrinsic value. I do not believe haiku is obliged to demonstrate its relevance to poetry as a precondition for serious consideration.

the prologue to his collection *Formulas for Chaos* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1994).

Haiku in Japan

2.1 Haiku history: tanka

This chapter deals with the origin and development of haiku in Japan, and is structured largely around discussion of the life and work of the major haiku poets. Since this thesis is concerned with haiku as it has evolved and as it is practised in Britain, a full-scale history of haiku in Japan would be beyond its scope. However, an outline sketch of haiku history is necessary to provide the background against which the practice of writing haiku in English can be set and, perhaps, measured.

The prehistory of haiku is the story of tanka and renga, of which tanka came first. The earliest known anthology of Japanese poetry is the *Manyōshū*, the Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves. This dates from the second half of the eighth century and contains over 4500 poems. Of these, the vast majority are tanka, a name which means simply 'short poem'. Two other kinds of verse represented are the *chōka* and *sedōka*. The metric base of all three verse-forms is an alternation of five-syllable and seven-syllable lines. The pattern of the *sedōka* is six lines of 5-7-7-5-7-7 syllables. This form fell into disuse and is not represented in subsequent anthologies. The pattern of the *chōka*, or 'long poem', is an indefinite number of alternate five and seven syllable lines, always ending with an additional seven-syllable line.

Frequently the *chōka* will have a postscript or envoy appended and this takes the form of a *tanka*. The *tanka* itself is five lines on a pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. It remained the dominant form of Japanese poetry throughout the five hundred years following the *Manyōshū*. The popular themes of *tanka* are love and nature, as in these two examples from the twelfth century poet, Fujiwara no Teika. (The translations are by Kenneth Rexroth; only the first imitates the 31-syllable pattern.)

From the beginning
I knew meeting could only
End in parting, yet
I ignored the coming dawn
And I gave myself to you.¹

I rein in my horse
To shake my sleeves
But there is no shelter
Anywhere near Sano ferry
This snowy evening.²

The predominant mood of *tanka*, of which these are typical, is a poignant loneliness, a sentiment to which the themes of love and nature give themselves readily. One common *tanka* technique was to write of both love and nature, using nature as an 'objective correlative' to express feelings concerning the love relationship. This example is by Hitomaro, from the *Manyōshū*:

In the empty mountains
The leaves of the bamboo grass
Rustle in the wind.
I think of a girl
Who is not here.³

Sight, sound, touch, and even the scent and taste of the open air, are all involved here, and we can take this poem as exemplifying the following general observation:

¹ Kenneth Rexroth, *One hundred more poems from the Japanese* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p.53

² *Ibid.*, p.55

³ Kenneth Rexroth, *One hundred poems from the Japanese* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p.19

The language of the *Manyōshū* is highly sensuous; that is to say, a psychological reaction, instead of being described in an abstract and general way, is expressed in terms of the physical senses, visual or auditory, gustatory or tactual.⁴

The parallel of the natural image gives the poem a more acute impact than could be achieved by a bald display of emotion. It was also possible, however, for poets to celebrate nature in its own right rather than as a resource of evocative imagery. Saigyō, the Buddhist priest-poet (1118-90), shifted the focus away from his personal feelings towards a more universal expression of wonder:

A seedling pine in the garden
when I saw it long ago –
years have gone by
and now I hear the storm winds
roaring in its topmost branches⁵

Saigyō's tanka were put together in the *Sankashū*, 'Mountain Home Collection'. This collection is divided into six sections – one for each of the four seasons, plus a section on love and a miscellaneous section for poems which otherwise elude categorisation. It can be seen that the tendency to arrange poems on the basis of seasonal references predates the development of *renga* and *haiku* and appears to be ingrained in Japanese poetic thinking. The 5-7 metre and the mood of loneliness are other perennial features. I identify three further tendencies towards which the ancient Japanese poets gravitated.

Firstly, the imaginative effect of this poetry is comparable to that of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, using a few brushstrokes to sketch a foreground subject, placing it against a spacious and indeterminate background: pines, bamboo, fishing boats, waterfalls, looming out of a mist. An example:

⁴ Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, *The Manyōshū* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p.lxix. This edition is a valuable resource, containing 1000 out of the 4500 poems of the ancient collection.

Passing Chen's Trail

Once, passing Chen's Trail in a boat,
I raised my head to listen to the wind in the pines.
Now, a year later, I am standing in that wind
looking down at the boats traveling east and west.⁶

This is by Yang Wan-li, a poet from Sung dynasty China. Its imaginative power closely resembles that of Saigyō's poetry; the underlying assumptions concerning what constitutes poetry appear to be the same.

A second tendency, for which the imbalance between tanka and chōka in the Manyōshū may be taken as statistical evidence, is a preference for brevity. This delight in the miniature is visible also in other Japanese arts – bonsai, ikebana (flower arranging), even origami. The austerity of the tea ceremony and the economy of effort required in martial arts such as karate may also be taken as indicating a taste for the minimalistic. We might guess that if and when the Japanese poets found a way of saying something successfully in a form shorter even than the tanka, they would take it.

Thirdly, tanka history also shows evidence of certain images acquiring enduring popularity and becoming complex accumulations of symbolic value. This drift towards the conventionalisation of poetic response can be seen in the early concept of uta-makura (literally 'song pillows'), 'places famed for some particularly noteworthy natural feature or sight'; i.e. scenic places which were, in and of themselves, inspirational to poetry. These sites, in the words of Burton Watson, 'fairly bristle with poetic monuments'. A similar appropriation occurred with inspirational images. Cherry blossoms came to be expected to

⁵ Burton Watson (trans.), *Saigyō: Poems of a Mountain Home* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.214

⁶ Jonathan Chaves (trans.), *Heaven my Blanket, Earth my Pillow* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975), p.74

evoke thoughts of transience. Wild geese suggested love-longing or homesickness. The full moon of autumn came to represent the epitome of the beautiful and all references to the moon were taken to indicate this particular moon unless the poet had gone to the trouble of specifying otherwise. In short, certain resonant images formed the substance of poetry and became a kind of publicly significant poetic currency. Ultimately these tendencies led to the development of the concept of the season-word, a single concrete noun which was held to embody the essence of one or other of the seasons. The number of season-words available to renga and haiku poets numbered many hundreds. I will turn to renga and haiku shortly, but I will conclude this introduction to tanka with brief biographical notes on Saigyō. His work is important to the future development of haiku, since both his way of life and the tone of his poetry provided an example and inspiration to Japan's greatest haiku poet, Bashō.

2.1.1 Saigyō

Saigyō was the leading poet in the *Shinkokinshū* anthology ('New Collection of Ancient and Modern Times'), compiled in 1206. Ninety-four of his poems are included. His own collected works preserve 1500 of his poems. According to Burton Watson, Saigyō's writing is characterised by its 'simplicity, directness, and air of somber beauty.'⁷

His real name was Satō Norikiyo. He was born in 1118 in Kyoto, the capital of Heian Japan. He became a member of the elite private guard of the retired emperor Toba, but in 1140 he renounced this post and entered religious life as a Buddhist priest of the Shingon sect. As a priest he lived a travelling life, staying at various mountain temples, finally settling at Hirokawa-dera where he died in 1190.

⁷ Burton Watson, *op. cit.*, p.1

As a poet he worked closely with the two other leading writers of his age, Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204) and his son, Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241). He is credited with initiating a new style 'marked by a bleak and somber air ... a tendency to favor imagery suggestive of drabness, loneliness, and melancholy, qualities summed up in the Japanese term *sabi*.⁸

This effect is consciously sought after by Saigyō. Given his ascetic existence, we can imagine that a poignant solitude was a goal of his way of life. It is clearly evoked in his writing. His poetics are summed up in the following piece, which challenges the reader to appreciate its fresh air, isolation, the music of the calls and wingbeats of the birds, the gathering dark at the waning of the year:

Even my heart
Freed from passion
Is deeply moved by
Snipe flying up from the stream
In the autumn evening.⁹

Other significant figures among later Japanese tanka poets whose work is available in English translation include the Zen hermit, Ryōkan (1758 – 1831), and the woman poet, Yosano Akiko, whose collection of passionate love poems, *Midaregami* ('Tangled Hair', 1901) gave new impetus to tanka in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ An account of modern Japanese tanka is available in Donald Keene's *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1984) and examples can be seen in Makoto Ueda's *Modern Japanese Tanka: an anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁸ Ibid., p.8

⁹ My own translation, comparing other versions.

¹⁰ For Ryōkan, see John Stevens (trans.), *One Robe, One Bowl: the Zen poetry of Ryōkan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988) and Burton Watson (trans.), *Ryōkan: Zen Monk-Poet of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). For Yosano Akiko, see Sanford Goldstein and Seishi Shinoda (trans.), *Tangled Hair: Selected Tanka from Midaregami* (Rutland: Tuttle, 1987) and Dennis Maloney and Hide Oshiro (trans.), *Tangled Hair: Love Poems of Yosano Akiko* (Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1987).

2.2.1 Haiku history: renga

Further information on renga is given in Chapter Eight, but its history must also be told in brief at this stage, to complete the account of the rise of haiku.

Haiku developed out of renga, and renga ultimately developed out of tanka. One characteristic of tanka was the tendency to exhibit a mid-poem pause or syntactical break. At different periods of poetic fashion the placing of this pause varied, but gradually, by 1200, the commonest location of the pause came to be after the third line. In other words, the poem was divided into two parts, 5-7-5 and 7-7. Poem number 1635 in the Manyōshū is of particular historical interest:

We dammed the water of Saho River and planted the paddies
But I'll harvest and eat the first rice by myself¹¹

The first three lines (equivalent to line one above) were written by an anonymous nun. Apparently, at this point she found herself unable to complete the poem and the last two lines (line two above) were supplied by the famous poet, Ōtomo no Yakamochi (716-85). What we have, then, is the basis of a poetic game, a stimulus and response, and gradually a collaborative form of writing took shape around this idea. Poets would gather in groups to write long poems of alternating 5-7-5 and 7-7 links, the completed chain of poems being known as renga. Rules for the composition of renga were settled in the twelfth century. These rules affected the placing of verses on recurring themes – the moon, cherry blossom, love, etc., - and the use of seasonal topics.

¹¹ Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku in English* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), p.6

Like tanka, renga developed as poetry of the court and nobility and its governing values were elegance and beauty. In time, however, its seriousness provoked a reaction in the form of haikai, a lower-class renga which linked verses together on the basis of wit and wordplay, and aimed at less than full sincerity. R.H.Blyth explains the rise of haikai renga – playful linked verse – as follows:

Renga was dying of repetition and inanition. The only thing to put some spirit into it was humour: puns, proverbs, satire, parody, paradox, far-fetched allusions, vulgarity, eroticism, - poetry has always needed them in some form or other to prevent the stagnation into aestheticism and artificiality. Two poets, Sōkan, 1465-1553, and Moritake, 1473-1549, were the originators of the haikai renga that was the immediate origin of haiku ... Haikai means sportive and playful, not solemn and serious.¹²

2.2.2 Haiku before Bashō

Early haiku writers include Sōgi, Sōkan, Moritake, Teitoku and Sōin. In the generation before Sōkan and Moritake, Sōgi, 1421-1502, had brought renga to the pinnacle of its development. At the same time, he began to write hokku independently of renga. The hokku was the opening link of a renga and the effective origin of haiku. As well as being in the 5-7-5 form it was required to contain a definite seasonal reference. It was the practice of writing hokku for their own sake that led to the development of haiku. Indeed, until the nineteenth century what we now call haiku were known simply as hokku – three line verses that resembled the opening link of a renga but were regarded as poems in their own right.

R.H.Blyth characterises Sōgi's haiku (i.e. hokku) as 'elegant and refined'. An example:

The willow-tree
Brushes the morning dewdrops
From the grasses along the path.¹³

¹² R.H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku*, vol.1 (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1963), p.45

¹³ Ibid., p.48

Blyth remarks that this is 'almost too beautiful for haiku'.

Sōkan and Moritake were more inclined towards humour. Sōkan originated haikai renga, popularising what had previously been a refined and courtly art. One of his more poetic pieces:

The wind is cold;
Through the torn paper-screen
The moon of October.¹⁴

Moritake is the author of a famous haiku about mistaking a butterfly for a fallen blossom. Another of his haiku states that scent is not so much in the flower as in the nose and relies on a pun for its effect – 'hana' means both flower and nose in Japanese.

Teitoku (1570-1653) was the founder of the Teimon school, which continued the punning and word-games of haikai renga but at the same time, gave the art more elaborate rules.

Sōin (1604-1682) founded the Danrin school as a reaction to the Teimon school. He sought to free renga and haiku from restrictions – 'any kinds of words, any materials were allowed.' His writing is also a reaction against, and debunking of, the conventionalised beauties of tanka:

Gazing at the cherry-blossoms,
The bone of my neck
Gets painful.¹⁵

The most significant haiku writer of Bashō's time, the late seventeenth century, other than Bashō and his followers, was Onitsura (1661-1738). His poetic ideal was *makoto*, sincerity.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.55

¹⁵ Ibid., p.79

In parallel with Bashō, he retained the freedom encouraged by the Danrin school yet managed to elevate haiku and dignify it with a greater resonance. Blyth comments:

Onitsura composed the first real haiku. They show his genius; they show his pure nature; they best express his unintellectualised experience; they are 'a sort of thought in sense.' His verses are simple and easy, melodious and poetical.¹⁶

An example:

A trout jumps up;
At the bottom of the water
Clouds coming and going.¹⁷

Most of the other leading haiku writers at this time were disciples of Bashō. They include Kikaku, Ransetsu, Kyorai, Kyoroku, Bonchō and Tokoku.

2.2.3 Bashō

Bashō's dates are 1644-94. He was born at Ueno in Iga province. The peak of his creative activity centres on several journeys he undertook during the 1680s, and the travel diaries that these journeys inspired. (These travel diaries belong to the genre called *haibun* which is the subject of my Chapter Nine.)

The name Bashō means 'banana plant': there was such a plant outside his hut in Edo (Tokyo), and Bashō seems to have identified with it, admiring the way its leaves caught the rain and were torn by the gales. Bashō's earliest extant poem dates from 1662. In 1666 he entered the service of the lord Yoshitada. After Yoshitada's death he moved to Edo in 1672, where he is known to have taken part in *renku*, judged poetry contests, and begun practising

¹⁶ Ibid., p.103

¹⁷ Ibid., p.100

Zen meditation under Priest Butchō (1642-1715). Bashō's father died in 1656 and his mother died in 1682. The first Bashō Hut was destroyed by fire in 1682. In 1684 he undertook the first of his long travels, visiting the Shinto shrines at Ise, returning to his home town of Ueno (where he met up with his elder brother) and moving on to Nara and Kyoto, returning by the summer of 1685. During this trip he also compiled *Winter Sun*, a collection of five renku. In the autumn of 1687 he made a visit to Kashima shrine to view the full moon. In the winter of 1687 he began the second of his long travels, visiting Ueno, the cherry-blossom mountain of Yoshino, Nara, Osaka, Kyoto and Nagoya, and including another moon-viewing trip, to Sarashina. In the spring of 1689 he set off on his longest journey, travelling north to Sendai, the famous pine-clad islands of Matsushima, and across to the Japan Sea coast. In the summer of 1690 he spent some secluded weeks at the Unreal Hut on the shores of Lake Biwa. In the summer of 1691 he spent seventeen days at the House of Fallen Persimmons in Saga, Kyoto, where he wrote his *Saga Diary*. Bonchō and Kyorai compiled the *Monkey's Cloak*, an anthology of renku by Bashō and his disciples, in 1691. On his return to Edo, Bashō moved into his third Bashō Hut. Here he felt disturbed by interruptions and worldly involvements and he closed his gate to visitors for a time during autumn 1693. He apparently resolved his doubts and felt able to face the world again after coming to an understanding of the poetic principle of *karumi*, lightness. His final journey, in 1694, took him to Ueno, Kyoto and Osaka, where he was taken ill and died.

In his diary of his travels of 1687-8, *The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel*, he describes his struggles with his poetic vocation:

There have been times when my spirit, so dejected, almost gave up the quest, other times when it was proud, triumphant. So it has been from the very start, never finding peace with itself, always doubting the worth of what it makes ... All who achieve greatness in art - Saigyō in traditional poetry, Sōgi in linked verse, Sesshū in

painting, Rikyū in tea ceremony - possess one thing in common: they are one with nature.¹⁸

By Bashō's time the art of haiku was well established but, in Lucien Stryk's words, 'expiring of artificiality'.¹⁹ Bashō gave haiku truthfulness and depth. His disciple, Dohō, expresses Bashō's ideal of a unity between subject and object thus:

'Description of the object is not enough: unless a poem contains feelings which have come from the object, the object and the poet's self will be separate things.'²⁰

Bashō followed the lead of Saigyō in seeking to achieve the qualities of *sabi*, 'contented solitariness', and *wabi*, 'the spirit of poverty, an appreciation of the commonplace'. In addition he formed his own poetic goal, *karumi*, 'the artistic expression of non-attachment, the result of calm realization of profoundly felt truths.'²¹

There are about 1000 of Bashō's haiku extant. Makoto Ueda identifies five stages of Bashō's life, as follows:

1644-72	Apprenticeship prior to departure for Edo
1672-80	Life in Edo prior to moving to the Bashō Hut
1681-85	Searching for poetic identity
1686-91	Peak of literary activities
1691-94	Final phase

Bashō's development can be analysed according to these stages:

[1] He wrote his earliest (extant) haiku at the age of eighteen. His early poems tend to rely

¹⁸ Lucien Stryk (trans.), *On Love and Barley: Haiku of Bashō* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.10

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.9

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.10

heavily on wordplay and allusions. Gradually he begins to incorporate more colloquial diction.

[2] Perhaps under the influences of the worldly environment of Edo and the humorous, anti-classical Danrin school of haiku, Bashō's poetry becomes more earthy in tone. He begins to develop the technique of surprising comparison, for example:

I fell a tree
And gaze at the cut end -
The moon of tonight.²²

He also moves in the direction of greater objectivity, replicating the sombre atmosphere of classical Chinese verse:

On a bare branch
A crow is perched -
Autumn evening.²³

[3] He learns the art of presenting an experience in the simplest terms, making it available for the reader's participation:

Along the mountain road
Somehow it tugs at my heart:
A wild violet.²⁴

Increasingly, his haiku are derived from his own experience rather than from literary themes.

The tendency towards objectivity intensifies, without striving for emotional effect:

²² Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982), p.42

²³ *Ibid.*, p.44

the sea darkens –
faintly white
a wild duck's call

On this poem, written in 1685, the critic Konishi comments:

This is a poem in the 'descriptive mode,' a type of poem not found in Bashō's earlier hokku. It describes a scene objectively, with no imported sentiment like happiness or grief. This method, however, should not be mistaken for the *shasei* principle that became famous in early twentieth-century Japan. In Western literature, realism did not emerge until the nineteenth century. There is no way Bashō could have any idea of *shasei*, which derived from Western realism. Bashō had apparently befriended the monk Butchō in Fukagawa and begun studying Zen. And Zen monks were good at describing a landscape objectively in a few words and embodying cosmic truth in it.²⁵

[4] At the peak of his poetic output, Bashō is exploring different ways of expressing the poetic ideal of *sabi*. *Sabi* is derived from an adjective meaning 'lonely' or 'solitary', and at times Bashō approaches it directly in this specific sense:

Loneliness -
Sinking into the rocks,
A cicada's cry.²⁶

Makoto Ueda comments:

To realize that all living things are evanescent is sad, but when one sees a tiny creature enduring that sadness and fulfilling its destiny one is struck with a sublime feeling.²⁷

Common to many of his poems of this period is a

²⁴ Ibid., p.49

²⁵ Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p.124. See the sub-section on Shiki, p.28, for more on *shasei*.

²⁶ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, p.51

²⁷ Ibid., p.52

merging of the temporal into the eternal, of the mutable into the indestructible, of the tiny and finite into the vast and infinite, out of which emerges a primeval lonely feeling shared by all things in this world²⁸

These comments apply in particular to his most famous haiku of all, written in 1686 (my version):

old pond
a frog jumps in
the sound of water

Donald Keene identifies Bashō's characteristic tendency to combine both change and permanence, and comments on this poem:

In the first line, Bashō gives us the eternal component of the poem, the timeless, motionless waters of the pond. The next line gives us the momentary, personified by the movement of the frog. Their intersection is the splash of the water.²⁹

In some cases, Bashō focused on the 'infinity, immensity, strength, or indifference of the universe' (my version):

a wild sea
stretching across to Sado Island
the Milky Way

In other cases, he contents himself with a homely scale, communicating atmosphere by empathy:

A pile of leeks lie
Newly washed white:
How cold it is!

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p.39

Ueda comments:

The coldness that emanates from these poems is not really that of wintry temperature, but has more to do with some essential quality of the universe we live in.³⁰

In some poems nature appears to offer an 'embrace' which may suggest the possibility of transcending loneliness:

Weary from travel
I seek a lodging for the night -
Wistaria flowers.³¹

[5] The tendencies of Bashō's final phase were: less emphasis on the world of nature, more on the world of man; an exploration of the idea of *karumi*, the 'acceptance of all things as they are'. Occasionally the predominant mood is bleak –

on this road
where nobody else travels
autumn nightfall³²

Sometimes he achieves a kind of transcendence, an absorption into his subject:

While sweeping the garden
It forgets about the snow:
The broom.³³

Bashō's own critical values were: austere beauty; *karumi* (literally 'lightness', see above); *yojō* ('surplus meaning') and 'soul'. Of 'lightness', Ueda says

³⁰ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, p.55

³¹ Ibid., p.57

³² Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, p.406

³³ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, p.63

a poem should present a picture of life objectively in familiar words, avoiding intensely emotional expression. A poet should not pour his passions into his work; he should rather detach himself from his passion and submerge it within an objective scene. This is easy to say and difficult to practise - an inexperienced poet often ends up composing a descriptive poem so plain and trite as to evoke no feeling at all.³⁴

'Surplus meaning' is this communication of feeling via objective description - a poem should suggest more than appears on its surface. The mind should make a 'leap' in combining the elements of a poem. The same leap should be required between separate verses in *renku*, where words such as 'fragrance', 'reverberation', 'shadow' and 'reflection' are used by Bashō to describe the process of linking. As with *renku*, Bashō states that a haiku 'is made by combining things'. *Renku* links, or the elements of a haiku, should 'vibrate in unison', not by any logical or cause-and-effect connection, but according to subtle qualities, the inmost nature of things, their 'soul'.

After Bashō, haiku once more began to recede towards less than full seriousness, anticipating the development of *senryū*. Blyth is inclined to blame this effect on the influence of Bashō's disciple, Kikaku ('His art is artificiality, his warmth a pose, his wit cold-hearted.'). Among the most significant haiku writers between Bashō and Buson are Chiyo-jo (1701-75), the most famous woman haiku poet, and Taigi (1709-71), whom Blyth ranks as the fifth greatest haiku poet. An example by Chiyo-jo:

A moonlit night;
Coming out on a stone,
A cricket chirping.³⁵

And two examples by Taigi:

³⁴ Ibid., p.160

Sweeping them up,
And then not sweeping them up, -
Fallen leaves.³⁶

Not a single stone
To throw at the dog:
The winter moon.³⁷

2.2.4. Buson

Yosa Buson was born in 1716 at Kema, a suburb of Osaka. At twenty-one he moved to Edo to study painting and haikai, and became a disciple of Hayano Hajin, who was in turn a disciple of Kikaku and Ransetsu, followers of Bashō. At the age of thirty-five Buson moved to Kyoto, and he married ten years later. His wife's name was Tomo. He died aged sixty-seven in 1783.

In his own time Buson was valued more as a painter than a poet, but his poetic reputation was enhanced by an essay by Shiki in 1897. In Shiki's view, Buson achieved a detached objectivity more consistently than Bashō. Many comparisons have been made between these two haiku greats and it is probable that all such contrasts exaggerate the differences. Sawa and Shiffert provide the following list. Buson is modern, Bashō medieval; Buson is epicurean, Bashō stoic; Buson is a poet of spring and summer, Bashō of autumn and winter; Buson is pictorial, Bashō musical; Buson is a colorist, Bashō is an artist of black and white. Buson was content to see himself as a poetic descendant of Bashō, seeing his own poetic mission thus: 'I shall seek only for the elegant simplicity and sensitivity of old master Bashō and restore haikai back to what it was in the ancient days.'³⁸

³⁵ R.H.Blyth, *A History of Haiku*, Vol.1, p.224

³⁶ Ibid., p.294

³⁷ R.H.Blyth, *Haiku*, Vol.4: *Autumn-Winter* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1982), p.1167

³⁸ Yuki Sawa and Edith Marcombe Shiffert, *Haiku Master Buson* (Union City: Heian, 1978), p.24

The objectivity which Shiki praised can be seen in the detachment of the following two poems. In both examples, Buson evokes a deep sense of stillness. In the first, we can almost sense the hand trembling slightly as it holds the candle. Additionally, there is a subtle correspondence between this transfer of light and the lengthening days of spring. In the second poem, there are gentle sensations of sound and movement, together with a refreshing coolness, felt in both the air and water.

Lighting one candle
With another candle;
An evening of spring.³⁹

With the evening breeze,
The water laps against
The heron's legs.⁴⁰

2.2.5. Issa

Kobayashi Issa was born in 1763 at Kashiwabara, a mountain village in northern Shinano (now Nagano). His mother died when he was three, and his father remarried when Issa was eight years old. Issa's stepmother was notoriously unkind to him and Issa's father thought it best to send Issa away from home, to Edo, when he was fourteen. Little is known of Issa's early years in Edo, but it is known that he entered the Katsushika haiku school, and at the age of twenty-eight he was elected to the rank of teacher. However, his creativity and individualism led him to intolerance of the school's conventionalities. He spent the years 1792-8 travelling in Kyushu and Shikoku. His travel journals enhanced his poetic reputation. At the age of thirty-nine he returned to his native village to visit his dying father, and this visit also provided the material for a journal. In 1812 he came back to Kashiwabara to stay, beginning a legal wrangle to claim his inheritance from his stepbrother. In 1814 he married a

³⁹ R.H.Blyth, *Haiku, Vol.1: Eastern Culture* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1981), p.113

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.226

woman named Kiku. She bore him four children, all of whom died in childhood. Kiku herself died in 1823. He remarried the following year, but his second marriage soon ended in divorce. His third marriage, in 1825 to a woman named Yao, was happier. Issa himself died in 1827. A daughter named Yata was born after his death and became his only surviving descendant.

Issa's qualities are described by Lewis Mackenzie as 'compassion and fortitude, innocence and faith'⁴¹. He is famed for his 'blunt honest speech, impatience with orthodoxy, a universal sympathy and hatred of all forms of pretension.'⁴² Compared with other leading haiku poets he is notably concerned with self, but his self is compassionate and acutely sensitive. He is known for his huge number of haiku on insects, as if he identified with the insects' indomitable spirit and apparent insignificance. In the following two haiku, in translations by Lucien Stryk, the sharpness of his perceptions is evident. There is energy (horse, wind), atmosphere (mist, wind) and a sense of excited involvement in the action of the moment.

Twilight mist -
horse remembers the gap
in the bridge.⁴³

Eating alone –
how wild
the autumn wind.⁴⁴

2.2.6 Shiki

Masaoka Shiki was born in 1867 in Matsuyama on the island of Shikoku. In 1883 he moved to Tokyo as a student. In 1890 he entered the literature department of Tokyo University, but he withdrew two years later to devote himself full-time to creative activities, soon becoming

⁴¹ Lewis Mackenzie (trans.), *The Autumn Wind: A Selection from the Poems of Issa* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984), p.1

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lucien Stryk with Noboru Fujiwara (trans.), *The Dumpling Field: Haiku of Issa* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1991), p.90

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.60

haiku editor for the newspaper, *Nippon*. For all his adult life he suffered with tuberculosis, and from 1895 he was often confined to his sickbed, dying in September 1902.

Shiki's lifetime was the age of the Meiji Restoration, which took place in 1868 when he was one year old. At this time, Japan suddenly opened itself to Western trade and influences and embarked on a period of reappraisal of its traditional culture. It was widely anticipated that traditional literary forms such as the tanka and hokku might become obsolete under the impact of these changes, but Shiki's response was to initiate a reinvigoration of these ancient forms. He decoupled hokku from the context of renga⁴⁵, treating it as a fully independent form which he designated by the name by which it is now known, haiku. He utilised concepts associated with Western realist art to describe his own understanding of haiku technique: *shasei*, the 'sketch from life.'

Take your materials from what is around you – if you see a dandelion, write about it; if it's misty, write about the mist. The materials for poetry are all about you in profusion.⁴⁶

In his parallel reform of tanka he took a similar approach: 'an appeal for greater freedom and naturalness in the handling of the form, for greater realism in subject matter.'⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Whether this was a healthy disassociation is open to debate. Blyth disapproves:

[The dropping of renga is] ... perhaps the chief reason for the decline of haiku since 1900. Man is a social animal, and haikai was a social poetry. It linked poetical minds together, and the hokku was simply the beginning of the chain. The hokku became haiku and had no further purpose, no object of stimulating a train of poetical thought; it was isolated and unnatural, that is, unsocial and unsociable ... Renga were the continuum, of which haiku were the isolated phrases and themes. When the actual or implied nexus of renga was gone, haiku found themselves beating their ineffectual wings in the void. (R.H.Blyth, *A History of Haiku Vol. 2* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1964), p.103)

I have quoted this passage at length less because of its relevance to the poetics of Shiki, more because of its relevance to a later argument of this thesis: haiku thrive in relationship, in context, and can seem insufficient in isolation. The most natural and traditional context for the haiku was renga.

⁴⁶ Burton Watson (trans.), *Masaoka Shiki: Selected Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.7, cf. Janine Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986), p.46. For a fuller statement of the principles of the 'sketch from life' see Beichman, pp.59-60.

⁴⁷ Burton Watson (trans.), *Masaoka Shiki: Selected Poems*, p.9. One of Shiki's aims was to create 'harmony' between the haiku and tanka, using similar methods in the construction of each, to break down barriers that had

As a writer he was extraordinarily prolific, completing, in his short life, 2000 tanka and 25,000 haiku:

The very large number of poems ... reflects the restless fertility of his artistic imagination, his belief that a poet must be constantly experimenting and probing for new themes and modes of expression, and the care he took to preserve his works ... He believed that bad poems as well as good should be recorded so that one could learn from one's mistakes.⁴⁸

The following examples of Shiki's haiku show him putting the theory of *shasei* into practice, finding poetry in the most mundane of circumstances.

The little knife -
sharpening pencils with it,
peeling pears⁴⁹

old garden – she empties
a hot-water bottle
under the moon⁵⁰

This example of his tanka is equally based on an actual experience, but at one remove; a recollection in tranquillity suggesting an interesting comparison with Wordsworth's daffodils.

Note Shiki's understatement, and the absence of interpretative comment:

saw the country
and returned – now deep at night
I lie in bed and
fields of mustard flowers
bloom before my eyes⁵¹

previously existed between the two forms (which had traditionally been written by separate classes of poets, neither of which would trespass into the territory of the other). For a fuller account see Janine Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki*, p.76.

⁴⁸ Burton Watson (trans.), *Masaoka Shiki: Selected Poems*, p.10

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.56

⁵⁰ Janine Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki*, p.63

2.2.7. Kyoshi and Hekigodō

Takahama Kyoshi was born on 22 February 1874, at Matsuyama, and died on 8 April 1959. From October 1898 to March 1951 he edited the magazine, *Hototogisu* ('Cuckoo').

Kyoshi and Hekigodō were the two leading disciples of Shiki. After Shiki's death in 1902 they engaged in a vigorous debate over the future direction of haiku. Kyoshi favoured the retention of the traditional form of haiku, 5-7-5 syllables and the season-word. Hekigodō favoured the abandonment of the traditional form. He initiated the Shin Keiko, or 'New Trend Movement', with these aims: to go beyond the mere sketching of nature; to go deep into human life and the basics of human existence; to explore the mystery of human psychology; to liberate haiku expression from form in order to arrive at inner truths; to free the human spirit from the shackles of rigid rules, hackneyed idioms, clichés and the superficial worship of nature. Although this free-style haiku encouraged some great writers, notably Hōsai and Santōka, it all too easily degenerated into obscurity and subjectivity.

Kyoshi's haiku aims were: beginning with sketching from nature, to arrive at the unity of subjective and objective; to depict landscape yet go beyond the observable; to retain the traditional themes of nature and impermanence. Susumu Takiguchi writes that Kyoshi

understood the importance of both tradition and newness, discipline and freedom, objectivity and subjectivity, realism and romanticism and finally nature and man, though arguably he tilted more towards the first of all these pairs.⁵²

Among traditional-style haiku writers in the twentieth century, his position is pre-eminent.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.88

⁵² Susumu Takiguchi, *Kyoshi: A Haiku Master* (Bicester: Ami-Net International Press, 1997), p.18

He has, however, been criticised for his superficiality, relative to the masters of the past.

a basic weakness in [Kyoshi's] style of haiku: it could not normally be used to express man's deepest concerns but only momentary perceptions. Flowers and birds add joy to life, and the changing of the seasons is eternally worth celebrating, but surely Bashō attempted something more profound in his haiku.⁵³

Two examples of Kyoshi's style:

rain cleared -
for a while the wild rose's
fragrance⁵⁴

Autumn wind:
Everything I see
Is *haiku*.⁵⁵

A majority of modern haiku poets have followed Kyoshi in continuing to adhere to haiku tradition. Poets who followed Hekigodō's lead and practised free verse haiku include Seisensui, Ippekirō and Hōsai (1885-1927), who, like Santōka (discussed below), lived a life of monastic poverty, begging his way between temples. Two sample poems by Hōsai:

at midnight
a distant door
pulled shut⁵⁶

grasping
the warmth of a sparrow
and letting it go⁵⁷

2.2.8 Santōka

Santōka⁵⁸ was born in the village of Sabare in Yamaguchi Prefecture, on December 3, 1882. His mother committed suicide at the age of thirty-three, when Santōka was eleven. In 1902 he entered Waseda University, to read Literature, and took the pen-name Santōka, 'Burning

⁵³ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1984), p.117

⁵⁴ William J Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985), p.28

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite (trans.), *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.166

⁵⁶ William J Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku*, p.3

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.108

⁵⁸ His original name was Shoichi Taneda.

Mountain Peak'. He began to drink heavily, suffered a nervous breakdown, and was obliged to return home in July 1904 because his father's financial difficulties meant that funds to support his education were no longer available. In 1909 he made an arranged marriage with Sakino Satō, and their only child, Ken, was born in 1910.

The family brewing business went bankrupt in 1915 and Santōka moved to Kumamoto, where his wife opened a picture-frame shop. In 1918 his younger brother, Jirō, committed suicide. Santōka and his wife drifted apart and Santōka left her to seek work in Tokyo. They were divorced in 1920. Santōka took a library job but had to retire after another nervous breakdown. After the earthquake of September 1923 had destroyed his lodgings he returned to Kumamoto to help his ex-wife run her shop.

In December 1924 he made a drunken suicide attempt, standing in front of an oncoming train. The train halted just in time and Santōka was pulled clear and taken to a nearby Zen temple, Hōon-ji. He stayed in the temple for about a year, being ordained a Zen priest in 1925. In April 1926 he began his first pilgrimage, taking very few possessions and begging his way around southern Japan, returning to Kumamoto in December 1930. In 1932 he moved into a cottage in the mountain village of Ogōri in Yamaguchi Prefecture, and from 1932 to 1938 he divided his time between living in the cottage and travelling, visiting Hiroshima, Kobe, Kyoto and Nagoya. In December 1938 he moved to Matsuyama, where he died on October 11, 1940.

As a haiku poet, Santōka followed the free-style school of Ogiwara Seisensui (1884-1976) who had founded his own haiku magazine, *Sōnn*, in April 1911. Santōka became a major contributor to the magazine from 1913 onwards, and became one of its editors in 1916. His

first haiku collection, *Hachi no Ko* ('The Begging Bowl') was published in 1932. He had six more collections published from 1933 onwards. He also published his own journal, *Sambaku*, from 1930 on. His haiku are notable for their 'unadorned style' and the 'Zen qualities of simplicity (wabi), solitude (sabi) and impermanence (mujō)'⁵⁹. Santōka wrote as he lived: 'no one was poorer, more alone, or more anguished ... There is no dichotomy between poetry and poet, life and emotion.'⁶⁰ John Stevens assesses his work thus: 'In his verses there is nothing extra, no pretense, no artificiality. They can be understood at once without analysis.'⁶¹ Santōka's own understanding of haiku:

Haiku is not a shriek, a howl, a sigh, or a yawn; rather, it is the deep breath of life. In poetry, we constantly examine life ...⁶²

The stark simplicity of the following two examples is immediately evident:

My begging bowl
Accepts the fallen leaves.⁶³

Wearing rags,
In the coolness
I walk alone.⁶⁴

2.2.9. Haiku in Japan: the current situation

In general, the recent trend since the experiment with free-verse haiku seems to be to adhere to traditional form but broaden the range of subject matter. However, a minority of haiku poets have continued along the free-verse path; there are many schools of haiku in modern

⁵⁹ John Stevens (trans.), *Mountain Tasting: Zen Haiku by Santōka Taneda* (New York: Weatherhill, 1980), p.9

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.10

⁶² Ibid., p.25

⁶³ Ibid., p.36

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.46

Japan, and enough to cater for a wide variety of poetic tastes.⁶⁵ In terms of numbers of practitioners, present-day haiku continues to be an activity of major significance, but there seems to be some doubt as to whether modern poets can emulate Bashō and successfully accomplish the transition from ephemeral hobby to artform of enduring worth:

An anonymous article published in February 1957 declared that the modern haiku has become a literature without readers. 'In brief, one can say with respect to haiku that the reader is the writer himself.' The article estimated that as many as a million amateur poets, belonging to haiku organizations each headed by some well-known poet, supported the publication of many magazines chiefly for the pleasure of seeing their own names in print.⁶⁶

As a small-press phenomenon, English-language haiku may be open to a similar critical assessment, but it is naturally the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that, whatever its status in Japan, English-language haiku is an art with interest, value and promise. Indeed, some Japanese haiku poets claim that it is the dialogue with haiku as it has developed outside Japan that offers the best hope for the future vitality of the genre.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Examples of modern Japanese haiku can be found in Makoto Ueda, *Modern Japanese Haiku: an anthology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) and Kōko Katō and David Burleigh (trans.), *A Hidden Pond: Anthology of Modern Haiku* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1997).

⁶⁶ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, p.177

⁶⁷ The Matsuyama Declaration of 12 September 1999, a statement by several leading figures in Japanese haiku, gave an optimistic assessment of the possibilities of haiku both inside and outside Japan. Its essential claim is: 'Haiku is a part of world literature. Haiku is opening itself to various peoples of the world.' (Shimanamikaïdo International Haiku Convention, 1999).

Haiku in North America

3.1 Introduction

As with Japanese haiku, a detailed account of haiku in North America is outside the scope of this thesis. However, some attention to North American haiku is necessary, for two reasons in particular. Firstly, haiku gained widespread popularity in North America a generation or so before its equivalent expansion in Britain. It is therefore true to say that the North American experience of haiku forms a historical bridge between haiku in Japan and haiku in Britain. Secondly, haiku practice in North America has to some extent conditioned haiku practice in Britain. The range of British haiku is not a mirror-image of its transatlantic counterpart but, nevertheless, there is a degree of correspondence and many developments in British haiku have been anticipated by, and parallel, trends in America. My brief account of North American haiku focuses on the two most influential works of American haiku literature, *The Haiku Anthology* and *The Haiku Handbook*. I open with a short account of American haiku history, largely drawn from William J Higginson's *Haiku Compass*. I append a discussion of Eric Amann's *The Wordless Poem*, which has particular historical significance in being the clearest statement thus far, concerning the composition of haiku in English, of a position which sees haiku as deriving inspiration from the example of Zen. This position has never quite attained the status of full orthodoxy among English-language haiku poets, but it

does provide a set of criteria which ground any debate on haiku theory and can, to some extent, act as tests of haiku authenticity. Discussion of general haiku guidelines, and further examination of the case for and against the influence of Zen, is continued in Chapter Four on haiku theory.

3.2 Haiku in North America – a short history

Cor van den Heuvel, in *The Haiku Anthology*, discusses the development of haiku in the USA:

Haiku in English got its real start in the fifties, when an avid interest in Japanese culture and religion swept the post-war United States ... This interest centered on art, literature and Zen Buddhism.¹

William J Higginson, in *Haiku Compass*, notes that:

Haiku in English begins in earnest after the publication of three key works in the late 1950s: Japanese-American scholar Kenneth Yasuda's *The Japanese Haiku* (1957); Columbia University professor Harold G Henderson's *An Introduction to Haiku* (1958); and Beat generation novelist Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* (1958).²

The first magazine in English devoted exclusively to haiku, *American Haiku*, ran for twelve issues between 1963 and 1968. It 'excluded just about everything but 5-7-5s' (*Loc. cit.*). 1967 saw the founding of two more periodicals which were to flourish for several years, *Haiku West*, edited by Leroy Kanterman, and *Haiku*, edited by Eric Amann in Canada. The latter became a 'counterfoil' to the conservative approach and held out for a broader and deeper understanding of haiku than just a poem in 5-7-5 syllables. The longest running (and still

¹ Cor van den Heuvel, *The Haiku Anthology: Haiku and Senryu in English*, 2nd edn., p.24

active) haiku magazine is *Modern Haiku*, begun in 1969 by Kay Mormino and edited since 1978 by Robert Spiess. It is the largest haiku magazine, both in size and circulation, and has most pages of reviews.

In October 1968 Leroy Kanterman and Harold G Henderson formed the group which was to become the Haiku Society of America, with a charter to 'promote the appreciation and enjoyment of haiku in English'. The HSA initially attracted around twenty participants to monthly meetings at the Japan Society in New York City. Higginson records some of the questions which were regular topics of debate:

What did Bashō really stand for? Is there any English equivalent for a kireji? Should we or should we not count English syllables ... ? What is 'nature' – in and out of haiku? What is the difference between haiku and senryu? Where did haiku come from? What makes a haiku 'traditional' in English?³

In 1978, at the instigation of Lilli Tanzer, the HSA founded its own quarterly haiku journal, *Frogpond*. Higginson credits *Frogpond*, particularly under the editorship of Elizabeth Searle Lamb between 1984 and 1990, with holding together the HSA 'through a period of growth that brought it to over 500 members'.

Events in the 1990s have included: the publication of regional anthologies (*The Midwest Haiku Anthology* (1992) and *The San Francisco Haiku Anthology* (1992)); the holding of the Haiku North America conferences every two years since 1991; the instigation of an HSA renku contest in 1990 (joining longer established awards for haiku and senryu); the

² William J Higginson *Haiku Compass: Directions in the Poetical Map of the United States of America* (Tokyo: Haiku International Association, 1994), p.1

³ *Ibid.*, p.2

establishment of HSA regional co-ordinators in 1993 to promote local group meetings and activities.

Higginson lists three recent developments (in 1994) as indicators of future areas of growing interest: increased attention to the seasonal aspect of haiku; a greater recognition of the separate role of senryu; greater participation in writing renku.

The foundation of haiku societies in other English-speaking nations (including the British Haiku Society) and the publication of other national anthologies (including *The Iron Book of British Haiku*) are developments that have taken inspiration and practical guidance from the ground-breaking experience in the USA.⁴

3.3 *The Haiku Anthology*

The Haiku Anthology, edited by Cor van den Heuvel, was first published in 1974, with a second edition – containing over three times as many poems as the first edition – published in 1986.⁵ Van den Heuvel, in his Preface to the First Edition, is keen to point out the freshness of haiku, presenting it as a new direction for poetry in English:

Haiku is a poetry of simplicity and suggestion new to Western literature. It has been called 'the wordless poem', and is often so bare as to seem meaningless to the uninitiated. Yet its few words have such an ontological immediacy that the sensitive reader can almost reach out and touch the things they describe.⁶

He identifies several opposing trends, which create a tension in the haiku-writing world. The

⁴ A detailed history of the Haiku Society of America is available in L.A. Davidson et al (eds.), *A Haiku Path*

⁵ The anthology has also recently emerged in an expanded third edition: Cor van den Heuvel (ed.), *The Haiku Anthology*, 3rd edn. (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1999)

⁶ Cor van den Heuvel, *The Haiku Anthology: Haiku and Senryu in English*, 2nd edn., p.26

first, and perhaps most fundamental, of these is the tension between haiku as a form of writing, a literary art, and haiku as a spirituality, a way of life. The most notable proponent of the latter view is J.W.Hackett, for whom haiku is 'fundamentally existential and experiential, rather than literary'. Presumably, for Hackett, the poem as a record of a moment of awareness, a profound experience, takes precedence over the poem which seeks to create or stimulate imaginative experience for the reader. This tension between two views of haiku is one that is not open to final resolution. It is evident that a successful poem is one that goes beyond the level of journal jotting; it must come to meet the reader. In doing so it gives rise to a new 'haiku moment', the moment of reading, just as it is, in turn, the record of a moment of writing or, at least, conception. Yet equally, haiku retains its vitality as a form to the extent that haiku poets remain grounded in experience: it is this which ensures the poem's accessibility and prevents a self-indulgent celebration of purely subjective states. So we are led to a second dichotomy at the core of haiku: objective / subjective - neither can finally triumph over the other. A further dichotomy is that between 'natural speech' and 'poetic techniques' - how to use plain language without falling into the flat and prosaic? How to write poetry without falling into a language which is over-ornate, clouds the sought-after transparency and militates against wordlessness? A final dichotomy identified by van den Heuvel is that between writers who follow a 5-7-5 syllabic pattern and those who prefer a free form. Although the position of free-form writers has become increasingly accepted and dominant over time, this dichotomy too resists final resolution. Maybe the insistence on a precise 5-7-5 form is now a thing of the past, yet the desire to cling to some underlying formal structure remains. Writing in three lines, with the middle line the longest of the three, continues to be a norm - not a rigid skeleton but at least the ghost of a form. I offer a diagrammatic summary of these four tensions below. The division between left and right is significant for the first three items in each column, which I suggest belong together, but

arbitrary in the case of the final item, form, which might just as well be reversed.

existential / experiential	<>	imaginative creation
natural speech	<>	poetic techniques
objectivity	<>	subjectivity
free form	<>	5-7-5 syllables

Surveying the swing of the pendulum between these alternatives, van den Heuvel comments that 'Haiku in English is still in the process of finding its "way",' and reiterates Henderson's prophecy that 'what Haiku in English will become "will depend primarily on the poets who write them".' It is an art which must develop not through following the dictates of pundits but through the experience of shared practice: one successful poem stimulates another.

Van den Heuvel's Preface to the Second Edition, written twelve years later, identifies three major developments in the intervening time: [1] the emergence of one-line haiku as a fully acceptable form; [2] the increasing practice of writing longer works - sequences and renga; [3] the increasing tendency to draw on human relationships, love and sex, as subject matter.

One-line haiku were popularised by successful examples from a number of poets, notably Marlene Mountain, and given 'legitimacy' by the use of the one-line form in translations from the Japanese by Hiroaki Sato. Van den Heuvel also notes the occasional use of a two-line form by Bob Boldman and others, and increasing experimentation with tanka by, amongst others, Bob Boldman and Michael McClintock.

An attempt at an English-language renga is recorded as early as 1968, in *Haiku* magazine, but it was from the mid-1970s that the practice caught on.

In Japan haiku originated when the hokku of *haikai no renga* began to be written as an independent poem. The process has been reversed in the West. Renga developed here when haiku poets started looking for ways to extend the haiku into longer forms.⁷

The shared experience of renga-writing 'helped stimulate innovation' in haiku and 'encouraged the exchange of ideas and a sense of community among poets.'

Van den Heuvel notes several current terms for poems which deal with love and sex: 'psychological haiku', 'erotic haiku' or 'serious senryu':

Instead of recreating a moment of awareness in which human nature is related to nature, they give us a moment of awareness about one's own inner feelings or one's relationship with other human beings.⁸

He moves on from discussing serious senryu to emphasising where to draw the distinction between haiku and senryu:

It is the subject matter that determines the genre - not the form, and not whether the subject matter is looked at humorously or not. Haiku itself began as a kind of humorous verse, and one can still write a funny haiku.⁹

This second preface looks back to the earlier preface, and beyond, in the following terms:

After about twenty-five years of English-language haiku do we know what a haiku is? There seems to be no general consensus - which may be a sign of its health and vitality. There is still much talk about awareness and perception - less about Zen and the Infinite.¹⁰

It seems that time and the experience of writing / reading is moving haiku away from the

⁷ Ibid., p.12

⁸ Ibid., p.13

⁹ Ibid., pp.13-14

Zen-inspired perspective, removing some of the mystical polish and glow. Haiku, in a position which is actually entirely consistent with Zen tenets, is becoming more and more attuned to everyday life, with a greater breadth of *ordinary* experience being drawn within its scope. It is not a *heightened* awareness or an awareness of anything *special* which qualifies the haiku poet, merely the simple fact of awareness as such, the readiness to record - and recreate - moments of all kinds. Although I regard talk of 'no general consensus' as exaggeration - a list of some minimum acceptable criteria is quite easy to establish - van den Heuvel's contention that the absence of full consensus is a sign of vitality bears restatement. We cannot say with complete assurance what a haiku is because each new poem offers a challenge to previous perceptions.

The Haiku Anthology remains the best collection of English-language haiku available, from the point of view of both the energy and diversity of its contents. It is impossible to do it justice in a short selection but as a way of indicating the range of possibilities it contains I offer the following twelve poems:

As examples of what might be called the 'traditional' haiku: 5-7-5 syllables with a pure focus on nature as subject -

A long wedge of geese;
straw-gold needles of the larch
on the flowing stream

(Robert Spiess)¹¹

Across the still lake
through upcurls of morning mist -
the cry of a loon

(O Mabson Southard)¹²

As a contrast to the above, a poem of the home rather than the outdoors, in a similar form

¹⁰ Ibid., p.19

¹¹ Ibid., p.230

(5-8-5, in this case). The traditional sense of the season is replaced by more human-centred measurements of the passage of time:

A night train passes:
pictures of the dead are trembling
on the mantelpiece (Eric Amann)¹³

Moving on from this, to a free form poem relating the human world to nature, with the natural world as a generalised background only. This poem seems to be in a line of direct descent from Buson's *rats / running over the dishes / the cold* -

a box of nails
on the shelf of the shed
the cold (John Wills)¹⁴

The intensity of the seasonal feeling is retained in these two haiku which show the possibilities of the one-line form -

an icicle the moon drifting through it (Matsuo Allard)¹⁵
old towel folding it again autumn evening (Marlene Mountain)¹⁶

Marlene Mountain is also prominent among contributors of haiku which tend towards concrete poetry. There is certainly an interface here to be explored, although mainstream haiku magazines have, over time, not taken this path often and examples tend to be confined nowadays to journals of the avowedly experimental. An example - the ultra-minimalist -

¹² Ibid., p.216

¹³ Ibid., p.34

¹⁴ Ibid., p.311

¹⁵ Ibid., p.128

¹⁶ Ibid., p.157

rain
dr p
o

(Marlene Mountain)¹⁷

The following haiku also shows the influence of concrete poetry and points in another direction so far not widely taken, that is, a free-form which expands beyond considerations of constraint. If it takes four lines and a space to say it, then so be it -

flinging the frisbee
skips off the ground
curving up hits a tree

petals

(Alan Pizzarelli)¹⁸

A more conventional use of five lines is the tanka. Again, there is a haiku / tanka interface (four lines?) which exists to be explored. The concision of the following poem might qualify it as a haiku (only sixteen syllables) but the element of psychological narrative marks it apart -

sat down
to enjoy the view
the beauty of it
suddenly
gone

(Michael McClintock)¹⁹

A typical senryu offers irony and social comment. This one happens to contain a seasonal element, but the focus is purely on the human world -

Christmas Eve:
in the massage parlour window -
reduced rates

(George Swede)²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., p.162

¹⁸ Ibid., p.167

¹⁹ Ibid., p.140

Finally, two examples of what van den Heuvel calls the 'serious senryu' - poems about relationships. The first of these maintains a tenuous link with traditional haiku subject matter in the first line, but swiftly moves away from nature-observation to emotional observation. The second again looks outwards as far as the 'shadows', but simultaneously looks inward - there is a strong suggestion that these 'shadows' can also be understood in a psychological sense -

Waterlilies ...
in a moment he'll ask me
what I'm thinking

(Alexis Rotella)²¹

Not speaking
our shadows
keep touching

(Alexis Rotella)²²

3.4 *The Haiku Handbook*

Haiku happen all the time, wherever there are people who are 'in touch' with the world of their senses, and with their own feeling response to it.²³

Thus William J Higginson puts the case for the accessibility of haiku. His *The Haiku Handbook*, subtitled *How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku* (written in collaboration with Penny Harter) is the most thorough introduction and 'how to' guide on the subject currently available. It is divided into four sections covering, roughly: haiku history; the art of writing haiku; teaching haiku; related genres. Appendices include a list of common Japanese season-words and a glossary.

²⁰ Ibid., p.236

²¹ Ibid., p.198

²² Ibid., p.199

²³ William J Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku*, p.4

Higginson gives an authoritative account of the history of haiku outside Japan. Early attempts were made by French poets between 1905 and 1920. Basil Hall Chamberlain's *Bashō and the Japanese Poetical Epigram* brought haiku to the attention of English readers in 1910, as did Lafcadio Hearn's *Japanese Lyrics* in 1915. Poets whose work shows the influence of haiku include Ezra Pound ('In a Station of the Metro', 1913), Wallace Stevens ('Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird', 1917), William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell and, in German, Rainer Maria Rilke. Mexican and other Spanish-language poets took up the form in the 1920s.

R.H. Blyth's four-volume work, *Haiku*, published between 1949 and 1952, was the first detailed and comprehensive account available in English. The Beat Poets - Snyder, Ginsberg, Kerouac - writing in the 1950s were influenced by haiku and include a small number among their other works. Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958) and *Desolation Angels* (1965) approximate in style to haibun, or haiku prose. Higginson comments that Kerouac occasionally achieved the 'density of image, event, experience piled up on one another' found in the haibun of Bashō, Buson and Issa, and such prose passages by Kerouac are in places capped with haiku.

In discussing the form of haiku in translation, Higginson expresses his belief that a range of between ten and twelve English syllables is required 'in order to simulate the duration of the original'.²⁴ He also quotes with approval Blyth's suggestion of a pattern of 'two, three and two accented beats'. He suggests writing in three lines, incorporating a grammatical pause (equivalent to the Japanese kireji) at the end of the first or second line. This form would

²⁴ Ibid., p.102

yield a sense of rhythmical incompleteness similar to that in Japanese haiku'.²⁵ He advocates that articles and prepositions 'be used sparingly, but not unnaturally omitted'. Regarding the practice of writing English haiku in three lines of five, seven and five English syllables, he makes the following observation:

Many Western haiku poets first learned of the haiku as a 'poem in seventeen syllables, arranged in three lines of five, seven and five' and began writing in that form ... some very striking poems have been written in this mode ... some of the 'five-seven-five' poets are well aware that the form they write in is longer than the traditional Japanese form, but they find it still has a balance and grace that they like, and provides a kind of challenge when they attempt to compose a haiku.²⁶

His chapter on 'The Craft of Haiku' includes a section on the use of allusion, and another on the possibilities provided by alternatives to the standard three-line layout. He makes Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' the focus for a discussion of revision, with particular reference to changes in punctuation.

The following four poems represent pioneering work by British authors, recorded by Higginson:

caught out in the snow
for a moment, I seem to recognise something
in the dog's eyes (Bill Wyatt)²⁷

a small ceremony
lifting stakes now thinner than
my trees come of age (Dee Evetts)²⁸

white butterfly, blue cabbage
the allotment hut sags
in noonday heat (Chris Torrance)²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., p.105

²⁶ Ibid., p.112

²⁷ Ibid., p.71

²⁸ Ibid.

each
grassleaf
distinct before
the storm

(Gerry Loose)³⁰

In general, the picture of haiku which emerges from both Higginson's handbook and van den Heuvel's anthology is clear and consistent. The boundaries of the form are perhaps not distinct. Where does it merge with concrete poetry, and how free can free-form be? What degree of heightened poetic expression is acceptable? But the basis of the form is established: a record, or presentation, of a significant moment of objective experience, appealing to the imaginative re-creation of a sensitive reader.

3.5 *The Wordless Poem*

Eric Amann, based in Toronto, wrote *The Wordless Poem* in 1969. It was reprinted in 1978. This timing suggests that it reflects, and to some extent created, the consciousness of haiku that culminated in *The Haiku Anthology* and *The Haiku Handbook*. The argument of the essay is built around a set of contrasts between the requirements of haiku and the perceived bias of Western poetry and Western consciousness generally. Early on in the discussion he refers to the apparently nonsensical sayings of Zen masters, which in fact serve the purpose of drawing attention 'from the abstract to the concrete and from the intellectual to the actual'. Haiku is presented as the poetry of the concrete noun, offering its images to be re-experienced directly by the reader 'without intellectualization'.

The title of the essay is taken from a phrase used by Alan Watts, and is designed to characterise the haiku's sparse language and absence of floridity:

²⁹ Ibid.

A haiku is never a complete statement. Just as the Japanese ink-brush artist tosses a few light strokes in one corner of the picture and leaves all the rest in emptiness, so the haiku master puts down a few simple words and leaves all the rest in silence. More is implied than stated, more hidden than apparent. A haiku is no more than a hint, a bare suggestion of a poem.³¹

Unlike the sequential and linear progression of most Western literature, the haiku is 'sudden and instantaneous'. It avoids intrusive subjective comment and leaves itself open to the reader's intuition.

The Western poet leaves a lengthy record of words in which the original experience and his reaction to it are inextricably interwoven; the experience has already been 'pre-digested' for the reader who can then only react to the poet's reaction ... In haiku on the other hand, the poet only gives us the circumstances that evoked his reaction, not the reaction itself. Here the reader must supply his own reaction, relying on his own poetic resources.³²

The absolute commitment of the haiku poet to immediacy and suchness disallows such poetic devices as simile, metaphor, personification and symbolism. The original sense-experience is to be presented unadorned and undistorted. Honesty to this experience also prevents the haiku poet from seeking out the True and the Beautiful. Poetry is found in the circumstances of our lives, however superficially unappealing they may be: beauty, religion and poetry are in fact everywhere. Amann quotes with approval the following haiku of Issa:

Winter snow:
a harlot
scraping soot from her saucepan.³³

A guiding ideal of the haiku poet is selflessness: to lose oneself in contemplation of the object. Even in cases where the haiku poet does express strong personal emotion, that

³⁰ Ibid., p.72

³¹ Eric Amann, *The Wordless Poem: A Study of Zen in Haiku* (Toronto: Haiku Society of Canada, 1978), p.10

³² Ibid., p.16

emotion is resolved (in the examples Amann gives) and transformed 'into a feeling of universal communion'.

A further poetic ideal is oneness, which has a direct bearing on the frequently-employed technique of juxtaposition of images. The collision between images – whether a reinforcement or a contrast – can only be understood intuitively. Amann compares the haiku to the Zen koan:³⁴

... we look in vain for a logical connection between the juxtaposed images. The 'explanation' lies in a deeper level of consciousness than the logical mind ... where the discriminatory influences of our minds have ceased to function and things are perceived in their totality.³⁵

The Wordless Poem ends with a challenge to would-be haiku poets:

Unless the poets in the Western world writing haiku today appreciate this wider perspective and are willing to express some of this true 'spirit of haiku', not by way of imitation, but as a spontaneous and genuine experience of life, haiku poetry will fail to have any rejuvenating effects on the impoverished literature of our age, and the 'Way of Haiku' will become no more than a 'Cult of Haiku', one of the infinite, constantly changing superficial diversions of a bourgeois consumer culture.³⁶

In critical assessment of Amann's essay, I find it necessary to point out that 'suchness', 'selflessness', 'oneness' and the like can in turn degenerate into slogans, to be imitated rather than attained. And if, as attainments, they are held to be spiritual qualities rather than artistic skills, it is difficult to see how their attainment might manifest in the poetic realm. Not all Zen masters are haiku poets; and vice-versa. I would direct further criticism at the historical accuracy of this portrait of haiku. (I discuss the relationship between haiku and Zen in more

³³ Ibid., p.24

³⁴ The koan is a paradoxical topic of meditation, designed to focus the attention of the meditator. The well-known phrase, 'the sound of one hand clapping,' is a mis-quoted version of a famous koan.

³⁵ Eric Amann, op. cit., p.36

detail in the next chapter, Section 4.5.) Many haiku poets were not writing from any consciously-held Zen perspective: superficial coincidences are the product of shared cultural assumptions. My final point would be that to introduce a challenge to the reader's entire world-view may be to raise an unnecessary hurdle. Zen training is no necessary prerequisite to haiku appreciation. However, these are all superficial criticisms. I approve the fundamental soundness of Amann's characterisation of haiku and even if we accept that the role of Zen has been over-stressed this does not alter the basic premises. In particular, I think it is essential to grasp that words are used in a haiku only as 'a few light strokes', and the resulting picture is incomplete, to be completed in the reader's own experience. My own experience as an editor has shown that failed haiku, written in ignorance of such precepts, too ornate or too intellectualised, are all too common. However, no person accepting Amann's advice is likely to go far wrong in the practice of haiku.

³⁶ Ibid., p.39

English-language haiku: theoretical issues

4.1 Introduction

The development of haiku in North America over the thirty years from 1960 to 1990 provided a foundation which influenced the direction taken by haiku in Britain in the 1990s. Subsequent chapters will chronicle this period of growth in Britain through an examination of the journals, poets and poems which came to prominence during this time. Consideration of this explosion in haiku practice must, however, be delayed while we examine haiku from a more theoretical perspective. This presentation offers no grand unifying theory or structured scale of values. (In one sense, haiku theory is necessarily elusive since haiku is driven by practice: a continual dialogue of innovation and imitation.) Rather than attempt to identify a central focus, this chapter offers insight into haiku from a diversity of angles through a series of what are, in effect, separate essays. These various approaches are as follows: basic guidelines; haiku form; haiku content (including examination of the question of metaphor and a critical look at the concept of the 'haiku moment'); the influence of Zen; the interface with senryu and tanka. I trust that these separate aspects will assemble into a thorough and reliable characterisation of haiku.

4.2 Haiku in Britain: Guidelines, and the evolution of Consensus

The aesthetic values of the Western haiku tradition were derived from three sources primarily. The first ingredient in the mix was the imagism of Ezra Pound and other poets in the early twentieth century: attempts to incorporate the insights and methods of haiku into the existing idioms of English literature.¹ As Donald Keene notes,

the haiku ... attracted the attention of Western poets, particularly those of the imagist school ... Richard Aldington tells how

One frosty night when the guns were still
I leaned against the trench
Making for myself hokku
Of the moon and flowers and of the snow

... although the main thesis of this school, that poetic ideas are best expressed by the rendering of concrete images rather than comments, need not have been learned from Japanese poetry, it is hard to think of any other poetic literature which so completely incarnates this view.²

William Carlos Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow', although not a product of the Imagist school as such, is a fine example of the convergence with haiku in the development of

¹ My argument here appears to be circular: haiku influenced imagism influenced haiku. But what I mean is that imagism, which was initially influenced by Japanese haiku, helped to create a climate of appreciation for terse poetry with haiku-like qualities and this, in turn, furthered the development of haiku in English. For a discussion of Pound's use of haiku techniques, see: Earl Miner, "Pound, Haiku and the Image" in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Walter Sutton (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

The three principles of imagism, as formulated by Pound, H.D. and Richard Aldington, were:

1. Direct presentation of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Principles one and two suggest an evident relationship to haiku. The third principle is more tangential in its relevance, although also applicable. Pound's definition of the Image was: 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time ...' This suggests an ambition for poetry to approach the instantaneous impact of visual art, as opposed to the more gradual development normally associated with literature. Evidently, the form of poetry which comes closest to realising this ambition is haiku. Two further characteristics of Imagist poetry which bear comparison with haiku are the avoidance of interpretative statements and the technique of comparison, or juxtaposition. For a brief account of the Imagist movement, see: P.N.Furbank, *Pound* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

twentieth century poetry. It dates from 1923:

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.³

The only adaptation necessary to convert this poem into a haiku is the removal of the first two lines. As it stands, however, the poet appears to need to provide the Western audience with this reassurance that the image is significant.

The second factor was the appreciation of haiku as an apparent Zen art, derived from authors such as D.T.Suzuki, R.H.Blyth and Alan Watts and taken up with enthusiasm by writers such as Jack Kerouac and, with a more thorough devotion to haiku, James Hackett. The final factor was an adoption of Shiki's recommendation as the method of haiku, 'sketching from life' (*shasei*), which informs much of William J.Higginson's technical advice in *The Haiku Handbook*. Shiki's perspective, derived in part from his own exposure to Western literature and art, seemed to point to a convergence of Eastern and Western traditions and offered access to the otherwise mysterious structures of haiku. These factors, added together, give us a list of aims that guide the Western haiku poet: concision, directness, honesty, simplicity, immediacy, objectivity, 'expression through the senses and the heart

² Donald Keene. *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p.46

³ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.57

rather than the intellect' (to quote the guidelines for the Haiku Presence Award) and a focus on the concrete and specific rather than abstractions and generalities. As we have seen, these foundations were firmly in place in North America by the mid-1980s. Building on the American experience, British haiku in the 1990s developed its own theoretical underpinning, largely derived from two sources: poet and editor, Brian Tasker, and the British Haiku Society committee, in which the leading role was played by its Secretary, and later President, David Cobb.

Brian Tasker's haiku magazine *Bare Bones* ran for eight issues between 1992 and 1995. Originally quarterly, there was a gap of eighteen months between #7 and the final issue, #8. In the editorial of #8 Brian Tasker stated that disenchantment with the quality of submissions was a major factor in this delay. During his time as editor Brian Tasker earned a perhaps exaggerated reputation as 'the hard man of haiku' due to the uncompromising limits he placed on what he regarded as acceptable practice in haiku writing. In an effort to encourage quality submissions, *Bare Bones* #5 carried 'The *Bare Bones* Haiku Guidelines'. These Guidelines remain among the most concise statements available on desirable haiku practice, and I summarise the main points here:

- * Haiku are defined primarily by attitude and openness, not by shape or even content. Openness to the moment is a pre-requisite, as haiku arise out of *original* experience which precludes a *stock* response.

- * The form of the poem will emerge from the actual experience. The natural limit is the span of one breath. Seventeen syllables should be regarded as a loose maximum. The average syllable count in an English haiku is 12-14.

- * Titles are not necessary.

- * Haiku should always be firmly in the *here and now*. They should also be open-ended: this means they should be available for the reader.
- * There should be an element of tension and contrast between images. Only plain language should be used, and gross metaphor and all similes should be avoided. Beware of adjectives that imply judgement or personal preference.
- * A haiku should be concise without being telegraphic.
- * The personification of nature and inanimate objects is not appropriate to haiku. Allow things to be themselves.
- * A haiku should convey an atmosphere and depth without being overtly philosophical or sentimental. The form is really defined by its emptiness, i.e. the creative potential of what is left unsaid.
- * Haiku are not epigrams, mottoes, proverbs or aphorisms: these forms are not haiku because they operate on a level of knowledge already familiar, therefore redundant.
- * The spirit of haiku is honouring the present moment, as it is, and as it changes.⁴

The British Haiku Society, meanwhile, has produced its own set of guidelines, existing under various names and going through various editions. A typical version is the third edition, 'Towards a Consensus on the Nature of Haiku', dated 1995 and used to provide advice for entrants for the BHS Hackett Award annual contest. As its title suggests, this document aims to be descriptive rather than prescriptive and attempts to bring together a variety of views on haiku. However, the practical effect of the Consensus (as it was soon nicknamed) was otherwise than intended: it was put to use to arbitrate over the question of whether a given poem was, or was not, a haiku. As a result, 'Consensus' was dropped from the title and later versions were styled, more openly, 'On the Nature of English Haiku.' Yet

'Consensus' remains a useful shorthand when referring to the document and the convergence of views on haiku that it represents. It does allow for a greater range of possibilities than the *Bare Bones* Guidelines, which are the product of an individual perception, but the basis of the Consensus comes close to the *Bare Bones* model. It is therefore not necessary to restate points which have already been mentioned: the following few points represent cases of elaboration not covered in such detail by the *Bare Bones* Guidelines.

* Haiku are conceived or perceived in a moment of keen awareness and the poet's task is to keep the perception fresh and authentic, as a unique event, avoiding generalisation, when recording it ... But immediacy can be recaptured even if the moment is recorded long after it actually happened; even if it depends on accumulation of experience rather than a single event.

* The best haiku do not just recreate the 'haiku moment', pictorially or in a narrative way; they hint at something beyond; they present a movement. This may be the movement of things or creatures in the poem; or the movement of the mind as they are registered; or the little jump as they are put together and an implication realised.

* If we separate two images with a caesura (a dash, say), we create the possibility of 'internal comparison'. Haiku usually have a caesura somewhere, though it is not always shown by punctuation.

* Though the poet aims at compression, haiku, like other forms of poetry, benefit from a melodic, rhythmical quality.

These convergent views may be said to represent a school of haiku. It is a school which

⁴ The final point is taken from Brian Tasker, *Haiku and Zen: the Bodhisattva of Forgetfulness* (Frome: Bare Bones,

aspires to, and probably attains, the status of orthodoxy among English-language haiku poets. That is, the ideas expressed in the formulations above would be acknowledged as accurate by the Haiku Society of America, Haiku Canada and the haiku communities of Australia and New Zealand. As the BHS Consensus states, these views 'now enjoy majority support worldwide'. They are views to which I would personally subscribe: I am an active member of the BHS. Therefore it is to be expected that the content of my own journal, *Presence*, reflects acquaintance with these guidelines. Naturally, the same applies to the BHS journal, *Blithe Spirit*. The newest haiku magazine in the UK, *Snapshots*, may also be said to be out of the same 'stable'. Its editor, John Barlow, is both a BHS member and a subscriber and regular contributor to *Presence*. Both Kevin Bailey, editor of *HQ*, and Erica Facey, editor of *Time Haiku*, have been BHS members in the past, yet neither is a member any longer and they each display preferences in haiku at variance with the Consensus. Ai Li, editor of *still*, is a BHS member but she is also fiercely independent and her magazine is the product of a highly individual viewpoint.

It is important not to view these Guidelines as measuring sticks or a set of tests to be applied to pass or fail a given haiku. In fact, the Guidelines are an attempt to articulate something elusive: a taste. This is the reason for their relative long-windedness and the variation between the versions. Haiku appreciation is not a cumbersome process of measurement, it is as instantaneous as the process of composition itself. This is not to judge the Guidelines as an unnecessary encumbrance but to set them in context. It is useful to have conceptual points of reference, but the actual reading experience always takes precedence: we can allow ourselves to be surprised. Yet if we do analyse what works in haiku we are likely to find that judgements close to those outlined in the Guidelines have been applied.

4.3 The variety of haiku forms

In this section I want to catalogue the range of formal possibilities for haiku in English. Although I will not refrain from making qualitative judgements in discussion of the examples, this section is nevertheless descriptive rather than prescriptive. I will list the alternatives in two stages: alternatives to the three-line format; alternatives within the typical three lines. In the latter section I will also include a number of distinctions based on content and dominant tone rather than form.

4.3.1 Alternatives to three-line haiku

Four lines

The mountain lake today,
Quietly silver -
Until the sky came down ...
Bringing ravens.

[Yamanaka, Yamanashi, 10/74] (Tito)⁵

As far as I know, Tito - a British author currently based in Japan - is the only English-language haiku poet who habitually writes in four lines. He may well have been influenced by Nobuyuki Yuasa's translation of Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Yuasa also uses four lines as standard for his translations. Yuasa gives the following reasons for preferring a four-line form:

First, the language of *haiku* ... is based on colloquialism, and in my opinion, the closest approximation of natural conversational rhythm can be achieved in English by a four-line stanza rather than a constrained three-line stanza. Second, even in the lifetime of

⁵ *Blithe Spirit Vol 3 No 2* (April 1993), p.25. Tito's poems always have the date and place of composition appended, and the author regards this information as an integral component of the haiku.

Bashō, *bokku* was given a special place in the series [of *renga*] and treated half-independently, and in my opinion, a three-line stanza does not carry adequate dignity and weight to compare with *bokku*. Finally, I had before me the task of translating a great number of poems mixed with prose, and I found it impossible to use the three-line form consistently.⁶

Tito makes his own case thus:

I enjoy two things in particular about my own haiku quatrain form ('haiqua'): [1] the extra line-end hiatus, which slows down the delivery of information (for in the Western poetry tradition one pauses at the end of each line), and [2] the increased possibilities for contrast. In three-line haiku, if you want a mid-poem *kireji*-like emotional pause, you can only contrast one line against two; in 'haiqua,' you can oppose one with three or two with two ...⁷

Although the four-line form has clear advantages - greater scope for music and cadence, more methodical development of an idea, a more relaxed tone - these advantages are not necessarily native to haiku. They closely resemble, or match, the natural advantages of *tanka* over haiku and I think therefore that there are intrinsic (not merely numerical) reasons for regarding the four-line haiku as occupying a mid-point between haiku and *tanka*. Putting classification to one side, I think the form very often succeeds. Other British poets to have employed the form successfully include Susan Rowley and Geoffrey Daniel. Its use in North America has been rare.

Two lines

sparrows sunning
on the slaughterhouse

(Martin Shea)⁸

the cat's whiskers
brushing tinsel

(Penny Harter)⁹

⁶ Nobuyuki Yuasa (trans.), *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp.48-9

⁷ Stephen Henry Gill, "Haiku as Poetry and Sound" in *Frogpond* Supplement XX (1997), pp.24-5

⁸ Cor van den Heuvel, op. cit., p.210

Two-line haiku work effectively in cases where the haiku includes an internal comparison, stripping the comparison down to the minimum detail required to make it effective. In the example by Martin Shea the brevity of the introduction sets up the blunt shock of the conclusion. In the example by Penny Harter the two-line form draws attention to the tantalising simplicity of the relation between whiskers and tinsel. In both cases, two lines seems an inevitable outcome of a commitment to 'wordlessness': the minimum information necessary. I know of no poet specialising in two-line haiku. British poets who have used the form effectively include Frank Dullaghan, Stuart Quine and Susan Rowley. It should also be mentioned that practice in the two-line form is encouraged by renga writing, of which it is an integral part.

One line

leaving all the morning glories closed (Elizabeth Searle Lamb)¹⁰

one fly everywhere the heat (Marlene Mountain)¹¹

There are two sub-varieties of one-line haiku: with or without breaks. A common practice in writing one-line haiku has been to include breaks marked by spaces, which give a structure comparable to the familiar three lines (or in some cases, two parts comparable to two lines). Reasons for preferring one line to three appear to be subtle and intuitive, a felt effect not easily analysed. One possible advantage is enhanced ambiguity. Cor van den Heuvel notes:

The most common argument for one-liners is that the Japanese write haiku in one vertical line or column and therefore we should write in one line also, but of course horizontally in the Western style.¹²

⁹ Ibid., p.87

¹⁰ Ibid., p.119

¹¹ Ibid., p.155

¹² Ibid., p.11

In cases where the one-line haiku is written without breaks, this would indicate that the poem is to be read without pausing. A special case of this possibility is discussed under the next heading.

One line, no spaces

starrynightlentyourmirror (Alexis Rotella)¹³

As well as indicating that the poem is to be read without a pause - which, in this example, would result in a breathlessness appropriate to erotic content - the closing of spaces seems to bring about an increased degree of correspondence between the elements of the poem. It is as if all the words are made to relate to each other. Here, 'your' is allowed to apply to 'starrynight', an imaginative reading which would not have been encouraged by conventional presentation in three lines.

Concrete haiku

in the forest
tracks of a deer
di 't se
dn em know
to where
to
go (Gilles Fabre)¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., p.197

kkkkk
 cccccc
 ooooooo
 cccccc
 aaaaa
 eee
 p

(Marlene Mountain)¹⁵

It is arguable that concrete haiku should be classed as a minimalist form of concrete poetry with only tangential relevance to haiku. Much depends on the particular case. In Marlene Mountain's 'peacock', where the letters are repeated, ascending vertically, to mimic the shape of a peacock's fanned tail, the presentation accounts for all the interest of the poem. The word itself hardly constitutes a haiku; it is unrelated, and therefore relatively uninspiring. In Fabre's 'in the forest' however, the poem would have been meaningful as a haiku if presented conventionally; the attention to layout provides added value, increasing the appeal to the visual imagination.

Haiku with a concrete element

my neighbor's rooster hops the stick i throw (Marlene Mountain)¹⁶

W OME TO VERMONT
 on the border sign
 a farmer's coat (Gilles Fabre)¹⁷

In these examples layout has been used to allow the presentation to communicate directly, bypassing ordinary linguistic and logical structures. The concrete element is perhaps more effective through the singling out of a word or phrase for special attention. The rest of the

¹⁴ *Presence #6* (January 1998), p.8

¹⁵ Cor van den Heuvel, op. cit., p.162

¹⁶ Ibid., p.157

haiku, unmodified, has a grounding effect, fulfilling usual expectations and throwing the isolated word or line into sharper relief.

Three-word / two-word / one-word haiku

scarecrow
coughs
butterflies

(Alan Pizzarelli)¹⁸

stars crickets

(George Swede)¹⁹

tundra

(Cor van den Heuvel)²⁰

These exercises in ultra-minimalism are, I contend, justified primarily by their playfulness. They have risen to the challenge to take 'wordlessness' as close to its logical conclusion as it can go. (The ultimate would be a blank page!) The three-word and two-word forms do allow for the possibility of internal comparison and creative juxtaposition and, as such, they have to be regarded as having potential as fully valid haiku. I would defend my own two-worder

puddles

bubble²¹

as containing as much tension and action as a typical full three lines. Van den Heuvel's 'tundra', however, does come close to reducing the exercise to the absurd. I agree that there are good reasons why 'tundra' should work where another single word might not. It is vivid, communicating a sense of landscape. The starkness of the single word reflects the bleakness

¹⁷ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.18

¹⁸ van den Heuvel, op. cit., p.168

¹⁹ Ibid., p.241

of that landscape; so does the blank white page which (as originally presented) surrounds it. It becomes an isolated utterance dropped into a vast expanse in a way which parallels the hopping of Bashō's frog into its pond; and yet, despite this, it remains an isolated, unrelated word, which it is absurd to consider copyrighted. I think the exercise of presenting a one-word haiku does draw attention to the elemental character of the concrete noun: every concrete noun is an image which speaks to the senses and is a kind of proto-haiku. But does the trick bear repetition? The proper composition of haiku involves the combination of such elements, the arrangement of images so that they illuminate each other.

4.3.2 Varieties of three-line haiku

Single image / complete sentence

Nudged by rain	
Yew berries shift and roll	
Along a tombstone	(Cicely Hill) ²²

The typical Japanese haiku includes a caesura or syntactical break, marked by a 'cutting word', usually after the fifth or twelfth syllable, that is, in translated terms, at the end of the first or second line. Haiku in English often preserve this tendency to break but in this opening example the pause - at the end of the first line - is unmarked and slight. The picture is complete. The effectiveness of this haiku is a result of the clarity of presentation, the delicacy of the verbs of motion (Nudged, shift, roll) and the vivid colour of the berries against the background of rain and stone. It is a single image, finely observed, given with sensitive attention to detail.

²⁰ Ibid., p.255

²¹ Martin Lucas, *darkness and light* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1996)

Two images in juxtaposition

Remembrance Sunday
only the faint rumble
of a distant train (Richard Goring)²³

Although the caesura here is unmarked, it is clearly present at the end of the first line. The rumbling train and the day of remembrance are set against each other with the intention that a spark of intuitive insight should result. Perhaps it is during the two minutes silence on Remembrance Sunday that the train becomes audible. However, this conclusion is suggested rather than demanded: this is classical haiku technique, as described by Donald Keene, thus:

... the haiku, for all its extreme brevity, must contain two elements, usually divided by a break marked by what the Japanese call a 'cutting word' (kireji). One of the elements may be the general condition – the end of autumn, the stillness of the temple grounds, the darkening sea – and the other the momentary perception. The nature of the elements varies, but there should be the two electric poles between which the spark will leap for the haiku to be effective; otherwise it is no more than a brief statement.²⁴

5-7-5 syllables

on the edge of sleep:
the silent glide of a star
into nothingness (Brian Tasker)²⁵

In America, the 5-7-5 pattern has been particularly associated with poets who are also conservative in matters of content, specialising in keenly perceived nature-poetry: James W.Hackett, O.Mabson Southard, Foster Jewell, Robert Spiess. In the UK there are several poets - James Kirkup, Colin Blundell, Eric Speight and others - who write exclusively or

²² David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1998), p.53

23 Ibid., p.41

²⁴ Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), pp.40-41.

predominantly in the 5-7-5 pattern, preferring the discipline of a structure. James Kirkup has claimed that the Japanese model should hold good for writers in any language:

A syllable is a syllable, in whatever language it is written or spoken ... As a professional poet versed in all disciplines, my own preference is for the traditional 5-7-5-syllable form in haiku, simply because I find it more intellectually and artistically satisfying. As Auden once said to me: 'What's the use of having rules if you don't observe them? You lose the whole fun of the thing.'²⁶

But, as we have seen, it is debatable whether the sound-symbols in which haiku are counted qualify as syllables in the English sense at all. Brian Tasker has attacked James Kirkup's views as 'a superficial attempt to argue that all languages are equal'. His own position is that the essence of haiku is 'the acceptance of things as they are, not passively but as dynamically as life itself'²⁷ and that 5-7-5 is best left to happen by accident. So, at the risk of being provocative, I illustrate with an example of one of his own, above.

Organic form

rain on leaves
the piano-tuner's
scattered notes (James Kirkup)²⁸

The term 'organic form' is derived from an article by Mel McClellan in *Blithe Spirit*.²⁹ It is an alternative to 'free form' and is used to emphasise the fact that 'free form' does not equate to formlessness - an interior logic is at work; the poem should sound well and flow. A majority of haiku currently published is in the free form category. Again, I am being provocative in

²⁵ Brian Tasker, *Woodsmoke* (From: Bare Bones, 1993)

²⁶ James Kirkup, *Formulas for Chaos* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1994), prologue

²⁷ *Bare Bones* #8 (1995), p.35

²⁸ *Bare Bones* #2 (1992)

²⁹ '... the "organic" style, where form is reinvented for each new poem / experience, seems best for haiku, enabling form and content to reflect each other.' (Mel McClellan, "Some thoughts on the Haiku Process", in

my choice of illustration. This is a comparatively rare venture by James Kirkup outside the confines of 5-7-5, but it works admirably, with a breathtaking internal comparison.

2-3-2 stresses

Jeep tracks
over deer tracks
in new snow

(William R Mosolino)³⁰

a yellow leaf
stuck between screen and window
not a word

(Selma Stefanile)³¹

William J Higginson, acting on a suggestion by R.H.Blyth, argues that

a three-line structure of two, three, and two accented syllables, respectively, would establish rhythmical proportions similar to those of traditional Japanese haiku.³²

He points out that this is not intended as 'the last word on the subject of haiku form'. It is a suggestion

... offered to provide a model of an English-language form that corresponds both to our sense of poetic tradition and to the quantities and rhythmical proportions of, as well as the amount of information normally contained in, traditional Japanese haiku.³³

He gives the examples quoted above, which 'happen to be in the form' of 2-3-2 stresses and his choice of 'happen to be' here seems relevant. My guess is that the writers did not aim at any specific form and Higginson's classification is retrospective. This does not necessarily lessen the value of this suggestion as an alternative formal possibility to 5-7-5 for English haiku.

Blithe Spirit Vol.6 No.2 (May 1996), p.9)

³⁰ William J.Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*, p.107

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p.105

2-2-2 stresses

as light fails
sound of a stream
entering the river

(Martin Lucas)³⁴

Asleep or awake,
The night is long -
The sound of the rapids.

(Santōka, tr.Stevens)³⁵

George Marsh argues that 'Seven-stress poems of the kind that Higginson recommends are too lumpy, full and indigestible in English.' He proposes an amendment to Higginson's 2-3-2 stress definition, illustrating his alternative with the poems quoted above.

the haiku has three two-stressed lines and unstressed syllables up to a maximum of fifteen ... Variations in the two-stress line structure are exceptionally used for effect - an effect which works because our rhythmic expectation is for two.³⁶

He reminds us that this is not a rule but an observation:

'There are certainly exceptions, but there is also a "point of rest" where the thing, when it settles, is at its central balance.'³⁷

Arbitration between the seven and six stress models might be possible on the basis of a statistical analysis of a body of 'free form' haiku. How many stresses do writers typically allow when judging by ear?

Haiku with metaphor

undulating landscape,
hills are enlarged waves
in the nightfall ocean

(Ertore José Palmero)³⁸

³³ Ibid., p.106

³⁴ Martin Lucas, *darkness and light*

³⁵ John Stevens (trans.), *Mountain Tasting: Zen Haiku by Santōka Taneda*, p.83

³⁶ George Marsh, "Stresses in English Haiku" in *Bûthe Spirit* Vol.8 No.1 (March 1998), p.19

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Hill: British Haiku Society Members' Anthology 1994* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1994)

One critical objection to metaphor in haiku is that it introduces an element of subordination. In this example, the ocean is made use of to describe the hills; its independent reality goes unappreciated. Implicit metaphor, such as that in James Kirkup's 'rain on leaves' above, is much more effective: each image describes the other and either or neither can be regarded as metaphorical. A second objection is that metaphor can become an excuse for resting content at the level of description. In Palmero's haiku, lines two and three draw attention to a certain visual resemblance which allows us to see line one in rather more detail. But we might be seeing it on the television or at the cinema: there is little sense of 'presence'. Our feelings, and senses other than sight, are not engaged.

We *can* find examples of successful use of overt metaphor in haiku, but they are very rare. This poem, by Maurice Tasnier, goes beyond description and attains convincing evocation. We hear, as well as see, the scene, and our feelings are engaged:

school gate
mothers unravelling
a tangle of children³⁹

We must, then, judge metaphor on its merits. Ordinarily, metaphor clutters and obscures the picture. But Maurice Tasnier's 'tangle' clarifies and, in doing so, is justified. Whatever 'rules' we make in haiku, we are failing in our duty to be alert as readers if we are not alert to the possibility of exceptions.⁴⁰

Haiku with simile

Even more so than metaphor, simile creates difficulties in haiku. It is almost always

³⁹ *Time Haiku* 13 (2001), p.6

unsubtle, and it is hard to see how it could ever be necessary. But again there are exceptions:

Walking through leaves,
the beech mast underneath
popping like seaweed

(Billy Watt)⁴¹

In this case, the poem is only partially justified by the aptness of the comparison since, despite the undeniable resemblance, in the last analysis beech nuts pop like beech nuts and only seaweed pops exactly like seaweed. Also, the poem records the drift of attention rather than its focus. But it succeeds precisely because of the honesty with which it does so. It brings to notice a spontaneous association in an unguarded way. Simile is generally heavy-handed, and it undermines immediacy, but here — in my reading, at least, — it is unforced. Such examples are very, very rare.

Haiku with titles

The established consensus is that haiku are not given titles. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule. In British haiku journals: titled haiku are almost unknown in *Blithe Spirit*; there are, on average, one or two per issue in *Presence* (i.e. one or two per cent of the total haiku per issue); in *HQ*, by contrast, titling is common. Sometimes a title acts as the functional equivalent of a footnote, as in this rare example of a titled haiku (or senryu?) from *Blithe Spirit*, which would be puzzling outside the context which the title supplies:

In Japan

stepping into slippers
for the single
step to the toilet

(Philip Rowland)⁴²

⁴⁰ I offer a more detailed treatment of subtle applications of metaphor in sub-section 4.4.6.

⁴¹ unpublished (due in *Presence* #14)

⁴² *Blithe Spirit* Vol 8 No 2 (June 1998), p.6

Reasons sometimes given for the unacceptability of titles are that either they are redundant or they become a way of smuggling in an extra line, counter-acting the virtue of brevity. However, since four-line haiku exist, and since haiku with headnotes (short prose introductions, the shortest form of haibun) also flourish, it would seem to be fairer to judge titled haiku on their merits. It would be easier to dismiss haiku with titles if, in fact, they were unknown in the Japanese tradition. However, numerous well-known haiku by Bashō and Issa, for example, are embedded within prose accounts (haibun). The prose acts as a prescript to supply context, and fulfils much the same function as a title. These headings may be short descriptions of the occasion of writing, dedications, or locations, as in the following example:

On the road to Nara

it is spring!
a hill without a name
in thin haze

(Bashō, tr. M.Ueda)⁴³

Deadpan

Cold tea
in a cold cup
paperwork

(Ken Jones)⁴⁴

Turning to a series of classifications on the basis of tone, I record this superb evocation of the experience of drudgery. Nature is only faintly present here, through the repeated 'cold', yet a sense of *sabi* is evoked, a poignant solitude as effective as Buson's *rats / running over the dishes / the cold* or Bashō's *freshly washed / white leeks / the cold*. Despite the location in an office there is nevertheless an echo of a seasonal connection.

⁴³ Makoto Ueda, *Basho and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, p.126

⁴⁴ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.59

Homeliness and Grandeur

Through a hole
in a borrowed tent
the Milky Way

(Steve Shapiro)⁴⁵

This haiku unites the small-scale and familiar with the vast and impersonal. As such, it displays the Japanese aesthetic value of *yūgen*, the profoundly mysterious and moving. (See sub-section 4.5.3 below for more on *yūgen*.) It is in direct descent from, and probably consciously derived from, Issa's *so beautiful / through a hole in the paper screen / the Milky Way*.

Humour

children panicking
out of the tiger cage
a wasp

(David Cobb)⁴⁶

Walking my friend's dog
I am shown where his mistress lives
and which is his pub.

(Eric Speight)⁴⁷

the elevator
descending to the lobby
with my deadly fart

(Dee Evetts)⁴⁸

the men on both sides
have taken
my armrests

(Karen Sohne)⁴⁹

Humour is present as a minor ingredient in many haiku. It is a clearly discernible undertone in, for example, Ken Jones' 'Cold tea' above. Some haiku aim primarily to amuse. I illustrate with four examples showing something of the possible range: gentle condescension from

⁴⁵ William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), p.187

⁴⁶ David Cobb & Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.26

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.91

David Cobb; barbed wit from Eric Speight; schoolboy crudity from Dee Evetts; amused indignation from Karen Sohne. All four examples are perhaps closer to senryu than true haiku. (See sub-section 4.6.1 below for a discussion of the interface between the two forms.) Karen Sohne's poem most resembles a typical senryu, being a form of social comment. However, it is haiku-like in its presentation as a single incident without generalisation.

Indirectness

Half of the minnows
 within this sunlit shallow
 are not really there (James W.Hackett)⁵⁰

Haiku should give us sensations and intuitions rather than thoughts. Although philosophical ruminations are beyond its scope, sometimes reflection can be a means to the end of evocation. This haiku achieves some success, despite lacking the virtue of directness.⁵¹

Sensual indulgence

letting my tongue
 deeper into the cool
 ripe tomato (Michael McClintock)⁵²

⁴⁸ *A Small Umbrella* (New York: Spring Street Haiku Group, 1995)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cor van den Heuvel, op. cit., p.76

⁵¹ The poetic value of directness in haiku has some potential for causing confusion, since it can be used in what appear to be contradictory senses. It is a value in the sense in which it is used in the Imagist manifesto: direct presentation of the image. But a consequence of this is that these images 'reflect intuitions' while thought and feeling remain implied. Conversely, where thought (or feeling) is stated directly, this can result in a more oblique presentation of the image. As a general rule this is a less successful approach in haiku, but there are exceptions, of which this example by James W.Hackett is one.

⁵² Ibid., p.136

Whether epicurean or erotic, a focus on a heightened sensuality is a clear option for an art-form based on keen perception of sensory experience.

Elegy

dead by the roadside
the hare's eye holds the sky (Stuart Quine)⁵³

The sadness associated with *wabi* and *sabi* (see below, sub-section 4.5.3) is experienced in its starkest form in contemplation of death. David Cobb has written many fine haiku on this theme. It may even be claimed that such haiku have a therapeutic value, expression assisting the grieving process. This may sound a grandiose claim when applied to the death of a hare, but the phenomenon of roadkill, too, requires an effort of adjustment on the part of the observer.

Compassion, social awareness

crossing the bombarded bridge
one by one in starlight
refugees (Kohjin Sakamoto)⁵⁴

The absence of comment, the detachment, is appropriate to haiku rather than senryu. Nature is present in the 'starlight' and this touch gives a modulating and moving quality, stimulating a sympathy which is also a haiku rather than a senryu effect. Haiku is a particularly popular form in Serbia and Croatia and the recent conflict in those countries has produced many fine haiku on the theme of war.

⁵³ *Blüte Spirit Vol 3 No 2* (April 1993), p.27

⁵⁴ *Blüte Spirit Vol 4 No2* (May 1994), p.18

Clearly, this list of haiku types is far from exhaustive but it is intended to suggest something of the range of possibilities.

4.4 Aspects of haiku content

4.4.1 Punctuation

Punctuation in haiku can be considered under two sub-headings: personal style and cutting punctuation.

(a) Personal Style. This concerns primarily capitals and full stops at the beginning and end of each haiku. The commonest practice is to do without both. The effect is to soften the beginning and ending of the poem, lending a sense of incompleteness, perhaps emphasising the flow of experience of which the particular haiku is an extract. (Some poets extend decapitalisation to include the personal 'I', de-emphasising the self, perhaps in accordance with Buddhist principles.) Use of capitals and a full stop, by contrast, marks the haiku as complete, aspiring to the same degree of grammatical coherence as any other text. Tito is one poet who has adopted as standard the practice of capitalising each line and using a full stop. Cicely Hill usually capitalises each line but uses no full stop. Ken Jones is one of a number of poets who use an opening capital only, with no full stop. There is also a minority of poets who are inconsistent and seem to have no set practice. The whole area is purely a matter of personal preference and it seems desirable to preserve diversity. (My editorial policy in *Presence* is always to respect the original layout and punctuation of submissions.) However, inconsistency by an individual poet within a single publication does look messy, as if evidence of absent-mindedness, and should perhaps be avoided.

(b) Cutting Punctuation. This occurs within the body of a haiku, usually at the end of the first or second line, although this category can also be extended to include an ellipsis or exclamation mark at the end of the poem. It is a direct inheritance from the Japanese *kireji*, or 'cutting word', used to add emphasis and to break the haiku into two juxtaposed parts. In English haiku, cutting punctuation typically takes one of the following forms: colon; semi-colon; comma; dash; double dash; ellipsis; line break or indentation; exclamation mark. Insofar as a consensus exists it is that all such punctuation should be used sparingly: if the poem makes as much sense without it, it may safely be omitted. Again, personal preference plays a large part, with the extreme positions being: liberal use to provide a highly guided reading experience; and, avoidance of all punctuation under all circumstances. The choice between a dash and a double dash, for instance, is a matter of taste. The double dash is fairly common practice in America whereas (British poet) Colin Blundell regards it as ugly and undesirable. Personally, I would prefer to see exclamation marks used very sparingly, but I know of one poet - Colin Nixon - who seems to use them in almost every haiku. Some punctuation choices *are* dictated, or at least suggested, by meaning: a colon naturally implies a degree of logical inference; an ellipsis creates a 'fade' effect, emphasising incompleteness, thus ...

4.4.2 Layout

As with punctuation, layout can be considered under two aspects. General layout is a matter of personal taste. Options include centre alignment and indentation of one or two lines. For example, Ruth Robinson's haiku are usually centred; Cicely Hill's haiku usually have the first and third lines indented.

Of greater significance is layout which affects or reflects the meaning of the poem, either using indentation or a line space to replace punctuation, suggesting a pause in reading, or incorporating a 'concrete' element, as in the following examples:

she dresses

under her arm
the moon

(LeRoy Gorman)⁵⁵

our longtail boat g i n g over the wave off another boat (Gilles Fabre)⁵⁶

4.4.3 Season Words

Season words are central to the Japanese conception of haiku, but they have never played such a major role in haiku in English. There are two main reasons for this. To begin with, the Japanese use of season words relies heavily on a tradition which has allocated particular words to a set place in the calendar. Although the allocation of many words is either self-evident (e.g. 'spring rain') or obvious (e.g. 'snow'), a good number seem to have been placed according to principles which appear to the Western observer to be mysterious. Sparrows are resident rather than migratory - why place them in spring? Similarly with cormorants - why place them in summer? Perhaps because cormorant fishing is a summer activity. Dragonflies are placed not in summer but in autumn, probably because early autumn is the time when several attractive species are at their liveliest and most visible. Daffodils are placed not in spring but in winter - the Japanese daffodil apparently flowers earlier than our

⁵⁵ William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*, p.131

⁵⁶ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.8

species.⁵⁷ The Japanese sense of season is thus highly refined and each season word can incorporate a cluster of associations. This state of affairs is one which has evolved gradually, beginning to develop over one thousand years ago with the early tanka writers. It is a tradition which we in the West are not able to recreate overnight. Even if we aspire to do so, we face an additional hurdle. Japan is relatively geographically compact and if the seasonal patterns of Kyoto are taken as standard, most of the population live in an area which will not experience wide variations from that standard. Only perhaps in Hokkaido or Okinawa will the divergence be particularly noticeable. English haiku, by contrast, is written in North America, the UK and Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, and in outposts elsewhere. Even within the USA, say, there are great possibilities for divergence between the seasonal patterns of New Mexico and New England. Many North American season words may be unintelligible to British readers, and vice-versa. The difficulty is not restricted to words derived from nature; there are also cultural obstacles. An American cannot be expected to understand all the associations of Guy Fawkes Night any more than a British reader can appreciate the full significance of Thanksgiving. Standardisation would seem to be impossible.

Despite these difficulties, William J Higginson has made a noble attempt to produce an English-language haiku seasonal almanac, published by Kodansha as *Haiku World*. In his introduction he discusses some of the obstacles he had to negotiate. To begin with:

The traditional seasons of Japanese haikai follow the old Chinese solar calendar, with spring beginning midway between the winter solstice and spring equinox. Thus, each season peaks at its solstice or equinox.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ cf. William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*, pp.267-286

We are therefore dealing with a sense of season which differs from the common perception.

A second hurdle is provided by tropical seasons:

The tropics present a special problem for the *saijiki* [seasonal almanac]. People living near the equator have a very different sense of season, since the rhythms of nature are controlled by fluctuations in rainfall rather than by shifts in temperature.⁵⁸

A third challenge is presented by 'the problem of varying translations of closely related phenomena, all of which are seasonal topics'. This is dealt with by Higginson in an essay, 'On Haze, Mist, Fog', which discusses the difficulty that one Japanese word translatable as 'mist', *kasumi*, is a spring word whereas another, *kiri*, belongs to autumn.

In Japan it is common practice to use a *saijiki*, or index of season words, as a prompt to composition and, whatever the success of *Haiku World*, it is hard to envisage it being used by English-language authors in the same way. It is quite usual for haiku periodicals to retain special seasonal sections - *Blithe Spirit* does so, in the UK - but I think it is safe to assume that most haiku in these sections were classified by their authors as a secondary process after composition, rather than being written to order. English-language authors do not usually aim to write haiku on specific seasonal themes unless stimulated to do so by, for example, the rules of a competition such as that set by the Yuki Teikei Society of California which provides a list of season words for the use of entrants.

So it seems that season words in English haiku are doomed to rise no higher than the status of afterthought or fossil relic of Japanese origins. Yet this conclusion overlooks the fact that many fine haiku have been written in which season words play a key role, and if they do so

⁵⁸ William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac*, p.19

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21

unobtrusively this is probably a strength rather than a weakness. I give here some examples in which the poets have taken a straightforward seasonal idea and set it in particularly striking juxtaposition, using the season powerfully rather than as a mere convention:

red leaves -
I didn't change
the calendar page

(Ion Codrescu)⁶⁰

autumn chill -
without its hanging plant
the chain clinks

(Jeff Witkin)⁶¹

Spring rain:
the lid is dancing
over boiling beans.

(Marinko Spanovic)⁶²

toothless comb in the winter grass

(Penny Harter)⁶³

4.4.4 Present Tense

Haiku appearing in contemporary journals are almost exclusively in the present tense, used because it heightens the effect of immediacy. Although Japanese haiku are also generally in the present tense, a minority are in a perfect tense. The most famous of such examples is Bashō's

on a bare branch
a crow has settled
autumn dusk⁶⁴

As a rare example of a non-present tense haiku in English, I offer Gemma Bristow's

⁶⁰ *Mirrors: International Haiku Forum Vol.10* (1998)

⁶¹ *Frogpond Vol.20 No.3* (December 1997), p.75

⁶² *Woodpecker 1998 No.1* (March 1998), p.49

Hospital window -
the rainbow
came right through the slats.⁶⁵

In speculating why present tense has been abandoned here, I suggest that the moment was somehow *too* instantaneous. It was so fleeting that to record it as in the process of happening would be affected. By the time it came to awareness it had passed.

4.4.5 Internal Comparison

One technique deployed by both Japanese and English-language haiku poets, to impart depth and weight to superficially matter-of-fact observations, is internal comparison. This involves a juxtaposition of two diverse images which have some non-logical relation or resonance. R.H.Blyth has suggested that cause-and-effect connections are a weakness in haiku, and he has high praise for haiku which exhibit a synchronicity of apparently unrelated phenomena. A perfect example is Buson's

As they were lighting
The lanterns at the barrier,
The autumn storm subsided.

Blyth comments:

The connection between the lighting of the lamps of the barrier gate and the falling of the wind is an almost entirely accidental one, viewed objectively and scientifically. Seen subjectively or sentimentally, we may ascribe any relation to any unrelated groups of phenomena, and we then get what is called the pathetic fallacy. But when

⁶³ Penny Harter, *The Monkey's Face* (Fanwood: From Here Press, 1987), p.24

⁶⁴ My translation

⁶⁵ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.12

in the poetic or religious realm, (a region that is not susceptible of the intellectual, dichotomous division of related and unrelated), we are at one with the events concerned, we feel the interpenetrative and not the causal relation of things. It is in this state that the above verse was written and is to be read. The lighting of the lamps and the dying down of the wind are perceived rather as the leaves and blossoms of a flowering bush, where the relation is a vital and not a mechanical one.⁶⁶

Bashō was fascinated by such subtle relationships and he built a theory of renga linking on this basis. According to Bashō, the most admired kind of renga link was *kaori*, or 'scent'. This implies a felt or intuitive correspondence as opposed to any logical inference. (For further detail see Chapter Eight, 'On Renga.')

In these examples of English haiku we can see similar synchronous associations at work:

reading a mystery -
a cool breeze comes through
the beach roses

(Cor van den Heuvel)⁶⁷

pregnant again ...
the fluttering of moths
against the window

(Janice Bostok)⁶⁸

Internal comparison is closely related to the issue of metaphor in haiku, to which I will now turn.

4.4.6. Metaphor

Ostensibly, haiku avoids metaphor.⁶⁹ However this is true only in one sense and can be understood by analysing metaphor into two kinds. I refer to these kinds as 'closed' and

⁶⁶ R.H.Blyth, *Haiku Vol.3: Summer-Autumn* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1982), p.959

⁶⁷ *Vuursteen Vol.15 No.3* (1995), p.115

⁶⁸ Cor van den Heuvel (ed.), op. cit., p.46

'open.' Closed metaphor is figurative language, in which one image is used to stand for another; the words do not mean precisely what they say. Terence Hawkes characterises it thus:

What happens in metaphor is that the 'literal' or 'dictionary' level at which words usually operate is systematically avoided, even violated.⁷⁰

I call such metaphor 'closed' because it is closed to the possibility of a literal interpretation. Its use in haiku is problematic because it undermines the value of presence. Such an image cannot be interpreted as referring to immediate sensory experience and, furthermore, two images in a metaphorical relation (of this kind) are connected in a hierarchical way. That is, one image is interpreted in the light of the other and we look past, or through, one image (at the expense of its tangible reality) in order to focus on, and understand, the other. Haiku is sensitive to the 'violation' which Hawkes describes. It is an art of making natural images vividly present to the sensory imagination and it is forced to find such metaphorical language (including all simile) unsatisfactory.

However these objections do not apply to the other kind of metaphor. 'Open' metaphor is open to the literal interpretation and may, at first sight, escape notice as metaphor at all. In open metaphor, the words mean what they say, but they imply *more* than this. Such metaphor adds a dimension of reference to the poem while taking nothing from the literal value of the surface. It thus fulfils what Bashō regarded as a vital criterion for a good haiku, by providing 'surplus meaning' (*yōjō*), and it could even be argued that it is indispensable. A haiku which is rigidly literal lacks depth and resonance. As many novice haiku writers soon

⁶⁹ By 'haiku' here I mean haiku as it has been understood in the West. I do not wish to make any such categorical assertion concerning haiku history in Japan.

⁷⁰ Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen, 1972), p.71

discover, a merely arbitrary yoking of two coincidental images does not constitute a poem. Poetic resonance is achieved in cases where the constituent images of a poem can be understood as metaphors for each other. In many haiku, this effect is subtle, but it is best demonstrated by examples which make the connection obvious:

freshly fallen snow –
opening a new package
of typing paper

(Nick Avis)⁷¹

the branches
of the cedar tree –
islands in the bay

(Claire Bugler Hewitt)⁷²

These coincidences seem almost too good to be true, and we are entitled to doubt whether there was an actual experience, a 'haiku moment', in either case. Perhaps the poet has invented either the snow or the typing paper, either the cedar tree or the islands. But it does not matter if they have done so: whether by artifice or serendipity, they offer the images as united in a moment of experience and this makes them present to our senses. Snow and paper, tree and islands, each is simultaneously *both* the other *and* itself.

There is a second sense in which a metaphorical dimension applies to our reading of haiku. In this case, rather than separating elements of the poem, we may take the haiku as a whole. Let us consider the following, by Penny Harter, which is generally thought to represent one of the highest achievements of naturalness in Western haiku:

broken bowl
the pieces
still rocking⁷³

⁷¹ Cor van den Heuvel (ed.), op. cit., p.38

⁷² *Blithe Spirit Vol.7 No.3* (August 1997), p.27

⁷³ Cor van den Heuvel (ed.), op. cit., p.84

I would argue that 'broken' carries metaphorical connotations that deepen the haiku beyond the level of the simple snapshot that it superficially appears to be. It speaks to our sense of loss. Notwithstanding the fact that we are dealing with mere kitchen equipment and not a leg, let alone a life, one dimension of our response to this haiku is a kind of grief that gives the event an emotional colouring and unites writer and reader in a shared experience. Furthermore, 'bowl' has an archetypal significance as a primitive receptacle and work of careful craft, even if the actual bowl that inspired the poem is at least as likely to have been cheap, mass produced and easily replaceable. This haiku, then, has the merit of vivid surface intelligibility while at the same time touching on mysteries – impermanence, loss, and a sense of shock – which we can't confidently understand. The power of the poem is that through the mere facts we can access levels of profounder significance.

Through such applications of metaphor in haiku we can come to the general through the particular and the enduring through the momentary. It has been noted that the season word in Japanese haiku has a metaphorical power. Cherry blossoms, for instance, speak of the fleeting quality of life and beauty. Every time a season word is used it links the poem to the entire previous cultural history of that image, expanding the range of reference far beyond the horizon of an isolated event. Haruo Shirane has identified this simultaneous operation of haiku on two levels as a fundamental characteristic, deriving from the social function of the hokku in renga as a greeting from renga master to host:

Even as the *hokku* includes within it an allegorical address, it reflects, or at least appears to reflect, a careful nonconventional observation of nature. The *ga* [direct expression] contains the *fū* [indirect expression] fully within it. As a consequence, the reader will often miss the allegorical (*fū*) dimension while still appreciating the *hokku* as a lyrical or descriptive (*ga*) poem.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Haruo Shirane, "Aisatsu: The Poet as Guest" in *New Leaves: Studies and Translations of Japanese Literature in Honor of Edward Seidensticker*, ed. A.Galten & A.H.Chambers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993), p.95

This is an example of what I designate as non-duality: two purposes united in a single poem. The haiku can be read as either simple or complex, and either reading is valid. English-language haiku can also carry weight by operating in a similar way, on both the literal and metaphorical dimension. To lose the sense of a particular moment would be to lack solidity; to lose the sense of metaphorical application would be to lack relevance. In this sense, metaphor, the making of imaginative connections, despite being hidden beneath the surface of haiku is, nevertheless, invaluable.

4.4.7 Overt expression of thought or feeling

It is widely held that overt expressions of thought or feeling are undesirable excesses in haiku. Haiku should 'show' rather than 'say'. (For this reason adjectives should also be used sparingly. Over-use of adjectives both clutters the rhythm of a haiku and heavily directs the reader's imaginative response.) A defining difference between haiku and tanka is that there is more scope in the latter for direct expression of emotion. Indeed, it is possible, in a theoretical sense, to turn a haiku into a tanka by the addition of two lines providing 'emotional impact', or to turn a tanka into a haiku by performing the operation in reverse. We can use Rexroth's translation of Hitomaro quoted in Chapter Two, section 2.1, as a clear-cut case. If we remove the last two lines, which express the subjective significance of the experience ('I think of a girl / Who is not here'), we are left with a three-line objective image practically indistinguishable from a haiku ('In the empty mountains / The leaves of the bamboo grass / Rustle in the wind'). Thus, in haiku, emotion generally remains implied; the poem appeals to the reader's intuition. It is absolutely essential, in reading haiku, that we become accustomed to seeking the 'resonance' or significance of the image for ourselves.

(Naturally, this is not a process of 'solving clues', as if there were a single correct interpretation each time, it is simply a matter of being open to whatever the poem suggests.)

However, if avoidance of direct⁷⁵ statement is the rule in haiku, it must be admitted that there are many classical exceptions. Bashō, in places, expresses his feelings directly:

Should I hold it in my hand
It would melt in my burning tears -
Autumnal frost. (Bashō, tr. M.Ueda)⁷⁶

This poem was written on his being shown a tuft of his dead mother's hair and displays what Ueda describes as 'intense and unresolved emotion'. Issa's poetry is full of examples of authorial intrusion. In the following example he does not imply or suggest beauty, as haiku theorists advocate, he states it overtly:

Flea-bites!
They too thanks to her youth
Are beautiful! (Issa, tr. L.Mackenzie)⁷⁷

Among writers of haiku in English to follow Bashō and Issa on this point are Tito, George Marsh and Jim Norton. In the following example, Jim Norton intervenes by supplying an overt statement in the last line, as if 'thinking out loud', interpreting the image for the reader:

In a blue china bowl
two boiled eggs -
their nakedness⁷⁸

(Another example of 'thought' in haiku, which we have already encountered, is James

⁷⁵ To clarify the two contradictory uses of 'direct' – direct image / indirect thought or feeling, vs. direct thought or feeling / indirect image – refer back to footnote 51 in this chapter (page 74).

⁷⁶ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, p.127

⁷⁷ Lewis Mackenzie, op. cit., p.79

W.Hackett's 'Half of the minnows', discussed under the heading of 'Indirectness' in sub-section 4.3.2.)

In these next two examples we are confronted with overt expression of emotion. If we encountered these poems in an Eastern context, we might suspect that they were informed by Buddhist teachings on Impermanence. But it is not necessary to invoke any didactic element. These haiku have a self-evident power. They are touching expressions of a sensitive vulnerability:

Just echoing boards
this empty house
where we laughed and cried

(James Norton)⁷⁹

after the spring clean
wishing I'd played the music box
one last time

(Annie Bachini)⁸⁰

It is, indeed, possible to be too dogmatic about the necessity for objectivity and 'direct presentation of the image' in haiku. Very often the success of the poem hinges on some hint of the inner significance of the moment of experience. A perfect example is this, by Keith J.Coleman:

winter solstice ~
the first time in how many years
sharpening a pencil⁸¹

Here, we could just about create a satisfactory, if somewhat limited, haiku out of the objective elements in lines one and three alone. But the power of this poem is a consequence of the interpretative intrusion in line two. The simple action, so familiar in

⁷⁸ James Norton, *Words on the Wind: Haiku and Scroll-Poems* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.8 No.4 (December 1998), p.18

⁸¹ *Presence* #8 (December 1998), p.28

childhood, acts, in a disarming way, as a measure of ageing and the passage of time. Much of the excitement in reading haiku derives from applying intuition and discovering significance for ourselves. The poet's skill is in knowing when 'to show' is not enough: we need, sometimes, to be told.

4.4.8 Imagination and experience

I have touched on the dichotomy between imagination and experience in my review of *The Haiku Anthology*, and it will come up again when we consider the 'haiku moment'. It should be noted that any haiku writer who takes renga seriously must become accomplished at writing from the imagination. However, even in renga, the usual practice is to write from memory of actual events or to stick to the plausible and avoid the surreal and fantastic. The dichotomy between imagination and experience is paralleled by a division between 'literary' and 'spiritual' writers. That is, poets who take haiku to be a form of literature like any other tend not to object to the inclusion of imaginative elements in haiku. By contrast, poets who see a spiritual value in haiku would be likely to uphold the pre-eminence of actual experience and regard imagination as a contaminant. Use of imagination is not rare in Japanese haiku and theorists who wish to maintain the 'Zen' position and restrict haiku content to lived experience in the moment cannot do so through an appeal to tradition. There is a further parallel here to the discussion of metaphor above, and I would again conclude that while there is value in an imaginative dimension to haiku, it should not be at the expense of the literal meaning of the poem. The relationship between imagination and experience in haiku can be studied by an examination of the following, by Kyoroku, in Blyth's translation:

Even to the saucepan
Where potatoes are boiling, -
A moonlight night.

Blyth comments:

The moon is reflected in the water of the saucepan, but the poet goes beyond the fact that the moon of highest heaven is in the saucepan together with the potatoes. It is not merely the moonbeams but the whole autumn night, the wind in the pine-trees, the darkness, the radiance, - all are in the saucepan.⁸²

Here, imagination and experience are interdependent. It is through imagination that the poet comes to a full appreciation of the significance of the experience. It is the imaginative eye of the poet that becomes aware of the moonlit night boiling along with the potatoes, but nothing in that awareness contradicts the experience. Look in the pan, and you'll find the night there. Symbolically, the two realms of the sublime (the moonlight) and the mundane (the potatoes) are brought together. The imaginative and the literal are fused and each is reliant on the other.

4.4.9 Music: alliteration and cadence

Alliteration, assonance and consonance have always played a part in Japanese haiku, which have aimed to please the ear as well as the mind's eye. A fine example is this, by Santōka:

The thistles -
Bright and fresh,
Just after the morning rain.⁸³

which reads, in the original,

Azami azayaka na asa no ame agari

⁸² R.H.Blyth, *Haiku Vol.3: Summer-Autumn*, p.929

My view is that similar effects in English haiku should be encouraged.

Rhythm and cadence also have a role, even in such a minimal form. I have already noted that Tito prefers to write in four lines because this gives greater scope for musical effects. In his paper, 'Haiku as Poetry and Sound', Tito (Stephen Henry Gill) sets out the case against the minimalistic haiku that have acquired the status of orthodoxy in North America:

A haiku that does not 'sound' - that pays no attention to sound - may be nothing more than a short list of ingredients by which a clue to the taste of a cake is given: hardly poetry by Western standards. In Britain and Ireland at present, there is a lively debate as to whether or not haiku is a form of *poetry* by which we are 'transported' or of *koan*, which need to be 'solved'.⁸³

His call is for haiku 'to be recognizable as poetry rather than as "poetic recipe",' and he supports the argument with his own experience:

I have made many radio programmes featuring haiku for the BBC. They have ranged from poetic interval, to rhapsody, to documentary, to drama, to comedy ... One thing all this has taught me: 'The old pond - / A frog leaps in, / And a splash' will simply not do for the average listener. As it leaves too much to his imagination, it falls flat. The average listener will require things to slow down for the spell to be cast: 'Breaking the silence / Of an ancient pond, / A frog jumped into water - / A deep resonance'. Please do not forget that poetry is not only read, it is *listened to*. The sound of haiku *is* important.⁸⁴

Can haiku be seen as a normal species of poetry? Rhymed haiku have never really caught on, despite early rhyming translations by Yasuda and Henderson. (End-rhyme plays no role in Japanese haiku, partly because in a language in which the great majority of words end in a vowel, rhyme would be so facile as to be worthless.) But alliteration, rhythm and cadence are valuable resources. I offer two examples here: Katherine Gallagher's

⁸³ John Stevens (trans.), *Mountain Tasting: Zen Haiku by Santōka Taneda*, p.55

⁸⁴ Stephen Henry Gill, "Haiku as Poetry and Sound" in *Frogpond* Supplement XX (1997), p.23

the boats lift
- sun's late rays
on decaying paint⁸⁶

where the assonance unifies lines two and three, and the delicate sounds of the haiku give it a quality which transcends the apparent ordinariness of the image; and my own

morning mist
a workman whistles
no particular tune⁸⁷

where I believe that the music (morning / mist; workman / whistles; mist / whistles) helps to capture the image and call it into life.

4.4.10 Haiku Moment

There are two relevant kinds of 'haiku moment'. The term is usually used to refer to a moment of keen perception, a flash of sudden insight or awareness in which the poet is suddenly attuned to his / her senses or emotions and an observation is made which forms the basis of a haiku, the poem sometimes taking finished form at a later stage. The task with a haiku is to recreate such a moment for the reader, so that the reading experience brings its own reward, the sudden 'aha.' An effective haiku depends on the communication of this spark of insight: a successful haiku is one which moves the reader, irrespective of the original quality of emotion felt by the writer. There is therefore room for two schools of thought on the subject of the 'haiku moment'. On one view, it is the reader's experience which is the primary concern – there is no objection to contrivance on the part of the writer provided the contrivance works, creating the illusion of profundity and avoiding any

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Katherine Gallagher, *Shifts* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1997)

⁸⁷ David Cobb and Martin Lucas, *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.67

appearance of self-consciousness. The opposite position is to elevate the writer's experience, the original moment, to central importance, even reducing the poem to the level of homage to that moment. It is from such a position that Bashō's *old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water* came to be regarded as the record of a moment of enlightenment in the Zen sense.

In practice, most haiku poets would adopt a position somewhere between these extremes, regarding a moment of insight or emotion as a vital stimulus but seeing also the necessity of communicating this insight to the reader.

I have two parables from my own experience which suggest contradictory conclusions. Firstly, when I won *poetry postcard quarterly's* 'UK Haiku Championship' in 1996, I entered twelve poems. Of these, eleven were 'desk haiku', composed entirely in the comfort of my study. The winning poem, however,

spring dawn -
 watchstrap's
 coolness⁸⁸

was the result of a pure haiku experience, a moment of surprise felt while waking and dressing one March morning. Somehow the authenticity of the moment seemed to transmit itself. Yet, alternatively, I can report Brian Tasker's review of my collection, *darkness and light*, in *Presence* #3. He contrasts two of my poems,

the symphony's
opening bars -
scent of hyacinths

after the goodbye kiss
the sweetness
of a russet apple

⁸⁸ Martin Lucas, *...click...* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1998)

praising the latter for its 'charming casualness'⁸⁹ while criticising the former for its contrivance. Unknown to the reviewer, the former poem did in fact come to me as a response to a single moment of emotive experience whereas the latter poem juxtaposed two separate experiences brought together because I suspected that a stimulating haiku might result. So, on the one hand, an authentic moment has somehow failed to convince while, on the other hand, an illusion of emotion has been evoked by skilful composition.

4.4.11 Haiku moments and haiku myths

The haiku moment, after holding a position of dominance in Western haiku thinking for thirty or forty years, is beginning to be subjected to critical analysis and exposed as something of a mythical beast. Doubts were raised by Hiroaki Sato in the 1980s and these doubts have been expanded upon by Haruo Shirane more recently. In his paper, "Beyond the Haiku Moment: Bashō, Buson and Modern Haiku Myths", Shirane introduces the idea of two axes:

one horizontal, the present, the contemporary world; and the other vertical, leading back into the past, to history, to other poems ... Bashō believed that the poet had to work along both axes. To work only in the present would result in poetry that was fleeting. To work just in the past ... would be to fall out of touch with the fundamental nature of haikai, which was rooted in the everyday world. Haikai was, by definition, anti-traditional, anti-classical, anti-establishment, but that did not mean that it rejected the past. Rather, it depended on the past and on earlier texts and associations for its richness.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *Presence* #3 (November 1996), p.40

⁹⁰ Haruo Shirane, "Beyond the Haiku Moment: Bashō, Buson, and Modern Haiku Myths" in *Modern Haiku* Vol. XXXI, No.1 (Winter / Spring 2000), p.53. Shirane's characterisation of haiku as 'anti-traditional' (etc.) is perhaps over-stated. He is referring to the haikai movement which was born out of a reaction to the perceived stuffiness of serious renga (see sub-section 2.2.1). It is true that Bashō's art emerged from the haikai context but, this apart, he had every respect for the centuries of poetic tradition of both China and Japan. This fact is effectively acknowledged in the sentence which concludes this quotation.



In the view of Shirane, Western poets have fully grasped the principle of the horizontal axis, 'the focus on the present', but have missed the levels of allusive depth which represent the vertical axis. The assumption has been that all haiku should represent direct observation and personal experience, but as Shirane amply demonstrates with examples from both Bashō and Buson, 'haiku that are fictional or imaginary are just as valid.'

As Shirane shows, many haiku by Bashō and Buson embody references to earlier literature, perhaps the poetry of Saigyō, or the Chinese tradition. For example, Bashō's *above the moor / not attached to anything / a skylark sings* recalls Saigyō's tanka, *Like a red lily / growing on the wilderness / left behind by a lark / my heart remains alone, / not attached to anything*.⁹¹ Furthermore, the use of the season word (which, despite the evangelical work of William J. Higginson in *The Haiku Seasons* and *Haiku World*, has yet to become fully established as a dimension of international haiku) is itself a powerful allusive tool. It not only relates the present moment of the poem to the current season, but to every previous poetic incarnation of that same season-word. In Japanese haiku, a similar use is made of famous place names, which have also acquired, over time, their own mass of poetic references.

... the seasonal word, like the famous place name in Japanese poetry, anchors the poem in not only some aspect of nature but in the vertical axis, in a larger communal body of poetic and cultural associations.⁹²

A further level of allusion is implicit in the function of haiku, as the hokku of renga, as a greeting and compliment paid by the renga master to the host of a gathering. In this way, a haiku, rather than being determinedly literal, is often to be taken as a whole in a metaphorical sense. What Shirane does concede, however, is that this metaphorical dimension often

⁹¹ Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, p.156

⁹² Haruo Shirane, *Modern Haiku* Vol.XXXI No.1 (Winter / Spring 2000), p.59

remains implicit and on a superficial level haiku frequently retain an appearance of literal simplicity.

The fundamental difference between the use of metaphor in haiku and that in other poetry is that in haiku it tends to be extremely subtle and indirect, to the point of not being readily apparent. The metaphor in good haiku is often buried deep within the poem. For example, the seasonal word in Japanese haiku tends often to be inherently metaphorical, since it bears very specific literary and cultural associations, but the first and foremost function of the seasonal word is descriptive, leaving the metaphorical dimension implied.⁹³

As can be seen from these insights, the cherished Zen conception of haiku as a few slight brushstrokes of purity and simplicity, conveying the poetic essence of a moment of enlightened presence, emphasises one major dimension of haiku (Shirane's horizontal axis) but excludes another (the vertical axis). This misrepresentation is probably not accidental, but inevitable. As the poetry of immediate experience, haiku is instantly accessible and eminently translatable, open to cultural export and import. As poetry enmeshed in a complex web of cultural associations, however, haiku would be barely translatable and the import tariffs would be prohibitive. It is hardly mysterious that Western enthusiasts have seized on one aspect and chosen to overlook the other. It is reassuring that Shirane accepts that Western notions do represent a good starting-point for the understanding and practice of haiku. At the same time, it is chastening to admit that, up to now, Western poets have been operating within a limiting paradigm. The remainder of this thesis displays, without undue concern, the products of that paradigm, the consensus view of haiku that has attained the status of a poetic tradition of over forty years duration. But I place this section here to record that the shortcomings of this view have been demonstrated and that it may be due for further development. The haiku may be a more complex, subtle and multi-purpose beast than we had, until recently, realised.

4.5 Zen interpretations of haiku

It may be no more than a historical accident that Bashō is known to have practised Zen training. The degree to which his Zen practice informed his sense of poetic mission is debatable. Some have claimed that his most famous haiku,

old pond
a frog jumps in
the sound of water

records a moment of Zen enlightenment; others have disputed this claim. The historical accident was fortunate from the point of view of the popularisation of haiku in the middle years of the twentieth century. Zen and haiku were linked, and haiku rode on the back of the Zen wave. The historical accident has been unfortunate for the same reason. It has led to a misleading overemphasis of a single dimension of haiku, and the curious result that Western haiku poets are perhaps more conscious of the Zen inheritance than Japanese haiku poets have ever been. Yet the Zen connection merits at least a brief examination, for two reasons. Firstly, and crucially, the potent mixture of Zen and haiku exercised a powerful influence on Western readers and gave a decisive impetus to the practice of haiku writing in English. Secondly, and tangentially, there is some practical connection: a significant minority of British haiku poets are, at the same time, practising Zen Buddhists. These names include: Ken Jones, Bill Wyatt, George Marsh, Brian Tasker, Helen Robinson and Stuart Quine. Other haiku poets, such as myself and Colin Blundell, though not practising Buddhists, have made a committed study of Zen on an intellectual level. It was the subject of my MA dissertation, "The appearance of Zen in the West" (Lancaster University, September 1995).

⁹³ Ibid., p.55

4.5.1 Perceptions of Japanese character

D.T.Suzuki is responsible for a presentation of Zen and, by extension, haiku, as simultaneously tantalising and unattainable, fulfilling Western caricatures of Oriental inscrutability. He fuels a fascination for haiku and Zen, while emphasising the alien character of the Japanese mind:

In many ways *haiku* may be said to reflect the Japanese character. First of all, the Japanese are not given to verbosity; they are not argumentative, they shun intellectual abstractions. They are more intuitional and wish to give out facts as facts without much comment.⁹⁴

He is not averse to taking this perception to its logical nationalistic conclusion:

Haiku is the poetic form most natural and most appropriate and most vital for the Japanese genius in giving vent to his or her artistic impulses; and for this reason, perhaps, it takes a Japanese mind to appreciate fully the value of a *haiku*.⁹⁵

(If true, this claim undermines the foundations of this thesis!) Western writers have overlooked this erection of barriers and admitted their own delight in the Oriental arts, as interested observers. A typical response is this, by Alan Watts, which manages to encapsulate many of the defining characteristics of haiku:

Both Chinese and Japanese artists admire beyond everything a certain kind of restraint, an expression which hints rather than states, indicates rather than explains, suggests rather than describes; an art which leaves an enormous amount to the beholder's, or the listener's, imagination, instead of excluding his participation by a perfection of finished detail.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ D.T.Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.230

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.247

⁹⁶ Alan W Watts, "Haiku" in Nancy Wilson Ross (ed.), *The World of Zen* (London: Collins, 1962), p.126

Conrad Hyers, too, sees the Japanese perspective as uniquely stimulating to haiku:

... it is a poetry that only a culture with a devoted attention to the most trifling particulars, and an unusual sense of the comic, could have imagined.⁹⁷

4.5.2 Haiku as Zen art

Between the Japanese character, Zen and the Japanese arts it is not clear which is the cause and which is the effect. All three appear to arise together. (The arts include tea ceremony, flower arranging, martial arts and calligraphy as well as haiku.) A responsible scholarly account should seek to tease out the distinctions and precise causal connections between these three phenomena. One of the best treatments of the subject is by William R. LaFleur. LaFleur argues that 'aesthetic and religious experience merged easily in Japan from early times' and

[In the poetry of Saigyō and Bashō] ... aesthetic vision is virtually the same thing as religious vision. In the cultural context of Japan the weight of tradition invites the two into synthesis ...⁹⁸

In short, in traditional Japanese culture, literature and religion were not compartmentalised in the way that they are understood in the modern, secular West.⁹⁹ The kernel of truth in this position has allowed popularisers of Zen to approach haiku with an attitude of uncritical conflation. Among the Zen-linked, or even Zen-derived, characteristics of haiku the

⁹⁷ Conrad Hyers, *Zen and the Comic Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p.73

⁹⁸ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.161

⁹⁹ LaFleur's position has not convinced all critics. For example,

The Narrow Road to the Deep North is not a religious work. Composed in a secular age, it remains, for all its incipient religious overtones, firmly in the world of literature.
(J. Thomas Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1988), p.71)

following claims can be enumerated: egolessness; poverty of spirit; rejection of discursive intellectuality; humour. For D.T.Suzuki, the haiku poet evinces a commitment to artistic honesty:

Haiku, like Zen, abhors egoism ... The product of art must be entirely devoid of artifice or ulterior motive of any kind.¹⁰⁰

The poverty of haiku is the spiritual concomitant of its material brevity: 'Poverty is Zen and so is *haiku*. We cannot imagine a *haiku* rich in ideas, speculations, and images.'¹⁰¹

For Conrad Hyers,

The haiku is sublime in its very aversion to the sublime, and magnificent in its insistence upon being completely bereft of adornment.¹⁰²

And, 'it has only a beggar's display of the most mundane experiences, and everyday objects, immediately accessible to anyone.'¹⁰³

The well-known practicality of Zen, its aversion to speculation, has its counterpart in haiku's deployment of the concrete noun and its commitment to the value of presence. It is the poetry of experience as opposed to thinking. D.T.Suzuki emphasises that 'A haiku generally is not explicit about what has been going on in the mind of the author'¹⁰⁴ and Alan Watts converts the negativity of this avoidance into a positive resource:

the *haiku* sees things in their 'suchness', without comment – a view of the world which the Japanese call *sono-mama*, 'just as it is.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ D.T. Suzuki, op. cit., p.225

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.254

¹⁰² Conrad Hyers, op. cit., pp.72-3

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.73

¹⁰⁴ D.T. Suzuki, op. cit., p.247

The Zen masters have been noted for their grasp of paradox and their readiness to wield humour and this, too, finds its parallel in the scope of haiku, which reveals 'the combination of sublimity and absurdity, of reverence and humour, of amazement and laughter.'¹⁰⁶

The legacy of Zen to the theory of haiku, irrespective of its debatable contribution to historical poetic practice, is its support for two key values: the *concrete*, as opposed to the abstract, and the *specific*, as opposed to the general. In Zen, questions about enlightenment expressed in general terms may well receive replies that deflect the attention of the questioner onto the tangible world of the senses. Indeed, the content of these replies frequently resembles at least the raw ingredients of a haiku. A perfect example of this process is:

A monk once said to Fuketsu Osho: "Speech and silence tend toward separation [from It] or concealment [of It]. How shall I proceed so as not to violate It?"

Fuketsu replied with the following verse:

"I always remember Konan in the spring
The partridges crying and flowers spilling their fragrance."¹⁰⁷

The values of the concrete and specific have the same bracing and energising effect when embodied in poetry as they do in the anecdote above, and, with whatever subtleties of personal interpretation, they have formed the foundation of the Western haiku tradition.

Their power is most memorably expressed in the following passage from R.II.Blyth:

In haiku, the two entirely different things that are joined in sameness are poetry and sensation, spirit and matter, the Creator and the Created. The coldness of a cold day, the heat of a hot day, the smoothness of a stone, the whiteness of a seagull, the distance of the far-off mountains, the smallness of a small flower, the dampness of

¹⁰⁵ Alan W.Watts, *The Way of Zen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.204

¹⁰⁶ Conrad Hyers, op. cit., p.100

¹⁰⁷ see Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton on Zen* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), p.83

the rainy season, the quivering of the hairs of a caterpillar in the breeze – these things, without any thought or emotion or beauty or desire, are haiku.¹⁰⁸

It is from insights such as this that Western haiku poets took inspiration, and I suggest that this inspiration has power to endure long after the limitations of the historical analysis that gave rise to it have been exposed.

It is worth noting, as a postscript to this short account, that there is at least a small subsection of the Japanese haiku community that maintains a vital link with Zen practice as a poetic resource. Lucien Stryk has interviewed one such haiku poet, Noboru Fujiwara. Fujiwara's description of his poetic method tends to support my account of haiku writing in English. His aim, he says, is ' "a weeding out of all that would clutter, muddy, confuse, leading to great incisiveness, clear purpose"'.¹⁰⁹

This clarity of purpose is reflected in the clear surface of the finished poem. Against attempts to emphasise symbolic or allegorical readings of haiku (e.g. Haruo Shirane's views quoted in the section on metaphor, 4.4.6 above), we can set Fujiwara's confident assertion, which supports the Western haiku values of simplicity and directness: ' "I don't think there has ever been an obscure haiku. The form won't permit it"'.¹¹⁰

4.5.3 The four moods

Here and there, in the course of this thesis, I make reference to various traditional Japanese critical terms which identify desirable aesthetic qualities of haiku. Four of these terms have

¹⁰⁸ R.H.Blyth, *The Genius of Haiku* (British Haiku Society, 1994), p.68

¹⁰⁹ Lucien Stryk, *Encounter with Zen: Writings on Poetry and Zen* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1981) p.245

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.244

been emphasised, by Lucien Stryk and others, as the 'four traditionally recognised dominant moods of Zen-related art.'¹¹¹ These are: *sabi*, *wabi*, *aware* and *yūgen*. Below, I present characterisations of these four moods (they hardly qualify as definitions). The first of each pair of characterisations is taken from Alan Watts, with the exception of *yūgen*, which defeats Watts (he calls it 'baffling to describe') and for which I have substituted a definition by Makoto Ueda. The second of each pair is from Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto. (One-word parallels of the four moods in English might be: loneliness; poverty; pathos and mystery. But these must be understood as only very rough approximations.)

Sabi is described thus: 'The quiet, thrilling loneliness of *sabi*,'¹¹² and

Sabi may be defined as the feeling of isolation, or rather at a mid-point of the emotion when it is both welcome and unwelcome, source of both ease and unease.¹¹³

On *wabi*, we find: '*Wabi*, the unexpected recognition of the faithful "suchness" of very ordinary things.'¹¹⁴ and 'Wabi is the spirit of poverty, the poignant appreciation of what most consider the commonplace.'¹¹⁵

On *aware*, we note that:

Aware is not quite grief, and not quite nostalgia in the usual sense of longing for the return of a beloved past. *Aware* is the echo of what has passed and of what was loved ... the moment of crisis between seeing the transience of the world with sorrow and regret, and seeing it as the very form of the Great Void.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, with Taigan Takayama, *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill* (Garden City: Anchor, 1973), p.xxxviii

¹¹² Alan W.Watts, *The Way of Zen*, p.204

¹¹³ Stryk, Ikemoto and Takayama, op. cit., p.xxxviii

¹¹⁴ Alan W.Watts, *The Way of Zen*, p.205

¹¹⁵ Stryk, Ikemoto, and Takayama, op. cit., p.xl

and

[*Aware*] is the sadness that comes with the sense of the impermanence of things, the realization that they are lost to us even as they are found.¹¹⁷

And *yūgen* is described thus:

yūgen. Beauty of mystery and depth, often combined with other effects such as elegance, refinement, ambiguity, darkness, calm, ephemerality, and sadness.¹¹⁸

Yūgen is the sense of the mystic calm in things ... *Yūgen* also suggests the sense of a strong communion with nature, a descent into depths.¹¹⁹

From a critical point of view, the advantage of being able to refer to such moods is that it cuts short heavy-handed analysis. That a poem succeeds in evocation of one or more of these moods is sufficient to justify it; further explication is superfluous. Also, mood itself can be elevated as both aspiration and outcome. Thoughts, reflections, observations and allegorical messages can be brushed aside as relative irrelevancies; the mood is the thing. Thus haiku can approach the condition of music and distance itself from the prosaic. To be able to employ such critical terminology would seem to be desirable in response to all poetry; it is certainly valuable in assessing haiku in particular.

Unfortunately such critical terms are unavailable in English. Pathos, it is true, is a poetic value and so too, in a more general way, is mystery. Loneliness and poverty require a greater effort of imagination to translate. Without adequate cultural support and context, it would be pointless to introduce *sabi*, *wabi*, *aware* and *yūgen* as viable critical terms in English. But I hope it is of some value to point to the gap which these terms fill and express the desirability

¹¹⁶ Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen*, p.206

¹¹⁷ Stryk, Ikemoto, and Takayama, op. cit., p.xli

¹¹⁸ Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and his Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, p.429

of using similar terms in a similar way. As a gesture in this direction, I offer the following four poems by Michael Gunton, which I think offer a starting point for further exploration in expressing each of the four moods in turn. (Note that the moods cannot be firmly distinguished; there is a high degree of overlap.)

<i>Sabi?</i>	wintry sun over the deserted funfair a gull, soaring ¹²⁰
<i>Wabi?</i>	winter wind – alone this evening I water my plants ¹²¹
<i>Aware?</i>	the snow melts and slowly names reappear on the war memorial ¹²²
<i>Yugen?</i>	waves crash against fortifications dead of night ¹²³

4.6 Haiku, Senryu and Tanka: Characteristics and Relationships

In this section I would like to clarify what haiku is by looking at what it isn't; i.e. by examining senryu and tanka and how they differ from haiku. Further, I wish to look at what might be called the 'interface' between senryu and haiku and between tanka and haiku. Although haiku, senryu and tanka are clearly differentiated as far as their essential

¹¹⁹ Stryk, Ikemoto and Takayama, op. cit., p.xliv

¹²⁰ Michael Gunton, *Echoes in the Heart* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997)

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

¹²³ Michael Gunton, op. cit.

characteristics are concerned, nevertheless, in practice, there is a high degree of overlap and it is possible to find poems which elude categorisation: they clearly combine features of haiku and senryu, or of haiku and tanka.

4.6.1. Haiku and Senryu

As haiku developed from the hokku, the opening link of a renga, so the origins of senryu are in the links which formed the central portion of a renga, which could be witty and startling and needed no seasonal reference. The syllabic pattern of senryu was identical to haiku, i.e. 5-7-5, but the subject matter was typically human society (as opposed to nature) and the tone typically ironic (as opposed to sincere). The irreverence of senryu gave the form a broad-based appeal, and during the eighteenth century they began to be assembled in popular anthologies, with one critic responsible for such compilations, Karai Senryū, giving his name to the new form. (The actual verses were frequently anonymous.) Since not all haiku exhibit full seriousness and since senryu treatment can be given to serious subjects which merit genuine concern, the boundary between senryu and haiku is not clearly marked, but there is a distinct difference of emphasis between typical examples of the two forms. R.H.Blyth categorises Japanese senryu into ten types, every one of which is representative of some form of humour. Two examples of the typical tone of Japanese senryu:

Against the eyes upon his wife
The husband turns
His eyes.¹²⁴

Not a word of blame, -
But praising
The bride next door.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ R.H.Blyth, *The Genius of Haiku*, p.122

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.129

When it comes to senryu in English, there are various schools of thought on whether to operate a broad or narrow definition. The broad definition of senryu is: any haiku-like poem which takes humanity as subject as opposed to nature. It is unlikely to contain any seasonal reference. This definition makes no stipulation as to the mood or tone of the poem. On the narrow definition, senryu not only focuses on the human world, but specifically on hypocrisy, social idiocy, compromise or moral inadequacy, and is comic, ironic, even mocking in tone. Should senryu make us laugh? The narrow definition says, yes; the broad definition says, not necessarily. The broad definition allows room for 'serious senryu' or 'psychological haiku' under the senryu umbrella.

One feature which I use to distinguish between haiku and senryu is 'pointedness'. Senryu are 'pointed', haiku are 'pointless'. I use these terms to cover several related characteristics. A senryu should have a point in the sense that a joke has a point; indeed, it frequently is a form of joke. A senryu can be pointed in the sense that a cutting remark is pointed, and, again, many senryu do resemble such remarks. Also, a senryu tends to have a point in the sense of a single meaningful interpretation whereas haiku frequently appear to have many levels of meaning and interpretation. The pointlessness of haiku consists in their tendency to lend themselves to contemplation and defy facile explanation.

Deciding whether a particular poem is a haiku or a senryu may appear to be a purely academic exercise, of interest only to purists arguing over technicalities of classification. However, whether we classify a poem as a haiku or a senryu has a direct bearing on how we read it. Does the humour produce an inward chuckle (senryu) or an enigmatic smile (haiku)? More seriously, do we look for a sudden and definitive resolution (senryu), or attune ourselves to a more gradual, diffuse and many-angled appreciation (haiku)? In cases where it

proves impossible to decide whether a particular poem is a haiku or a senryu, this may well indicate an unresolved conflict within the poem itself, or a simultaneous functioning on two or more levels. The best example that I know of a poem which provokes such a dilemma is Maurice Tasnier's

standing up
for a closer look
at the stars¹²⁶

On its original appearance in *Blüthe Spirit* this poem was labelled as a senryu, a judgement which I disapproved of at the time and later countered in an article, "Some thoughts on Senryu," in *Blüthe Spirit* 8/4, where I described the poem as exhibiting a 'purely haiku humour'. Now I am not so sure. The poem now seems to me to be equally amenable to either reading. The crucial factor is whether or not we shift our focus from the human actor to the stars. Reading it as a senryu, we are interested in the nonsensicality of the action, and the poem offers gentle mockery of its human subject. But the wholesome quality of the humour – we laugh with, rather than at – lacks the edge associated with senryu. And the nonsense hinges on a deeper paradox, an abiding mystery behind the clash of the human scale and the cosmic scale, which this poem succeeds in asking us to reflect on. This may lead the reader to move through the humour into joining with the subject's stargazing. If our attention comes to rest on the stars, we are reading the poem as a haiku. In fact, just as the eye can shift back and forth between the close and distant, so too our focus can move out to the cosmic and return to the domestic scale. The conclusion, therefore, must be that the poem exhibits a binary character and is fundamentally resistant to definitive categorisation.

¹²⁶ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.8 No.1 (March 1998), p.7

Tasnier's poem, then, comes close to the mid-point on a spectrum which has pure haiku at one end and pure senryu at the other. Two interesting examples of poems which fall slightly on the haiku side of the divide are these:

custody battle
the bodyguard lifts the child
to see the snow

(Dee Evetts)¹²⁷

management meeting
out of the window two gulls
take flight together

(Colin Blundell)¹²⁸

Here, in both cases, the action of the poem takes place on senryu territory, the courtroom and boardroom respectively. But what happens in each case is that attention is diverted away from the scene, out of the window, onto the snow and the gulls, which then offer release from the tension of the social situation. As readers, we participate in this movement of attention and are enabled to lose ourselves in contemplation. This is the haiku reading, and, in both cases, this is where the emphasis of the poem falls. However, neither poem is without comment, and this comment provides the senryu element. If the movement of attention is an act of boredom or desperation, it implies a judgement on the other participants in the scene, the parents or managers absorbed in their struggle. This judgement is a senryu response. It does not predominate because in each case it remains indefinite, the central character refrains from any pronouncement and merely looks away.

My final example of a poem close to the mid-point between the two readings will allow us to tease out a further subtlety of interpretation:

news of a death
not knowing what to say
saying it anyway

(Brian Tasker)¹²⁹

¹²⁷ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.33

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.21

¹²⁹ *Blithe Spirit Vol.8 No.3* (September 1998), p.11

This seems to me to be simultaneously deeply serious and grimly humorous. The poem expresses an honesty, openness and intensity of feeling, which deflects attention away from the irony. Yet for all that, the focus of the poem is psychological and the irony, though subdued, is not absent. For me, these are defining characteristics of senryu, and the subtlety of the poem suggests that we can access deep feeling through senryu just as we can through haiku. In senryu, the poet is somehow present as judge whereas in haiku the poet may be simply a witness, even if, as in this case, the judgement is gentle rather than harsh. Also, in senryu, it seems that there is often an element of generalisation. The human interest relies on the fact that the subject could be anyone, anywhere. Brian Tasker is not different from us in reacting thus, the power of the poem is that we can so readily substitute ourselves in the poet's place. If we read this poem as the record of a moment of awareness, we are reading it as a haiku, and that reading is valid. If we read it as offering a comment, however subtle, on the vanity of the human condition, we are reading it as a senryu. If in haiku we (poet or reader) witness and in senryu we judge, this equates to the dichotomy between nature and humanity which is the traditional distinction: judgement of nature is inappropriate whereas judgement of human nature is unavoidable; it is, in itself, human nature.

Having looked at cases where senryu borders on haiku, it seems necessary to give some examples of pure senryu. The examples I have chosen are by poets who have a particular talent for senryu. They seem to have opted for a degree of specialisation in the art rather than, as may be the case with some haiku poets, treating senryu as a sideline or comic relief.

briefing his successor
he struggles to remember
how he did it

(Dick Pettit)¹³⁰

As he dismisses
the gardener, he praises
his delphiniums

(Patricia V Dawson)¹³¹

¹³⁰ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.80

Flood warning -
neighbours humping sandbags
introduce themselves

(John Shimmin)¹³²

Train
going south; scenery
going north

(Hamish Turnbull)¹³³

The generalisation that I have identified as characteristic of senryu is evident in the example by Dick Pettit. That the location is the workplace is clear enough, but there is no telling what line of work is in question. There is no need to specify: the drama is universal in its interest, relevance and familiar awkwardness. The specificity of 'delphiniums' in the Patricia Dawson poem adds to the comedy, but as far as the action is concerned, it does not much matter which species of flower is chosen. The comedy of John Shimmin's social comment is less cutting and more humane: the introductions come better late than never. Hamish Turnbull's poem is less classical; the product of an idiosyncratic sense of humour. Here, there is a double reading. There is a 'haiku possibility' that we are being offered a film clip of a train journey, watching the scenery flash rapidly by, as neutral observers. But this is quickly overtaken by the senryu reading as we get the point, emphasised when we deduce that the author is a Scot – the scenery that is thus disappearing is the hills, woods and mountains of the north as we head further into the flat and unremarkable south.

Humour is a key feature of these poems that are unmistakably senryu, yet it is not necessarily diagnostic. Humorous haiku also abound, indeed a subtle and understated humour is a highly prized quality in haiku. It is also possible to come across senryu that are deeply serious. One example is Nika's

¹³¹ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.2 (May 1996), p.16

¹³² *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.1 (February 1996), p.19

¹³³ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.99

too ashamed
to say I lied
another lie¹³⁴

which is as cutting in its condemnation of hypocrisy as a senryu can be but (partly because of the first person focus) is expressive of feelings too wounded to laugh at. Nevertheless, humorous or not, it is unquestionably ironic.

Some critics have doubted whether the distinction between haiku and senryu serves any useful purpose, and have advocated absorption of senryu into a broader umbrella category of haiku. Hiroaki Sato quotes with approval my own view (expressed in the introduction to *The Iron Book of British Haiku*) that a strict demarcation is 'impossible to maintain,' and claims that in Japan the distinction is 'already artificial.'¹³⁵ Colin Blundell has used the term 'haisen' to characterise his own art as an amalgam of the two forms. However, my belief is that if the special case of senryu were to come to be overlooked, something would be lost. Recognising that the categories are indistinct at their edges need not lead to rejecting them as valueless. It seems more interesting to hold to the idea of a spectrum, recognising that there will be poems which combine features of both forms and that there may well be a point of balance between the two.

4.6.2. Haiku and Tanka

In Japan, there is a broad gulf fixed between haiku and tanka, such that it does not seem possible for confusion between the two forms to arise. This gulf is based partly on history (tanka has almost a thousand years greater antiquity), partly on social status (tanka was

¹³⁴ Nika, *Frogs Singing* (Calgary: Duck Island Press, 1993)

¹³⁵ in a review in *The Japan Times*, Tuesday 6 June, 2000.

traditionally the poetry of the court and nobility whereas haiku was poetry of the merchant class), and partly on form, about which Japan is able to be more specific than is possible in the West. Yet even in Japan the kind of tanka which is less personal and more descriptive, such as much of the poetry of Saigyō, comes close in spirit to haiku, even if the five-line form clearly marks it apart.¹³⁶ (An image which I like to use to represent this 'gap' between haiku and tanka is to compare the two forms to the cities, Tokyo and Kyoto. From a Japanese perspective, they are far apart, but from a Western perspective there is little distance between them.)

Indeed, in the West, since form is more indeterminate, the boundaries between the two types are correspondingly blurred. Often distinctions based on form can seem superficial. As a submission to *Presence #4*, Helen Robinson sent a poem to me which read

returning home
I unlock the quiet
of my life alone

It was intended as a haiku, but I suggested that the identical poem should be stretched into five lines and recast as a tanka, thus:

returning home
I unlock
the quiet
of my life
alone¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Shiki attempted to break down these barriers between haiku and tanka. See the section on Shiki (2.2.6) in Chapter Two.

¹³⁷ *Presence #4* (May 1997), p.5

If the content is unchanged, how much does the new form matter? The five lines allow for a slower pace of reading, and each new line of the five is substantial enough to carry the weight thus placed on it. But the reasons for my recommendation were primarily to do with the focus of the poem. It is subjective, personal, emotional, based on the inner life: these are traditional features of tanka. It should be read as a tanka and written in a form which supports that reading.

I know of another example of a poem from *Presence*, which illustrates the conversion of a haiku to a tanka. Stuart Quine had originally written the following haiku:

after the funeral she sleeps
on his side of the bed¹³⁸

He offered it for publication in *Presence*, recast as a tanka by means of three apparently minor alterations: switching the sex of the characters; stretching into five lines (of course); and adding two words to make up the fifth line. Thus:

after the funeral
he sleeps
on her side
of the bed
winter sunlight¹³⁹

It is doubtful whether the sex change makes much difference, although to my ear there is a more pleasing sound to the second version. The move to five lines has an effect similar to that in the Helen Robinson tanka: the pace is slowed, and there is more emphasis placed on each separate element of the poem. The addition of the extra line, however, is powerful and

¹³⁸ *Frogpond* XIX:2 (September 1996), p.24

¹³⁹ *Presence* #3 (November 1996), p.9

startling. Rhythmically, the poem becomes complete. Crucially, lines three and four, at the centre of the poem, now become pivot lines, capable of equal attachment to lines two and five respectively. Finally, the last line deepens the mood and atmosphere and enhances the visual impact of the poem. This fifth line is certainly successful in adding an extra dimension, yet nothing in the basic character of the poem has altered. It resembles a tanka, in both versions, because of its narrative quality and its stress on implicit feelings of grief and consolation, albeit in the third person. But ultimately we may have to classify the earlier version as a haiku on the basis of its two-line form, even though it gave rise to an effective tanka with only minor revision.

The haiku / tanka interface is, then, generally located on the basis of form rather than content. Three-line tanka and five-line haiku are conceivable, but they are in such a minority that it would not be relevant to give any prolonged discussion of examples. Simply to demonstrate their existence, the following version by Bill Wyatt of an original Japanese tanka by Ishikawa Takuboku is in three lines:

like a pebble
that rolls down a hill
I arrive at today¹⁴⁰

And this haiku of my own is in five lines:

empty playground
a raindrop
trickles
down
the slide¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ *Presence* #2 (May 1996)

The subjectivity of the first poem is characteristic of tanka; the objectivity and relative brevity of the second is characteristic of haiku. Five-line haiku are rare, but four-line haiku are less rare, and there is a good case for regarding the four-line haiku as combining features of both haiku and tanka. Its most notable exponent is Tito (the pen-name of Stephen Henry Gill). His work has been submitted as haiku to several haiku magazines (notably *Bûthe Spirit* in the UK and *Ginyu* in Japan) and accepted as such. Yet, perhaps to avoid controversy, the author has decided to christen his four-line form 'haiqua', as if to mark an awareness that it represents a departure from haiku norms. Characteristics of haiqua include: greater subjectivity; more scope for narrative; greater use of musical effects, rhythm and cadence; a greater readiness to use metaphor. The number of published tanka written by Tito is few, but a good example is:

And just as I close my gate,
 Away down the valley
 The festival drums cease ...
 And the night fog
 Feels moist on my face. [Kujira, Nikko, 4/83] ¹⁴²

If we compare this to a typical Tito four-liner, we can see very little difference in approach and overall effect:

Sunrise at Sanchi
 Descending the hill
 The dog clears me a path
 Through the monkeys. [Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, 3/90] ¹⁴³

Both poems have a first-person focus and are in the nature of journal entries, commemorating a moment of heightened awareness of the environment. Both poems have

¹⁴¹ Martin Lucas, *bluegrey* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1994)

¹⁴² *Bûthe Spirit Vol.4 No.2* (May 1994), p.30

a sense of distance and a narrative development, and the second shares an expansiveness with the tanka which marks it apart from conventional three-line haiku. In avoiding the spareness of other haiku, the four-line form is a step closer to both tanka and other forms of poetry. It is tempting to ask whether we might equally well refer to it as four-line tanka, except that it seems accepted that haiku in English can exist in multifarious forms, while the five-line form of tanka is somewhat more sacrosanct. It is worth noting that my remarks about Tito's poetry hold good for four-line poems by other authors:

my sister calls
across a darkened field
the cold wind
takes her voice¹⁴⁴

This, by Susan Rowley, has an implicit first-person focus, a balanced four-part rhythm and a narrative progression.

For examples of pure tanka I turn to two poems by Brian Tasker, one of the finest exponents of the art.

the windblown clouds
lighten and darken
lighten and darken
the room
in which we argue¹⁴⁵

Here there is a classical juxtaposition of interior and exterior, the atmospheric turbulence reflecting the emotional turbulence. The repetition of 'lighten and darken' suggests an oscillation between positive and negative feelings. These feelings are the centre of the poem,

¹⁴³ *Blithe Spirit Vol.3 No.1* (January 1993), p.8

¹⁴⁴ *Blithe Spirit Vol.4 No.2* (May 1994), p.4

but rather than being expressed directly, they are embodied in a correlating image. The flow of the lines is also impressive – lines two and three act as a pivot and lead us from the outer scene to the inner scene without any hiatus.

a dead friend
buried
deep within
the year's first dream –
my forgotten grief¹⁴⁶

Here, again, there is a pivot linking the inner world with the objective event: 'buried' can refer backwards or forwards equally. Beginning as a statement of fact, it suddenly acquires emotional resonance. The factual character of the opening reflects the superficial numbness which the dream ultimately probes. The poem builds steadily to the final line, where the true feelings are exposed. That the grief has been buried and forgotten renders this final exposure all the more poignant.

In these two poems, the central aim is the expression of emotion, but in each case it is rendered tangible by connection with the external. Inner and outer echo each other and thus resonate in the experience of the reader.

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This concludes my multi-faceted presentation of theoretical issues in haiku. The next two chapters will examine haiku in Britain from a more practical angle, focusing on publications, poets, and their products, the poems themselves.

¹⁴⁵ Brian Tasker, *the wind blown clouds: Tanka 1990-1995* (Frome: Bare Bones Press, 1996), p.26

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.19

Haiku in Britain (1): Publications

5.1 Introduction

The previous four chapters have prepared the necessary historical and theoretical background for an appreciation of current haiku practice in Britain. The British Haiku Society was founded in 1990 and, although isolated poets had been writing haiku well before this date, this represents the beginning of the proliferation of haiku activity. Effectively, then, this presentation is a retrospective assessment of the decade of the 1990s. New haiku material is appearing with great rapidity, and in order to prevent this thesis becoming unmanageable due to an unstoppable succession of updates, I have had to operate a cut-off point at, roughly, mid-2000. It is important to recognise that the haiku world is highly volatile. New names, both poets and publications, are bound to come to the fore in the near future, as some of the poets and publications discussed below recede from prominence. The rapidity of the pace of change is best interpreted as a sign of vitality, although a test of the next ten years will be whether the British haiku world can build on the structures now in place, and endure. If magazines fold, and poets lose interest, it will prove to have been an ephemeral phenomenon but, at the time of writing, there appears to be no danger of this happening. Rather than losing momentum, it is more likely that haiku will continue to

evolve, and I discuss possible directions for this evolution in my concluding remarks at the end of this thesis.

Two chapters on British haiku practice now follow. The next chapter focuses attention on individual poets and individual poems. This chapter focuses on publications, primarily the journals that provide the essential matrix for haiku life. After a critical appreciation of all the British haiku magazines of the 1990s, I conclude with the story of my own magazine, *Presence*: how it came about, and how it works.

5.2 British Haiku Magazines and other Publications

Haiku activity is divisible into two broad categories: events and publications. The category of events includes small-scale gatherings such as workshops and renga parties; medium-scale events such as public readings; and large-scale gatherings such as the British Haiku Society National Conference. Active haiku poets may meet socially on such occasions, having the opportunity to comment on each other's work and perhaps collaborate in creative enterprises such as renga. Such events are discussed in more detail in a later section (10.7). The other main category of haiku activity is publications. Among published haiku poets, some may regularly attend events while others, for reasons of age, health, geographical isolation or personal preference, may confine their activity to reading, and writing for, publications. There are three kinds of publications to consider: individual collections, anthologies and magazines.

5.2.1 Collections

Within the last ten years, many leading haiku poets have put together personal collections to represent a sample of their latest work. Such collections show great variation in size (from fewer than ten haiku to over a hundred), in presentation of poems on the page, and in physical production (stapled, spiral bound, string bound, perfect bound with glossy covers, etc.). These collections may be self-published (e.g. David Cobb's Equinox Press, or Richard Goring's Cat's Yawn Press) or may be produced by one of the small presses that have specialised in haiku book production in recent years, notably Iron Press (North Shields), Hub Editions (Sutton Bridge), Waning Moon Press (Portsmouth) and Snapshot Press (Liverpool).

Iron Press is the work of Peter Mortimer and assistants. It has produced the magazine, *Iron* (now defunct), and has published a wide variety of literature, specialising in encouraging talented writers from its local area, the north-east. Its first venture into haiku publication was a collaboration with the BHS to put together *The Haiku Hundred* (edited by James Kirkup, David Cobb and Peter Mortimer, 1992), a smaller-than-pocket-sized anthology which proved highly successful, selling several thousand copies. After this encouragement, Iron Press decided to take a greater risk with individual collections. *Cloud Blunt Moon*, by Chris Mulhern, followed in 1994. This collection can be read as a sequence of love poems and is best classified as haiku-related, although some of its contents do work as pure haiku. This also sold well, helped by its high-quality production and broad-based appeal. After this came David Cobb's *Jumping from Kiyomizu* (1996) and Jackie Hardy's *The Dust is Golden* (1999), both of which are substantial collections of haiku. David Cobb's work was probably selected as he was perceived as the leading light of British haiku, founder of the BHS and a co-editor of

The Haiku Hundred. Jackie Hardy, a past editor of *Blithe Spirit*, is the leading haiku poet in Iron's local region, the north-east.

Hub Editions is a solo enterprise by Colin Blundell. His books are all hand-made but nevertheless highly presentable and durable. He asks for payment from his authors, who then recoup their outlay by privately selling copies of the book. The total print run for each title is small, sometimes less than a hundred copies, since it is intended for private sale and few find their way into bookshops. (This is in contrast to Iron Press, which has a distribution agreement with Signature, ensuring representation in bookshops countrywide, and justifying larger print runs of 500-1000.) Colin Blundell began by publishing collections of his own work, but he soon began to attract the attention of fellow poets, and numerous authors are now represented in the 'Hub Haiku Series'. These include myself, James Kirkup, Kōko Katō, Ion Codrescu, Caroline Gourlay, Diana Webb, John McDonald, Fred Schofield, Katherine Gallagher, Eric Speight, Susan Rowley and Norman Barraclough, whose collection *And a White Butterfly* was published by Hub as a posthumous tribute.

Waning Moon Press is the work of George Marsh, who in 1997 published five collections of haiku. These were: *Salting the Air* by George Marsh himself; *Echoes in the Heart* by Michael Gunton, also based in Portsmouth; *The Earth Drawn Inward* by Cicely Hill, also based in the local southern region; *Words on the Wind* by Irish haiku poet, Jim Norton; and *My Green Wife*, a collection of translations from the Japanese and Bulgarian. These original collections were distinctive in appearance, with corrugated card covers and Japanese-style string binding. Although Waning Moon was founded as a haiku press, it has since expanded into publishing other collections by Portsmouth writers.

Snapshot Press is the work of John Barlow. In 1998, and again in 1999, he ran a Collection Competition, awarding publication as the prize. The contest was won in the first year by Geoffrey Daniel, whose collection, *Gripping the Perch*, was the outcome. Snapshot Press has since published collections by David Cobb, Caroline Gourlay, Matt Morden and Maurice Tasnier. The books are typically A6 size with attractive colour cover designs, a format which has proved successful with *Snapshots* haiku magazine.

For discussion of the content of some of these collections, see section 6.1. on 'Major British Haiku Poets.'

5.2.2. Anthologies

The Haiku Hundred qualifies as the first British haiku anthology. As the name implies, it contains a hundred haiku, with no author being represented by more than two poems. Poets were invited to submit work for consideration, and haiku by several international poets are included alongside British representation. A follow-up anthology of tanka is planned in 2001. The first anthology to concentrate on British authors from across the whole country was also published by Iron Press: *The Iron Book of British Haiku* (edited by David Cobb and Martin Lucas, 1998). Around seventy poets are represented, by between one and fifteen poems each. In 2000 Iron Press released an international anthology – *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide*, edited by George Swede and Randy Brooks. This concentrates on broader selections from a narrower range of poets. Five British-based authors are represented. Snapshot Press plans the release, in 2001, of a further national anthology, *The New Haiku*, which represents the best work from four haiku magazines (*Blüthe Spirit*, *Presence*,

Snapshots and the Irish *Haiku Spirit*) during 1998 and 1999. Naturally this also includes work by international contributors as well as British poets.

Two other presses have produced haiku anthologies during the period under review. These are Alec Finlay's pocketbooks, based in Edinburgh, which published the Scottish haiku anthology, *Atoms of Delight* in 2000, and Chris Mulhern's acorn book company, based in Tadworth, Surrey, which published *The Acorn Book of Contemporary Haiku*, also in 2000. The acorn book company also published Chris Mulhern's personal collection, *Water*, in 1998. All three of these books explore the boundaries between haiku and other forms of short poetry, and *Atoms of Delight* and *Water* are discussed in some detail in Chapter Ten (Sections 10.5 and 10.6).

At least two regional anthologies have also been compiled. These are *Into the Small Hours: Portsmouth in Haiku* (edited by George Marsh and Anthony Rollinson, 1994) and *Spindrift: Haiku from the Saxon Shore* (edited by Colin Blundell and David Cobb, 1997), each published by their respective local branch of the BHS. In addition, the BHS has, in every year since 1992, produced an anthology of members' work, in which members who choose to submit are guaranteed inclusion of a single haiku. The BHS members' anthologies are not intended for public sale, but are circulated only to participants in the project.

5.2.3. Magazines

One haiku magazine, *Haiku Byways*, edited by Gerry Loose, appeared briefly between 1969 and 1973.¹ However, widespread haiku activity only began to occur in the 1990s. At the

¹ Format was A5 stapled, 28-30 pp, price 23p and total print run per issue was 250.

centre of this activity in Britain there is the British Haiku Society. This organisation was formed in 1990 by David Cobb and Dee Evetts, with James Kirkup elected as its first President. Current membership is around 250, of whom about 200 are resident in the UK. Only a minority of members are active as writers of haiku. The turnover of membership from year to year is quite high, so the total number of people who have been members at some time since 1990 is perhaps approaching 1000.

The British Haiku Society publishes its own quarterly journal, *Blithe Spirit*. In recent years six other magazines have catered to some degree or other for an interest in haiku. These are: *HQ* (1990-), *Bare Bones* (1992-95), *Time Haiku* (1995-), my own *Presence* (1996-), *still* (1997-), and *Snapshots* (1998-). I offer below a short table analysing the content of a sample issue of each magazine. I divide the content into three categories: haiku and related genres; other short poetry; and prose or editorial material, with each category expressed as a percentage.

	BB	BS	HQ	Pr	Sn	st	TH
Haiku, etc.	37	36	22	50	73	46	60
Short Poetry	13	0	54	20	0	41	18
Prose	50	64	24	30	27	13	22

I will now examine these six magazines in chronological order of first publication, concluding with an account of the only British tanka magazine, a recent arrival on the scene.

(a) *HQ* ('The Haiku Quarterly')

HQ first appeared in 1990 and 24 issues have been produced up to and including 2000. Its title is potentially misleading as, in practice, it is not quarterly and haiku forms a relatively

small proportion of its contents. Its physical appearance has changed very little. Each issue has a yellowish card cover. On the front, the title, issue number and name of the editor (Kevin Bailey) are prominent, together with a selection of names of contributors. The back cover typically displays an extract of edifying text from a historical writer who interests the editor; this may be political or social comment; it is only rarely directly relevant to poetry. Inside, the poetry is presented in a single column, with selections headed by the author's name in bold capitals, followed by the author's residence in bold italics, and the title of the poem in bold italics. The spacing between contributions is clear and comfortable, except that haiku by a single author are generally separated only as if they were stanzas of a single poem. Page size is A5, and the total number of pages per issue varies between 36 and 56, usually towards the higher end of the scale. (The double issues 19/20 and 23/24 were 80 pages long.) The price of a single issue has risen from £1.80 to £2.60 over the years; a four-issue subscription is £9. The magazine has received funding support from Southern Arts.

The content of *HQ* is a variety of short poetry, not always particularly short; contributions can be a page or more in length. Some of this work is imagistic; that is, following the example of haiku, the poem attempts to communicate directly through the choice of images, without didacticism or intrusive authorial comment. However it is difficult to identify a unifying principle (other than the editor's taste, which is, of course, a fully respectable principle in its own right) between the haiku and non-haiku content of the magazine. Among haiku-related forms, senryu appear quite frequently (although only rarely identified as such), tanka appear occasionally, haibun and renga are unknown. The magazine generally contains a substantial review section; the books reviewed encompass a broad spectrum, and haiku collections make only an occasional appearance. *HQ* also carries a small number of articles; these are generally not of immediate relevance to haiku. The content of *HQ* reflects

its editor's conviction that haiku and mainstream poetry can form a mutually enhancing relationship. The magazine is best seen not as a journal of haiku as such, but as a mainstream poetry journal which, unlike all of its competitors, is prepared to devote a significant proportion of each issue to haiku.

As might be expected from this profile, the haiku content of *HQ* exhibits a high degree of variety, much of it falling outside the 'consensus' established by the British Haiku Society (which reflects current practice in the Haiku Society of America, Haiku Canada and elsewhere in the English-speaking world). Some examples of this range follow.

Some of the work presented as 'haiku' qualifies primarily on the basis of compliance with the 5-7-5 form. For example, let us look at these two poems by Robert Roden:

Wish I could give you
Much more than the hum of the
Refrigerator

As for Hemingway,
The sun also rose along
His shotgun barrel²

The 5-7-5 form is not too obtrusive. But the content of the poems does not comply with a definition of haiku as the perception of a single moment of experience directly presented as one image, or two images in juxtaposition. The essence of both these poems is a thought. In the first poem, this is expressed precisely as a 'Wish', with the sensory experience, 'the hum of the / Refrigerator', being reduced to a secondary role. True haiku have an expansive quality; the accessibility of the experience they articulate gives them a communal appeal, and the images they present can be understood as metaphors which have a unifying power, relating the experience of the writer directly to the experience of the reader. Here, there is something private about the 'Wish' which complicates, although it does not destroy, its

accessibility. The poem is centred on the 'more', which necessarily remains vague and undefined. While it has its own appeal, and succeeds in its own terms, it lacks the tangible quality which is the basis of haiku. It is, at least, derived from a sensory experience, whereas the second poem is not. Although it achieves the expression of a sardonic optimism, 'As for Hemingway' is an entirely imaginary construct.

Another example of imaginative excess which causes a poem to fail when judged as a haiku, irrespective of its other merits, is personification or anthropomorphism. An example occurs in this poem by Pam Penny:

In Monet's garden
the Japanese bridge bows low
to the floating lilies³

The image of the bridge bowing is both unintentionally comic and surreal. It seems to be used to enliven what would otherwise be plain description, lacking in action, feeling and commitment. The poem has been 'written up.' This often appears to be the result of treating haiku writing as a compositional exercise, an attempt to produce a finished piece (usually in 5-7-5, though this example is 5-7-6) without any strong motive to share experience, and therefore without trust in the bare facts of the haiku moment.

It is possible, however, to be unnecessarily harsh on imaginative attempts at evocation. Consider the following example, by John Capp:

² HQ 22 (1999), p.40

in the lampshade
the soft detonation
of moths⁴

Here, the interest of the poem hinges on 'detonation.' The extremity of the literal interpretation might have ruled the poem out of consideration with a purist editor. Yet in the tolerant ambience of *HQ* we are able to read the poem in a supportive light and consider what is surely the intended meaning, the sound of the collision between moths and lampshade. Haiku conventions which would seek to rule out such linguistic risks would arguably be counter-productively severe, although as both readers and writers we need to be aware that such risks may fail as often as they succeed.

It is a fine line. The metaphor in this poem, by Simon Down, seems to me to be excessive:

We swim in the lake –
the air swathes our bodies with
bandages of mist⁵

There is a heavy-handedness about 'bandages', too broad a range of connotations, which interferes with the simplicity of the objective image. On the other hand, it helps the poet to evoke the scene more precisely than might otherwise have been possible. Although it is doubtful whether the experiment works, it is refreshing that *HQ* is able to be open to such trials (the purist would argue, errors!) of metaphor. Only occasionally is space given over to 'haiku' for which it is difficult to find any justification, but I think that the other poem by Simon Down in this issue qualifies in this category:

³ Ibid., p.29. Somewhat surprisingly this poem is given the accolade of an anthology appearance in Lucien Stryk and Kevin Bailey (eds.), *The Acorn Book of Contemporary Haiku* (Tadworth: Acorn Book Company, 2000)

⁴ Ibid., p.21

⁵ Ibid., p.15

Like channels through space
the day goes wearily on –
ancient remedies.⁶

The simile is vague and irrelevant and the whole poem lacks any grounding in the tangible.

There are two further aspects of *HQ*'s content to consider. Firstly, it quite frequently features haiku with titles. Here is an example, by Ronald Tamplin:

An Arrangement

You laugh at my flowers.
Do you not think the absurd
Has a certain charm?⁷

Given the approximation to 5-7-5 form, it is probable that the piece is intended as a haiku, in which case it has to be judged as lacking in detail and precision. But it is not actually proclaimed to be a haiku, and the presence of a title allows us to consider an alternative conclusion, that it is simply a three-line poem to be judged on its inherent merits.⁸ As such, the poem can be seen to be approaching the condition of a tanka, chronicling a moment in the passage of a relationship. It does, indeed, have a 'certain charm'. Perhaps we should be grateful that *HQ* allows us access to such colourful minimalism without being restricted by worries over haiku definitions.

The final point to be made about the content of *HQ* is that, along with the various divergences from the haiku consensus indicated above, the magazine does offer a selection of undeniable haiku, generally by poets whose work also appears in the wider spectrum of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p.28

haiku magazines. In *HQ* 22, which has been the issue under consideration, such material is provided by Maurice Tasnier, Patricia Prime, David Elliott, Steve Dolphy, Linda Jeannette Ward, Melissa Scanlon, and William Woodruff, together with the less familiar names of R.K.Singh and Tommy Curran. I particularly like the contribution from Tommy Curran:

fishmonger's window
four bluebottles walking
across a shark's back⁹

This is vivid and grounded, without metaphorical intrusions, and without being imaginatively 'written up.' Yet the image, in its stark simplicity, has an evident emotive power, a definite eeriness which is enhanced by its being so clearly realised.

(b) *Blithe Spirit* ("Journal of the British Haiku Society")

Blithe Spirit first appeared in 1991, and 40 issues had been produced by the end of 2000. Barring the occasional slight delay, it has maintained a regular quarterly output throughout this time. It has undergone three distinct phases of editorial control: up to and including Volume 3 Number 2 (April 1993) it was edited by Colin Blundell and Richard Goring; from Volume 3 Number 3 (July 1993) until Volume 7 Number 4 (November 1997) it was edited by Jackie Hardy; from Volume 8 Number 1 until 2000 it was edited by Caroline Gourlay; Colin Blundell is to be editor from Volume 11 onwards (2001). Three issues have been guest-edited: Volume 5 Number 3 (August 1995) was edited by Susan Rowley and focused on renga; Volume 6 Number 3 (August 1996) was edited by Richard Goring and focused on tanka; and Volume 9 Number 3 (September 1999) was edited by Colin Blundell and focused

⁸ Unfortunately for my argument here, this poem *is* included in the haiku anthology edited by Lucien Stryk and Kevin Bailey, *The Acorn Book of Contemporary Haiku*. However, this anthology does include a number of poems

on haiku in the 5-7-5 form and 'found haiku' (haiku-like extracts from other texts). During Jackie Hardy's editorial reign there were also two further themed issues: Volume 7 Number 1 (February 1997) concentrated on the visual presentation of haiku: calligraphy, computer graphics and illustration; Volume 7 Number 3 (August 1997) had a special section on haiku sequences. There have also been three distinct phases in production and physical appearance. Volumes 2 to 5 (1992 to 1995) were produced by Colin Blundell. Volumes 6 and 7 (1996-7) were produced by Richard Goring's Cat's Yawn Press, during which time the glue binding was replaced by staples, but the appearance of the magazine inside remained largely unchanged. Volumes 8 and 9 (1998-9) have been professionally printed and represent a distinct upgrade. The magazine has always featured a front cover illustration, often with an accompanying back cover illustration. The cover of Volume 9 Number 3 features the volume number, date and title ("Journal of the British Haiku Society") in bold, with *Blithe Spirit* as a subtitle in outline. The cover is a pale grey card, with an illustration on the front of four flying birds in silhouette, with an expanded silhouette of the same illustration on the back. Inside, the presentation of poems on the page has tended to vary in recent issues, but a common pattern in Volume 9 Numbers 1 and 2 was to give the poet's name in bold as a heading, followed by the haiku in one or two columns. There are between six and eight haiku on a single A5 page. Distinct sections are included for senryu, tanka and seasonal haiku. In the early years of the magazine the total number of pages could be as low as 26, but it is now typically 64. The cost of a single issue has risen over time from £1.50 to £4, but the magazine purchase is normally included in the BHS subscription, which brings four issues, and is to be raised to £20 at the full rate (£15 for concessions) from 2001. Total print run is between 400 and 500, for a BHS membership of 200-300, implying a high number of

which can only be interpreted as broadly haiku-like, rather than haiku as such.

⁹ Ibid., p.28

bookshop / single issue sales. The subscriber breakdown is: 71% UK-based, 7% European, 22% international.

The distinctive strength of *Blithe Spirit*, compared to other British haiku magazines, is probably in the space it gives to articles on topics of haiku interest. In recent issues, there have been between four and seven articles in each issue. Volume 9 Number 2 contained essays on "Haiku on the Internet" by Matt Morden; "Progress in Haiku in the Past Hundred Years" by Tōru Sudo; "The Buddhist Spirit within the Haiku of Bashō" by Martin Lucas; and the latest in a regular series entitled "Points of Differing Views" in which accomplished 'conventional' poets discuss haiku and its relation to mainstream poetry. (The contribution in 9/2 was from *Blithe Spirit*'s past editor Jackie Hardy, who has a poetry collection published by Bloodaxe. Other contributors to this series of articles have been Nigel Jenkins, Gabriel Rosenstock, Carol Rumens and David Hart.) The haiku in Volume 9 Number 2 were divided into three sections, one of which was devoted to the seasonal theme of 'Spring.' The issue contained a total of 79 haiku by 48 different poets. In addition there was the latest in an occasional series entitled "Featured Haiku Writer" focusing closely on the work of a well-known haiku poet, in this case the Canadian, George Swede. Volume 9 Number 2 also contained sections devoted to senryu (13 poems by 7 poets) and tanka (9 poems by 4 poets). A regular feature since the earliest days of *Blithe Spirit* has been "The Pathway", a section of haiku in translation. In Volume 9 Number 2 this featured Brian Fergusson's translations of four Georges Friedenkraft haiku, from the French, and a haiku by Ioan Gabudean, translated by the author from Romanian. There were no renga in Volume 9 Number 2 and, indeed, renga make only an occasional appearance in *Blithe Spirit*; but there were two haibun, by David Cobb and Bill Wyatt, and haibun seem to be appearing now with increasing regularity.

⁹ Ibid., p.28

To complete the contents of the issue, there were seven book reviews, three letters to the editor, and two Award announcements (one for the annual BHS James Hackett Award and the other for the regular best-of-issue award with a prize donated by The Museum of Haiku Literature).

I would like to present a sample of work from the issue under consideration (9/2) but it is necessary to note that, given nearly 80 haiku to choose from, this can only provide an impression rather than a detailed cross-section. It would certainly be wrong to portray *Blithe Spirit* as a bastion of purity, excellence and orthodoxy. Much of the work it contains appears to be experimental, testing the limits of what is possible in haiku and, as in the case of *HQ*, these experiments fail at least as often as they succeed. There are poems such as Steven Ford's on 'Kosovo's orphan' or Leslie Giddens' 'after the avalanche' which I strongly suspect are products of a compassionate imagination rather than the poet's personal experience (I may be wrong!). There are exaggerations, such as Tom Williams' 'old men smoking / exhale a storm cloud'. There are puns of dubious value: David Cobb's 'pop concert / in the open air - / all eyes on the stars' or Janice Fixter's 'in the supermarket / wavering over the steak - / an old flame' (which at least has the excuse of being offered as a senryu).

Very few of the contents are models of such classical elegance that they seem to be the products of the collective haiku consciousness, lacking any obvious stamp of the author's personality. The most 'conformist' haiku that I can find is this, by Dermot O'Brien:

Bending to the weight
of a bumble-bee a flower
swaying in the breeze¹⁰

This is a quite effective attempt to give a new expression to a subject which has attracted the attention of haiku poets many times in the past. I would identify two weaknesses: 'flower' is disappointingly general – a particular species would be preferable; and the similarity of 'bending' / 'swaying' is repetitive – probably it is the latter that is least essential and could be re-thought. But the result is concise and evocative if, as I have said, not startlingly original.

I can also find an example of a haiku which appears to have all the right ingredients yet, somehow, as a whole amounts to less than the sum of its parts. This is by Ama Bolton:

white petals
dark water flowing fast
rain on the wind¹¹

The weakness here is that the three lines are rather detached from each other, so that the whole reads like a list. As with the O'Brien poem, the 'petals' lack specificity, as does the 'dark water', which may well be a river torrent but might only be a stream in the gutter. It helps to imagine the petals on the surface of the water, but the poem does not give us this, the reader has to take it.

Not all the haiku in this issue convey the sense of a single 'haiku moment.' Stanley Pelter's

landscape retreats
as you move
into it¹²

¹⁰ *Blüte Spirit* Vol. 9 No.2 (June 1999), p.27

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p.26

may be the product of an actual train journey, for instance, but it is expressed as a generalisation. As such, there is a case for placing it among the senryu. It is an observation in the sense of being a comment, rather than a field note.

At the other end of the scale, a very clear sense of moment is conveyed by Alison Williams'

waiting room
the slow drip
of rain¹³

Here, the opening line arouses a sense of expectation. The layout of the second line, the space before 'drip', has a tantalising effect, delaying satisfaction. The context allows us to imagine a heavy background silence, against which the moment of the 'drip' is thrown sharply into relief.

To conclude with two haiku which I think are particularly effective, let us look at these:

grass still wet from morning
the cow licks
the calf's ear
(Fred Schofield)¹⁴

at the crossroads autumn winds
(Stuart Quine)¹⁵

Fred Schofield's haiku is precisely observed, richly textured, with an effortlessly natural juxtaposition of the wetness of the grass and the cow's tongue. Stuart Quine's one-liner suffers a little from the temptation to personify the wind, as if it somehow had to make a

¹³ Ibid., p.24

¹⁴ Ibid., p.6

¹⁵ Ibid., p.4

choice. However, it is strong in its contrast of the precise direction of human travel with the apparently aimless meandering of the wind, which perhaps only becomes noticeable as the hidden character in the poem (and therefore the reader) pauses to decide.

(c) *Bare Bones*

Bare Bones first appeared early in 1992, and for most of its existence it came out quarterly, except for a long delay in the release of the final issue (#8), which did not appear until 1995. Its sub-title was 'A magazine devoted to haiku and other forms of poetry in miniature' and although its emphasis was always on haiku, a variety of other short poems was included, dependent on the taste of the editor, Brian Tasker. The first three issues were A5 size, but from #4 on this was reduced to a pocket-sized A6. This reduction in size also had the effect of limiting the contents to the inclusion only of poems which could comfortably fit onto the new smaller-scale page. The magazine maintained a consistent look, with each issue having a handmade recycled paper cover, with the title in outline capitals, the Chinese character for the appropriate season in coloured ink in the lower right hand corner, the ISSN number and the price (£2.50) on the reverse, with a string binding. Inside, poetry was presented on the page in a single column, with titles in bold, and names of authors beneath the poem, also in bold, usually accompanied by the poet's residence (although not in #8). This presentation sometimes looks cramped and could give rise to occasional ambiguities. In earlier issues, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish separate haiku from stanzas of a single poem. In the final issue, a poem appears to be signed with a pen-name, 'Chicken Tikka' but this turns out (evidently enough) to be the title of the following poem. In the small-scale format of #4 to #8 the maximum number of haiku per page is usually four. The magazine included

occasional sumi-e¹⁶ illustrations by Ion Codrescu and others, with a series of cartoons by Marlene Mountain being used in the final issue. The large-scale issues, #1 to #3, did not use page numbers; the number of pages in #4 to #8 varies between 44 and 52. Total print run each time varied between 100-120 copies. The subscriber breakdown was: 60% UK-based, 30% US-based, 10% other.

The prose content of *Bare Bones* is limited to reviews and the odd article, usually concerned with technical advice on haiku practice. During its short lifespan the review section of *Bare Bones* acquired a certain notoriety for what Brian Tasker himself styled (in an editorial in #7) as 'an element of righteous anger.' The source of this anger was a clash with the views of 'certain poets who insisted on a personal version of what is a specific form.'¹⁷ This led to the publication of the *Bare Bones* 'Haiku Guidelines' in #5, with the following defence:

These are not some *ad hoc* rules that I have thrown together to impose upon people. They are a distillation of the generally accepted view of what haiku are.¹⁸

(Extracts from these Guidelines are presented in Section 4.2.) Brian Tasker held (and continues to hold) passionate commitment to the values of haiku, and proclaimed in his editorial of #7: 'I'm not prepared to stand idly by and see haiku diluted down to personal taste.'¹⁹ Authors who were to suffer castigation as a consequence include Kenneth Verity and James Kirkup. Kenneth Verity's book, *Breathing with the Mind*, includes 'haiku' such as this: 'The carp swims slowly / Because going nowhere / Always takes a long time', to which Brian Tasker retorted:

¹⁶ Sumi-e is Japanese-style brushed ink drawing, ideal for black-and-white reproduction.

¹⁷ *Bare Bones* #5 (Spring 1993), p.45

¹⁸ Ibid.

If Mr Verity thinks that these trite maxims are haiku, then that's his delusion. There is not one concrete image in this book, not one direct expression of insight, not one poem that even vaguely relates to haiku the way that it is and has been understood in the West for the last 25 / 30 years, and in Japan for the last 300. Every single so-called poem in this book is a product of mind: just so much subjective rubbish. The whole point of haiku is to be direct, to be objective: it is to invite the reader to participate as an equal.²⁰

James Kirkup's collection, *Formulas for Chaos*, is similarly dealt with. An example of the kind of thing that provoked the response: 'Human beings live / to kill one another – and / their infested earth.' Brian Tasker sums it up as

an egocentric and self-indulgent list of some 150 in-your-face graffiti-type slogans, variously labelled haiku and tanka.²¹

In fact, Brian Tasker's setting of standards in haiku was a contributory factor in the demise of *Bare Bones*: he was tired of receiving 'too many inappropriate submissions.' It is certainly true that haiku editors have to strike a balance between ideals and the reality of the work they receive. Is it possible to be open to individuality in poetic expression, without falling for a 'dilution' in haiku standards? Each of the magazines described in this section has chosen to strike this balance at a different point.

In general, the haiku content of *Bare Bones* reflects the care taken by its editor to ensure quality. The following sampling is taken from #8. At the maximal end of the haiku scale, there is this poem by Tito:

Morning cool:
One long bell-boom
Overcome
By the sound of the pebbled stream.

[Lethbridge, Alberta, 8/78]²²

¹⁹ *Bare Bones* #7 (Autumn 1993), p.43

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.33-34

²¹ *Bare Bones* #8 (1995), p.38

²² *Ibid.*, p.5

The scene is realised in precise detail. The poem is musical, with a pleasing assonance between 'cool' and 'boom', underscoring the meaning of the latter. The relaxed length of the last line provides a refreshing alternative to the clipped minimalism more typical of haiku. Questions are raised by the third line: 'Overcome' establishes a relationship between the two sounds which goes beyond simple juxtaposition. It is interesting that this does not seem to have fallen foul of the editor's distaste for anthropomorphism. Perhaps the degree of activity / passivity attributable to the stream-sound is dependent on the interpretation of the reader.

Although only three lines long, the following poem by David Steele is comparable to the previous poem in its development, care and precision:

Late sun on the sands
each long shadow stretches
from a single stone²³

The sound is somewhat cumbersome, but visually it approaches perfection. The definition of haiku as 'the essence of a moment keenly perceived' has been fulfilled. Although the haiku is not season-specific ('long shadow' would normally indicate winter, but not necessarily in this case), the awareness of the time of day acts as a valid alternative to the traditional response to the time of year: there is a momentary pause on a point of change.

In contrast to the natural ambience of the previous two poems, Christopher Herold's work here, with equal skill, evokes a social setting:

²³ Ibid., p.21

in a restaurant
she toes my thigh and pulls
the legs off her prawns²⁴

He has achieved both a sensuality and a lively comedy, as well as accurately sketching a character with only a couple of strokes.

Towards the minimal end of the scale are these final two examples, each of which, though they possess distinct merits, can be criticised as exemplifying flaws which are occupational hazards for the direct objective methods which Brian Tasker advocates and which this thesis broadly supports. Firstly, from David Walker:

a black spider
in her bath ...
pubic hairs²⁵

David Walker is an artist – he has designed the recent covers for *Blithe Spirit* – and this seems to me to be an artist's poem. The visual point of the juxtaposition is evident, but the objectivity seems to come close to the point of eliminating feeling. Certainly, there is an emotional content, a mixture of fascination and distaste, and a playing with possibilities of repulsion and attraction, but there is little depth; we might justly question whether there is any *poetry* in it.

By contrast, there is a definite resonance in this poem by George Marsh:

misty dawn –
under an old moon
a sapling²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., p.14

²⁵ Ibid., p.3

The atmosphere here can be savoured. The slight artificiality of the contrast between the youth of the tree and the 'age' of the moon is not, in itself, damaging. The relative weakness of the poem is that it is static; there is a scene, but no action. It is true that haiku is the poetry of the noun, the concrete image, but full involvement often hinges on the contribution of the verb, and the absence of a verb here is felt. Nevertheless, judged purely as a picture, this is one which we can appreciate.

(d) *Time Haiku*

HQ, *Blithe Spirit* and *Bare Bones* belong to what might be termed the first phase of haiku expansion in the 1990s. The second phase begins with *Time Haiku*, which first appeared in the spring of 1995. It is published twice a year, so has reached issue 13 by the spring of 2001. Its content is mainly haiku, with senryu and tanka sprinkled among the haiku rather than being separated out; there is an additional minority of longer short poems. The physical appearance of *Time Haiku* owes a debt to *HQ*: the editor, Erica Facey, consulted Kevin Bailey for advice prior to setting up her own magazine. The page size is A5. The cover is a coloured card, in a pastel shade of either blue, cream or green. On the front, the title is given in capitals, followed by a column of names of selected contributors, the editor's name, the issue number and year. The title, issue number and year appear on the spine. The back cover contains a short prose essay in a series entitled 'Haidan News' which presents a biography of a featured poet. The issue opens with a selection of work from this same poet. Inside, the poetry is presented in a single column. Titles, where used, are printed, apparently indiscriminately, in bold, underlined or capitals. The poet's name is given at the bottom of the poem (or group of poems), tabbed across to the right hand side of the page. Residence is

²⁶ Ibid., p.22

added only in the case of international authors. The poetic contents are grouped into two sections. The first, 'Stardust', allots a whole page of work to each represented poet (usually a total of six haiku); the second section, 'Heath and Hills', gives a more mixed representation, with fewer poems by each poet. Pages were not numbered in earlier issues; between issue 4 and issue 13 the total number of pages has risen from 40 to 48. The cost of a single issue began as £2.50 but is now £2.75. The usual subscription arrangement is to subscribe for the two issues of any given year, which also brings a newsletter; the cost of this began as £4, was soon raised to £5.50, and has been £6 from issue 11 on. The usual total print run is 100, with extra copies being generated as needed. The breakdown of subscribers is: 88% UK-based, 12% international.

In my own view, the prose sections of *Time Haiku* are of considerably greater value than the poetry. There is often an essay or two on the experience of writing haiku, by various contributors ('What Haiku writing means to me' is a typical title) but of particular interest is the 'Time Saijiki.' This is the editor's own contribution, and it is an ongoing series describing the meaning and connotations of a variety of season words in Japanese haiku. (Despite her anglicised name, Erica Facey is Japanese, and her remarks on Japanese haiku are reassuringly authoritative.) These discussions generally centre on the 'hoi' of a particular season-word, that is, the atmosphere that it represents and the associations which it inspires. The notion of 'hoi' reminds us that Japanese haiku writing takes place within a historical context, a culture of conventions, and the Japanese haiku poet has to operate within (or, perhaps, against) these conventions, establishing a unique (or, if unsuccessful, hackneyed) arrangement of associations. *Time Haiku* is thus the only UK haiku magazine which is so regularly informative on Japanese haiku practice.

The poetic content of *Time Haiku* is, unfortunately, less exciting. One (again, unique) innovation is a regular section of Children's Haiku, based on lessons given by Erica Facey in east London schools. Judged as a workshop rather than a showcase, this is clearly commendable. Some attempts are notably worthy of such encouragement; for example, the warmth of feeling and physical detail in this, by Taji Jelani:

I feel happy
The cat is sleeping by the fire
Outside it's snowing²⁷

Unfortunately, not all the contributions show comparable promise. 'A panda hunts for fish / Endangers other animals / And humans' is rather confused. Similar confusion is evident in some of the offerings from adult authors. This example, by Pamela Harvey, seems not to have been thought through:

Underneath my feet
Bouncing hailstones grind to dust
Dance wet on my clothes.²⁸

'dust' seems inaccurate; the hailstones cannot simultaneously be 'Bouncing' and be being ground down; and I would have thought they only become noticeably 'wet' after they have ceased to 'Dance.'

This example, by Martha Street, seems to have fallen through a metaphorical trapdoor:

Eastern warrior
tilts his lance a little more:
autumn morning sun²⁹

²⁷ *Time Haiku* 10 (1999), p.22

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17

The poem is destroyed by the colon, and all that it implies. If the first two lines could have given us a convincingly realistic portrayal of a warrior with tilted lance, preferably without the word 'Eastern' as a giveaway, the comparison might have remained pleasingly subtle, but as it is, the metaphor is so blatant that the physicality of these two lines instantly evaporates, and the experience is lost to the artificial construction.

Similar carelessness undermines the following offering, from Janice Fixter:

falling petals –
confetti for courting
blackbirds³⁰

The second line is disastrous. Again, there might have been merit if this illusion had been merely implied, by a matter-of-fact juxtaposition of the first line with a mated pair of birds. But spelt out, as it is, the reality of the moment is subordinated to a whimsical fantasy which I find positively distasteful.

In this same issue (10), there are less objectionable contributions from several established haiku poets, such as Eric Houck jr., Diana Webb, Tom Williams and Maurice Tasnier, although even these seem to have been chosen with less discrimination than their usual representation in other magazines. The breadth of Erica Facey's working definition of haiku would seem to slide perilously close to Brian Tasker's anathema: 'haiku diluted down to personal taste.' Fortunately, I am able to end this account on a positive note; I did appreciate this contribution from Dylan Pugh:

²⁹ Ibid., p.18

³⁰ Ibid., p.19

choosing poultry from
the supermarket freezer –
getting goose pimples³¹

There are no concessions here to the conventionally poetic, but a triumphant result in plucking poetry from such a mundane action in such mundane surroundings. The expression is not ideal – beginning lines one and three with similar –ing forms – but the realisation, the physical sensation, the cold shiver is communicated instantly.

(e) *Presence*

In a section to follow (5.3) I give an account of some of the practical issues that arise in running *Presence*, but it may still be worthwhile to include a discussion of its style and content in this section, even if I can't view my own magazine with perfect objectivity.

Presence #1 dates from January 1996. New issues have appeared approximately every five months, and #13 was reached in January 2001. Along with haiku, it includes senryu and tanka, generally separated out but not labelled with identifying headings. It is the only British haiku magazine regularly to include renga, as well as featuring haibun more frequently than any other. Each issue usually includes one or two other short poems, but they are very much in a minority. Each issue has a white card cover, usually with a cover illustration, although for #10 this was replaced by the title in large-scale calligraphy (by Bill West). The ISSN number, date and price, generally appear on the back cover. Inside, the haiku are presented scattered across the page, with each selection 'signed' with the poet's name in italics. Usually, the haiku number six to a page. There are typically two or three illustrations per issue, which have included cartoons and photographs as well as sumi-e brush drawings. The size of each

issue varies between 36 and 60 pages. The price of a single issue began as £2.50 but was raised to £3 from #9. A four-issue subscription is available for £10. The total print run per issue is 125-175. The subscriber breakdown is: 68% UK-based, 6% European, 26% international.

Presence #10 represents a fairly typical issue, except in its heavy representation of haibun – seven, covering nine pages. There are no prose essays, but there is a review section, covering eight books over six pages. There is a page and a half of editorial, and a page devoted to the results of the best-of-issue awards. There are two pages of tanka; thirteen and a half pages of haiku (including the odd senryu); one renga; two other haiku sequences (one, a ‘rengay’³²); and one page containing two other short poems. There are two full-page illustrations. The particular strength of the magazine, the gap in the market which it fills, is the space it devotes to sequences, renga and haibun, which receive much reduced coverage in *Blüthe Spirit*, and almost no representation at all in other British haiku magazines. In other respects, *Presence* quite closely resembles the earlier incarnations of *Blüthe Spirit*. This is partly because *Blüthe Spirit* exercised a formative influence over my own taste in haiku magazines, and partly because *Presence* is copied, covered and bound by Colin Blundell, who performed the same role for the early years of *Blüthe Spirit*.

The haiku contents of *Presence* are intended to be firmly in line with what has come to be called the ‘consensus’ (after the BHS document entitled “Towards a Consensus on the Nature of Haiku”), and might reasonably be called the western haiku tradition, which is now firmly established, even if the tradition is only about 40 years old. Three-line objective

³¹ Ibid., p.5

³² A rengay is a short six-stanza linked poem, a kind of mini-renga, developed by the Californian haiku poet, Garry Gay.

nature-sketches are frequent, but I do not want the magazine to appear restrictive, and departures from the norm are welcomed. There are two forms of comparative originality which feature strongly in #10. One is one-line haiku, which includes submissions from Philip Rowland, Fred Schofield and Stuart Quine as well as the two examples shown here:

filling with leaves the road with no bend (LeRoy Gorman)³³

rainy evening the smell of my cat's fur (Brian Tasker)³⁴

Often poets writing one-line haiku use spaces to indicate pauses, analogous to the line breaks of a poem in three lines. But these two examples are written without breaks, although a slight pause in reading would be appropriate after 'leaves' and 'evening.' The result of this is to bind the images more closely together, perhaps suggesting that the fall of leaves is a continuous action (the single line may also mimic the straightness of the road). In 'rainy evening' it shifts the focus onto the atmosphere and away from the logical inference that we notice the smell of the cat's fur simply because the cat has been out in the rain.

The second unusual aspect of the haiku content of *Presence* #10 is the number of poems which indulge in some form of wordplay. Here are four examples:

black spots move
across the laurel leaf -
tightroping spiderlings

(David Brady)³⁵

half-moon
pale clouds
deckled with silver

(Helen Robinson)³⁶

³³ *Presence* #10 (October 1999), p.11

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8

all the stones on the beach
togetherwashed
by the rain

(Allan Jarrett)³⁷

big chlups
at the surface
from small fish

(Allan Jarrett)³⁸

I confess to having a weakness for the light-heartedness of these neologisms. Too much emphasis on the meditative and visionary aspects of haiku can give it a sombre and weighty appearance which is alien to its original inspiration. Bashō valued *karumi*, lightness, in haiku, and wordplay seems one way to get at it. Onomatopoeia has always had a role in Japanese haiku, and Allan Jarrett's 'chlups' is a good attempt at this. I find Helen Robinson's 'deckled' easy to see, despite never having heard it before (it's in the dictionary, so this is a not a coinage, though new to me). David Brady's 'tightroping' perhaps displays an anthropomorphism which I have criticised when encountered elsewhere, but I can't think of a better way of putting it and the result is finely observed.

Finally, to set against these attempts to try something different, I would like to point to the haiku in *Presence* #10 which falls most classically within the Western tradition. This is John Barlow's

filling the crinkle-cut
crisp packet
winter beech leaves³⁹

The coincidence of the 'crinkle-cut' seems almost too good to be true, but we have to believe what the poet gives us. Effortlessly, we are made aware of the leafiness of crisps and the

³⁶ Ibid., p.13

³⁷ Ibid., p.17

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p.15

crispiness of leaves. The poem thus carries a metaphorical charge without – and this is crucial – betraying the literal reality of the observation. (Of course, we are in no position to know how true it is to the actual moment of composition, but it operates with an *artistic* honesty.) The ‘crinkle-cut’ is a *tour de force*, since it relates directly to the species, beech. We can see it, precisely.

(f) *still*

The third magazine of the second phase of haiku expansion in the 1990s was *still*, which emerged at the beginning of 1997. It added a new, classy dimension to the previously rather homespun range of haiku journals, having a glossy cover, with an intriguing high-quality photograph on the front (in issue *one*, of a single flint and its shadow on cracked paving) with a titled spine, and a barcode on the back cover, along with a small-scale reproduction of the front cover image. Subtitled “a journal of short verse”, its contents are nowhere defined as haiku (or anything else) and its only overt indication of a haiku reference was its bi-annual Haiku Award, launched with an impressive prize fund of £300, later rising to £1,000. The cover price of £5.99 reflected its high production standards. The first issue was a weighty 96 pages long. Total print run is claimed, rather imprecisely, as 1,000 - 2,000. I have no figures for the actual number of subscribers but, since a large number of copies is circulated to bookshops, it is reasonable to assume that subscribers are numbered in the hundreds rather than thousands.

Inside issue *one*, there was further evidence of innovation. It was the first British haiku magazine to have an e-mail address and web site. It included an index so that authors could immediately locate their own poems. It included detailed lists of publications received, with

editors' addresses (including e-mail). It even included a slogan which appeared to summarise its aims: 'to quiet / to silence / to distil.' The most notable innovation, however, was the decision to devote a whole page to every single poem. This would not be a startling tactic in a conventional poetry magazine, where poems might be long enough to demand a whole page to themselves, but it seems extravagant when the contents are frequently only three lines long, and sometimes less. Undeniably, this adds to the impression of quality but it does mean that, for all its bulk, there are only eighty or so poems in the issue. Apart from a page of editorial, and a page of submission information, there is no prose. Just over half the contents are haiku or senryu, and there are a few tanka; the rest is a variety of short poetry of all kinds, not necessarily resembling haiku, up to a maximum of about twelve lines in length.

The most disappointing aspect of the content of *still* was, and continues to be, its reliance on previously published material. Many of its haiku have appeared elsewhere and, as if to avoid seeming second-hand or parasitical, these previous appearances are not acknowledged. The editorial advantage of this tactic is that it allows the quality level to be raised by the inclusion of haiku which are established classics.

The most challenging aspect of the decisions taken by its editor, ai li, is the avoidance of all labelling of the contents. Haiku are seamlessly integrated into the generic grouping, 'short verse', rather than being set apart as something different, as they are elsewhere. This unusual approach has a distinct value. I would argue that, ideally, haiku should be simultaneously treated as both different from, and akin to, other poetry. On the one hand, as Brian Tasker argues, haiku is a 'specific' form, a unique discipline which demands a reading which is sensitive to its history and character. On the other hand, any original poem should be judged on its intrinsic merits and labelling as haiku, senryu or tanka, or forcing a limited reading on a

poem, can blunt a reader's response. Haiku are routinely marked apart; even Kevin Bailey, who abhors what he sees as the 'haiku ghetto' (created by the consensual and convergent trends of the BHS, HSA and similar organisations) identifies the haiku contributions to *HQ* by titling them as such. Thus the boundary between haiku and other forms can easily come to appear fixed and immutable, and the blurring of distinctions that takes place in *still* usefully challenges these perceptions.

There is even, in the pages of *still one*, a poem which apparently encapsulates this theoretical position. I am thinking of Michael Facherty's

in the room two flies
circling the argument
about poetry⁴⁰

The implication is that arguments about poetry are circular, whereas the concrete image is direct, and needs no further justification. Perhaps the absence of theoretical comment in *still*, in the form of essays, as well as the abandonment of labels, can be seen as constituting a strategy, a position in its own right: let the poetry speak.

We have already encountered the one-word haiku, in the form of Cor van den Heuvel's 'tundra', which I can defend with the following justification: since haiku is the poetry of the concrete noun all concrete nouns are, in essence, haiku. In *still one* we have a one-word poem which is an adjective (the part of speech treated most suspiciously by haiku poets). How do we read this (by Nathan Braund)?

sad⁴¹

⁴⁰ *still one* (1997), p.77

I can offer one reading: as an adjective it does not belong alone; is this why it is 'sad'? The fact that, not being a concrete and self-sufficient noun, it fails to qualify as a haiku seems, by a long way, a secondary question. The primary question is, what do we make of it?

still one also shelters the didacticism of Kenneth Verity:

In the mirror I
See sixty years; in Nature
I see it is Spring!⁴²

It is the posturing of this kind of thing as haiku which so enraged Brian Tasker in his review of one of Kenneth Verity's collections. If we are spared having to read it as haiku, can we see any merit in it? Well, by any reckoning it is ponderous; the capitalisation of 'Nature' is a debilitating abstraction; the exclamation mark lays claim to more profundity and surprise than is warranted. I find that I do not distinguish: to read it and criticise it as a haiku, I read it as a poem. It is rescued, to some small extent, only by another kind of reading altogether: nutshell philosophy; the agelessness of natural renewal is worthy of some reflection.

As an example of material from *still* which does fall solidly within the haiku mainstream, I need not improve upon its first poem of all, ai li's own

a flickering tv screen
in a darkened room
new year's eve⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., p.38

⁴² Ibid., p.25

⁴³ Ibid., p.5

One of the arts of haiku is implication, particularly with respect to emotional content. Here, the choice of 'new year's eve' is so much more highly charged than any alternative could have been. Suddenly, the television and the darkness connote loneliness in a way they would not have done otherwise; a fine example of haiku economy and the power of the specific image.

(g) *Snapshots*

The most recent addition to the haiku scene is *Snapshots*, which first appeared in January 1998. It is edited by John Barlow. Originally intended as quarterly, it ran into problems due to the editor's workload (John Barlow had committed himself to the publication of an anthology, several haiku collections and the tanka magazine, *Tangled Hair*, as well) so that we have only reached issue 6 by the end of 2000. Its production values combine the best of both worlds: it is handmade yet looks thoroughly professional. Unlike all other surviving UK haiku magazines, which are A5, *Snapshots* is a pocket-sized A6. Like *still*, it uses a front cover colour photograph, usually a landscape, displayed along with the title, the issue number, the name of the editor, and the press (Snapshot Press). The title and issue number appear on the spine. The back cover carries a list of contributors, the title, issue number, price (£3.50 for issues 1-3; £4 for issues 4-6), ISSN number, and acknowledgement of support from the North West Arts Board. The contents are exclusively haiku and senryu (tanka were included prior to the launch of *Tangled Hair*, but no more), typically three poems per page, the layout sometimes in a column and sometimes scattered. The poet's name appears in bold heading each selection. Each issue also contains a page of subscription / submission information, a page or two of editorial, a couple of pages devoted to the results of the best-of-issue award, an index, and – a unique feature – several pages of 'Notes on Contributors', brief biographies which may be factual, self-promotional or less than fully

serious. The number of pages has risen from 40 in issues 1-3 to 48 in issues 4-6. A four-issue subscription costs £16. The total print run per issue is 150-200. The subscriber breakdown is: 65% UK-based, 5% European, 30% international.

Like *still*, *Snapshots* focuses exclusively on poetry and does not include articles (a short essay on “Haiku Form” by the editor appeared in *Snapshots* 1, but this has not become a regular feature). Space constraints effectively eliminate consideration of renga and haibun, and *Tangled Hair* now provides an alternative venue for tanka. Unlike the rather eclectic *still*, there is no inconsistency in the quality of haiku offered in *Snapshots*; the standard is uniformly high.

Although *Snapshots* does include a fair proportion of senryu, it is haiku based on its traditional subject, the observation of nature, which forms the basis of *Snapshots*’ strength. It is frequently possible to compare alternative treatments of similar themes within a single issue. For example, issue 6 includes these two haiku on the subject of ‘heron.’

dusky blue sky
slow glide
of a heron

(Alison Williams)⁴⁴

water meadows
the poise of a heron
on a sheep path

(Matt Morden)⁴⁵

Neither author opts to startle; they are content with a simple, factual sketch. Matt Morden’s poem is the more grounded; only the invitation to consider the ‘poise’ takes it beyond the level of a field note. Alison Williams establishes a dreamier atmosphere, yet her poem is nevertheless precisely observed.

⁴⁴ *Snapshots* 6 (October 1999), p.11

Another comparison possible in *Snapshots* 6 is between these two poems on the theme of 'geese.'

wild geese overhead
shifting and changing patterns
the scent of jasmine

(David Platt)⁴⁶

the calls of geese
pass out of hearing
evening snow

(A.C.Missias)⁴⁷

In one case they are seen, in the other heard. Both poems offer a sudden switch of senses in the final line. A.C.Missias' surroundings become visible, although there is also the implication of a deep silence, by contrast with the opening line. David Platt shifts the focus to 'scent', with the middle line operating as a hinge, suggesting that the 'scent', too, has 'changing patterns.' This haiku is unusual in attempting to combine two images which are notably both powerful and disparate. The hinge line accomplishes a long leap.

Three of the strongest haiku in *Snapshots* 6 offer evocations of specific sounds. These are:

trundle of the train -
the musician settles
a score in his lap

(David Cobb)⁴⁸

sliding back the bolt
on the garden gate
the screech of gulls

(Maurice Tasnier)⁴⁹

autumn gust —
a rowing coach bellows
from the towpath

(Matthew Paul)⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.16

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.13

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.39

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.8

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.19

The actions of the musician in David Cobb's poem become an invitation to consider the musicality of the 'trundle.' In Maurice Tasnier's haiku, the sound of the bolt is undescribed, but the 'screech' suggests the possibility that the bolt is stiff or rusty, and has a screech of its own. In Matthew Paul's poem, the 'autumn gust' and the 'rowing coach' reinforce each other and we hear the bellowing of each more loudly.

(h) *Tangled Hair*

Tangled Hair is the only British-based tanka magazine and one of very few English-language tanka magazines anywhere in the world. The first issue is dated Summer 1999 and is the only one to have appeared so far (by the end of 2000). It is another product of John Barlow's Snapshot Press and the style is reminiscent of *Snapshots*. It is even smaller than its stablemate, large enough only to fit a single five-line poem comfortably on a page. Each page is signed with the poet's name in italics and nationality in the bottom corner. The 64 pages of issue 1 include an index, an introductory essay and, as in *Snapshots*, Biographical Notes. The front cover is a colour photograph of a sunset (or sunrise), with the title in lower case, and the issue number. The back cover lists the contributors and also includes the price (£4) and the ISSN number. A four-issue subscription costs £16. The magazine is intended to be quarterly but as with *Snapshots* its original timetable has been considerably delayed.

Whereas haiku is by now a thoroughly established form in English, tanka is in a much more tentative position. There may be several reasons for this but two are prominent. A definition of tanka by content rather than form is more elusive than an equivalent definition of haiku; and the more lyrical tanka is closer, in its lyricism, to Western traditions, therefore

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.35

less immediately distinctive and less uniquely appealing. The three main sub-types of tanka are all represented in *Tangled Hair* 1. These are: nature as subject; human emotions or relationships as subject; a conjunction of objective natural content with subjective emotional content.

As an example of nature-tanka, there is this from Keith J. Coleman:

from our bikes
we watched a line of heron
crossing the flame-coloured sky;
how vast, the estuary
that summer evening⁵¹

In the way this sketches a location and atmosphere it resembles a lengthy and leisurely haiku. There are three ways, all interconnected, in which it differs from a haiku and proclaims its tanka affinity in terms of content, beyond its five-line form. These are: its use of the past tense; its setting within the context of shared experience, at least hinting at the background of a relationship ('we'); its overt expression of awe ('how vast ...?'). As a recollection, rather than a straightforward observation, the emotive force of the experience is underlined. This is then made accessible by the wonder explicit in 'how vast' together with the choice of 'flame-coloured' as an adjective. (Fire hints at desire, with disturbances and overtones beyond the simple appreciation of beautiful scenery.) That it is a shared experience suggests an emotional setting which may parallel the natural setting, even if no comparisons are forced and the identity of the narrator's partner is unrevealed.

As a poem located securely within the emotional realm, there is this, by John Barlow:

hours
before daybreak –
the gap
between us
our bodies cannot warm⁵²

The author's haiku skills ensure that the physical situation is keenly felt, giving the time of night and the purely sensory yearning for warmth. But here the senses are all operating in service of the feelings. The 'gap' is evidently an emotional distance for which the slight but detectable physical separation is only a symbol. It is possible for haiku to possess these qualities, to point to sought-after intimacy and the isolation that is felt as a consequence of its failure or denial, but this is much more typically the territory of the tanka. Haiku excite our imaginations, but this touches the heart.⁵³

As an example of a tanka which combines both subjective and objective elements I would point to this, by Bill Wyatt:

corkscrew willow
bending
in the wind –
sadness
that will not go away⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Tangled Hair* 1 (Summer 1999), p.33

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.36

⁵³ There is an element of rhetoric in my conclusion here. I do not mean to imply that haiku never move us, but the difference in approach between tanka and haiku presents an additional degree of challenge to haiku if it is to engage our feelings. Tanka can confront our emotions directly. In haiku, emotion generally remains implicit, an inference from the choice of objective image. Whether it is communicated, then, depends on the writer's truthfulness, awareness or skill in selecting the image, and the reader's openness in response. It might seem, then, that it is harder to write a good haiku than a good tanka, but on the evidence in current journals this appears not to be the case. Tanka more or less demands emotional connection; if it fails, we get sentimentality. Haiku appears to offer a wider range of options, including the harmonisation of images for its own sake, or painterly artistry, or understated humour. See Chapter Four, sub-section 4.4.7, for discussion of the question of overt feeling in haiku.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.35

In time-honoured fashion, this gives us a haiku-like natural image in the opening three lines, the objective correlative, followed by two lines giving the inner parallel. The contorted quality of the tree may reveal something of the torment that underlines the 'sadness.'

A less pointed combination of subjective and objective occurs in the following tanka by Maggie West:

watching evening rain
from the back door
coconut mat
prickly under my feet ...
I wait for you⁵⁵

Here, it is possible that the rain and the prickliness of the mat indicate the emotional, as well as the physical, backdrop. But they need not do so. These details stimulate the sensory imagination in a haiku-like way, in tantalising detail, and it is possible to read them as emotionally neutral or positive. Bare feet may indicate that there is no need for defensiveness, and the rain may well be cool and refreshing, so the waiting may be an optimistic waiting, after all. It is up to the reader to choose an interpretation.

I hope I have done something in this summary to indicate the distinctive character of each of the British haiku (and tanka) magazines. Each of these magazines has its own style, and each has its own set of devotees, although there is a small number of highly active haiku poets who contribute to most, or all, of them. It is possible to arrange the magazines in a spectrum indicating their degree of convergence with, or divergence from, the consensus values which

this thesis is attempting to encourage, i.e. directness (showing rather than telling), objectivity (absence of intrusive interpretation or comment), a reliance on implicit rather than explicit metaphor. Moving from convergence to divergence this list would read: *Snapshots* – *Presence* – *Blithe Spirit* – *still* – *HQ* – *Time Haiku*.⁵⁵ Given my own bias, this list equates to my personal 'league table' of quality in terms of haiku content. I stress the qualifier 'haiku content'. An overall indicator of quality, or value for money, would have to consider additional factors such as: production values (*Snapshots* and *still* are ahead of the field here, with *Blithe Spirit* also doing well); prose content (*Blithe Spirit* is out on its own, *Time Haiku* scores a lot better, *Snapshots* and *still* fail to score at all); quantity of material relative to cost (*HQ* excels here, *Snapshots* and *still* do very badly); and poetry, i.e. non-haiku, content (*HQ* is far ahead of the rest, *Blithe Spirit* and *Snapshots* fail to qualify). The magazines do, to some extent, compete for subscribers – few poets are able to afford to subscribe to them all – but each retains its own niche within the poetic cosmos, which remains open to a range of styles, views and understandings.

5.3 On Editing *Presence*

5.3.1 Production

The idea of *Presence* was initially conceived in discussions with David Steele in the late spring of 1995. At the time, there were only three haiku journals in the UK, and it seemed likely that one of them, *Bare Bones*, might be in imminent danger of demise. Given that the material published in *HQ* did not accord closely with my view of where haiku should be

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.49

⁵⁶ I have not included the extinct *Bare Bones*, but it could be located roughly equal with *Presence*.

heading, this would leave *Blüthe Spirit* as the only available vehicle for what I perceived as an expanding band of UK haiku poets. So, I felt that there was a sufficient market, and I also felt confident enough, after an energetic three years on the haiku scene, to make the authoritative aesthetic decisions that would be required in editing such a journal. What I was less sure about was the physical production, but David Steele felt able to supply the necessary computing expertise and foresaw the copying, covering and binding as surmountable obstacles. My initial step towards publicity of the project was to insert a notice in the final issue of *Bare Bones* (#8), which finally emerged in the summer of 1995. I also informed members of the haiku community in the course of ordinary correspondence. Responses to these first tentative steps, and a small selection of initial submissions, persuaded me to go ahead.

The name, *Presence*, came to me in September 1995. At the time, I was working on my M.A. dissertation, a discussion of presentations of Zen to the western audience, and I had identified 'presence' as the best available label for what I perceived as the central goal of Zen practice. By extension, it was also a suitable label for the most desirable quality of haiku, the essence of my poetic ideal. I suggested the name to David Steele (he approved) and confirmed his availability to provide the practical support which I was seeking. By December 1995 we had enough material available to consider going ahead with the production of a first issue, and I arranged a few days' holiday at David's Norfolk home where we would work together on the typesetting.

Early decisions on the layout and the choice of the Helvetica font were taken by David. The typing was shared between us. After the input had been completed, and the results proof-read, I left it to David to complete the production. He had access to cheap photocopying

and he found a local printer whom he was able to persuade to quote a very low price for the trimming and stapling of the pages. This meant that costs would fall well within our budget, enabling us to build a reserve to ensure the future viability of the project. All seemed to be going smoothly, but problems arose. Firstly – you get what you pay for! – the printer botched the stapling. David had to pull the staples out (they weren't centred) and he redid the job himself. The magazine was sent out, and we congratulated ourselves. However, among the initial reactions were a few complaints about the ink on the cover. For the cover design, I had chosen a drawing by my brother David, of a large white moon against a half-page black background. The large area of black on the cover resulted in the ink coming off easily, blackening the hands of readers and fading to a dark grey over time. Another chastening came with a discovery of a misprint in the very first haiku in the magazine: Norman Barraclough's 'seeing sunrise' had somehow become 'seeping sunrise'. Norman generously commented that the result almost worked. Fortunately, on the whole, the fastidious proof-reading had worked and no other errors were noticeable. This first issue was dated January 1996 and went out to about fifty subscribers.

No decision was taken concerning the magazine frequency, although we asked for subscriptions of £5 to cover two issues. (In practice, the frequency gradually settled down to one issue every five months, or 2-3 per year. This was dictated purely pragmatically, by the volume of submissions.) By May 1996 I had enough material for a second issue, and I again took a few days' holiday in Norfolk to help with the typesetting. The only significant difference about the look of #2 was the choice of a Palatino font for the prose sections. The financial viability of the project was further secured by a small grant from Waltham Forest Arts Council (I was living in east London at the time), an organisation that was also supporting *Time Haiku*, which had coincidentally been launched at around the same time.

(Within a few more months, *still* would also be launched: the gap in the haiku market was very rapidly being filled!) The grant enabled us to institute a regular Best-of-issue award based on a poll of subscribers.

As the date for a third issue approached it became clear that David Steele was having difficulties finding the time to combine work on the magazine with his full-time teaching work. Also, I was looking for ways to improve the production of the magazine, particularly the staple binding. I approached Colin Blundell, who had for several years been producing hand-made books for his small press, Hub Editions. Colin had done a neat job producing *Blithe Spirit*, but he had recently been relieved of this role and was now free to help me out. Colin took over production of #3, which now had glue binding, numbered pages (44) and a very tidy overall appearance. *Presence* was now fulfilling my ambitions, and the style of the magazine had been set for the future.

As the time for #4 approached, I was working on an NVQ course in Information Technology and had access to computers that meant I was able to consider typesetting the magazine myself. I chose an Arial font, which was the closest available approximation to our previous style, and typed and printed the 44 pages myself, sending a master copy to Colin, whose work was then reduced to copying, covering and binding. This became the pattern for future issues. #5 became my project for my NVQ2, used to demonstrate my word-processing proficiency. For #6 to #8, although I had now completed my NVQ, I returned to Lancaster Chamber of Commerce, where I had been training, to borrow their facilities for the typesetting. #9 was typed entirely by Stuart Quine, who had accepted the task of being Guest-Editor for that issue. (Fred Schofield had guest-edited #7, but I had taken over at the

typesetting stage.) Finally, when #10 came round, I acquired my own computer to work on, and this has now simplified production.

5.3.2. The editing process

Surprisingly, even shockingly, decisions on what poems to include and exclude are not taken purely on artistic merit. My personal taste remains the ultimate arbiter, but I am to some extent swayed by considerations of whether the poet is a paid subscriber, and also by the poet's level of haiku experience. I find only a small proportion of haiku appealing and satisfying on first reading, and if I restricted acceptance to poems which immediately moved me I would never fill an issue. My appreciation usually takes place after acceptance, in the course of typing, when I have ample opportunity to dwell on the qualities of each poem. There is also some quantitative element in decision-making, although I never have a final figure of included poems that I am working towards. Experience has shown that, as if by magic, acceptance at my usual rate from a steady flow of submissions at the usual rate will produce enough poems to fill the magazine every five months. My usual rate of acceptance would be, I estimate, about 25% from among serious contenders. Non-haiku poems (but see below for exceptions) and poems which, although presented as haiku, lack identifiable haiku characteristics (i.e. the cluttered, the wordy, the vague, the over-ornate, the mystifying, the didactic, aphorisms, epigrams, etc.) are not serious contenders. The maximum number of poems to a page is normally six and this represents a reasonable upper limit for acceptance from an individual poet (although I would break this limit if there was a good case for doing so). From poems submitted by a subscriber, I would do my best to find at least one to include. Similarly, I would also take a generous view of poems submitted by a new enquirer. I am more demanding when faced with submissions by repeated non-subscribers, i.e. those

who have submitted on several previous occasions and seem to rely on receiving free contributor copies. I always try to judge a poem relative to other work by the same poet, rather than relative to other poets. Thus, my standards are more demanding for experienced haiku poets than for novices. Acceptance of even a single poem by a new writer serves three purposes: (1) an indication of quality, i.e. a chance to compare the merits of the accepted poem with those which were rejected; (2) an encouragement to persevere; (3) a stimulus to wider reading experience, by exposing the writer to the work of other authors whose poems appear alongside the writer's own. Much of my strategy as editor is geared towards producing a magazine that people will read as a whole, discouraging the practice of writing merely to see one's own name in print. In cases where I have to issue a blanket rejection to a new enquirer I always issue an invitation to purchase a sample issue, so that the aspiring writer can gain a good idea of the kind of material that I accept. This invitation is rarely taken up. Bad writers tend to be bad readers, uninterested in the work of others; good writers are good readers, alert to the talents of their competitors in the field.

Among positive qualities that I do look for in choosing poems are: good English; intelligibility; wordlessness and presence. By 'good English' I mean primarily an avoidance of the telegrammatic tendency that frequently infects haiku writing, the temptation to omit articles in order to trim length. Clipped and broken syntax can succeed, but there is an art to it. By 'intelligibility' I mean that I have to feel confident that I have at least a partial understanding of the poem. (This can frequently be a subjective criterion, limited by my own experience and imagination.) By 'wordlessness' I mean that a poem should be restrained in its diction, avoiding, for example, heavy use of adjectives. Many novice writers pad their poems with superfluities in an attempt to reach 5-7-5 syllables, and this is not a tendency which I wish to encourage. By 'presence' I mean that a poem should convey the sense of a

particular moment, rather than a generalisation. The poem should appeal to the senses rather than the intellect, although this criterion can be relaxed to some extent when considering senryu. I am also on the lookout for originality in the choice of imagery. A haiku that resembles a hundred other haiku has little to recommend it, although I would be more harsh in my judgement of an experienced writer than a novice in this respect.

It may be helpful to give some brief indication of my selection criteria when accepting or rejecting poems, by looking at an example. The following six poems were offered by Matt Morden as submissions for #12:

steam railway
a bumblebee
races the loco

summer evening
the old town clock
drowning a drunk

friday evening
low branches scrape
the last bus home

evangelical church
red hot poker
marking the boundary

another birthday
all the tall docks
gone to seed

cool shade
the old folks picnic
slow to finish

Matt Morden is an experienced haiku poet who regularly submits to both British and American magazines. He has swiftly risen to a position of prominence among British haiku poets. His first collection, *A Dark Afternoon*, was published by Snapshot Press in 2000. Although none of the poems above would be out of place in *Presence*, because of the author's evident competence I operate a high standard when making my selection. In 'steam railway' I am dubious about the anthropomorphic implications of 'races' – this is a case of projection by the poet; the bee itself is, we presume, unaware. In 'summer evening' I again object to a single word: 'drowning.' The scene itself is appealing, but the pun attracts too much attention. 'friday evening' seems to lack some significance. Again, the scene is vivid, but

there is no clear relevance in the particular time of day. In 'cool shade' it seems rather too obvious that the coolness is causing the delay: there is no element of surprise. Obviousness also afflicts 'another birthday': the link to 'gone to seed' is predictable. Given all these objections, it might be assumed that I would also reject 'evangelical church.' After all, the 'red hot poker' are hardly subtle, and the double meaning almost amounts to a pun. However, I find the humour here bracing and barbed, and the coincidence is (we must assume) pure chance. The poet has discovered a startlingly appropriate relevance in an accident of nature (or, at least, gardening). For these reasons, I chose to accept 'evangelical church.'

Having chosen which poems to include, I then have to give consideration to the order in which they appear in the magazine. My current preferred running order is: tanka, then haiku, then senryu, then sequences, renga and other poems. Haibun are used to divide these sections. I do not label the sections, as the divisions (particularly between haiku and senryu) are only approximate and I do not want to force interpretations on to poems. (I can't now remember how this running order became established.) Four-line haiku are quite likely to be found with the tanka, with which they have much in common. Within the haiku section, I follow a loose seasonal arrangement: spring - summer - autumn - winter - no season. However, poems by a single poet are kept together unless this would lead to a clear clash of seasons, so many non-seasonal haiku are incorporated into the seasonal sections. No very thorough attempt is made to separate non-seasonal haiku from senryu; these categories have a tendency to merge. In grouping haiku together, I give consideration to distance and balance between images. Poems which closely resemble each other are separated out, but, ideally, all the haiku on a particular page should harmonise. Although the standard number of haiku to a page is six, this may extend to seven if one or more one-line or two-line haiku is

included. For the composition of poems on a page, I prefer a 'jazzy' arrangement, scattering the haiku about using the 'tab' key on the computer. Each poem or set of poems is 'signed' with the poet's name in italics. Critics (e.g. David Walker, who has designed covers for *Blüthe Spirit*) have said that the arrangement looks 'busy' but I prefer it to the single column of *Blüthe Spirit* or the frequent double column of *Modern Haiku*. The economics of the magazine do not allow consideration of a single poem per page (as in *still*).

5.3.3. Poetry other than haiku

Presence continues to receive regular submissions of longer poetry, most of which is totally unsuitable for inclusion in a magazine devoted to haiku. In the early issues of the magazine, I felt it appropriate to include a relatively high proportion of non-haiku poetry. Although I set an upper length limit of sixteen lines, this was broken on occasions (Colin Blundell's 'in this age of ineluctable Progress' in #2; Albert Russo's 'Poetry & Peanuts' in #3). At this stage I felt that the magazine would benefit from building a bridge between haiku and conventional poetry. There was also the mundane consideration that by including a wider range of styles I was expanding the subscriber base (assuming I could tempt contributors to subscribe). However, feedback from my haiku poet subscribers suggested that they felt that the magazine ought to find a closer focus on haiku. Between #3 and #6 I thinned down the representation of non-haiku poetry. #7 was guest-edited by Fred Schofield, who I felt confident would tighten the haiku net still further, and so it proved. Having reached #13, representation of 'other poetry' is, in theory, now restricted to work in which I can see clear haiku connections. However, this rule is made to be challenged, and I would probably break it if I received an attractive submission from a new enquirer. There remains the incentive to broaden the magazine's appeal by injecting more variety into the contents. Unfortunately,

though, the bridge-building ideal is rarely achieved. A few haiku poets (e.g. Jim Norton, Helen Robinson, Philip Rowland) have successfully submitted longer poems, and at least one poet – Hannah Mitte – who began by submitting non-haiku material has subsequently successfully submitted haiku genre poems. In theory, I think there is plenty of scope for poetry which is imagistic, which retains the clarity, restraint and presence of haiku, but differs in length, allowing itself a more relaxed and patient expression. In practice, writers of longer poems seem drawn towards the didactic, the ornate or the overtly metaphorical, whereas haiku poets seem to continue to find satisfaction in the three-line form and rarely feel moved to expand beyond the limits of a tanka.

5.3.4 The place and value of artwork

Shiki described the method of haiku as ‘sketching from life’ and there does seem to be close correspondence between haiku and an artistic sketch. Essentially, both a haiku and a drawing are achieved by looking closely at an object, perceiving its inner life.

Although I have been unable to afford the luxury of presenting a single poem per page, at an early stage in the design of the magazine I decided that it would encourage more careful reading if I could single out a poem for special attention. I decided to use the centre pages for a poem with an illustration, for which I commissioned the services of my artist brother, David. A haiku by Jim Norton was chosen for this headline treatment in #1, with poems by Norman Barraclough and Michael Gunton being selected in #2 and #3.

Illustrations in the magazine tend to fall into three categories: the cover; the centre page or other full page design; small-scale space-fillers. In choosing designs for the cover I have tried to satisfy the conflicting demands of continuity and variety. #1 featured a stark moon-over-water by David Lucas. #2 featured a vertical strip of Japanese calligraphy by an anonymous monk, sent to me by Leslie Giddens. For #3 I used a sumi-e picture of dragonflies by my wife (to be), Noriko Kajihara. For #4 I chose another sumi-e, of reeds, by Tito (Stephen Henry Gill). #5 and #6 were both different from anything that had gone before, and from each other. #5 used a scanned image of a classical Japanese painting of pines by Tohaku. #6 had a plain white front cover, with a single fly (by John Hawkhead) 'crawling' across the back cover. (John Hawkhead had sent me a whole page of flies and it had been difficult to decide how best to use them.) #7, #8 and #9 all featured plant sketches by Helen Robinson. In detail, delicacy and balance, the catkins of #9 were possibly the most successful design thus far. #10 was different again: a plain white cover with the title and number in bold calligraphy, by Bill West.

After using illustrations by David Lucas for the centre pages of the first three issues, I was offered a whole set of sumi-e by Keith Coleman which I enjoyed working out how best to display to good effect. I used his painting of pines for the centre pages of #4; his rushes for the centre pages of #5; and Stuart Quine used Keith Coleman's 'sword' for the centre pages of #9. Others of his sumi-e were used to decorate spare corners of the magazine, although their value actually goes well beyond the merely decorative. By inviting the reader to pause, and offering themselves for meditative appreciation, they make a perfect accompaniment for the haiku, encouraging a closer reading of the poems which they partner. An ideal would be to return to the traditions of the haiga, or haiku painting, in which the poem and its illustration form an indivisible artistic unity. Although printed roman text cannot match the

beauty of brushed Japanese calligraphy, it is nevertheless possible for both the poem and the painting to exist in a mutually enhancing relationship. The sumi-e technique is well suited to this function: as well as the work of Keith Coleman, I have also used contributions by ai li (#2) and Tito (#7). Western-style sketches which have served a similar purpose have been provided by Keir Watson (#5), Maria Wallace (#7) and Bill West (#10) and, in particular, Helen Robinson, who supplied subtle and delicate images of a cat for #6 and feathers for #9. Helen has also provided a couple of photographs, of a stretch of sandy beach (#7) and a leaf-strewn pavement (#8), with accompanying poems. Finally, for variety and comic relief, I have also used a couple of cartoons by Geoff Lucas (#5, #6) which, although operating with some of the concision and immediacy of haiku, have no other pretensions to relevance; their purpose is pure refreshment. Some examples of haiku with artwork, including work by Keith J. Coleman and Helen Robinson from *Presence*, are presented in the appendix.

5.3.5. The challenge of reviews

At least one haiku-relevant book has been reviewed in each issue of *Presence* thus far. It is probably true to say that the reviews present the most daunting section for the editor. To begin with, a review has somehow to reconcile two conflicting demands: it should constitute a brief critical assessment of the work in question; at the same time, it should encourage sales. Naturally, an honest assessment is not always a stimulus to sales. A further difficulty is provided by the fact that the authors of many of the books under review are subscribers whom I have no desire to offend. This provides a strong impulse towards the anodyne; yet, as Brian Tasker pointed out in a letter which I excerpted in #10, hard-hitting critical reviews 'make for more interesting reading'. How to balance these considerations?

An early policy decision was not to seek out material for review, but to make do with whatever I was sent. I have thus abandoned the goal of providing my readers with up-to-date information on all the most significant releases in the haiku world. As with the poetry and artwork, the review section is submission-driven; I generally avoid commissions. Fortunately, the magazine's existence is well-publicised enough to attract several books for review for each issue and there is no danger of the section being discontinued for lack of material. Books submitted for review do have to satisfy the criterion of being haiku-relevant. A book which contains only one or two haiku in a body of conventional poetry will get at least a brief mention (e.g. Mahmoodul Haque Sayed's *Moonlight Flowers* and Labi Siffre's *Monument*, both reviewed in #6) but, although I reviewed Peter Loney's entirely non-haiku *London Idylls* in #5, I would not review a non-haiku collection again. (Instead, my strategy with non-haiku material is to insert a brief advert, accompanying a haiku by the author, or a poem excerpted from the book if one can be found which is sufficiently haiku-compatible for inclusion.)

The awkward result of writing a negative review is well illustrated by the response to my account of Francis Gallagher's *300 haiku and tanka*, in #10. The author, who is also a subscriber, wrote me a full page vituperative reply which he strongly insisted be published in #11 (a request with which I complied). In this case, I felt I had little room for manoeuvre as, out of the 300 poems in the book, only one or two would pass as suitable for inclusion in *Presence*. I could not, therefore, honestly recommend the book to would-be purchasers yet my comments were nevertheless rather restrained, including a few selective quotations which I suggested readers judge for themselves. (My biggest crime in Francis Gallagher's eyes, may have been to use inverted commas, describing the contents as 'haiku' and 'tanka'.)

The awkward result, on the other hand, of writing a positive review is illustrated by Brian Tasker's response to my review of his *the sound of rain* in #9. My review had been a half-page, highlighting a single example, briefly complimentary rather than analytical. It appeared alongside equally brief and complimentary notices of books by Diana Webb, Chris Mulhern and Gary Hotham. Brian Tasker's letter, from which I included an extract in the #10 editorial, lamented the poverty of critical analysis and the resulting sameness between the various accounts. It isn't enough, it seems, to recommend a book, it is also necessary to clearly distinguish a book from its competitors and maybe introduce a sliding scale of approval.

The ideal, therefore, would be a balanced account of at least one full page in length, identifying, and giving critical weight to, both strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult enough, however, to continue to find original language to describe how particular haiku succeed, let alone finding new ways of saying that certain haiku fail. A proportion of haiku poets possess an identifiable personal style, but in many cases one collection of haiku can look very much like another. This isn't to say that they aren't worth reading, or worthy of recommendation, but it does make it difficult to draw attention to individuating characteristics. One way out of this difficulty, rather than introducing variety into my own reviews, is to vary the reviewer. Recent issues of *Blithe Spirit* have included an admirable range of voices. Early issues of *Presence* employed, at times, the services of Fred Schofield, Helen Robinson, Dick Pettit, Stephen Derwent Partington, David Steele and (back in #3, for a review of one of my own books) Brian Tasker, but we did not begin to emulate the scope of *Blithe Spirit* until #11 and #12. Despite the lure of a free copy of the book under review, reviewing is not a popular activity; saying why you like or dislike creative work is not an easy thing to do.

5.3.6. Best-of-issue Awards

The notice of the institution of the Best-of-issue Awards placed in #2 described both the purpose – ‘to encourage submissions and reward excellence’ – and the methods – ‘two forms, autocratic and democratic’. The autocratic version is an Editor’s Choice for which the prize has remained throughout as two free issues. The democratic version, for which the prize was initially £15, raised to £20 from #4, is based on a poll of subscribers. Every copy sent out includes a voting slip, which initially asked for five preferences, raised to ten from #7 on. The average response is between 25 and 30 votes cast, enough to provide a decisive conclusion. The original idea behind the Editor’s Choice reflected a degree of suspicion on my part that the ‘People’s Choice’ would not adequately reward quality, but in fact this fear has proved unfounded. In most cases, the subscribers’ poll has thrown up a clear winner which, it would be hard to dispute, is a striking example of a successful haiku. The award is open to all forms of creative work presented in the magazine, including haibun and renga, but, except for the victory of Hannah Mitte’s sequence, ‘Barcelona in Winter’ (#4) and an Alison Williams tanka (#12), it has in all cases been won by a haiku. The explanation is simple enough: a large majority of the poems published is haiku; and there is a preponderance of haiku poets among the subscribers.

The idea of the readers’ poll has been so successful that it has been imitated by *Snapshots*, which runs its own contest on an almost identical basis. As a means of providing feedback about the poetic tastes of the readership it is invaluable, though its other primary purpose – to encourage submissions, since every published poem is in the running for a £20 prize – has not been so clearly fulfilled. There is no evidence that the poll has acted to stimulate a higher volume of submissions that would have been offered without it.

So far, *Presence* has also run two additional competitions, a 'SciFaiku' contest (announced in #5, results in #6) and the 'Haiku Presence Award' (announced in #9, results in #11). The SciFaiku contest encouraged the imaginative combination of haiku form and SF content. Our judges were two pioneers of this somewhat bizarre genre, Stuart Quine and Steve Sneyd. The Haiku Presence Award included a set of guidelines which sought simply to ensure that the poems entered were identifiably haiku rather than some other genre; beyond that, its only criterion was excellence, for which our judge was Jackie Hardy. Both contests have proved to be a means of reaching out to a wider readership, and the Haiku Presence Award may well become an annual feature, a major device in preventing the magazine's circulation falling below a critical level.

5.3.7. Administration

The two main administrative tasks in running the magazine are ensuring financial viability and maintaining the level of subscription / readership.

As described in the section on production, the extremely cheap methods used to produce #1 and #2 ensured that the magazine very quickly built up a reserve to guarantee its future viability. Although costs have risen from #3 on, they are still at a level equal to or slightly below the income taken from subscriptions. Inland postage costs are easily met, and Air Mail rates to European destinations are not too demanding. International mailing is made manageable by using Surface Mail, which seems efficient enough. I have only two or three international subscribers who request an Air Mail service, which is fortunate because the rates are a significant drain on resources. To meet these costs, there is no 4-issue discount available for Air Mail subscribers; they must pay the single issue rate of £3 / \$6 each time.

This rate was raised to its current value from #9 on, not, primarily, as a way of raising more funds directly, but as a way of encouraging readers to take out a 4-issue subscription (£10 or \$20). Previously I had asked for 2-issue subscriptions (£5 / \$10) but this meant that reminder notices were sent out with irritating frequency and there was a significant falling away of subscribers on a regular basis.

Little active effort goes into publicising the magazine. Listings publications such as *The Small Press Guide*, *Light's List* and *Poets Market* (USA) tend to contact me unsolicited and are duly supplied with up-to-date information. My regular attendance at British Haiku Society events ensures that active BHS members receive frequent reminders of the existence of *Presence*. The Haiku Presence Award publicity (circulated to 20-30 magazines and organisations in the UK and abroad) had the incidental benefit of raising the magazine profile. I have also had notices included in *Mirrors* (Canada) and the Haiku Society of America newsletter listing. Current subscriber numbers fluctuate at around 100-130, with 30-40 copies going out each time to contributors or in exchange. (I have subscription-exchange arrangements with four or five magazines worldwide.) If subscription levels were to fall much below 80, the concomitant reduction in submission levels would render the project unviable. (The only way to survive would be to reduce the frequency of issues to perhaps no more than one per year.) On the other hand, if subscription numbers were to rise much above 130 I would be faced with the task of raising extra help to make the project manageable.

One area which has seen a change of policy in recent issues is responses to readers' letters. Originally I gave only the briefest necessary replies in letters both of acceptance and rejection. However, from #12 on, I decided to experiment with providing more detailed critical feedback. I made this decision with some trepidation, since I am aware that not all

writers appreciate criticism, even when it is intended to be constructive. But the response to this new policy has been overwhelmingly positive, and I am encouraged by the high proportion of haiku poets who have expressed a readiness to reflect on, and develop, their art.

The future of the magazine is assured for the time being. The greatest threat is probably personal fatigue – haiku overdose – but this can always be countered by inviting a guest editor to deputise for an issue or two, an idea which has twice proved successful so far. The magazine is not under any immediate financial threat, and subscriptions have not yet dipped below the critical level, despite increasing competition. Some subscribers have paid as far ahead as #17, which is not likely to emerge until the summer of 2002. This is as far as I dare look right now!

Haiku in Britain (2): Poets and Poems

6.1 Major British haiku poets

This chapter looks more closely at the work of selected poets. In this section I present an account of the work of nine leading British haiku poets. This section is then followed by a selection of impressive examples of haiku, each accompanied by critical commentary. The chapter concludes with a short anthology. These sections combine to produce a detailed picture of the individuals, and the poetic works, that together constitute the British haiku scene.

Each presentation of the major haiku poets is in two parts. Firstly, I give the results of a questionnaire that I circulated. My questions focused on the poets' attitude to and understanding of their work, rather than biographical information (except for an enquiry about their initial contact with haiku). The degree of detail of the responses varied considerably but I have not hesitated to give lengthy extracts as I find it interesting to hear their understanding of haiku in their own words. Note that these questionnaire replies have all been edited – I hope without misrepresentation – and I have not indicated editorial changes as this would have broken up the text and made it difficult to follow. The second part of each presentation is a selection of the poet's work, with commentary. Some of these

poets have published several hundred haiku so adequate representation of their range is difficult to achieve but I have concentrated on what I believe is their best work and I trust that this succeeds in demonstrating characteristic strengths.

The nine poets I have chosen have, in my opinion, a strong case to be regarded as leaders in the field but, inevitably, there are a number of other poets with good claims for attention and I have had to draw a line somewhere. I have not considered the work of Irish poets as qualifying under the umbrella of 'British', thus eliminating, notably, Jim Norton. I have not considered expatriate British authors such as Dee Evetts or Tito (Stephen Henry Gill). I have not considered writers of foreign nationality temporarily resident in Britain (notably, Gary Hotham). I also did not consider writers who have yet to publish a personal collection, accounting for several significant omissions such as (to name just a few) Annie Bachini¹, John Barlow, Claire Bugler Hewitt, Stuart Quine, Helen Robinson and David Steele. Finally, other prominent writers who have produced collections have been omitted only because the available space is ultimately limited: Geoffrey Daniel, James Kirkup, Matt Morden, Maurice Tasnier and Susan Rowley (to name just five) might have had a case for inclusion, but didn't make the final nine. In order to remedy this situation to some extent this chapter ends with a selection of haiku without commentary, constituting a mini-anthology, which gives some of the remaining names in British haiku some recognition.

6.1.1 Colin Blundell

How long have you been writing haiku and how did you get into it?

¹ A good selection of Annie Bachini's work is available in Jim Kacian and Dee Evetts (eds.), *A New Resonance: Emerging Voices in English-language Haiku* (Winchester VA: Red Moon Press, 1999)

Seriously and regularly thinking consistently about the aesthetic of haiku – ten years. Prior to that I wrote things approximating to the haiku form on and off for thirty-ish years – since reading Alan Watts some time in the 60s. I taught kids to write haiku from 1968 onwards with sometimes stunning results. When I started teaching I looked for ways into kids' minds and 'awareness of the present moment' seemed to do the trick so I had them writing haiku.

Are there any other poets / haiku poets whom you regard as influences?

Paradoxically, the major influence on my poetic style ('real poetry') was Walt Whitman. In spite of his length (maybe because of ...) he's so in tune with this moment now. After that, Eliot and Pound were my formal way into imagism. On the haiku front, *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* was my only source for many years and anything in there is what I modelled on. Thereafter, since 1990, Santōka was important, though obviously not for his formal style – more for the purity of his mindfulness.²

Are there any other poets / haiku poets whose work you particularly admire?

Poets: Frank O'Hara, James K. Baxter, W.E. Henley, Hardy, e.e. cummings, D.H. Lawrence, Emily Dickinson, Norman McCaig, John Drinkwater, Borges. Haiku writers: Issa, Shiki.

Have you a favourite haiku - of your own? By somebody else?

somewhere way up there
the buzz of a woodman's saw –
the tilted landscape

Glint of hoe
Lifted high up:
Fields in summer.

(Colin Blundell, *Afternoon Stillness*) (Sugiyama Sampū, *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*)

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga and haibun? How do you see the relationship between haiku and these related forms?

Apart from a few 'found tanka' I wrote once I have no interest in tanka. Or haibun really (though I do have an unfinished picaresque novel that will have a lot of haiku in it in the manner of a haibun). Renga is a good game that I enjoy playing; I think it is a participator sport and don't find it particularly interesting to read other people's renga unless there's thematic development or 'story line' over several stanzas. I find the discussion of the differences between haiku and senryu exceptionally tedious – whether a piece is or isn't is a waste of breath. The important point for me is the writer's state at the moment of writing: this comes from being NOW and whether the outcome is 'natural' or 'satirical' or whatever is not important to me; it's the moment of writing that is the key.

Do you also write other poetry? How do you see its relationship to haiku?

What I call proper poetry (PP) – yes. Published under my own imprint, Hub Editions. Haiku are poems; they are the poetry of the moment. Since I've been writing haiku alongside PP systematically, I've noticed how the mood I get into to write haiku has crossed over easily into writing PP. Sometimes I'll write a sequence of haiku that'll somehow set me up for a PP completely unrelated but my mind's had a work-out on the haiku.

² Refer to the section on Santōka in Chapter Two (2.2.8)

My distinction between haiku and PP is just a jovial stance for the sake of haiku-writers who don't offer up long poetry, indeed seem to reject it because it's long. I think the rejection is reprehensible and I incline to the view that people who do reject longer poetry, often along with the whole of Western literature, write haiku because they can't imagine what it's like to go on at length about something. The first test I'd set for entry into a Haiku Writers' Circle would be 'Show us your long poems first!'

Some thoughts on 5-7-5 haiku ...

I deliberately choose to write 5-7-5 haiku. Not out of any belief that this is how it *should* be done but just as a challenge to myself to do something with a bit of structure for a change. Writing 5-7-5 haiku seems to come naturally to me; like it was the rhythm of my mind after having been in the habit for so long. I write haiku in the moment. No polishing – well, very little and only when I'm setting the poems up for publication. If I find myself thinking too much about 5-7-5-ery or what words to use or switching things around a lot then I know that this is not a haiku and I give up on that particular group of words. The 5-7-5 haiku has to flow naturally and eschew padding for padding's sake.

One way of categorising haiku poets would be to ask whether they pay more attention to quantity or quality. That is, how severe are they in their criticism of their own output? Do they amass, and eventually publish, a vast body of work, or do they ruthlessly sift and cherish only a few carefully chosen successes? Without wishing to imply that he neglects quality, Colin Blundell is clearly towards the extreme end of the quantity scale. He has the advantage of operating his own press, Hub Editions, which allows him the liberty to publish what he likes, and he has made full use of this facility, issuing collection after collection of haiku. A *selected* list of titles (all published by Hub Editions) includes: *Eating Buttered Toast* (1992), *My Dog Reads Haiku* (1992), *The Desert Highway* (1993), *Something Beyond the Stars* ('found haiku' from the diaries and notebooks of Richard Jefferies) (1993), *Wet Nude Statues* (1994), *Beguilement* (1994) and *Afternoon Stillness* (1996). Each of these collections contains a hundred or more haiku, all (there are only one or two exceptions) in the 5-7-5 syllable form. He is probably Britain's most prolific haiku poet. Against such a vast background, it can require a focused effort to find work which stands out. However the six pieces I have chosen to present below do represent the fruits of an attentive reading; they are not a mere random sample:

at the funeral
the little bird tap-tapping
outside the window³

the leaf in your hair
brightens up the do of it
this autumn morning⁴

the man with a face
like a bull-dog is tugged by
(guess what ...) his bull-dog⁵

not a real haiku?
chuck it out of the window
and see if it flies⁶

in the Tate café
all conversations include
spacious hand movements⁷

the hairless guru
advocates Total Vision
facing half his group⁸

What each of these examples demonstrates is an alertness of wit, an ability to distil apparently chance events and give them meaningful structure. Despite Colin Blundell's professed lack of interest in the haiku versus senryu debate, it is nevertheless clear that distinctions can be seen here, the strongest division coming between the first two poems (haiku?) and the final four (senryu?). It is true that both (of what I classify as) haiku display senryu elements. The little bird is inadvertently drawing attention to, and disarming, the solemnity of the funeral; but this 'comment' is purely a subtext. The charm of the haiku is in the neutrality of the superficial activity. The meaning is in the mind of the poet and reader, not the bird. 'the leaf in your hair' could be taken as ironic. Much depends upon the reader's projection of the emotional health of the implied relationship; but, in my reading, the comment is genuinely chivalrous. The admiration is wholesome, not barbed, and extends to contemplation of the leaf as well as the hairstyle, shifting the focus onto nature and into the realm of haiku rather than senryu.

³ Colin Blundell, *Afternoon Stillness* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1996)

⁴ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.4 No.1 (February 1994), p.27

⁵ Colin Blundell, *Eating Buttered Toast* (Flitwick, Hub Editions, 1992)

⁶ Colin Blundell, *My Dog Reads Haiku* (Flitwick, Hub Editions, 1992)

⁷ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.5 No.2 (May 1995), p.15

By contrast, three of the four senryu are classical examples of the genre, fundamentally judgmental. The characters in each are caught in moments of compromise and undergo metamorphosis into caricatures. The poet invites the reader to join in and enjoy the embarrassment. 'not a real haiku?' is in a class of its own. I would categorise it as a senryu only by default, in that it describes a general rather than a particular case. Perhaps it could be described as a meta-haiku, a haiku-about-haiku. In my role as magazine editor I come across such attempts fairly frequently; they almost always fail. But this formula is a stunning success, a heartfelt plea for a holistic and sensitive reading practice which opens itself to experience a poem rather than merely measuring its superficial characteristics. And of course it challenges us to estimate its own value: *is it a real haiku?* Does it matter?

6.1.2 David Cobb

I started writing something I thought were haiku as early as August 1977; a few, quite fortuitously, actually were; the majority suffered from the most familiar faults: anthropomorphic, thoughtful-sentimental, projecting, wordy, some similes; these I have over time either ditched or 'rescued', i.e. remembered the 'moment' and found a more suitable way of re-presenting it. I was rescued from a rather dire prospect by being given a copy of Joan Giroux's *The Haiku Form*, a useful all-round guide for the beginner, although the number of American haiku writers known to her was very restricted.

Among these, Jim Hackett clearly stood out; I have since learned to recognise his faults, but I think his models did me more good than harm. In January 1984 I plucked up courage to write to him and a rather frequent correspondence began, in which he acted as mentor. I also, later, wrote to Joan Giroux herself, and she also advised me. Both were very encouraging.

It was not till 1989, on the eve of 'founding' the BHS, that I discovered there were such things as a Haiku Society of America, a Haiku Canada, *The Haiku Anthology*, and from then on I was influenced by all sorts of Americans (McClintock, Rotella in particular, to a lesser extent Evetts) and I think I ought also to mention Amann as important. Reading Blyth, I began to receive vague impulses from the school of Japanese 'greats', but I guess Japanese poets have never meant so much to me as others.

⁸ *Blüte Spirit* Vol.4 No.3 (August 1994), p.19

Favourite haiku? I like haiku of a wide variety of types, right across the 'taxonomy', *providing* they are well-turned. I think the verse-qualities of haiku (balance, rhythm, assonance, alliteration, *kireji*-placement) are critical.

its sight has been lost
and yet, for that eye also
I polish a glass

(Hino Sōjō, tr. M.Ueda)

hot bath water
cold on the breastless side
another fine day

(Yoko Ogino)

passport check -
my shadow waits ✓
across the border

(George Swede)

Before we knew its name the indigo bunting

(Peggy Willis Lyles)

my runny nose:
everywhere, except on its dewdrop
evening dusk falls

(Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, tr. M.Ueda)

distant thunder
the dog's toenails click ✓
against the linoleum

(Gary Hotham)

midday heat
soldiers on both sides
roll up their sleeves

(Lenard D Moore)

shipping oars
I hold my breath to hear
snow on the water

(David Steele)

Do I also write senryu? Not 'arf, and I suspect an 'authority' might opine that senryu are at least as much my forté as haiku (though a good few of my senryu are of the 'serious kind' that begin to 'feel' like haiku).

Do I also write haibun? I think I could say that it's my current mission to try to 'invent' an English form of haibun. I believe I've done a useful bit of spadework with *Spring Journey to the Saxon Shore*. Ken Jones tells me we're both interested in an elegaic kind of haibun in which we infuse contemporary haibun with an undercurrent of ancient myth and tradition.

Haiku and other related forms. For me, the relationship between haiku on the one hand, and tanka and renga on the other, is largely formal. Tanka seem to me trite, mannered, sentimental; I don't wish to get much involved with them, for fear their habits will spill over into my haiku. Renga seems to me an elegant pastime; good for camaraderie, but otherwise I'd as soon play Scrabble. I see a positive advantage in practising renga, though, because I believe there's a resemblance (that of 'scent') between prose-haiku links in haibun and links in renga.

I occasionally write other kinds of poetry, not so much for amusement, as because of an urge, but I am rather surprised when people who ought to be able to judge (e.g. Mimi Khalvati) tell me the stuff is rather good. Colin Blundell egged me on to publish a few.

Poetic values? I think the poem must 'work'; in other words, I'm a complete pragmatist. And my principles don't go much beyond that. I've already said that I like my haiku 'well-tailored'; you know I'm a confirmed 'fiddler', to the point of spoiling what's already as good as it's ever going to get.

My 'poetic upbringing' (apart from Chaucer and Shakespeare) was pretty much the Romantics, the Romantics, the Romantics, so it's not all that surprising that I find it very comforting to find 'poetic values' rather ready-made in Coleridge, e.g. 'Poetry has for its immediate object pleasure, not truth.' I rise to the bait when someone says, there are certain moods / attitudes which are anathema to haiku, e.g. hatred, anger. As to subject matter, I don't feel there are any no-go areas, either.

Limitations of haiku? It is limited as a 'performing' art; in this respect, haibun is less limited, probably. In its efforts to attract an audience, it suffers from 'sameness.' A weakness of haiku – in English, at any rate – is that they are so often forgettable; I mean, the precise wording is forgotten, though the general idea may linger. I'm told Japanese haiku are far more mnemonic.

If any one individual has a claim to be Britain's leading haiku poet, it is David Cobb. He was the main instigator in the founding of the British Haiku Society, served for several years as its Secretary and is now its President. He co-edited *The Haiku Hundred*, the miniature collection that brought haiku to a new readership in the early 1990s, and also co-edited *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, Britain's first full-scale national haiku anthology, published in 1998. Among his many competition successes was first prize in the Cardiff International Haiku Contest in 1991. British haiku poets owe him a debt of gratitude for the tireless energy with which he has promoted and co-ordinated haiku activity in this country. He has also been influential in establishing international contacts, notably with European haiku poets from Germany, Holland, France, Croatia, Romania and elsewhere.

As a poet, his distinctive voice emerges perhaps most clearly in his senryu, of which these four are notable examples:

rain -
the boat in my neighbour's yard
gets wet at last⁹

day of his funeral
still inviting messages
"after the tone"¹⁰

⁹ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.7 No.4 (November 1997), p.3

on the fixture list
the name of the groundsman
we buried last week¹¹

breakfast in silence –
both halves of the grapefruit
unsweetened¹²

He wields cutting irony in classical senryu fashion in 'rain', but the other three poems show ways in which he seeks to expand the range of the art. Irony, to be sure, is a constant ingredient, but in the two death poems it is used to underscore the bitterness of grief; the black humour supports and emphasises the sense of loss. In 'breakfast in silence' the butt of the joke is the poet himself, with the acid taste of the grapefruit serving a double function, grounding the poem in the senses and objectifying, as a metaphor, the pain inherent in the absence of communication.

What is evident in these poems is the way that wit and humour are placed in the service of emotional complexity. The humour acts as a hinge, a point where the sweetness and sharpness of life (and death) are held in balance. As we move across the spectrum from senryu towards haiku we can trace the way in which the readiness of this wit continues to enhance emotional coloration:

a shift in the wind -
thistledown starts to blow
in from the sea¹³

wet election day –
the poster-faces all
reduced to pulp¹⁴

after the snowman
melts into the lawn -
picking up his smile¹⁵

first day at school –
in the garden only the wind
swinging the swing¹⁶

¹⁰ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.4 No.4 (November 1994), p.19

¹¹ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.3 No.1 (January 1993), p.26

¹² David Cobb, *Jumping from Kiyomizu* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1996), p.44

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.67

¹⁴ *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

¹⁵ David Cobb, *Mounting Shadows* (Braintree: Equinox Press, 1992), p.36

¹⁶ David Cobb, *Jumping from Kiyomizu*, p.18

There is a gleefulness in the realisation that rain has enacted a judgement on the politicians in 'wet election day' – a kind of reverse-senryu effect in which social preoccupations are subjugated by nature. In the more purely natural environment of 'a shift in the wind' the poetry of the moment is nevertheless derived from an awareness of paradox. The senryu quoted previously have shown the poet in his role as husband, friend and neighbour; 'after the snowman' and 'first day at school' allow us to empathise with his role as parent. In fact, his collection *Jumping from Kiyomizu* (Iron Press, 1996) is a haiku record of turning points in life, rites of passage, in which the poetry does not provide an escape from existential tension, but heightens the impact of significant life-events. (His other collections are *A Leap in the Light* (Equinox Press, 1991), *Mounting Shadows* (Equinox Press, 1992), *A Bowl of Slices* (Snapshot Press, 2000) and the haibun, *Spring Journey to the Saxon Shore* (Equinox Press, 1997).)

Each of the above eight examples relies to some extent on the use of punchline effects, but he is also capable of a more open-ended poetry; less typical, perhaps, but well within his range, as these final four examples demonstrate:

birthday dinner -
lid of the ricepot
bubbling over¹⁷

boats left to winter
clacking of frozen halyards
against sheetless masts¹⁸

snow lingers on
in one right-angle
of the wayside cross¹⁹

towards sunset
the riptide rolling
an empty crabshell²⁰

¹⁷ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.26

¹⁸ David Cobb, *Jumping from Kiyomizu*, p.92

¹⁹ Ibid., p.87

Three of these are immersed in the open air, capturing almost a desolation, perhaps the touching emptiness that the Japanese tradition identifies as *sabi*. The indoors poem, 'birthday dinner', though different in atmosphere, operates similarly, avoiding any definite conclusion. There is a mutual enhancement between the two images of birthday and bubbling pot, but it is multivalent; its precise significance remains elusive.

6.1.3. Caroline Gourlay

How long have you been writing haiku, and how did you get into it?

About seven years. I think I picked up a book, an old favourite called *The World of Zen* which I first came across in the early sixties and decided to try haiku for myself.

Haiku influences? Probably mostly Issa, David Cobb, George Swede.

Haiku poets that I particularly admire? Cicely Hill, Brian Tasker, Martin Lucas, Lee Gurga, Ernest J. Berry, Eric Lhouck jr., Jim Kacian, Dee Evetts, David Cobb, Maurice Tasnier, Claire Bugler Hewitt.

Favourite haiku? If I had to choose one, it would probably be:

custody battle / a bodyguard lifts the child / to see the snow (Dee Evetts)²¹

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga and haibun? How do you see the relationship between haiku and these related forms?

I write senryu and tanka – not interested in renga, but will probably write haibun when I have more time. I see haiku as the centre of these related forms. Though tanka and renga came first, they formed round what came to be known as haiku – haiku is an intrinsic part of both these forms but can also stand on its own. It is also essential to haibun, creating a poetic dimension to what otherwise would simply be a piece of prose. Senryu came later, but this too was founded on haiku since the writer of senryu retains the form of haiku, while changing only the tone, commenting on various aspects of the human condition rather than nature.

Do you also write other poetry? How do you see its relationship to haiku?

I used to write other poetry for publication (and would write it even if I thought no-one would publish it) and would like to have time to do so again. My feeling is that unless haiku

²⁰ Ibid., p.55

²¹ For a discussion of this poem see the section on Haiku and Senryu (4.6.1)

finds its place (without losing its special identity) within the western poetic culture it will become nothing more than a diversion and a backwater in our society – a cult poem that will emerge from time to time and then subside, depending on how open we are to eastern thinking at any particular time. Haiku was popular in the 70s and many poetry magazines included them and this was probably a result of the Beat Poets in 50s America embracing Zen. Haiku is growing again today because people recognise in it a spirituality that they are hungry for and don't find in western institutional religion. Haiku with its emphasis on nature seems to arise from a deep source and its simplicity and directness is refreshing.

On the limitations of haiku, and further thoughts ...

The best haiku only offer a single insight. Philip Gross (*Blithe Spirit* Vol.9 No.4) says that haiku can't include contradictions and this is probably true. I believe poetry works at a level of consciousness not reached by prose and this is because of the musical sense at work in all good poetry. A good poem, like music, combines form and substance and therefore works on more of the senses than prose does.

Of the nine poets featured in this section, Caroline Gourlay is the most recent arrival on the haiku scene, but in little over five years she has developed a strong personal voice and acquired a position of influence as editor of *Blithe Spirit*. Her values encourage a dialogue with mainstream poetry and her own style shows a greater readiness to deploy poetic techniques than most of the other poets to whom she is compared in this section. In particular, she often uses anthropomorphic verbs or other enhancements beyond the boundaries of strict realism to intensify imaginative impact. Some hints of this method can be seen in the following two haiku.

garden lost in mist
a blackbird's song
where the seat was²²

watching
snowflakes drop into the lake
become the lake

In both cases a reductionist realism is resisted and the reader witnesses a transformation (seat to song, flake to lake). In this way the mundane is imbued with something of the numinous without, at least in these examples, losing its grounding in the literal. While such heightened

²² All quoted poems are taken from Caroline Gourlay's collection, *Reading All Night* (Sutton Bridge: Hub Editions, 1999); she has also published *Through the Café Door* (Liverpool: Snapshot Press, 2000).

intensity may be taken as characteristic, she is also capable of a plainer, less individualistic, style, as in:

woman on a bus
looks down at her painted nails -
summer's passing

snow clouds
circling
the kestrel

The matter-of-fact delivery of 'woman on a bus' barely conceals its metaphorical intention: it is the summer of the woman's life that we can see passing. The minimalism of 'snow clouds' is highly effective; it can be read backwards as well as forwards, with dizzying results. But even here, the poetic touch is noticeable: the primary reading (it is the snow clouds that appear to be circling, rather than the kestrel) is the less prosaic of the two.

Caroline Gourlay is also, as might be anticipated from the lyrical tendencies of her haiku, an accomplished tanka poet. Her talent is to home in on the emotional force of an incident or observation:

after
your death
your halfworked tapestry -
picking it out of the
wastepaper basket

my mother's desk
I notice for the first time
how varied the grain,
how tight the knots in the wood
that she polished each day

Beneath the apparently flat surface of 'after' there is real depth, a confrontation with the question of what we cherish of a dead person's life and work, and whether, and how, we hold on to it. There is, of course, the suggestion that the life's work was, in a broader sense, unfinished. In 'my mother's desk' an entire biography is implied within five lines. 'the grain' suggests the mother's character; 'the knots' suggest perhaps the contradictions of that

character or the stresses of her role; 'polished' suggests the respectability and capability that strove to manage these stresses and contain these contradictions. The tanka is as richly textured as its subject.

6.1.4. Michael Gunton

How long have you been writing haiku and how did you get into it?

I started writing haiku after I came across *The Haiku Handbook* in 1990, but before then I had been aware of haiku and had picked up several books of haiku without really knowing what they were trying to do or be or 'how to read them.' *The Haiku Handbook* opened this door, and I was off! I wrote to, and joined, the HSA, and through them found out about the newly established BHS.

Are there any other poets / haiku poets whom you regard as influences?

I studied Larkin and Yeats for A-level and these have left their mark, perhaps. Then the Imagists, William Carlos Williams, Seamus Heaney and R.S.Thomas. On the haiku front, Hōsai is a big influence, and I keep going back to him.

Are there any other poets / haiku poets whose work you particularly admire?

Alexis Rotella, John Wills, Cor van den Heuvel, David Cobb, Brian Tasker, Martin Lucas, Dee Evetts.

Have you a favourite haiku — of your own? By somebody else?

I have several of mine I'm fond of: wintry sun / over the deserted funfair / a gull soaring
the snow melts / and slowly names reappear / on the war memorial²³
and

on the hillside
two horses stock still
in the pouring rain

By others, Hōsai's

at midnight a distant door slammed shut

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga, haibun? How do you see the relationship between haiku and these related forms?

²³ See Chapter Four (4.5.3) for location of these two poems in the context of the four Zen moods.

Some of what I write is probably senryu, depending on how you define it. I write tanka intermittently. I've taken part in renga writing sessions. I haven't written any haibun. The haiku / senryu divide seems very vague, as haiku develop and root in the West. I don't set out to write one or the other – I just write about the moment. Tanka seem to inhabit different territory – more subjective, and perhaps more lyrical – rather than being like longer haiku. Renga elements seem to be more flexible than single haiku, and not all of the same intensity – this offers new possibilities, of link and shift, as well as group creation. Renga seems to be a new way of 'doing poetry' in the West, and so exciting. Whether tanka have a longterm future in the West, I'm not so sure. They fit much more easily into the Western lyrical, subjective tradition, and might end up absorbed by it, especially as the flexible 'free verse' form they seem to be at the moment.

Do you also write other poetry? How do you see its relationship to haiku?

I used to, but no longer. Occasionally I wonder about starting again, but that's as far as it's got. One might ask whether any relationship exists! Haiku seem to exist, and increasingly to thrive, in a world of their own, with non-haiku poets only vaguely aware of haiku, puzzled by them, and not taking them very seriously. I've heard that haiku writing is often recommended to get would-be poets started, which is probably positive on a creative level, but also serves to make haiku a sort of intermediate creative exercise before going on to write 'real poetry.'

What are your 'poetic values'?

I'm interested in the thing as it is, simply stated, with enough to communicate / express a 'resonance' or kick. I don't set out to write jokey, wry haiku. I'm drawn to *sabi* themes and images. The communicate / express element is interesting – I'm not sure how far I write for an audience, though one is obviously implied. When I discovered what haiku are about, I realised that they were a vehicle / means to express all sorts of moments and impressions which I find valuable, and to that extent they're purely about me giving form to something.

What do you see as the limitations of haiku?

Haiku do not yield easily to being a vehicle for purely subjective statements but at best give a remarkable window into a world, a landscape that seems scarcely believable with so few syllables! The fact that Japanese haiku are known only in translation has served to downplay the linguistic / poetic possibilities of haiku. The marginal nature of haiku is a limitation in English, until more people are aware of what haiku are about. A bigger limitation concerns meaning / direction / force. Unless the haiku has a kick or resonance, the 'so what?' factor leaves the haiku lifeless – and you only get one go at it! In a longer poem there are more resources, more opportunities. Another element of this concerns how far haiku can point to some truth or other – the haiku writer has to be oblique, otherwise you get aphorisms. This can conspire to leave a haiku as merely decorative, aesthetically pleasing, rather than of any lasting interest. I sense cultural / religious resonances are clearer in Japan than we realise. I ponder the idea of Christian haiku – it's not one that I've cracked at all, but my

after the storm / the stone cross reappears / high on the hillside

is an attempt at something in this vein.

Of the nine haiku poets reviewed in this section, Michael Gunton's presence in the list is perhaps the one that might be most debated. He is not an avid self-promoter and his work is a good deal less visible, in terms of public profile, than that of many poets who would struggle to attain his level of quality. Again, the quantity of his output is not great, but in my view, at his best he reaches standards as high as anyone in the English-speaking haiku world. His self-assessment, above, indicates his conscious pursuit of *sabi* and my discussion of the Zen moods (Chapter Four, 4.5.3) recognises that in Michael Gunton's work the achievement of ancient haiku aims is realised. I admit that in this evaluation there is an element of bias, because his work evinces a gentleness and subtlety which accords with my own haiku ideals. These two haiku, for example, are among my favourites by anyone, anywhere:

opening a door
on the advent calendar
the sound of rain²⁴

at dusk
the darkness between the ivy
and the wall²⁵

These images are tantalisingly open-ended; there is no possibility of pinning them down to a single meaning. In both cases our gaze is drawn into the contemplation of a mystery; through mundane details we glimpse a possibility of revelation. Both haiku display a lightness of touch. Immediately upon reading they belong to the reader and the reader's interpretation; the author retreats without offering guidance.

This subtlety is typical of the work in Michael Gunton's collection, *Echoes in the Heart*, but he can also take a more obvious, directive approach, as in these examples:

The Great Wave
across the gallery
her eyebrows raised²⁶

between the bars
of the death row cell
the man in the moon²⁷

²⁴ Michael Gunton, *Echoes in the Heart* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997)

²⁵ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.46

²⁶ Michael Gunton, *Echoes in the Heart*

after the crash
the doll's eyes
jammed open²⁸

hanging around
at the open-air concert
for thunder²⁹

'The Great Wave' is little more than a visual pun, but a particularly apt one. 'between the bars' and 'after the crash' can be suspected of being 'desk haiku', imaginative empathy rather than actual experience, but they offer a sense of shared suffering and compassion. (Both poems may be open to the charge of trivialisation but it may affect our judgement of 'between the bars' to know that the poet does actually correspond with death row prisoners – see the tanka below.) I interpret 'hanging around' as a somewhat self-conscious poem about seeking out poetic experience, relishing the musical prospect of the storm. It is expressed with an air of nonchalance and, after all, the quest for poetry has succeeded: we are reading the result!

Michael Gunton's tanka are typically unadorned and understated. Often his focus is on a self-awareness, perhaps a sense of personal limitation, which opens out to consolation in the sudden revelation of a natural, or divine, presence. Thus:

across the atlantic
my friend on death row waits
for letters –
I stare at the falling rain
lost for words mid-paragraph³⁰

6.1.5. Jackie Hardy

I have been writing haiku for about ten years. I had an awareness of it in a 5-7-5 sort of way and I wrote to that shape because I enjoyed the discipline. Then I attended a workshop, run by David Cobb, which was part of the Poets and Small Press Festival when it was hosted in

²⁷ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.46

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Michael Gunton, *Echoes in the Heart*

³⁰ Ibid.

Newcastle. This was about 1991. I discovered the 'haiku moment' at the workshop and became more interested in the form. Later I entered the Cardiff International Haiku Competition and won second prize. I decided to join the British Haiku Society in order to learn more.

In my early days as a member, I leaned towards the Japanese style and read and admired Bashō. I began to learn Japanese. It did not take too long to realise that I needed another lifetime if I would ever be able to read Bashō in the original. Abandoning learning the Japanese language coincided with an interest in Western style haiku as a legitimate and desirable way of writing. I became active in BHS and edited the journal for nearly five years. During all this time I regarded writing haiku as a secondary activity to writing other poetry. Among friends in the world of mainstream poetry haiku was little understood and even less appreciated. I rarely owned up to writing haiku, rather in the way one would choose to hide any other perversion. I certainly did not consider it a publishable genre in this country, except as a subsidised initiative by an interested aficionado.

Early influences on my poetry were Masfield, Keats, Shelley and Shakespeare, a typical English school diet, seasoned with war poets for O-level and Hughes and Heaney at A-level. First degree gave me a taste for T.S.Eliot, Hardy and Yeats. At master's level I gorged on women poets: Rich, Plath, Walker, Dickinson. Closer personal influences have been Wendy Cope, Carol Ann Duffy, Linda France, Roger McGough, Simon Armitage. When it comes to haiku poets, I admire all your 'leading nine'. To these I would add Susan Rowley, Martin Lucas, Dee Evetts, Jim Norton, George Swede, L.A.Davidson.

I do not write tanka or renga but I have written haibun. I regard tanka as completely different from haiku, as different as a sonnet from a limerick. Senryu has a much closer relationship with haiku, so much so it is sometimes difficult to decide for one or the other.

I see haiku as being related to other forms of poetry in that it brings a discipline to writing which is always important, i.e. the best words in the best possible order. Haiku writing teaches an awareness of the instant and the potential for 'conjunction' (Colin Blundell) which aids the imagination in constructing metaphors.

What are my poetic values? Poetry (and haiku) should be some of these things: beautiful, clever, special, different, considered, resonant, inspirational, stimulating. Haiku should be concise, honest, genuine but above all interesting.

I have several favourite haiku. My own:

on the carcass / cutting it fine / crow in the road
cold hands / deep in my pocket / a forgotten coin
in a sunbeam / a bluebottle speeds up / floating motes

By others:

Sick on a journey / over withered fields / dreams wander on	✓	(Bashō)
high tide / over and over / the shifting shingle	✓	(Brian Tasker)
silent retreat / nothing on TV / but my own reflection	✓	(Martin Lucas)
a bitter rain - / two silences / beneath / the one umbrella		(Geoffrey Daniel)

Jackie Hardy has published a substantial collection of haiku entitled *The Dust is Golden* (Iron Press, 1999), and a smaller selection is also contained in her poetry collection, *Canuting the Waves* (Bloodaxe Books, 1998). Perhaps her most distinctive skill is her ability to take advantage of chance, a kind of attunement to serendipity. Her consistent use of this attribute does not translate into sameness in her haiku but manifests itself in a variety of ways. To pick just four examples:

in a bookstore
two flies settle
on a romance³¹

out walking alone –
just as I think of her
a friend turns the bend³²

through stained glass
sunlight rainbows
the mongrel's coat³³

horizontal sun –
dark against the dazzle
the fleeing deer³⁴

Reading these four haiku we move through a spectrum from thinking to poetic feeling. 'in a bookstore' appeals to head rather than heart, as the flies and the book comically modify perceptions of each other. As in the case of Colin Blundell's bird at the funeral, the poem is lifted above the level of senryu by the haphazard quality of the action, the utter unconsciousness of the flies. 'out walking alone' offers a very different treatment of the theme of coincidence. The incident is reported plainly, without any poetic flourish, but it sinks in deeply because it speaks to our sense of mystical significance. Do we not also find that, mysteriously, imagining a person's presence so often seems to cause them to phone, or write, or appear? 'through stained glass' offers us an incongruity as striking as that between the flies and the romance, but in this case there is no hint of mockery. The mongrel, and the moment, is blessed. There is a suggestion of a moral parable but nothing in the way of a

³¹ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.48

³² Jackie Hardy, *The Dust is Golden* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1999), p.16

³³ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.48

Jackie Hardy's range also extends to encompass poems about relationships, in both lighthearted and erotic modes:

midnight
your thumb strums my nipple
a creak on the stair³⁶

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6.1.6. Cicely Hill

How long have you been writing haiku and how did you get into it?

Thirty odd years. I first discovered haiku in R.H.Blyth's four famous volumes when I lived in Tokyo (1954-59). I began to write haiku soon after that but it was an entirely solitary activity till I heard of the British Haiku Society. My first meeting with members was a ginko [haiku compositional walk], setting off from Jim Norton's house – he then lived in Kent, where I met Martin Lucas and Stephen Gill. To these three I owe much.

Are there any poets / haiku poets whose work you particularly admire?

In Western poetry, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Blake, de la Mare, Montale, Milosz, Heaney. Among Japanese poets I greatly admire tanka poets Ono no Komachi, Izumi Shikibu and Saigyō and the great haiku poets with whom we're all familiar.

Do you write senryu, tanka, renga, haibun? How do you see the relationship between haiku and these related forms?

I write senryu. I avoid writing tanka and shall do as long as I continue my haiku practice. I tremendously enjoy taking part in live renga but not the kind which are passed on through the post. I've not yet written haibun but hope to do so soon. The subject matter of senryu is no more, no less, subject for reflection than that of haiku though the mood of expression is different. Allowing itself a sharpness of comment foreign to haiku, senryu observation implicitly identifies seer with seen. Haiku and tanka are very different; tanka arising out of an aristocratic way of life. Its subjects were prescribed though the emotions might be unbridled – grief, devotion, despair, loneliness, erotic love. I very much value the differences between the two forms and hope they won't become blurred in contemporary haiku. For all its intensity of feeling, tanka calls for a fastidious reticence of language.

The communal nature of renga makes it challengingly different from haiku in its making. With a good master, renga gatherings can generate a peculiar energy which aids response and is very exciting.

How do you see the relationship between haiku and other poetry?

I think there's far less difference between haiku and 'other poetry' than we allow and we do haiku a disservice by stressing the differences. No wonder haiku is sometimes seen as a sort of cottage industry. The question of metaphor is interesting in haiku. All poetry seeks metaphor; much poetry *is* metaphor. Metaphor often 'earths' a thought through a concrete image. But in haiku thoughts and abstractions shouldn't be there in the first place. Haiku are themselves records, through the senses, of concrete things. To introduce other images or sense impressions in the form of metaphor would be to overburden the slight poem structure. But, more importantly, every good haiku has behind it a deeper, unstated meaning. The whole haiku is, I think, in itself a metaphor for that meaning.

What are your 'poetic values'?

I'm interested in Eliot's view that the experience behind a poem is quite distinct and separate from the intensity of making the poem; a significant thought in relation to haiku where the two seem simultaneous.

Nothing superfluous should enter a poem, no two words where one will do and no single word which is not vital, chosen with great care and dyed with the poet's experience. He must present and suggest rather than describe. Nothing should be written in poetry which could better be written in prose. The sound of a poem is of greatest importance. Bashō recommended reading every haiku aloud. The poet's voice is heard through the music – phrasing, the rhythm. The senses rather than the intellect are poetry's concern, the concrete world rather than the abstract. Imagination prompts and suffuses the work. There is nothing which may not be the subject of poetry.

Cicely Hill's particular skills as a haiku poet can be seen in poems which are charged with energy. As in three of the four examples below, she is adept at recreating dramatic atmospheric conditions. The part played by lighting is central in all three scenes, and the intensity of the moment is so heightened as to be almost gothic:

Autumn night:
White mist, nothing else
Out there³⁷

midnight lightning:
neighbour never seen before –
there, at her window³⁸

a blueish light
falls across the beanfield -
far-off thunder³⁹

Wings rustling
A dragonfly alights
On the baby's warm head⁴⁰

What also assists the effect is the emphatic expression, indicated, in two of the poems, by mid-line commas. 'Wings rustling' is a different kind of haiku, calmer, even gentle, but the energy is still present in the lifefulness of child and insect and the delicate sensations ('rustling', 'warm') are keenly felt.

³⁷ Cicely Hill, *The Earth Drawn Inward* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997)

³⁸ George Swede and Randy Brooks (eds.), *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide* (North Shields: Iron Press, 2000), p.60

³⁹ *Snapshots* 5 (January 1999), p.25

⁴⁰ Cicely Hill, *The Earth Drawn Inward*

Each of the above examples is pure haiku, richly textured poetry of sensation and the natural world, so it might surprise us to find that Cicely Hill also has a sharp eye for senryu, but it is so:

A new bungalow
Where the cornfield used to be
They've named it Lark Rise⁴¹

Guided tour,
The man who wants to say a prayer
Doesn't like to⁴²

Both of these verses are limited in their ambition: a direct pointing to human folly is their main aim. The appeal of 'A new bungalow' is that, sadly, such ironies are not unusual. As development forces more and more species into marginalisation and extinction we come to know creatures not for what they are but through their symbolic value only. 'Guided tour' draws attention to the embarrassment which attends public displays of piety. Many of us are, perhaps hypocritically, only comfortable in our faith when there's no one looking.

Cicely Hill's haiku are collected in *The Earth Drawn Inward*.

6.1.7. George Marsh

How long have you been writing haiku and how did you get into it?

I first heard of them in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. I tried a few in the early to mid eighties, but didn't do much more until the encouragement of the founding of the BHS.

Are there any poets / haiku poets whom you regard as influences, and whose work do you most admire?

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Presence* #7 (June 1998), p.5

Lucien Stryk's translations have been the biggest influence. When I first came to BHS it was Brian Tasker I most admired. Then Brian went off the boil for a few years. Bashō, of course, and Issa, and the Blyth four volumes, and the Santōka translations by John Stevens.

Have you a favourite haiku?

Your own

as light fails / sound of a stream / entering the river

is a favourite. I well remember reeling and thinking, "Wow! His Death Poem, and so lovely!" when you read it out on our South Wales gig (October 1994).

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga, haibun, other poetry?

I've tried some tanka and renga and, in a tentative way, haibun (and senryu happen now and then by accident) but I'm not very serious about them. Renga is not going to have a future here, and I'm not putting energy into it. Yes, I write other poetry. So far, I have not published very much.

George Marsh has issued one collection of haiku, *Salting the Air*, together with a book of co-translations from the Japanese and Bulgarian, *My Green Wife* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997) and he has also produced an educational haiku web site. A compilation of my favourite George Marsh haiku reveals that a strikingly high number are night poems. Night, at least for this poet, seems to bring out a heightened awareness, throwing sights, scents and sounds into sharper relief.

sound of dance-music -
the last fishing boat
throbs into place⁴³

baby's gone to bed
from the darkening mist ✓
the cry of a swift⁴⁴

stillness -
the candleflame /
grows⁴⁵

stars fill the hatchway
swaying ✓
to the smell of melon⁴⁶

⁴³ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.71

⁴⁴ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.3 No.1 (January 1993), p.8

⁴⁵ *Fire: British Haiku Society Members' Anthology 1993* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1993)

⁴⁶ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.70

summer night
a duck glides
between moons⁴⁷

in the time it takes
to make toast and coffee
stars fade⁴⁸

'stillness' strips a familiar experience down to its minimal detail, describing and recreating a concentrated moment of contemplation. 'sound of dance-music' offers a classical haiku conjunction, in which the two sounds chime and intensify each other. ('throbs' is apt and efficient, and adds to the erotic overtones of the poem.) In 'baby's gone to bed' there is a variation on the method of conjunction, in which the cry of the swift supersedes the imagined cry of the child. The 'darkening mist' adds mystery, lifting the poem above the level of the mundane, and may be compared to Cicely Hill's similar use of atmospheric effects. In 'stars fill the hatchway' and 'summer night' we are offered an intoxicating literalism, a moment of visionary disorientation in which the intellectual interference that tells us the stars are not really swaying and one moon is merely reflected, has been temporarily suspended. The remaining haiku, 'in the time it takes', relates the domestic and the cosmic by a method unusual in haiku: generalisation. The success of the poem is that, although no single experience is isolated, it is nevertheless implied. Indirectly, the tastes and smells of breakfast, as well as the gradual brightening of the morning, are still made present to our senses.

George Marsh's haiku moments are not, of course, exclusively nocturnal, and the first of the two poems below demonstrates his ability to fill a haiku with air, sound and light. The effect is invigorating:

⁴⁷ George Marsh, *Salting the Air* (Portsmouth: Waning Moon Press, 1997)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

airing the house
church bells
in every room⁴⁹

rain —
I won't phone my mother
I'll make coffee⁵⁰

'rain' is another unconventional haiku, in which the poet's own feelings are the subject. It works because these feelings are reported with an honesty and objectivity almost as if they were an external rather than internal event. It is a tantalising record of the unpredictability of the mind. In its non-judgmental neutrality it qualifies, in my view, as a haiku rather than a senryu, but the self-awareness it displays is also utilised by the poet in more critical and ironic modes:

in the Rose Garden
a man I don't much like
enjoying the sun⁵²

missed it the moment to join in the laugh⁵¹

I discern a complex mix of envy and self-deprecation in the Rose Garden senryu. The reluctant acknowledgement of his enemy's good fortune is brilliantly disarming. In 'missed it' the humour of the poet's own sense of inadequacy creates a triumph out of potential disaster. In terms of both insight into self and the range of 'nerves' which the poems touch upon, these are two of the finest senryu (that I know of) written in English.

6.1.8. Fred Schofield

How long have you been writing haiku, and how did you get into it?

⁴⁹ *Haiku Spirit* 14 (June 1998), p.16

⁵⁰ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.3 No.3 (July 1993), p.14

⁵¹ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.70

⁵² Ibid.

Since 1992. I got into haiku at a workshop led by David Cobb at a Small Press festival. (I attempted my first haiku on the way to the workshop.) I'd written other poetry for several years and felt dried up, nowhere to go, etc. Haiku seemed to open up the possibility that poetry was everywhere – all you had to do was notice it.

Are there any poets / haiku poets whom you regard as influences?

Dylan Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, William Carlos Williams. Issa, for his passion for detail, compassion for what is often thought of as insignificant, and the heartfelt way he portrays deep respect for whoever and whatever he shares the world with. Santōka for his oneness with the elements and what seems a restless search for himself interspersed with moments of acceptance. Bashō for his depth within both the usual human sphere and beyond. Buson for subtlety and his pleasure in images for their own sake, the way they interrelate and overlap. Brian Tasker seems to attempt to write only as a result of a perceived haiku moment and always uses transparent language: the result is accessibility and continual movement between shades of intuitive meaning.

Are there any poets whose work you particularly admire?

R.S. Thomas, John Donne, Hugh MacDiarmid, Sylvia Plath, Rabindranath Tagore, Oscar Wilde, Allen Ginsberg, John Berryman, Jim Norton.

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga, haibun? How do you see the relationship between haiku and these related forms?

I don't really have a feel for tanka but write senryu, renga and haibun. Renga is a good discipline and can at the same time loosen up your attitude to haiku, guarding against an over-precious approach. I enjoy writing renga in both a serious and a frivolous vein. Working with others in this way is stimulating and helps develop a fluent style. I'm certain that taking part in renga has helped me gain some ease and confidence when composing haiku. Haibun teaches awareness of life in a way which is also vital to single haiku. I think the relationship between the prose and verse parts of haibun should arise naturally. It's important to realise that a verse in a haibun should primarily work within its context, thus not all verses will stand alone as haiku.

How do you see the relationship between haiku and other poetry?

Because it lacks the constraints of haiku, contemporary poetry tends to come across often as unfocused and laden with the writer's ego. This makes it very difficult for such poetry to achieve the unselfish perfection that even beginner haiku poets can produce. Perhaps when writers (like Jim Norton) have experience in and love for not just haiku but its associated forms it can influence their work by helping them avoid clutter and present things 'as they are.'

What are your 'poetic values'?

Since discovering haiku I think I've discovered the kind of communication I felt was missing (and more), through reading, writing, meeting fellow haiku poets and working with them. The 'values' that have so far emerged for me include: *depth* in the sense that a single poem can have different profound meanings for different people; this usually seems to be achieved

by *transparency of language* which lets the reader in. Also important is *trueness* to the haiku moment or feeling. *Uncontrived language* and *rhythm* seem as essential now as they did before I started writing haiku.

What do you think are the limitations of haiku?

Subject matter, although in principle completely open, tends to avoid politics, social sciences and current affairs, or treats them lightly, though some interesting poems have come from the former Yugoslavia. My feeling is that there are more possibilities for a wider social angle in haibun. It may even be that haibun, as a sort-of variation on the short-story genre, will be able to somewhat bridge the gap between East and West poetics.

Any other thoughts ...

Haiku is a way of life, large chunks of which its poets can share both practically and philosophically with each other. It seems more coherent in this way than other genres. It crosses barriers of class and culture and brings (sometimes unlikely) individuals together in a community which I find both warm and stimulating.

Fred Schofield has published two haiku collections: *Sway* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1997) and *small snorings* (Frome: Bare Bones Press, 2000). *Forgive Us Our Tins* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1993) contained a few haiku alongside longer pieces. In general, his greatest asset is an ability to write with an apparent lack of any contrivance, together with his sensitivity to detail.

an inch of wool
caught on heather
in the wind⁵³

October wind
a paper bag soars
over the allotments⁵⁴

between the piano's phrases night wind⁵⁵

drunken beggar
his grimy hand
so soft⁵⁶

thunder before breakfast
my back tickled
by your fingers⁵⁷

winter fireside
the cat's breath
on my bare toes⁵⁸

⁵³ Fred Schofield, *Sway* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1997)

⁵⁴ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.1 (February 1996), p.5

⁵⁵ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.8 No.2 (June 1998), p.15

⁵⁶ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.5 No.3 (August 1995), p.20

⁵⁷ *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

In each of the examples above, the sudden sensory awareness that constitutes the epiphany of the haiku moment is captured with delicacy and precision. This is well seen in 'an inch of wool' where such a minimal object captures his (and our) attention. The visual focus of this poem, the soaring paper bag in 'October wind' and the aural focus of 'between the piano's phrases' (three wind poems!), though impressive, have their counterparts in the work of other haiku poets. If we are looking for something distinctive offered by this particular poet, we can find it in his highly attuned sense of touch, exemplified in the remaining three poems in this selection. What is noticeable is that, in each case, through this tactile quality we not only discover keenly felt sensations, we also meet the emotional force of the situation. Thus, the haiku becomes a vehicle for an expression of the poet's compassion towards the beggar, affection towards his pet, and a warmth, as well as a charged tension hinted at by 'thunder', in his love-relationship.

Such alertness seems ideally suited to haiku and it is true that Fred Schofield is less noted as a senryu poet. However the method of honest observation also functions in social situations, and is put to use in these two senryu. In both cases, there is a greater openness than is typical of senryu: the moment of compromise and embarrassment is caught with haiku-like objectivity and the comedy of the incident emerges in the same unforced way, whether the joke is on the stranger or the poet himself.

answering the phone
I swallow
half my toothpaste⁵⁹

people holding
doors open
in each other's way⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Snapshots* 4 (October 1998), p.16

⁵⁹ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.3 (August 1996), p.18

6.1.9. Brian Tasker

How long have you been writing haiku, and how did you get into it?

Ten years. I got into haiku via Chinese poetry.

Are there any other poets / haiku poets whom you regard as influences?

A major influence was *The Haiku Anthology* in an ideal kind of way.

Do you also write senryu, tanka, renga, haibun or other poetry?

I've yet to write a haibun. I sometimes write other kinds of poetry, but not for a while. I have had longer pieces published. I can sometimes knock out a rhyming poem on demand (for a laugh).

How do you see the relationship between haiku and other poetry?

I don't. Haiku is writing closely to experience and mainstream poetry is developing an idea. Never the twain shall meet.

For 'poetic values' see the account of the *Bare Bones* haiku guidelines presented in Section 4.2.

On editing Bare Bones ...

The process of editing a haiku magazine was one of slow, painful disenchantment and eventual boredom with / hatred of anything passing as poetry.

If haiku writers can be classed as either majoring on quantity or quality (or somewhere along the axis in-between), Brian Tasker is definitely located at the quality end of the scale. He is noted as a sometimes severe critic of other poets' writing and, to judge from his intermittent output over the years, he is capable of extending that severity to judgement of his own work. 1992 and 1993 were years of high productivity, seeing the publication (all by his own Bare Bones Press, Frome) of two haiku collections, *Notes from a Humdrum* (1992) and *Woodsmoke* (1993) and the tanka collection, *Housebound in Nirvana* (1992). A second tanka collection, *The Windblown Clouds*, appeared in 1996, but his next haiku collection, *The Sound of Rain*, did not

⁶⁰ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.87

appear until 1999. He mentions his initial route into haiku as being via Chinese poetry, which differs from Japanese poetry not in its deployment of key images but in the greater attention devoted to elucidating the emotional significance of those images. It follows, therefore, that his poetry is not so much that of an artist, dealing in colour, light and texture, but a poetry of deep feeling even when, as it has to be in haiku, that feeling remains latent rather than manifest. An epigraph to *Woodsmoke* sums up an understanding that accurately translates the sense of pathos underlying conceptions of poetry that have been influenced by Buddhism: 'this life is fleeting ... haiku are nostalgia for that which we cannot grasp.' In one way or another this nostalgia underlies all his poetic output and can be discerned in the following selection of haiku:

summer storm:
on an old radio
jazz crackles⁶¹

at the doorway
pausing for a moment;
the autumn rain⁶²

high tide
over and over
the shifting shingle⁶³ ✓

the house cold
after my absence
the cat sleeps closer⁶⁴

a moment of thunder
here and there
raindrops dampen the dust⁶⁵

a sleepless night ...
flickering lightning
but no thunder⁶⁶

What is also evident here is technical skill. Each haiku has a distinct rhythm and a strong sense of development over three lines; a beginning, a middle and an end. Related to this aspect is his frequent, but invariably subtle, use of the middle line as a hinge. In four of these

⁶¹ Ibid., p.94

⁶² *Blithe Spirit* Vol.3 No.1 (January 1993), p.6

⁶³ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.94

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.4 No.2 (May 1994), p.9

⁶⁶ *Snapshots* 3 (July 1998), p.34

haiku (less clearly so in the first and the last) this hinge can be seen functioning, providing an imagination-provoking ambiguity and enhancing the underlying unity of each poem.

Given his attunement to the emotional implications of images, it is natural that Brian Tasker is also an accomplished tanka poet. Indeed, in my view, he is the leading exponent of the art in the English-speaking world.

my ex-wife
now pregnant
her belly tightens
the silver belt
that I gave her⁶⁷

late in the evening
the traffic sounds slowed
to a lull in the conversation ...
she reaches for a cigarette
nothing else to tell me⁶⁸

the rain on the window
and in the garden
through the maple's bareness
flowering
the winter jasmine⁶⁹

waking alone
3 a.m.
the night stripped bare
by the nakedness
of your absence⁷⁰

Here we see four different shades of emotional colouring. 'the rain on the window' offers haiku-like objective images in which our clues to the feeling connotations are entirely metaphorical. We sense a dejection in the images of rain and the tree's bareness, soothed and lifted by the flowering of the shrub. Against this wintry background the jasmine acquires a heightened poignancy as if its scent breathes through the whole poem, offering a kind of aromatic lifting of mood. The narrative context here, why the narrator feels as he does, is left to the imagination. 'late in the evening' offers more detail in the setting, creating an atmosphere perhaps redolent of a black-and-white film. But the absence of further information – we have come into the conversation only at its close – leaves the reader

⁶⁷ Brian Tasker, *The Wind Blown Clouds: Tanka 1990-1995*, p.22

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.28

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.38

abandoned to the mood. In 'my ex-wife' we have a fuller picture, knowing who the characters are and how they must feel. The excellence of the poem is in the complexity of emotions that it conjures: envy, loss, love and resignation, poised without being fully resolved. In 'waking alone' the feelings are simpler: an abandonment so powerful that it disrupts the relation of the facts. The words 'stripped bare' and 'nakedness' are rare examples of Brian Tasker straying into the figurative realm as if the poet has been shocked into a loss of control.

6.2. Selected haiku with commentary

This section offers a selection of readings of some of the best of British haiku. Some of the effects described will have been consciously considered by the authors, but other aspects will undoubtedly be unconscious. A poet judges primarily by ear and rarely targets a specific response. Haiku, in particular, is an open-ended poetry which does not seek to limit interpretations (although senryu differs in this respect). One of my key arguments, however, especially in my role as an editor, is that the best education in effective writing comes from sensitive reading. To that extent, these responses suggest insights that I can usefully apply to the production of my own creative work.

high on the fell
my numbed fingers lose touch
with the violets

Norman Barraclough ⁷¹

In reading this haiku our straining senses are focused on our finger-ends. The oddly literal

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.16

⁷¹ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.9

use of the expression 'lose touch' suggests the dizziness of altitude, as if the numbness has spread from hand to head. Good haiku are centred on a vivid concrete image: here it is the violets, which provide colour against the background bleakness, and an image of the delicate and unobtainable. This haiku won the readers' poll for Best-of-issue in *Presence* #6.

the silence
of the beech wood
bluebells

Norman Barraclough⁷²

The strength of this haiku is its emphatic simplicity. The silence takes on an eternal or, at least, geological dimension. It is *the* silence. The alliteration of 'beech' and 'bluebells' adds weight. The last line can be read as either running-on or detached. In the latter case, there is a pause to savour both the silent background and the foreground detail, the flowers. Alternatively, we are presented with a single entity, a mystery for contemplation: the silence of ... the beech-wood-bluebells. It could be that the full effect depends on us being aware of both readings, simultaneously.

both squinting sideways
to read each other's paper -
women on a train

Colin Blundell⁷³

A perfect senryu. As with any joke, explanation is adding legs to a snake. However, I would draw attention to the clever choice of 'squinting', which adds a touch of drama by hinting at a level of difficulty. The reader has been there, done it and knows how it feels. The balance and timing of the piece also gains from the choice of line order: better than if line three had been placed first.

⁷² *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.3 (August 1996), p.25

two children running
at the white edge of the tide -
the start of summer

Colin Blundell⁷⁴

Reading this haiku, we are young again. We have done it, seen it, so many times. This is the strength of the poem: its honesty to experience. There is an energetic rhythm in 'the white edge of the tide' as well as attention to detail - it is, specifically, the 'white edge' that children love to chase. The last line expresses a seasonal awareness as in Japanese haiku: the single scene is taken as emblematic of the time of year. There is also a correspondence between the season and the theme of childhood. It is a time when good things are beginning and no end to them is in sight. One final point: how do we visualise this poem? Are we with the children, chasing the tide, or are we at a distance, perhaps as parents, watching tiny figures against a wide horizon? This poem is almost a sequel to another of Colin Blundell's:

two small figures race / across the beach to become / the deep line of blue

a wasp crawls
from an apple core -
summer's end

John Capp⁷⁵

The seasonal feel in this poem is comparable to that of the previous poem, but here we are viewing life in close-up rather than at-a-distance. This haiku is impressive for the accuracy with which the season is captured. 'wasp' and 'apple' are both perfect season-words for, say, September. The ending of summer is underlined by the apple's *core*, the end of the apple, and the wasp's *crawl*, the last of the energy of the wasp.

the swifts have left
the silence
of the dusk

David Cobb⁷⁶

⁷³ Colin Blundell, *Beguilement* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1994)

⁷⁴ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.5 No.3 (August 1995), p.26

⁷⁵ *Snapshots 3* (July 1998), p.36

The timelessness of this silence is comparable to that of Norman Barraclough's 'bluebells'. As in that poem, we have a choice of whether or not to pause in reading - here, at the end of the first line. If we do pause, we feel the pang of sadness at the swifts' going and we dwell on the silence that remains as a separate thing. If we don't pause, the poem becomes an answer to the question, 'What have the swifts left?' We feel the contrast and connection between the silence now and the noise of the swifts before, and the present silence becomes a gift or blessing. This is a full appreciation of nature, relishing both presence and absence, just as Bashō relished the mist that *prevented* a view of Mt Fuji (*misty rain / today it is good for once / not to see Fuji*).

breaking for lunch
the joiner padlocking
the coffin shed

David Cobb⁷⁷

On a serious level, there is the contrast between the concerns of the living for security and the irrelevance of such considerations to the dead. However, I can't help reading this poem as a deadpan joke, conjuring visions not so much of a break-in as a break-out. (My logical mind knows the coffins are empty, but my imagination doesn't.)

turning from her grave
the tug of a rose thorn
on my padded sleeve

David Cobb⁷⁸

The tug of the thorn is, of course, an image of the emotional tug of grief. That the sleeve is padded is a suggestion of the resistance to emotion, the insulation that generally accompanies grief. The tugging thorn recalls the poet to the present, visible world, away from thoughts of

⁷⁶ David Cobb, *Jumping from Kiyomizu*, p.60

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.64

⁷⁸ David Cobb, *Mounting Shadows* (Braintree: Equinox Press, 1992), p.32

the absent loved one in the grave. The rose thorn is, almost classically, an image of the mingled pleasure/pain of life/death. Yet what is special here, why this is a haiku rather than a fragment of a hymn, and why it is effective as such, is that the tug of the thorn is realised as a particular event. It actually happened. The haiku jogs the imagination of the reader just as the thorn pricked the consciousness of the poet.

Spring fair -
the wind freeing
free balloons

David Cobb⁷⁹

Little explanation is necessary, except to point out the lightness of touch, the deftness in the pun on 'free'. The playfulness is in accordance with the mood of the fair: it brings in the wind as a participant.

still air:
trodden stalks
spring upright

Keith J. Coleman⁸⁰

Apart from the notable concision, what is remarkable here is that the 'still air' emphasises the animation of the stalks. There is a sense in which these stalks are reminiscent of Blake's 'clod.' Their springing is therefore a kind of affirmation, though entirely natural. This haiku may be compared with the following, by Jim Norton. What difference does the introduction of a human agent make? The focus is moved from the resilience of nature to a drama in which the traces of the other are evanescent and elusive. These are two different readings of what seems likely to have been a similar event:

You walking ahead / the grass springing back / erases your steps

⁷⁹ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.4 No.3 (August 1994), p.4

⁸⁰ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.7

dusk -
the sound of snow falling
the sound of the old pines
holding it

Geoffrey Daniel⁸¹

At the heart of this haiku is the silence that allows these sounds to be heard. This is an example of form being defined by emptiness, i.e. 'the creative potential of what is left unsaid'. We can only hear this silence through the sounds. They are sounds so delicate that they have no other name. Like the 'sound of water' made by Bashō's frog, they are only what they are. We have to put ourselves in the poem to hear them. 'holding' here, like the springing stalks above, suggests a natural animation. We can sense a spirit in the old pines, but it remains glimpsed, there is nothing forced on us.

in the quiet house
a fridge

Frank Dullaghan⁸²

The brevity is the source of the humour. We are told all we need to know. This is because we all know what noise a fridge makes. This haiku is suggestive of the intrinsic humour of human domestic existence. The fridge has a life of its own. Our expectations of a third line, perhaps describing the noise of the fridge, are defeated, and we are left with an empty space to fill in with our own memory of that familiar hum.

Autumn morning
a rain-soaked rose
sways in the breeze

Katherine Gallagher⁸³

This haiku is a good example of the 'elegant simplicity' held to be a core value of classical haiku in Japan. It is immediately accessible, and particularly musical: autumn / morning;

⁸¹ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.7 No.3 (August 1997), p.26

⁸² *Presence* #2 (May 1996)

rain / rose; rain / sways; soaked / rose; rose / sways / breeze; soaked / sways. At the same time, there is the classical seasonal element. That the rose is somewhat weatherbeaten chimes with autumn rather than summer. Nevertheless, this aspect remains restrained - the rose survives to sway in the breeze as a thing of beauty.

in the small gap
between quivering nettles -
a rabbit's still eye

Caroline Gourlay⁸⁴

The strength of this haiku is its focus. We zoom in to a close-up of the rabbit's eye. We recall Bashō's *when I look carefully / beneath the hedge - / shepherd's purse*. Caroline Gourlay imitates Bashō's precision here. The 'quivering nettles' anticipate a nervousness in the rabbit, yet actually the rabbit doesn't run away, it returns the look. The emotion in the poem is complex: pleasure at spotting the hidden rabbit, but disconcerting to meet an unexpected steady gaze. This poem won the BHS Hackett Award of 1995.

butterflies in the catmint -
the old woman's hands
cannot settle ...

Caroline Gourlay⁸⁵

This is a good example of the principle of internal comparison; perhaps too good an example. Do both the butterflies and the old woman lose something of their independence as subjects by being brought to comment on each other?

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

Jackie Hardy⁸⁶ ✓

⁸³ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.5 No.1 (February 1995), p.6

⁸⁴ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.6 No.2 (May 1996), p.23

⁸⁵ George Swede and Randy Brooks (eds.), *Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide*, p.53

⁸⁶ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.2 No.4 (October 1992), p.28

Appreciation of this haiku should be as instant as the action. Applause?

north wind -
a sudden gust
kaleidoscopes
the fallen leaves

Jackie Hardy⁸⁷

The elements of this poem come close to being haiku 'clichés' - except one. 'kaleidoscopes' provides a visionary quality: we have seen this so many times before yet not, until now, in this particular way. It is how well we see this that determines the success of the haiku.

the delicate v
of geese
over the gasworks

Claire Bugler Hewitt⁸⁸

A fine example of a lighthearted haiku. 'delicate' sets us up for a fall. The v-shape of the poem adds a visual dimension to the wit as well as helping to delay the punchline slightly. The alliteration of 'geese' and 'gasworks' adds to the punch. The incongruity of these two elements is the essence of the humour, yet the haiku retains its integrity as a poem because, in the final analysis, we are given a moving image. The v of geese does have a delicacy and, after all, they are as likely to fly over the gasworks as anywhere else.

the egg yolk runs
into the baked bean sauce -
his laugh in the café

Claire Bugler Hewitt⁸⁹

The *Bare Bones* Guidelines and the BHS Consensus stress the value of tension between images. R.H.Blyth approves the absence of cause-and-effect in haiku, the meaningful

⁸⁷ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.3 No.1 (January 1993), p.20

⁸⁸ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.11

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

(because apparently meaningless) coincidence. This poem is a good example of such tension. What possible connection is there between its two parts? Noticing the two events at once photographs the moment, giving a sense of heightened awareness for the observer. The egg is precious to the hungry eye as laughter is to the spirit. At the same time, the messiness of the egg-bean mix may suggest something seedy about the café and, possibly, the laugh.

Still unopened
The greenish hydrangea flowers:
The taste of tea

Cicely Hill⁹⁰

The tension / coincidence here is less mysterious than in the previous poem, but still delightfully subtle. The tea in question is Japanese Green Tea which is green and somehow tastes green. It has a resonance with the flowers: the elusiveness of the taste parallels the delicacy of the not fully visible colour.

caught in the sunlight
on the old rocking chair
two cats washing each other

Byron Jackson⁹¹

The language here is plain and the scene clear. It is close to prose, but the concision and clarity lift it into poetry. There is an atmosphere of faded photograph (suggested partly by 'caught') and an intense sense of touch - the fur of the cats, their tongues, the implicit softness of the chair or its cushions, the warmth of the sun.

the slippers i need
are beneath the sleeping cat
i walk away quietly

Byron Jackson⁹²

⁹⁰ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.3 No.4 (October 1993), p.21

⁹¹ *Bare Bones* #5 (Spring 1993), p.15

This is similar in its warmth and comfortable domesticity to the previous poem, with some added humour. This poem, consciously or unconsciously, echoes a famous haiku by Chiyo-ni: *morning glory / entangling the well bucket - / I borrow water*

Woken
by a recurring
helicopter

Allan Jarrett⁹³

Here, of course, we find 'helicopter' where we expect 'dream'. The joke endures as a poem because of its honesty to experience, the true-to-life expression of irritation at the effort it takes to get to sleep in the big city.

Again, far off,
that silver tarn
I'll never visit

Ken Jones⁹⁴

This poem has its own honesty to experience ... of walking in the mountains. 'Again' and 'never' suggest the length and limitations of the walk. In the mountains there are always distances that are unconquerable. 'silver' expresses something of the imagined value of the tarn, its preciousness, and at the same time gives us what we need to imagine it, the sunlight glinting on the water between gloomy peaks.

The pond's dark waters ...
only stepping stones covered
with the first snowfall

James Kirkup⁹⁵

This is a typical example of a James Kirkup haiku. The regular 5-7-5 form is unobtrusive and

⁹² *Bare Bones* #6 (Summer 1993), p.19

⁹³ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.13

⁹⁴ *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

the three lines express a natural progression. With a few brushstrokes we are given a picture we can walk right into. The stepping stones recede into the dark distance, leading us on.

I go out walking
till the blue horizon
sticks to my shoes

Leo Lavery⁹⁶

Rather too generalised to attain perfection as a haiku. There is no moment - the poet is in two places at once. Yet there is power in the daring, carefree, triumphant 'blue horizon', an expression of transcendence which makes an interesting comparison with the sense of limitation in the Ken Jones poem above.

tinged with red
crescent moons
in the wake of the teal

George Marsh⁹⁷

One of my very favourite haiku, yet so hard to say how I see that it works. It has a visionary quality - this is certainly not something we can all say that we have seen. I discern a resonance, a correspondence, between each of the ingredients ... but maybe I am just seduced by the music: tinged / crescent / teal; red / crescent; the long vowels of 'moons' and 'teal'. There is also an admirable boldness in 'crescent moons', rather than 'reflected moonlight' or some such fudge. We don't in fact know whether it refers to a reflection or is a description of the patterns of ripples. We don't need to know, we can entertain the vision. Yet the poem somehow manages to retain a groundedness, a plausibility, which lifts it a step higher than this comparable poem by the same author, also delightful in its way:

galaxies tremble / as a whirligig beetle / scoots the midnight pond

⁹⁵ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.6 No.2 (May 1996), p.6

⁹⁶ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.19

⁹⁷ *Presence* #3 (November 1996), p.39

while the speaker
fiddles with his OHP
the tea urn sighs

✓

George Marsh⁹⁸

A comic poem which relies for its effect on breaking a rule of haiku: it animates an inanimate object. Like Frank Dullaghan's fridge, this tea urn is a domestic object in which, through the power of animation, the poet has discovered intrinsic potential for humour. The key to the comedy here, of course, is the release of tension. The urn expresses the inaudible sigh of the audience as they long for their tea-break.

snow-crust
bridging the needles
of rosemary

George Marsh⁹⁹

I think the charm here is the surprise substitution of rosemary where we expect pine. 'bridging' is a well-chosen word to describe what the snow-crust does. There is an appeal to all the senses: the colour and coldness of the snow; the fragility of the crust; the sharpness of the needles; their scent; their taste.

summer lightning
a fox zig-zags
across the dark lawn

Linda Marshall¹⁰⁰

This internal comparison remains appealing despite its obviousness. The liveliness of the fox and the sudden flash of colour provide subtler harmonies than the simple zigzag.

thirtieth birthday
yellowing pears
in a porcelain bowl

Matthew Paul¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

⁹⁹ *Presence* #4 (May 1997), p.33

¹⁰⁰ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.6 No.4 (December 1996), p.12

Another rather obvious internal comparison, but again there is a secondary appeal: the intrinsic beauty of the still life which we can dwell on for its own value.

pissing into a steel trough
the muted boom of the bar

Stuart Quine¹⁰²

This captures the scene with a vividness which is almost a shock. The onomatopoeia of 'muted boom' and the cold reality of the steel trough provide the emphasis. The sense of solitude heightened by the proximity of the crowd offers a classical haiku moment of loneliness in an unlikely setting.

in the tumbled slate
the whiteness
of a small bone

Stuart Quine¹⁰³

As we saw earlier, sounds can emphasise by implication the surrounding silence. Here we have a visual equivalent: the 'whiteness' of the bone points to the unstated darkness of the surrounding slate. There is a hint of mystery - what sort of bone? how did it get here? - contained within the instant of the visual impression.

on the doormat
a letter franked
with a footprint

Stuart Quine¹⁰⁴

This straightforward haiku owes its impact to the familiarity of the scene. It is made memorable by the aptness of 'franked.'

¹⁰¹ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.7 No.1 (February 1997), p.18

¹⁰² *Presence* #4 (May 1997), p.12

¹⁰³ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.41

the feel of the chestnut
I failed to pick up

Fred Schofield¹⁰⁵

This haiku relies for its effect entirely on the reader's powers of empathy. Have we felt the surprising sharpness too? Again, like Bashō's sound-of-water, we are given here a sensation for which there is no other name: the-feel-of-the-chestnut ... (My interpretation assumes that the chestnut is still in its spiky case. It is possible, I suppose, that it could be a different kind of poem, an expression of regret at having missed a prize conker. Yet that, too, would have a tactile immediacy, felt in the imagination.)

music lesson
cat asleep
in the guitar case

Fred Schofield¹⁰⁶

As with the two cat haiku by Byron Jackson discussed above, appreciation of this haiku relies to some extent on a (common) knowledge of the habits of cats. Here, there is a delightful correspondence between the shape of the curled cat and the guitar-space it has nestled into. This is the discovery of the cat rather than the poet. The haiku is pervaded by an understated humour which is also the humour of the cat, the poet merely reports it honestly, transparently.

sound of a jet
- a butterfly
dithers past

Fred Schofield¹⁰⁷

We are presented with a rather forced comparison here, but the poem is raised a level by the apt verb, 'dithers.' This is almost a political poem: the juxtaposition of the jet and the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.10

¹⁰⁵ Fred Schofield, *Sway*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

butterfly is to the pointed detriment of the jet. Contrast this with Claire Bugler Hewitt's 'geese' and 'gasworks', where the latter provides a more neutral backdrop for the former.

the river rolls
mist along
between its willows

Eric Speight¹⁰⁸

The active role (pardon the pun) of the river in this poem arrests the attention. We are shown an uncanny power which stops short of outright anthropomorphism. The sounds of this haiku are worth relishing too: river / rolls; rolls / willows; river / willows.

The sound of a flute
at dawn, white mist on the lake
and one bird singing

Eric Speight¹⁰⁹

This is a stylised haiku, surely a conscious attempt to recreate a classical Chinese or Japanese landscape. It works. The choice of ingredients is perfect. If an actual experience does underlie the poem, we can only compliment the poet on his perception and powers of selection. The flute, the birdsong, the mist and the time of day all act to reinforce each other, suggesting a mysterious beauty.

Obliging rain -
It comes at the crest of a ridge
In front of a teahouse
With a river view ...

[near Besisahar, Nepal, 6/90]

Tito¹¹⁰

Walking down into afternoon sun -
The feeling of wanting
To commemorate every
Turning of the track.

[above Trevelez, Andalusia, 12/88] Tito¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Speight, *Hollow Afternoon* (Wisbech: Hub Editions, 1997)

¹⁰⁹ Eric Speight, *Dry Reeds Sing Small* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1993)

¹¹⁰ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.4 No.1 (February 1994), p.19

¹¹¹ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.3 No.3 (July 1993), p.20

I take these two haiku together because their author, Tito, has a distinctive approach to haiku - a preference for an expansive four lines - and these two are notably representative examples. Tito is very specifically seeking a haiku *experience* which the poem then serves to 'commemorate.' The first example makes a useful contrast with Eric Speight's 'The sound of a flute' - it is equally successful at evoking an Oriental landscape - but here we are left in no doubt that a lived moment underlies the poem. The poet may well be getting wet in the 'Obliging rain' - obliging because there is an illusion that the rain is co-operating in the author's aesthetic project. More than any other poet in this selection, Tito convinces us that haiku is something to be lived. It can have a spiritual dimension. It is not merely a game with language.

snow melt -
spreading butter
on your toast

Daniel Trent¹¹²

I made this haiku my selection as my favourite poem in the first issue of *Presence*. The internal comparison - the melting snow, the melting butter - is clear without being forced. There is a pleasing contrast between the cold outdoors and the warm indoors, a faint suggestion that the external 'melt' might be reflecting a thaw in the poet's relationship with the partner whose toast is being buttered.

Winter dusk:
mist gathers
the river that was there

Rod Treseder¹¹³

This reverses the situation in Eric Speight's 'the river rolls' - here the mist is the active partner. The effect is very similar to the Speight poem. The active verb, 'gathers', attributes

¹¹² *Presence* #1 (January 1996)

just enough agency to the mist. 'the river that was there' is also a refreshingly bold expression, exciting in its suggestion that the vanishing is more than a mere matter of appearance, there is a sense in which the mist has transformed reality.

The small jar
has bent
the goldfish

Hamish Turnbull¹¹⁴

I can't read this without wincing out of sympathy with the goldfish. (Of course, it may be the effect of refraction that is 'bending' the fish, rather than the size of the jar as such.) The unmentioned human participants in this drama are significant actors.

twilight ...
a loose leaf at the twig's end
twirls in the wind

Frank Williams¹¹⁵

The alliteration here (twilight / twig's / twirls) is effective, if a little heavy. It is the aptness of 'twirls' which is the poem's strength. I find it, on balance, more successful than this more concise rendering of what is, in effect, the same moment:

spinning on its twig - / a leaf / ready to fly (Frank Dullaghan)

evening bus ride ...
bumping along
to the smell of chips

Frank Williams¹¹⁶

Here, we are drawn in instantly by the powerful homeliness, and the vivid appeal to our sense of smell. The alliteration and assonance of 'bus' and 'bumping' enhance the sensation of the bumping, which exactly captures the quality of the ride.

¹¹³ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.8 No.1 (March 1998), p.11

¹¹⁴ David Cobb, James Kirkup and Peter Mortimer (eds.), *The Haiku Hundred* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1992), p.57

inside windowsill -
the dead fly has breezed
to a new position

Frank Williams¹¹⁷

The strengths of this poem are similar to those of 'evening bus ride', above - the familiarity of the moment, and the intelligent choice of the verb 'breezed' which expresses the light weight of the body of the fly.

6.3 Coda: a mini-anthology

In order to recognise the contribution of a wider range of haiku poets beyond the nine discussed in detail in Section 6.1, I conclude with a mini-anthology representing twenty-eight of the best British haiku¹¹⁸ not otherwise cited in this thesis.

1	washing up for one snow falling ai li ¹¹⁹	2	after dad tidies her scarf the toddler fixes it herself Annie Bachini ¹²⁰
3	still part-furled a wing of the butterfly on his open palm Norman Barraclough ¹²¹	4	drawing curtains past the old zither - frost in the air Geoffrey Daniel ¹²²
5	pale moon before dawn; in the wooden bowl / honesty Geoffrey Daniel ¹²³	6	days draw in - drops of broth by the noodle bowl Adele David ¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ *Time Haiku* 8 (1998), p.21

¹¹⁶ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.7 No.2 (May 1997), p.21

¹¹⁷ *Home: British Haiku Society Members' Anthology 1996* (Sutton Bridge: Hub Editions, 1997)

¹¹⁸ This includes three senryu, numbers 2, 18 and 19.

¹¹⁹ *Home: British Haiku Society Members' Anthology 1996* (Sutton Bridge: Hub Editions, 1997)

¹²⁰ David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.14

¹²¹ *Haiku Spirit* 7 (August 1996), p.8

¹²² Geoffrey Daniel, *Gripping the Perch* (Liverpool: Snapshot Press, 1998), p.32

¹²³ Ibid.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>7 my ironed shirt hanging
in a white shaft of moonlight ✓</p> <p>Frank Dullaghan¹²⁵</p> | <p>8 An adder glides away -
the air is suddenly sweet
with violets</p> <p>Edward D.Glover¹²⁶</p> |
| <p>9 On the great penis
of the fertility god
snow accumulates</p> <p>Edward D.Glover¹²⁷</p> | <p>10 bonfire -
the kitten takes two steps forward
and six back</p> <p>John Gonzalez¹²⁸</p> |
| <p>11 the flicker
from his dynamo ✓
cycling to the fireworks</p> <p>Claire Bugler Hewitt¹²⁹</p> | <p>12 winter morning stillness
chopping wood ✓
between the echoes</p> <p>Byron Jackson¹³⁰</p> |
| <p>13 In the crisp packet
a blue paper twist of salt:
the night sky, the stars.</p> <p>Richard Leigh¹³¹</p> | <p>14 sun through the clouds
pepper seeds drifting across
a washing-up bowl</p> <p>Matt Morden¹³²</p> |
| <p>15 stiff cross-wind
tumbling the crows
off the crash barrier</p> <p>Helen Robinson¹³³</p> | <p>16 potting a lavender plant
leaves heavy with scent -
spring thunder</p> <p>Helen Robinson¹³⁴</p> |
| <p>17 above the tree line
only the whisper
of the chair-lift wheel</p> <p>Ruth Robinson¹³⁵</p> | <p>18 in the car - finding
the distance from seat to wheel
is still yours</p> <p>Susan Rowley¹³⁶</p> |

¹²⁴ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.4 No.1 (February 1994), p.5

¹²⁵ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.8 No.2 (June 1998), p.11

¹²⁶ *HQ* 13/14 (1994), p.22

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Fire: British Haiku Society Members' Anthology 1993* (Flitwick: Hub Editions, 1993)

¹²⁹ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.11

¹³⁰ Byron Jackson, *Treading Carefully: Intimations 2* (British Haiku Society)

¹³¹ David Cobb and Martin Lucas, *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.65

¹³² *Snapshots* 4 (October 1998), p.36

¹³³ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), p.14

¹³⁴ *Haiku Spirit* 14 (June 1998), p.3

¹³⁵ David Cobb and Martin Lucas, *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.84

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.86

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 19 | kneeling
she looks sideways to see
who isn't

Susan Rowley ¹³⁷ | 20 | summer dark -
the faint glimmer of a ball
from child to child

Susan Rowley ¹³⁸ |
| 21 | two collared doves
walk circles
in the wedding rice

Susan Rowley ¹³⁹ | 22 | a slight drizzle -
the axe handle glistens
over split logs

David Steele ¹⁴⁰ |
| 23 | a sudden gust
the end of season beach balls
jostle in their nets

David Steele ¹⁴¹ | 24 | long weekend alone
the click of buttons
in the wash cycle

David Steele ¹⁴² |
| 25 | woodfire
flickering in the silence
corralled horses

Alan J.Summers ¹⁴³ | 26 | early December
sweeping silver stars
into the dustpan

Diana Webb ¹⁴⁴ |
| 27 | shelling peas -
hard rain falling
on the chimney cowl

Maggie West ¹⁴⁵ | 28 | sunday sadness ...
today I can't see
the wallpaper's faces

Frank Williams ¹⁴⁶ |

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.85

¹³⁸ André Duhaime (ed.) *Haiku Sans Frontières: une anthologie mondiale* (Orléans, Ontario: Les Éditions David, 1998), p.61

¹³⁹ David Cobb and Martin Lucas, *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.86

¹⁴⁰ *HQ* 16 (1995), p.15

¹⁴¹ David Cobb and Martin Lucas, *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.92

¹⁴² *Snapshots* 5 (January 1999), p.8

¹⁴³ Alan J.Summers, *Moonlighting: Intimations* 3 (British Haiku Society)

¹⁴⁴ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.9 No.1 (March 1999), p.38

¹⁴⁵ *Blüthe Spirit* Vol.8 No.3 (September 1998), p.37

¹⁴⁶ *Presence* #6 (June 1998), p.17

Creative Writing: Haiku, Tanka, Renga, Haibun

7.1 Freewheeling: 114 haiku

Freewheeling is a collection of 114 haiku, written between July 1997 and July 2000. It is composed of six sub-sections of nineteen poems each, which follow a loose seasonal arrangement as follows: late spring; summer; autumn; winter; non-seasonal haiku and senryu; early spring. These 114 poems are a selection from all my haiku written during this three year period, which totalled roughly twice this number.

7.1.1 Morning Sun

morning sun
highlighting the curve
of the cooling towers

rain gusts
rustling
the patio rose

flaking paint
on the abandoned boat –
daytime moon

south wind
combing the whitebeams
to white

Grasmere —
the darkness at the edge
of the mountain's reflection

hailstorm —
the snooker player [^]
misses the pink

a swan's flight
through the arch of the bridge ✓
low tide

pausing a moment
a mole crossing the path
collides with my boot

in the shady woods
the taste of dark chocolate ✓

cloudless sky
the cyclist ✓
freewheeling

the coolness
of the river and its mud
shadow of a gull

golf practice —
glint of the club ✓
lifted in the backswing

slow river
the blind man
slices an apple

in the angler's box
a wriggle of maggots — ✓
this perfect sky

the dog skids
as it catches a stick
dust. heat.

swallows suddenly blue the angelus bell ✓

the light of the setting sun —
two midges
oscillating

I read
haiku after haiku – outside
the chiffchaff chiffchaffs

morning sun
the bright white
of distant gravestones

7.1.2 Summer Night Music

summer clouds –
the bright white glaze
of the noodle bowl

the poetry editor –
plucking a snail
from the stone nymph's nipple

still pond –
mud
wriggling with frogs

on the angled hawthorn
lichen,
drifts of wool

half-sunk in sand
the polished indigo ✓
of mussels

sun-warmed brick
a peacock butterfly closes
and opens its wings

cool flow of the river elderflower scent

switching channels
from tennis to tennis ...
the sun comes out

summer heat
the sound of glass smashing
in the bottle bank

foam of the falls
in the gathering dusk –
scent of dog-rose

dead poet's house –
the ruins roofed
with ferns and foxgloves

shaking dust
off an old rug
summer cool

pipit song
spinning down ✓
the slope of the hill

after killing
the mosquito, I turn ✗
to read Issa

beat of a basketball
bounced along the court
summer breeze

garden rose
and the coffee-jar lid
gathering rain

cycling downhill
into the wind
into thistledown

summer night-music moth to the flame

the undersides
of silver maple leaves ...
summer's end

7.1.3 Steel Drum

quiet dawn –
carnation petals
on the hearthrug

lifting
the bookmark –
evening breeze

the play of light
along the slow canal –
cygnets preening

lunar eclipse –
across the channel, the faintest
trail of light

nightlights of a boat
heading straight towards us –
the equinox tide

the house painter
descending his ladder ✓
blue sky

raindrops
speeding up
raindrops

without a sound
on the dark horizon ✓
fireworks

October wind
all the florists' plant pots ✓
tumbled

Halloween –
eating one chocolate
after another

sipping green tea
afternoon sunlight through
the leaves of the basil

the slow plod
of an overweight labrador –
autumn rain

flashing lights
through the sword of Orion
an hour before dawn

light rain
over the grey Thames
steel drum ...

in the quietness
between one car and the next – x
you crunch an apple

clouds clearing
croak of a TV aerial
rook

rollerblading kids
zip past
a man gazing at squirrels

on the walk home
the multicoloured twinkling
of Arcturus

hushed morning
on the northern horizon
a sunlit hill

7.1.4 New Millennium

new millennium
a line of footprints
vanishing in grass

winter rain –
the lollipop lady sheltering
in a phone box

morning rush
wheeling, scattering –
the gulls

bright sunlight
on a distant peak
traces of snow

winter clouds
the first catkins'
whiteness

light – ✓
sliding
between the stepping stones

only against rhododendrons
noticing
the rain

wind-whipped river –
the narrow footbridge shaking
as we cross

wintry gusts
a tuneless clatter
from the wind chimes

rain at the window
the hot water bottle
slumped against the wall

a night of stars
the footpath
sparkles with frost

border hills
the jet-trail fades
to a line of dots ...

shadowed alley –
the miaow
of a grey cat

light fades
above the winter trees ✓
a swirl of starlings

north wind
a flicker of white
on the finches' wings

tip of the Christmas tree
bent:
the weight of the angel

winter sun
a tiny mite and its shadow
creep across my page

only on the molehills snow

new millennium
the lights on the bridge
curving into mist

7.1.5 Saxophone

a hush in the pub –
the girl's tale of seduction
reaches its climax

cooking for one
the taste of
boiled white rice

darkness above
darkness below
the distant window

through the winding tunnels ✓
of the tube station
saxophone ...

surrounded by sounds
the squeak
of the cyclist's wheel

balancing,
not balancing – ✓
crow on the wire

in the silence
after the poetry reading
the clink of ice cubes

squeezing the kumquat
a jet of juice
squirts across the kitchen

a dusting
of bright yellow pollen
where the vase was

PRIVATE PROPERTY
for a moment, a blackbird
perched on the notice

into the oboe solo
the hoot
of a distant train

rush-hour traffic
glitters along the bridge –
the shining sea

in the v
of the latin inscription
a blotch of lichen

beneath the tick
of its pink tail
the hog's bollocks

still water
all the straight edges of the building
bent

only earwigs
in the leaflet dispenser –
PLEASE TAKE ONE

wobbling downhill
rattle of the stabilisers
on the small boy's bike

river in the hills –
the graduate
learning to skim stones

emptying the washing-up bowl –
at the bottom, again,
a single teaspoon

7.1.6 Graffiti

early spring
in the city square
a loosening of ties

bright sunlight –
a bank of crocuses
at the prison gates

shore of the loch –
wavelets lapping
the fallen larch

your laughter ahead
and the sound now of the river
grown distant

a chink of light –
shadows of the palm
on the palm

a disposable fork
in a half-eaten pie –
April Fool's Day

mid-morning silence
a tiny fly
tickles my life line

fragments of green glass ✓
spring sunlight
on the leaves of ivy

a tiny insect –
just a blur of wings
under the thinnest of moons

boatyard cranes –
a hunting heron
at the river bend

spring sun
a tin can ✓
rusts in the gutter

moss between the cobbles
children's voices ✓
echo in the alley

faint gull's cry
fading to a breath
this spring breeze

the decorator
sanding down the paintwork – ✕
bark of a dog

dark skies
and driving rain
a duck on the roof

spring warmth
a broom and a bucket
propped against the wall

light through the leaves –
in green paint
illegible graffiti

look, no hands! –
the whistling cyclist;
willows and birdsong

sunlight and sparrow-chirps
the Mormon asks,
“Do you believe in God?”

7.2 Nine tanka

the many night noises of London
subside
in the smallest hour
all that's left:
voice of the blackbird

stuck for conversation
at the seafood restaurant
in every soup spoon
a spinning
ceiling fan

the darkening sea
deeper – our silence
dune grasses ✓
curled
by the evening breeze ...

a shared moment
watching the nightfall
grey sky
yellow lights
shimmering the river) ✓

startled redwings
fly from the holly
I walk alone
cracking ice ✓
along the track

your old grievance:
I won't share my thoughts
a magpie flies
into the shadows
beneath may blossom

wisps of cloud
on this first warm day
a blue-eyed girl
strolling past
the flowering cherries

at the slow pace
of a canal boat
evening stillness ✓
clouds across
the huge red sun

after the trauma
of two weeks without sleep
just enough
presence of mind
to recycle the papers

7.3 Renga

I present here five renga, four written with a single partner each time (one with Stuart Quine, one with Brian Tasker, and two with Fred Schofield). The fifth is a group effort, with five participants. Chapter Eight ('On Renga') contains analysis of three of these poems, and reading that chapter will undoubtedly assist in following the renga as presented here. It may be interesting to read the renga unassisted at first, and then come back to read them in the light of the analysis that follows in Chapter Eight.

7.3.1 Writer's Block

Writer's Block

ten thirty writer's block another sip of lager
threading through the traffic a thin black dog
working girl's bare white legs november drizzle
beneath the burnous painted toenails
camera flash four identical shots of a blink
factory window frames a single star

full moon broken on the steps of the weir
where the bus was an oily rainbow /
distant laughter perfume lingers in the subway
just a few foreign coins in the flat cap
rippling the rock pool their last peseta
rooks and jackdaws among the brown furrows
flooded fields mirror a cloudless sky
still the sound of snoring - daytime moon
home early pulling the curtains on another morning
drawn together by their love of books
five-year diary four years of empty pages
saturday circled in red ... but why?

the President (the only candidate) gets his mandate
morning frost the first petal falls
chocolate egg left in the light melting
sticky fingerprints on the new sofa
identity parade half the suspects wearing wigs
a flurry of tickertape in the limousine's wake
America's Team 'World Champions' ... which world?
raising his cane he points out Andromeda
night of the new moon - seeing so much more than before
scanning the bay from jetty to lighthouse
in the dark a small boat - creak of the oars
again the sixth stair gives him away

advancing down the aisle the fatherless bride
with difficulty the ring over the knuckle
his gestures more eloquent than his speech
as he exits the press conference the loser's v-sign
arrows of geese fly beyond the distant ridge
a wreath of evergreen at the hilltop shrine

Martin Lucas, *Stuart Quine*

30 - 31 November 1997

7.3.2 Kicking the leaves

kicking the leaves

new ball in a string bag - the boy in the park kicking the leaves
thumbs prise open a freshly fallen conker
by the fireside the cat asleep . twitches its tail
the soft hearth rug holding the warmth
missing her ... another night she hasn't phoned
hour after hour feverish dreams

Year of the Tiger - an extra chilli in the stir-fry
through the party wall the sounds of an argument
the thud of drums speeding up her heartbeat
he swings the Chevrolet slowly around the corner
there's no escape an anarchist mob brandishing placards
the 'Big Issue' seller offers his last copy
day moon over the city the squeal of seagulls
a fine spray flying from the prow of the boat
end of the pier - a couple stand gazing out to sea
unsure of the names of these southern stars
the child turns to follow a smell of popcorn with her nose
big blue balloons float above the fair

slowly moving traffic - all the stoplights dazzle in the drizzle ✓
a glance in the mirror the shock of recognition
his ex-lover applying lipstick averts her eyes
from the other room a friend calls her name
a small figure outlined in the distance waving and shouting
either side of the path all kinds of wildflowers
sudden lull - the brand new kite is caught in a tree
he shrugs his shoulders and chews another mint
sipping cool water - the air conditioning's faulty again
all flights delayed no change in the muzak
filling the trolley with unwanted goods - gifts for the family
four generations in the row of photos

all the salesmen in suits and ties - deepening shades of grey
clouds gathering over the dales
a dash to the pub - hailstones rattle the cobbled street
an evangelist calls everyone to be saved
day of the wedding white lilies decorate the chapel
at last the trapped butterfly finds the open door

Brian Tasker, Martin Lucas

5 January – 10 August, 1998

7.3.3 Pulp Friction

Pulp Friction

an anti-renga by Fred Schofield and *Martin Lucas*

dedicated to Dick Pettit, 10 November 1997

bonfire night in the guitar case cat piss ✓
afraid I've been shot but it's only a banger
head in the mud feet in the air his erection wilts ?
through the CN Tower's glass floor bugger all
dregs at the bottom enhance the urge to vomit
in vino veritas in Tesco 10% extra free

button jammed my refill refills and refills and refills ...
the unsolved rubik cube crashes through the window
six dummies with exquisite breasts and bald heads
a bluebottle crawls across the smooth surface
he stretches towards the cue ball bends – and farts
unable to cough as the dentist peers in
two eyes peer out the trainee gynaecologist screams
there must be a link at this critical moment
holding a handful of loose threads ... and waving goodbye >
the unborn unsure what to do
roll a last cigarette and ponder the mystery of life
John Wayne in the mirror briefly

Marilyn Monroe hungry for sex and death
candle in the wind relit
edwardian throwback tweaks his 'tache before bed
saying his prayers one eye on the clock
next morning a leaky hot water bottle is the excuse
heading for Bath ending up in Staines
she swims alone no longer aware of her legs
only the shark's fin dividing the horizon
on the hoarding the drink's unpronounceable name
call it what you like it won't change anything
vandalised lamp-post's severed head hits a dog
who put the 'r' in Pulp Friction?

on sacred papyrus totally illegible faded texts
the priest with false teeth mutters in the corner
clowns to the left of me jokers to the right here I am
the hat keeps slipping backwards
a gasp for breath one last despairing tug of the ripcord
fascists to ashes the curtain falls

7.3.4 Baroque Masterpiece

BAROQUE MASTERPIECE

baroque masterpiece the fat cheeks of the cherub
patterns on the bog roll only managed a fart
over the bay sinking into quicksand
she turns the hourglass and waits
freeze-up the apology a long time coming
this morning's milk bottles lost in snow

bright sun he laughs and claps his hands
old pond! that's it – thinks Bashō
the weak smile of the corpse among weeds
across a perfect lawn tractor tracks
posh car in the drive alongside seagulls after worms
pissed and collapsed at the Green Dragon
she breathes fire and swings the brick in her handbag
leader of the opposition on the floor of the House
transmission fault jazzed-up Bach fills the air
battered old Allegro stutters to a halt
t-t-t-t- t-t-t-too late! she cries
cramming the unwanted bouquet into the bin

a state of shock his first ever rejection letter
soothing and stimulating Pachelbel's Canon
an overflow of bubbles from the over-filled bubble bath
Superman thinks: shit, I've left the oven on
in desperation the search for a vacant phone box
hello bello this is an emergency!
getting 666 the Number of the Beast by mistake
an anteater's snout round the door
new Hoover sucks up a piece of the jigsaw
cats dash from the noise
soprano's crescendo distorted to a shriek
driving south can't find Radio 3

sky clouds over the explosion of a puncture
bubblegum all over her face
blushing as neighbours stare at the new boyfriend
behind the Nuclear Power station the sun sets
touching down in a strange land dead of night
cannibals feast on missionary soup

Martin Lucas, Fred Schofield

Lancaster, 17 October 1999

7.3.5 Almost a Sunflower

ALMOST A SUNFLOWER

Manchester, 14 November 1999

stormy sunset
she speeds between
police cameras fs

forked lightning
pigeons scatter fm

a wayward elbow
knocking salt all over
the tablecloth ml

the after-dinner talk
flat and insipid db

potted plants in line
removal men
sipping tea fm

a labrador sniffs
the van's rear wheel fs

moondance moondance moondance
the unattended cd
repeats dr

the lighthouse
against grey skies fm

high up
skeins of geese
heading inland ml

the feather boa
slips from her shoulders dr

grabbing a hooligan –
the policeman's helmet
wobbles fs

himalayan balsam
dense along the river db

a single splash by the time we get there the water settled	dr
the ticket office – peeling paint	fm
across the autumn fields the chimes of church bells	db
harvesting the crop circles	dr
dark evenings not one TV presenter poppyless	ml
handing over the cheque not quite the million	dr
he opens the silk cloth to reveal a smashed watch	fs
Number Crunchers do it 'just like that'	db
in the mirror practising his retirement speech	fm
for Christmas each twin knows just what to buy	dr
paper snowflakes on the windows of the infant class	ml
quick, to starboard – a school of dolphins	db
dusting down the orrery – Jupiter's missing	dr
the morning after feeling less jovial	db

postman tired of ringing – starkers I can't find the key	fs
moonlighting to pay for the extension	fm
steam beyond the heather clump an illicit still	db
the hillbilly restringing his banjo	fs
another hurricane engineers up every pole	dr
broken kite hangs from the tree	dr
mud on her boots – clearing last year's leaves from the pond	fm
bags of old clothes outside Oxfam	db
sixties tie-dye look – almost a sunflower	dr
a tentative bite of the GM tomato	ml

David Brady, Martin Lucas, Fokkina McDonnell, David Rollins, Fred Schofield

7.4 Haibun¹

7.4.1 Eleven Days in Japan

Eleven Days in Japan

Day One: Kansai to Kyoto

We land at Kansai Airport. 'Land' is the wrong word: it's in the middle of the sea. At the station we wait while cleaning ladies in uniform bright yellow dungarees polish the carriages from relatively spotless to absolutely spotless. As the train pulls away they line up on the platform to give a four-cleaner salute, waving in enthusiastic unison. The train arrives in Kyoto at 11.01 precisely.

Stephen and Kaz take us on a tour of Kitasaga, suburban Kyoto. The air is loaded with the green smell of rice and the electrical whirring of cicadas. Cars and pedestrians share the same narrow thoroughfares, broad enough for footpaths, hardly to be called roads.

The temperature is 32°. We leave town, find a river in the hills. While Stephen and Kaz swim we dangle our toes like children, the chill shocking us from our jet lag.

wagtail
at the weir's edge
back and forth
across the falling water

¹ As with the renga, I also devote a chapter to haibun (Chapter Nine) and it may be worthwhile to return to

Day Two: Kyoto to Hiroshima

There are queuing points for the shinkansen² marked on the platform. The passengers form orderly lines. When the train stops, inch perfect, each door is aligned precisely with the head of each queue. The powerful air-conditioning is not powerful enough to prevent us dozing ... through cities, rice fields, tunnels into mountains. Each time we wake we're in a tunnel, a brief bright moment of rice field, or: Osaka, Kobe, ... Okayama, Fukuyama, ... Hiroshima.

The welcoming meal is vast: infinite quantities of sashimi³, tempura⁴, tofu⁵, noodles, rice. Although I prefer the side dishes I sample a little bit of each sashimi dish to show willing. A little bit of each, and by half-past nine I'm stuffed.

At Yūko's flat we spread our futon⁶ on the tatami⁷, close the mosquito mesh, open the window. The sisters sleep. I digest restlessly, dreams disturbed by the station announcer. 'Hiroshima. Hiroshima desu.' This is Hiroshima.

through the sticky night
a train so loud
it's soundless

this section in the light of the discussion therein.

² Bullet train

³ Raw fish

⁴ Battered prawns, vegetables, etc.

⁵ Bean curd

⁶ Mattress

⁷ Floor mat

Day Three: Hiroshima - the Peace Memorial Cathedral

Sunday morning. The solidity and silence of the Peace Memorial Cathedral. Summer light split by stained glass into achingly resonant reds. The noticeboard said Mass was at 8 but there's nobody about, which is just as well. I'm dizzy and in tears. Can't answer why, can't even ask it, can barely stand up to walk home.

This evening's sashimi is a particularly expensive succulent tuna. I repeat yesterday's error. A taste of this, a taste of that, it all adds up to too much.

postcard home
a little bit of sashimi
stuck under the stamp

Day Four: Hiroshima - the Interview

We are trying to arrange my appointment to a teaching post at Kure University. I present a bottle of whisky to my interviewer: not a bribe, apparently, just the way things are done. He's puzzled by my interest in haiku. There are all these misconceptions Westerners have about the Japanese, he says. That they all grow bonsai, they all practice karate, they all write haiku. It's the origin of my journey into the Japanese language and culture, which has led me to this point, this arrival in Japan, but it doesn't seem to count for much. The perception gap between the exotic and the familiar.

After the interview there's a party for newly-appointed staff ...

the faster I drink my sake⁸
the sooner my glass is refilled

Asked to compare the relative merits of sake and scotch, I am inspired: 'A good scotch is better than a bad sake and a good sake is better than a bad scotch.' It's approved. After one too many I decide the best policy is to leave the next glass full to the brim, so they can't fit any more in.

Day Five: Hiroshima - Video games and shopping

I play some sort of mortal combat video game with Toshiki. He soon loses patience with my lack of skill. We switch to racing cars. His worst time is faster than my best. Lunch is delivered by the local Okonomiaki⁹ shop. It's tasty, so I find room somehow. After an afternoon shopping and an evening of video games my head's spinning. It's still hot, and I'm still stuffed, and sleepless.

clock ticking on
long after midnight -
crickets

Day Six: Hiroshima - More shopping

Under the new bridges
the old mud
teeming with crabs

⁸ Rice wine

⁹ Savoury pancake

I manage to buy stamps and take a tram down town unaided. We shop till we drop. I've no more room for food. Too much has gone in and none of it's coming out. The day ends with a hunt for a herbal remedy for constipation.

Day Seven: Hiroshima - Climbing to Busharitō

At the Shinto shrine we read our fortunes. I'm advised to seek relief by climbing to high places. We follow the trail to the Buddhist Peace Pagoda at the top of the hill. Hiroshima sprawls in the heat, broken by island hills, islands in the sea beyond. Butterflies and space. I feel the prescriptions working. I soar above the city haze, come down into freedom. My bowels are beginning to un-bung too.

a child
at the foot of the shrine steps
skateboarding

Day Eight: Hiroshima - Miyajima

In remembrance of August 6, 1945, at Hiroshima station there is no platform number six.

We buy tickets to Miyajima, the island shrine. One of the three most scenic sites in all Japan. It's crowded with Japanese tourists dutifully shuffling behind megaphoned leaders. We extricate ourselves from one group only to get entangled with the next. One disturbance after another: tame deer pester us for a share of our sandwiches. My mood dips again.

Apparently couples shouldn't visit Miyajima together: the island's goddess gets jealous and seeks to separate them.

After lunch we argue, taking a sullen walk under a darkening sky. Aimlessly, we wander off the beaten track, to a quiet shore where we beachcomb and catnap. Fragments of pot found among the shells are likely to date from 1945. Sea, and space again, and peace.

Returning to the ferry, we dodge showers as we go. The first and last rain this time in Japan. After taking shelter against a shrine fence we discover our clothes have been stained bright red by the paint.

Miyajima -
our tickets to the museum
eaten by a deer

Day Nine: Hiroshima - The restaurant in Kure

One last morning of shopping. I discover that you must also remove your footwear when entering changing rooms in Japanese department stores. Can't find any suitable clothes: I blow our spending money on cds instead. After lunch I take the camera in search of souvenir images. We don't have time to visit the Peace Park.

the stillness of a heron
in the river-mud of Hiroshima

That evening we drive out, through more mountain tunnels, to a seafood restaurant in Kure.

Toshiki weeps tears of farewell. He's overdone the wasabi¹⁰.

Day Ten: Hiroshima to Kyoto

leaving, lifting
a suitcase full of gifts
over the gardener's barrow

Goodbyes said, we take a quiet shinkansen back to Kyoto. Just before Kyoto a small child, having failed to persuade its parent that it's lunchtime, starts screaming: "O-bento!" O-bento! O-bento!" A (so far) unique example of social disorder.

Stephen meets us at Saga-Arashiyama station. We pause on the way back to buy spaghetti for lunch. He parks the van and, while Nori pops into the Co-op, he passes on the news from abroad. Princess Diana has been involved in a car crash in Paris and is suspected dead. The details are reported on World Service TV while the spaghetti is cooking.

We reach one famous temple half an hour before closing time ...

Ryoanji garden -
a row of seated tourists
a single darting lizard

green moss
green maples
eleven red buckets

¹⁰ Horseradish sauce

¹¹ Lunch box

temple lake -
dragonfly
touching its reflection

... and gatecrash another twenty minutes after closing time ...

summer dusk
bats, flying blind,
between the stones of Kiyomizu

chattering
quietens in the dark
to cicada chirps

We stroll the ancient streets, decline the pleas of an Indian restaurant owner to patronise his establishment, dine instead at a riverside izakaya¹² where outside, along the banks of the Kamogawa river, courting couples are equidistantly spaced like some species of colony-nesting seabird. We drink in the noise and the evening air and the lager, dive out into the night to wander Gion in search of a geisha, find only the Indian restaurant owner wandering aimlessly. (He's as surprised to see us as we are to see him.) We meander through the maze, into deep shadows between old wooden houses, disappear to somewhere outside time.

slow stroll
of a grandmother
down stone steps -
the Kyoto night

¹² Pub-cum-restaurant specialising in bar meals

Day Eleven: Kyoto to Izumisano

A brief but blissful pilgrimage to the House of Fallen Persimmons, where, over three hundred years ago, Bashō, the haiku master, stayed with his friend Kyorai. I dutifully compose a haiku, post it for posterity.

one thin tree
against the hillside skyline -
summer haze

Green light streams through tall bamboo. We return, taking in lunch at a noodle shop, round the temple lake, watching fat carp jostle in the shallows. On the quiet unfenced unmarked unsignposted path that leads from the temple grounds to Stephen's house we notice a flicker at our feet and crouch to watch ...

kamakiri no ugoku karetake daikakuji¹³
mantis moving brown bamboo: Daikakuji

Last night of the trip we lug our overweight cases to the First Hotel in Izumisano, two stops from the airport. A TV reporter outside Buckingham Palace offers us the umpteenth account of the Princess's death. The weatherman says today's temperature in Kyoto was 35°. We have the option of an extra 900 yen for the erotic channel, but we choose sleep.

August 22 - September 1, 1997

¹³ The name of the (Shingon Buddhist) temple

7.4.2 Jubilee Tower

JUBILEE TOWER

Forest of Bowland, 25 January 1998

with my brother, Pete (34) and his daughter, Faith (21 months)

Don't know the history of the Jubilee Tower. It's at the summit of a hill-climb. Pete time-trialled up here with the Cycling Club in the autumn, finishing third. It's easier by car. The track across the moors starts from the Tower car park.

On Boxing Day we took Faith as far as where the paths to Clougha and Ward's Stone diverge, but were then turned back by failing light. We're earlier starting today, and the January day is that bit longer, so we're hoping to be able to make it to Ward's Stone, the highest point on the Bowland fells. The path's a bit less boggy than in December, but the air's sharp.

Faith is a bit subdued. Last time I only had to leap puddles to entertain her, and she laughed all the way, until she fell asleep. But then it was mild and misty and the day after Christmas; now, although a bright morning tempted us out here, we all feel more sober: it's beginning to cloud over and turn wintry.

Pete carries Faith on his back. We zig-zag to avoid damp ground and are soon passed by a party of five, who pause and start unwinding kites, preparing to fly them. On up the cold hill; a couple come down the path towards us carrying a small child who looks chilled and

unhappy. Greetings exchanged, and then we're left, just the three of us, heading into the empty moor.

brown heather-tops
cackle of the grouse

Fine snow starts to fall in light flurries, the wind stinging. We get to where we got last time, but Faith isn't looking pleased. She's quiet, but not because she's asleep. Her face is red and raw, her nose running, her expression resigned, lacking enough energy for disgust. We look to our left, towards Clougha; to our right to the Ward's Stone; back to the Tower, the car park and the low sun over the sea - and exchange an understanding. 'Down,' moans Faith, 'home,' and she starts to cry. The attempt on the summit is abandoned again - there'll be another day - we turn and descend, Pete consoling Faith as we go.

As we lose height the wind loses some of its sting and the snow flurries ease, but Faith continues to cry. We come to where the kites are flying, one bright blue, one bright red, looping the loop. Faith looks up and her interest in the kites suddenly triumphs over her discomfort. The sky and her mood have both brightened.

hill winds
whistle
in the kite strings

Faith is so cheered she asks to be put down to walk. She takes three or four slow, tottering steps along the muddy slope, loses her brief confidence, and begins to cry again. Pete picks her up. As we head for the car the sun, between the clouds, is reddening.

western glow -
the hillside kite's
figures-of-eight

In the relative warmth of the car, sealed from the wind, Faith munches bread and raisins with rediscovered contentment. We drink from a flask of Lapsang Souchong, steam misting the windows. A few other cars are parked, facing the far-off sea. Rays of sun have pierced the clouds, spotlighting the bay.

Jubilee Tower -
three figures on the skyline
pointing to the west

7.4.3 Weatherbeaten in Wharfedale

WEATHERBEATEN IN WHARFEDALE

16 December 1997 - Linton to Kilnsey Crag ... and back

with George White and Janice Fong

Two male pheasants outside the bedroom window, picking about the garden, nodding through scrubby brown vegetation. Big breakfast, including a very runny porridge. Heavy stone bridge over the beck, built in 1898, a robin on its wall. East wind shaking the garden yew, rattling seedheads of honesty, rasping through beech hedges and roadside sorrel. Just out of Linton, a chocolate-coloured pony-sized animal grazing alone, turns out to be a llama (!). A thin 'peep' from high in the bushes at the edge of this field - identified by George as a bullfinch - its bright pinkish-red breast visible between the bare branches above us.

Past a house dated 1631. A cockerel crowing at 9.50 a.m. precisely, a couple of turkeys gobbling among the small free-roaming poultry collection. Over the Wharfe at Grassington, then north along the riverbank. Passing mallards, two dabchicks diving, bobbing, diving, heading downstream with the current. We're overtaken by a young woman walking two 'toy' dogs which scamper frantically, outsize ears and tails flapping ridiculously.

withered rosehips
the whiteness
of river-rapids

Thorn bushes thickly covered with lichen. The tree trunks, the lichen, the rocks, the sky all one limestone-grey. Sheep, and more sheep. A discussion of different breeds - Swaledale? Suffolk? Cheviot? One cocks its right ear as if attending to the sullen muffled hush of the snow-threatening wind. Janice stops to photograph a sheep much whiter than the rest. 'Just come on as a substitute,' jokes George, 'Go on, get stuck in, get your shirt dirty.' Janice offers us chewing-gum. Our cold hands fumble with the packet, squirting a single piece accidentally groundwards. It misses the sheepshit - I pluck it up and start chewing.

RAF Tornado jets scream overhead deafeningly, pilots practising their low-level skills. Just as they go, a dipper low over the water, alights on a rock, breast as white as the waves, shaking its feathers free of the cold river-droplets. A silent wren is busy in the shrubs. George has been hoping for a kingfisher - no luck so far. Janice is wanting to see snow - born and brought up in Hong Kong, she's seen snowcoated Alpine peaks this past summer, but never snow falling. We reckon there's a fifty-fifty chance she'll see some today.

To an area dotted with molehills, one molehill cut in two by the trampling of previous walkers.

river-rattle
over stones
a single blackback, swooping

Suddenly, as we reach a broad, flat stretch of valley-bottom, the clouds part ahead and the hill at the dale-end to the north is struck by sunlight. Something silvery glows at its summit, a dusting like flour on a loaf of bread. From this distance, in this light, we can't tell whether it's snow or limestone outcrops.

Another flock of sheep, which parts to let us through. A heron, rising above a nearby copse. A discussion of the taciturnity of Yorkshire locals, then a hearty 'Hello!' from a horsewoman as she clomps towards us, past us. The other side of the valley a small peloton of brightly-coloured tightly-lycra-clad cyclists glides along the main road. The small voice of a distant dog, yapping. Only a couple of minutes later presumably the same posse of cyclists heading downhill in our direction, going by us in a flash.

The first house in Conistone, called Close Garth. Its garden wall supports a row of wooden feeding-tables for sale. 'Winter Bird-House, £12, Nice Xmas Gift, Enquire within or post money through letterbox if no one around.' We approve the trust but don't take a birdhouse. The garden has a pair of green dragons, a gnome, a stone tortoise and, by the doorstep, a bottle of green-top milk. Further along, a cottage built in 1657 - who ruled then? Cromwell and his parliament? Or had Charles recently been restored? Next, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, positively new - 1885. It's struck by another of the fleeting shafts of sun. At a farm, a row of black tanks looking like a row of black puddings stood on end. The east wind clatters coppered saplings of oak.

We pause at the weathervaned maypole in the middle of Conistone. A farmer guides his

flock of sheep up the main street. While his dog has a pee the flock turns left, but he wants them to go right. 'Haway, Bob, yer daft bugger,' he shouts at the dog, and the sheep get sent right. We recross the Wharfe towards Kilnsey Crag. A nondescript little brown bird flits ahead of us - meadow pipit. Dry rushes line the lane before the inn, rustled by the east wind.

Different opinions about the weather offered in the inn. 'Bitter' seems a reasonable description. Two old couples at the table next to us. One voice, male, suggests: 'A bit fresh.' 'A bit fresh?! It's freezing!' another voice, female, answers. A serving-woman approaches them, asking: 'Who's the fish?' 'We're the two gammons,' she's told. Then, for some reason, conversation about George Eliot. 'I thought she was a man,' says one. 'No,' says another. 'It was this man who had a lady-friend called George Eliot ...'

We roast ourselves by the fire, eating huge portions of haddock and chips, gammon and chips. Beside the door to the toilets there's a fox's head trophy, below this a fox's brush, beyond the door a whole cabinet of stuffed birds. George finds a kingfisher, dull and motionless. The inn declares itself: 'Proud To Serve British Beef.' Beef-on-the-bone was banned two days ago. The chalked menu announces: 'T-bone Steak - Sold Out.'

Probably an illusion, but after lunch, beer and the logfire it seems like the temperature outside has dropped ten degrees.

wire fence -
one brown leaf
impaled on a barb

We take the path to Conistone Dib, undaunted by the ferocious barking of a farmyard spaniel. Fieldfares fly ahead of us up the dry-bedded gorge. Janice asks if there are any large

wild predators in Britain. This windswept emptiness would appeal to bears and wolves, but there won't be any. Cows huddled behind a tall drystone wall are hiding only from the wind.

Out of the gorge, up to a withered moor, into the light of the low winter sun, stretching our shadows and the shadows of the boulder-erratics. Past a 150-year-old limekiln to an expanse of limestone pavement dotted with stunted, twisted, windblasted hawthorns. Oddly undulating turf, every so often a rabbit skeleton. Two horses - one all black, one a piebald shire - trot towards us. I raise my camera. They raise their heads as if to eat it, and I retreat. George searches his pack for something edible to offer them, but can find nothing. The horses carry on northwards, upwards, into uninhabited fading light, side by side, swishing tails.

Back into Grassington through a farmyard of supper-munching cows and pecking chickens.

rows of stone houses
a swaying sign
creaks - ANTIQUES

Notices advertising a 'Dickensian Festival'. Only three in the afternoon but all the Tea Rooms are closed. The east wind sways estate agents' boards, roars among black pines, swings a one-plank swing strung by a length of orange rope from a tree in a neat front garden. A drift of crisp leaves sweeps uphill ahead of us, towards Threshfield. Our route leads through a newish housing development, the houses meant to look authentic but all a little too identical. Can't find the footpath we'd seen marked on the map ... until we spot it ... running behind a low fence beyond somebody's pristine lawn. We tiptoe across the lawn, clamber the fence, regain the way to Linton.

No snow yet, but now a few spots of freezing rain. More sheep mooching through the sunset, two of them headbutting each other in a rare display of energy. A scattered herd of bullocks wading through a marsh, one of them a woolly longhaired Highland beast. Back at the hostel a faded leaning notice warns against abusing nature:

A Request from the Holiday Fellowship

Friend, when you stray, or sit to take your ease
On moor, or fell, or under spreading trees
Please leave no traces of your wayside meal
No paper bag, no scattered orange peel
Nor daily journal littered on the grass
Others may view these with distaste and pass
Let no one say, and say it to your shame
That all was beauty here until you came.

Almost too dark to read it. From somewhere within the hostel garden undergrowth there's a single burst of song from a wren. Still no snow, the east wind as bitter as ever, but the lights are on.

7.4.4 A Walk to the Stork

A walk to the Stork

I step out into sunshine, the ringing calls of a great tit and – that rarest of sounds these days – the twittering of sparrows. A single crow heads westward, the way I must go. The sky is almost uniformly blue, only the merest smudge of cloud on the southern horizon.

the scuttle
of a crisp leaf
sparrow-chirps

Down the hill, and through the centre of town. A waft of cooked meat smells from 'Angela's Barbecues.' Rows of many-coloured primulas at the flower stall. On a vegetable stall, huge, bright red chillies and fat, muddy organic carrots. Then a stall selling only ostrich meat (!).

Dazzling sunlight reflects off the sign of the George and Dragon. I reach the Maritime Museum, where we'd planned to meet, but there's no sign of Phillip. I cross the road to sit by the river in the sun. Crocuses are emerging on the verge. Twelve gulls drift upriver. Two take flight towards town and are lost in the light. Looking back past the bend in the river, and up the hill, I can see our block of flats. Then I see Phillip's car pull up and turn the corner beside the museum.

A diving duck disappears under the river surface and, a few seconds later, bobs up again. It's too far away to identify – maybe a goldeneye. I greet Phillip and we head off along the riverbank, towards the estuary.

Under the railway bridge Phillip notices dripping stalactites hanging from the arches. Each arch frames another arch in a not-quite-infinite regression. 'Quite eerie, gothic,' I comment. 'Romanesque, perhaps,' Phillip responds.

Out of town now, among the fields and hedges. We fall into a discussion of recent dates. 'Did you know,' I ask, 'that 19 November 1999 was the last date in which every digit is odd until 1 January 3111?' 'Yes,' says Phillip, 'and 2 February 2000 was the first date in which every digit is even since 28 August 888.'

Overhead, the yelling of circling gulls. In the distance, the piercing calls of waders: redshanks, lapwing, oystercatchers. A pair of swans, silent on a pond. We pass a public notice: 'Shooting is prohibited in Lancashire on Christmas Day.'

At a point where the path is covered by deep puddles, Phillip wades through safely in his wellies. I cling to the verge, with precarious hand-holds on a thorn hedge. Gaps in the hedges now, so we can once more see the river. The near banks are waterlogged and marshy. A pair of shelduck pick their way along the mud. In the far distance we can see the snow-covered tops of the Lakeland peaks. Robin-song. Chaffinch-song. A single cormorant flying in from the sea.

Cyclists pass us, calling out 'Thank you,' as we step aside. There is a faint humming of faraway machines. Almost at our lunch-stop now, at the Stork pub, we pause at a riverside bench, to savour the stillness. Three mallards are upending simultaneously like synchronised swimmers.

clear skies
the river's drift
ripples

On Renga

8.1 Introduction

Haiku (as I hope I have demonstrated) can be strong enough to stand alone, the smallest unit into which poetry is divisible while retaining its integrity as poetry. But, like atoms, haiku have an inbuilt ability to form bonds. Haiku may be enhanced by their setting, and given a harmonic presentation in combination with other haiku or other works of art, whether literary, musical or pictorial. The original context of the haiku was the *renga*, a series of 14-syllable and 17-syllable verses, usually a communal composition, out of which the opening verse, the *hokku*, developed to become a poem capable of standing independently of the series: haiku. The liberation (if such it was) of haiku from the bonds of *renga* was completed as recently as the late nineteenth century, by the work of Shiki¹, but any account of the origins of haiku ought to examine it in its earlier role and trace the development of *renga*. *Renga* is a fascinating art. Haiku, in its astonishing concision, appears as exotic to Western literary tastes; but *renga* is profoundly alien. It is not merely socially performed, like a play (or a symphony, or, perhaps, a work of architecture), but socially composed, unlike any Western literary genre. (Except, perhaps, jointly authored plays such as the works of

¹ Refer to sub-section 2.2.6 on Shiki. It is true that our common perception of Bashō is as a haiku master, but in his own day he was known as a *haikai renga* master. Our focus on his haiku (rather than his *haikai renga*) is to some extent conditioned by hindsight, i.e. by the focus on haiku, at the expense of *renga*, for which Shiki was

Beaumont and Fletcher. But even then renga remains unique, since within the communal production individual voices retain their distinct identity.) It is sequential, but not linear, not narrative. Its fragments appear superficially as records of objective experience, but they are bound by the requirements of their social function, by an elaborate structure of conventions and by patterns of cross-reference and allusion. A detailed investigation of all the subtleties of renga would provide enough material for a full-scale thesis in its own right, but a somewhat concise account is necessary here if my presentation of haiku is to aspire to any degree of completeness. Furthermore, this record is of more than merely historical interest, because renga has caught the attention of English-language haiku poets and, however ill-fitting and anachronistic it may appear, it is now a form that Westerners practice (though they can hardly hope to perfect it).

8.2 The beginnings of renga

A renga is a long chain of haiku-like links, alternating stanzas of 17 and 14 syllables. Each pair of stanzas taken together should suggest a complete 31-syllable poem, similar to a tanka. Each stanza should connect to the immediately preceding stanza only; that apart, it should *shift* away from everything that has gone before. Thus there is no narrative or cumulative progression. The progress is described aptly by William J Higginson as “zig-zag”.²

Hiroaki Sato identifies three conditions which prepared the way for the Japanese development of renga. These are: Chinese influence; poetry as a group activity; the form of the tanka and its tendency to divide into two parts.³

primarily responsible. In Bashō's day haiku was, of course, still known as hokku. It did not become haiku until the time of Shiki.

² William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*, p.192

³ cf. Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku in English* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), pp.7-11

Japan has often looked to China for a cultural lead and it may be that the rise of renga was influenced by the existence of a similar form in China, the *lien-chü*. Although *lien-chü* never reached the levels of elaboration eventually attained by renga, they were known to have been written by groups associated with prominent Chinese poets, notably Po Chü-yi (772-846) whose writing has always been venerated in Japan.⁴

Poetry as a communal activity among Japanese poets goes back to the days of the earliest extant anthology, the Manyōshū. Most of the poems in the Manyōshū are in the 31-syllable tanka form, and some of these represent exchanges between two partners, or questions with replies. Towards the end of the ninth century poets began to gather for court-sponsored tanka contests, with the poems judged in pairs and prizes awarded to the winners. The introduction of a competitive element to poetry writing was to be retained as one of the constituent attractions of renga. (Although renga is a co-operative activity there is clearly a temptation for each new verse to be designed to impress.)

The form of the tanka is five lines, broken into syllables as 5-7-5-7-7. At an early stage in its development it exhibited a tendency to pause after the third line, dividing the poem into two halves. If these two halves were to be supplied by different poets, it would produce a prototype of the renga, a tan-renga. Communally produced tan-renga need only to be linked together in a series (like some organic molecule) for something resembling a renga to result.

⁴ Donald Keene doubts the relevance of this coincidence:

a careful examination of the Chinese *lien-chü* ... shows that no connection could have existed between the two types of poetry ... the linked-verse was a natural development of Japanese poetry, and not dependent on any foreign influence. (Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers*, pp.33-34)

By the tenth century, renga were being written regularly. In the early thirteenth century they received imperial encouragement from the retired emperor (and notable poet) Gotoba, who sponsored renga contests which attracted, among other participants, the renowned tanka poet, Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241). In the fourteenth century Nijō Yoshimoto (1320-1388) compiled the *Tsukubashū* anthology, a collection of renga which was accorded a status close to that of the tanka anthologies which had long been established as receiving imperial patronage. The subsequent history of renga can be analysed into two main phases, or styles. The first of these is distinguished as *ushin* renga (*ushin*: serious, mindful), a style which preserved the refined diction and classical themes of the tanka. The usual length of such a renga was one hundred verses, but thousand-verse sequences are also known. The second of the renga styles evolved as the antithesis of *ushin*, i.e. *mushin* (comic, mindless). This developed into a style called *haikai* (or *haikai no renga*) which aimed at playful incorporation of a wide variety of images from all walks of life, valuing wit rather than dignity. Haiku was eventually to emerge out of *haikai*. The renga of the Bashō school, typically comprising relatively short sequences of thirty-six links, falls into the *haikai* category, although Bashō sought to utilise the best of both styles and his renga encompass a range of tone and subject, from the elevated to the lowly.

8.3 Renga rules⁵

A detailed analysis of renga rules would involve too great a digression, but a sketch is necessary to indicate some of the conditions under which renga composition operated.

⁵ distilled from Hiroaki Sato, op. cit., pp.18-36

As stated above, the typical length of a traditional sequence was one hundred links, although one thousand links is also quite common. In Bashō's time, thirty-six links became the standard. Other lengths are also possible (variations include: 18, 20, 44, 50, 700, 10,000).

Links alternate between 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables. Each link must combine with the preceding link to form a viable unit, reminiscent of a five-line tanka. At the same time, it should shift away from what has gone before so that any two adjacent links may be taken together, but not three. The pattern is thus: AB, BC, CD, DE ... not ABC, BCD ... or ABC, DEF ... or AB, CD, EF ... This allows each link to operate as a hinge, forming one meaning with the link that precedes and a second meaning with the link that follows.

Possible methods of linking may be classed into three broad categories: verbal association (*kotoba-zuke*); linking 'by heart' or through an association of feeling (*kokoro-zuke*); straightforward developments of landscape or narrative implications. Verbal association includes puns, word pairs (e.g. boy / girl), contrasts (e.g. morning / evening), and allusions to tanka or other classical literature. All these methods are greatly assisted by the implicative, rather than explicative, nature of the Japanese language. Haruo Shirane observes:

The lack of stated subjects and tense in Japanese make it relatively easy to shift perspective, subject, gender, time and number: women are transformed into men, aristocrats into warriors, children into adults, single figures into multiple figures, domestic landscape into foreign. Linked verse thrived on the seemingly limitless ways in which words and phrases could be reinterpreted through even the slightest shift in context.⁶

Renga were traditionally written on folded sheets of paper, with each fold representing a section of the overall work. The 36-link renga was divided into four sections of 6, 12, 12 and

6 links respectively. Musical terminology was adopted to describe the development in tempo of the work, with the renga being divided into three phases, jo-ha-kyū (introduction, development, finale) corresponding, in the case of a 36-link piece, to the first 6 links, the middle 24 and the final 6. The opening section (*jo*) was expected to be sedate, without startling images or displays of virtuosity. The middle section (*ha*) was allowed to be more dynamic, with extravagant, experimental or eccentric linking being acceptable and a wide variety of images being expected. The final section (*kyū*) should flow smoothly, with more attention paid to the linking than to the excellence of individual stanzas.

One aspect of renga aesthetics which it is important to recognise is that a sequence was expected to be uneven. The intensity of the linking could vary from close to distant, sometimes obvious, sometimes requiring an effort of imagination to perceive. It should include not only impressive stanzas which stand out as being memorable, but also background pieces which contribute to the integrity of the whole.⁷

Four of the individual stanzas had specific names, with specific requirements. These were: the *hokku* (opening verse), the *wakiku* (second verse), the *daisan* (third verse), and the *ageku* (last verse). The *hokku* was composed generally by the most respected poet in the group. It was required to contain a reference to the season of composition, and to form a greeting, in some sense, to the host and assembled gathering. The *wakiku* was generally written by the host, as a response to the compliment of the *hokku*. It maintains the same season as the *hokku*. The *daisan* was required to get the renga moving into new territory and might link

⁶ Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.117

⁷ Despite its haphazard progression, a renga does exhibit some unity within variety, and one renga may differ from another in terms of its characteristic overall tone. This tone may well be set by the opening link, the *hokku*. This tonal thread, though, would be musical rather than logical, and highly variable rather than consistent.

more distantly with the *wakiku*. It often ended in a *-te* (cf. *-ing*) form of a verb. The *ageku* should 'finish the sequence, almost at any cost.'⁸ It need not link particularly closely to the preceding verse. It usually ends the sequence on an upbeat note, often in the season of spring.

Two images, moon and flowers, had set positions within the overall sequence. Moon links appeared at the 5th, 14th and 29th positions in a 36-link renga (although these positions were approximate and variation was possible). Flowers, typically cherry blossoms, appeared at the 17th and 35th positions out of 36. There were also rules governing the duration of seasonal sections: the themes of spring or autumn could be sustained for up to five consecutive links; summer or winter could be sustained for up to three links. The theme of love also had a maximum duration of five links. Certain words or phrases were restricted in the number of times they could occur overall; and some images were considered too strong for the decorous introductory section. Variation was also demanded in the choice of image and of grammatical phrasing, and similar images or constructions had to be separated by several links.

Overall, a renga should reveal a kaleidoscopic rather than a linear development. It should range across all four seasons, including verses of drama and action as well as static landscapes, with a balance between the themes of nature and human nature (particularly, love). The movement between seasons was not necessarily sequential. It was as valid to go from winter to summer or to autumn as it was to go from winter to spring. Narrative connections can be implied between two adjacent verses, but they are always transformed,

⁸ Hiroaki Sato, *op. cit.*, p.31

rather than sustained, as the renga develops. The final effect is a scattered mosaic encompassing a wide variety of images from the natural world and human experience.

8.4 A study of a renga poet: Shinkei

Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, in her book *Heart's Flower: The Life and Poetry of Shinkei*, has provided a detailed study of one of the leading figures in the history of renga. Shinkei (1406-75) was a Buddhist priest, resident for most of his life at a temple in Kyoto, although he spent his last few years in the Tokyo region as a refugee from civil war. The influence of Shinkei on Bashō can be traced through Shinkei's disciple Sōgi, who was quoted by Bashō as his model in the art of linked verse.

Ramirez-Christensen identifies three 'essential characteristics of "serious renga" (*ushin renga*)' as practised by Shinkei and Sōgi:

the formal autonomy of the single verse; a linking method, *kokoro-zuke*, based on conception and poetic feeling rather than mere verbal correlations; and an aesthetic of allusiveness and depth.⁹

In coming to terms with the aesthetics of renga it is necessary to consistently employ both / and logic (as opposed to either / or). Renga can be seen to exhibit not so much duality as non-duality, that is, unity-within-duality. One manifestation of this is the non-dual nature of renga as both an individual and collective art. Frequently the communal dimension takes precedence as, for example, in the dictation of appropriate topics for the opening phase:

⁹ Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, *Heart's Flower: The Life and Poetry of Shinkei* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.85

Apart from its poetic nature, a renga session was also a social gathering with its own formal decorum. As a conversation begins with observations about the weather, likewise it was deemed proper to start with wholly seasonal, tranquil verses of objective scenery before going on to the more involved human themes of love, travel, laments, and so on.¹⁰

An immediate consequence of renga composition is the forging of bonds between the participants. (This remains true today for poets writing in English, for whom the process, the shared activity of renga, gives it a value that transcends any merit it may have as literature.) In the words of Sōgi:

‘... one becomes as intimate as cousins with friends in renga. Indeed one feels a mutual sympathy even for a person one meets for the first time, in the course of exchanging verses with him during a renga session.’¹¹

There are other, more technical, senses in which renga exhibits a unity within duality. The linking process requires that each new link (*tsukeku*) gives a twist, a particular limited interpretation, to the preceding verse (*maeku*). It is thus a unique aspect of renga that it displays what Ramirez-Christensen calls ‘the contemporaneous existence of exegetical and poetic practice’ in the sense that each new link is simultaneously ‘both a reading (of the *maeku*) and a writing’.¹² Furthermore, the interpretation of a verse in the light of the link that follows is always different (in any properly constructed renga) from the interpretation of that same verse in the light of the link that precedes and, once again, these two parallel, even contradictory, interpretations co-exist. Neither is subordinate or superior. Thus, ‘the *maeku* in renga always has a double identity, or an indeterminate meaning, until it is fixed by the *tsukeku*.’¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p.116

¹¹ Ibid., p.106

¹² Ibid., p.177

It is therefore necessary, in reading a renga, to pay attention to each verse not simply as an isolated unit, reading it as one might read an individual haiku, but to read it specifically as a link, to focus on the sense in which it interprets the verse that precedes. Ramirez-Christensen describes as Shinkei's 'central critical tenet' the notion that

the poetry of renga does not lie in the individual verses but in the relation between them ... one reads, not the verses themselves, but the charged space ...¹⁴

Renga is 'a poetry of the gap, the charged pause, the interval.'¹⁵ Allied with this characteristic is the way a renga progresses, in a series of leaps, with sudden changes of direction. It is

a poetry of montage and the kaleidoscope rather than one of linear plot development. Each new verse signals a turn, a twist, a rearrangement, of elements into a new poetic image.¹⁶

Other aspects of renga composition tie in more closely with the desiderata for individual haiku, and illustrate how the latter genre might have emerged from the former. Ramirez-Christensen discusses Shinkei's hokku,

hiyayaka ni
tsuyu shiku take no
mushiro kana

Chillingly,
the moist dew slowly seeping –
the bamboo mat.¹⁷

as an example of one of many of his 'wholly objective images void of any expression of thought or sentiment.' It exhibits 'the erasure of the subject-object distinction' in the sense that 'the reader is directly confronted with the thing as a sensation on the skin, an apparently

¹³ Ibid., p.222

¹⁴ Ibid., p.265

¹⁵ Ibid., p.331

¹⁶ Ibid., p.269

¹⁷ Ibid., p.95

unmediated presence.¹⁸ Renga links, like haiku after them, are 'attempts to capture the fleeting moment'¹⁹ and require 'a feeling for the essential nature or *hon'i* of phenomena.'²⁰ This feeling offers a further example of a double identity, a unity within duality, since it is simultaneously dependent on both first hand observation (with authentic emotion) and a conventionalised response based on historical precedents, a communal accumulation of associations.

Non-duality is, of course, a recurrent pattern in Buddhist philosophy and it is to be expected that Shinkei's religious vocation informed his artistic awareness. The priest-poet was

trained in the knowledge of all phenomena as both ineluctably fleeting ... and just as ineluctably real ... for the very reason that there is no other reality apart from them. This paradoxical view of phenomena constitutes Shinkei's interpretation of *mono no aware*²¹ as the tragic beauty that inheres in all things. In his philosophy, the experiential knowledge of being as both a fullness and an emptiness is the ground of a poetic sensibility ...²²

In Shinkei's critical writings he stresses the need of a poet for 'a sense of the impermanence and mutability of this world' and a power to communicate 'deep feeling' and 'ineffable depth'. Mere 'technical dexterity' is not enough. Furthermore, feeling should be conveyed by the choice of image in preference to being overtly manifested: show, don't tell. The following passage from a letter written by Shinkei to Sōgi indicates the degree of sensitivity demanded of the renga poet. It articulates the aesthetic values that were ultimately to be transmitted to Bashō and later haiku poets, and to which even twenty-first century

¹⁸ Ibid., p.96

¹⁹ Ibid., p.330

²⁰ Ibid., p.331

²¹ *mono no aware* is a traditional Japanese critical term indicating pathos, or the moving power of things. See sub-section 4.5.3

²² Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, *Heart's Flower: The Life and Poetry of Shinkei*, p.113

practitioners of haiku in English continue to pay homage. The passage begins with the quotation of a hokku to which Sōgi had supplied the link (waki[ku]).

aki mo nao
asaki wa yuki no
yūbe kana

Even autumn is yet
shallow: this evening
of snowfall.

To this you added,

mizu kōru e ni
samuki karigane

Over the frozen water of the bay,
the cold cries of the wild geese.

This verse is somewhat overstated and contrived; it does not connect with the manifest intention and spirit of the hokku. It is desirable when composing the waki and subsequent verses to leave a few things unsaid. To exhaust the images of Water and Winter in this way would make it difficult for the poet of the third verse. It seems to be the common practice when composing verses on say, Autumn, to link up to the maeku by using words like 'wild geese,' 'deer,' 'dew,' and so on, even though the meaning does not actually connect. On the contrary, the verse that truly links up to the maeku from the depths of the poet's mind ... may discard such conventional associations ... and yet seem fully to connect.²³

Shinkei's demand for a linking based on feeling rather than language was subsequently to be adopted by Bashō as a key to his understanding of the method of renga. It is also interesting to note Shinkei's stress on the necessity for implication, 'leave a few things unsaid.' Here expressed as a courtesy to the poet whose turn would follow, this practice was to become a cornerstone of haiku aesthetics, valued not only by generations of Japanese haiku poets but also by pioneers of haiku in English (see, for example, Eric W Amann's *The Wordless Poem*).²⁴

²³ Ibid., p.140

8.5 Bashō's renga

Renga as a serious art form reached a peak with Shinkei's disciple Sōgi, and then declined, to be eventually overtaken by the humorous doggerel of haikai. Haikai began as a parody of serious renga, indulging in 'ribald, irreverent humor.'²⁵ What it lacked in depth it made up for in breadth of appeal.

Haikai differed from classical poetry and classical linked verse in the use of 'haikai words' (*haigon*) – vernacular, Chinese, Buddhist terms, slang, common sayings, and other language banned from classical poetry – which tended to anchor haikai in popular, contemporary culture.²⁶

Haikai itself underwent several reforms, such as that of Teitoku (1570-1653) and his Teimon school, who sought to purge it of the 'immoral and vulgar,' and the Danrin school of Sōin (1604-82) who 'sought to maximize the tension between haikai words and classical diction.'²⁷

Bashō's poetic project managed to encompass both depth and breadth, retaining some of the elegance and sensitivity of classical renga while taking advantage of the freedom and range of reference of haikai. His poetry was as earthy as it was spiritual. He gives us the following characterisation of the contrast between renga and haikai in their deployment of images from the natural world: '“A willow in spring rain” is entirely renga. “A crow that plucks a mud snail” is entirely haikai.'²⁸

²⁴ For a further account of renga, and information on Shinkei's successors, Sōgi and Sochō, see Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the late Sixteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), pp.921-970

²⁵ Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Bashō*, p.56

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.55

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.60

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.68

One way in which Bashō accomplished the unification of these opposing poles was in his cultivation of the aesthetic of *wabi*, combining spiritual elevation with (an image of) material poverty. He advocates a single-minded devotion to artistic goals, at the expense of social advancement, following the inspirational lead of past masters, both Japanese and Chinese. He wrote to his disciple Kyokusui:

... seek the distant bones of Fujiwara Teika, follow the sinews of Saigyō, cleanse the intestines of Po Chū-i, and leap into the breast of Tu Fu.²⁹

One technical method which Bashō employed in his renga, to raise it beyond the level of pastime to the level of art, was his linking technique of 'scent' or 'fragrance,' which demanded more profound associations than mere wordplay. Bashō's disciple, Zushi Rogan, quotes the following example of such a link.

Revived at the top,
Pine trees in a summer shower.

A Zen monk
Stark naked
Enjoying the coolness.³⁰

Both stanzas communicate a sense of refreshment and relish, but the second is an impressionistic parallel of the first, rather than a direct inference. The stanzas exist in a relationship of mutual metaphorical enhancement.

Other terms employed to describe admired linking methods include 'reverberation,' 'shadow,' and 'reflection.' What these techniques have in common is that they constitute a response to the mood or atmosphere of the preceding verse, rather than following on

²⁹ Ibid., p.158

directly from the language or narrative logic. As a masterful example of renga linking, in which the tsukeku acts as a metaphorical reinterpretation of the maeku, there is this (the couplet is by Bonchō, the triplet by Bashō):

The lid has been warped
And no longer fits the chest.

At a hermitage
The man stays for a while
And then takes off again.

Makoto Ueda provides this interpretation:

The lid that does not fit the chest suggests a man who does not fit into the world. He is a restless, homeless misfit; he wanders from one hermitage to another, never remaining anywhere for long.³¹

8.6 Western renga

One interesting deployment of the inspiration of renga was a multi-authored multilingual sonnet sequence composed by Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti and Charles Tomlinson, entitled *Renga: a chain of poems* and first published in 1971. Each author wrote a sonnet segment in his own language (Spanish, French, Italian and English) with an English translation later provided by Tomlinson; a total of 27 sonnets was produced. Octavio Paz, in his introduction to the sequence, describes one of its benefits as being 'An antidote against the notions of author and intellectual property.'³² He also describes five feelings suggestive of the psychological impact of the conditions under which this renga was composed (written over five days, secluded in the basement of a Paris hotel). These are: 'a

³⁰ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, p.164

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.103

feeling of abandonment ... a sensation of oppression ... a feeling of shame ... a feeling of voyeurism ... a feeling of returning.³³ When we consider that in Japan the renga was, in essence, a kind of game, albeit one that was approached professionally, the negativity of Paz's dominant emotions is striking. Describing the shame, he writes (as a somewhat sweeping generalisation) that

The Japanese invented the renga for the same reasons and in the same manner in which they bathe naked in public³⁴

by contrast with the privacy which normally surrounds the act of writing in Western cultures. Describing 'oppression' he writes that

... for a Japanese the circle of renga is a space which opens up, for me it is a snare drawn tight. A trap.³⁵

I am sure he is exaggerating somewhat, for rhetorical effect, but I trust the fundamental honesty of his observations. It seems that, for Paz and his companions, a key element of the act of renga has somehow been omitted, or gone astray. The process, the interaction, should be a liberation. The pleasure of the occasion should be a reason for doing it. It is necessary here to underline a central fact of renga composition: there is a degree of antagonism between the process and the product. The renga that is most fun to write may offer less satisfaction to the general reader. Conversely, as seems to have been the case for the Paris quartet, a renga which strives too hard to attain literary excellence may drain the writers' resources of spirit and energy. In my view, a renga should be the property of, and serve the purposes of, the group that writes it. It should not have one eye on the reading public. But

³² Octavio Paz, in Charles Tomlinson (ed.), *Renga: A Chain of Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979), p.30

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.24-26

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25

a consequence of this is that the finished product may not merit publication. Among Western haiku poets there is an ongoing debate about the value of publishing renga. In the editorial of *Blithe Spirit* Vol. 9 No.4, Caroline Gourlay observes:

While recognising that participation in the writing of a renga can be a form of bonding and is undoubtedly rewarding and enjoyable for those involved, I question whether it belongs in the realms of literature and whether the final result is particularly interesting for those who later come to read it.³⁵

It is doubtful, of course, whether the linked sonnet segments of the Paris quartet qualify as a renga at all. Paz admits as much:

Our translation is analogical: we are not concerned with the renga of Japanese tradition, but its metaphor, one of its possibilities or avatars.³⁷

The links of this 'renga' lack the objectivity, directness and clarity which renga shares with haiku, and although they link to the point of forming an indivisible unity, they fail to *shift*. A true renga moves inexorably onwards, encompassing an ever-widening range of territory. As George Marsh puts it, in an article in *Blithe Spirit* Vol.5 No.3, a renga 'is like a ... shark; it must keep moving forward or die.'³⁸ As these two extracts show, the voices of the Paris quartet tended to echo each other closely (in non-adjacent links) in a way specifically excluded by the conventions of Japanese renga. (These two extracts are the openings of, respectively, the first sonnet of the second sequence and the third sonnet of the second sequence.)

Love they kept crying love gravity
of the topmost branches far below the earth drew
down love they kept crying up there

(Roubaud)

³⁵ Ibid., p.24

³⁶ *Blithe Spirit* Vol.9 No.4 (December 1999), p.3

³⁷ Octavio Paz in Charles Tomlinson (ed.), *Renga: A Chain of Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979), p.20

³⁸ George Marsh, "Reflections on Renga Parties" in *Blithe Spirit* Vol.5 No.3 (August 1995), p.23

Love they kept crying love swift
already at rest love the unmoving
in full flight – the gravity of speed:

(Paz)³⁹

Reviewing *Renga: a chain of poems* in *Haiku magazine* 6:3 (1976) Cor van den Heuvel and William J Higginson are forthright in their criticism of its limitations:

In its self-conscious Romanticism, overbearing unity of tone, recurring themes, and constant recourse to the heavy-handed surreal and the mythical allusion, this Renga strikes us as mundanely Western. The combination of collaboration and four languages seems its only unique feature after all ... we find no justification for trying to associate this work with the exoticism of an Oriental tradition.⁴⁰

As might be expected, writers from the haiku community in North America, the UK and elsewhere have begun to write renga which attempt a much more faithful imitation of Japanese models. The edition of *Haiku magazine* from which the above quotation is taken also included two 36-link renga in English, each by three poets, together with a more experimental 'net renga' in which the links spread out across a double page in a diamond pattern and in which each verse connects not with two verses (one preceding, one following) but with anything up to six verses printed in close proximity. Since 1990 the Haiku Society of America has sponsored an annual renku contest⁴¹ and renga have begun to appear regularly in some North American haiku magazines. One magazine, *Lynx* (edited by Jane Reichhold), specialises in the form. In the UK, the form is still in the process of gaining acceptance. As early as August 1995 the British Haiku Society devoted a whole issue of *Blithe Spirit* to renga (edited by Susan Rowley) but, in general, appearances of renga within the pages of *Blithe Spirit* have been rather sparse. (Although a leaflet of 'Wind-blown Sand',

³⁹ Charles Tomlinson (ed.), *Renga: A Chain of Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979), p.57, p.61

⁴⁰ *Haiku magazine* 6:3 (1976), p.48

composed during a four-day BHS walk in Norfolk in May / June 1999, by fifteen participants, and believed to be the first 100-verse renga written in the UK, was given away with *Blütbe Spirit* Vol.9 No.3.) The only British haiku magazine to include renga as a regular feature is my own, *Presence*.

Renga may be written on a single occasion (at a 'renga party') or over a period of time and distance, by post (or, recently, more frequently by e-mail, which is ideally suited to the purpose). The former method typically takes around four to five hours to complete 36 links, although this duration is dependent on the degree of debate over the qualities of each stanza and more rapid, or more painstaking, results are possible. The composition of renga by mail might take only a few days, electronically, or it could be drawn out over a period of a year or more. A slightly different dynamic operates between the two methods. The single occasion puts greater pressure on the act of composition, allowing less reflection prior to writing, but greater debate about the merits of a given verse before acceptance. By mail, there is more time available for consideration of the writing of each link, but little opportunity for further discussion once the link has been offered. (Of course, both methods allow for the possibility of editing links between first-draft completion and final printing or publication.) Renga written by mail would normally establish a set 'running order' to determine whose turn it is to compose the next link. Renga written on a single occasion may also do this, or they may proceed by free-for-all, with competition between the participants to see who can supply the link. One further difference between the two methods is that renga written by post would normally proceed on the basis of equality between the participants, whereas a renga party allows for the appointment of a 'renga master' whose duty it is to oversee the quality and acceptability of each link as it is offered. One way in which the printed presentation of renga

⁴¹ *Renku* is almost synonymous with renga, but is generally used to refer to renga of the Bashō school, or later,

tends to vary is in the acknowledgement, or not, of individual links: sometimes the verses are annotated; sometimes the names of the participants are simply listed at the end. The latter option is a more effective admission of the communal quality of the poem, and negates any tendency towards competitiveness; but the former option allows individual voices to be traced, which may enhance a reader's appreciation.

In terms of content, there seem to be two possible approaches to the writing of renga in English, with a spectrum between these extremes. On the one hand, the writers might seriously attempt to enact as many of the traditional conventions as possible, and strive after a high standard, both in the quality of the individual verses and the linking. On the other hand, they might make the most of the opportunity to play a literary game, without worrying too much about complying with conventions, valuing the process, the meeting of minds, higher than the finished product. Of the two approaches, I confess that my sympathies are with the latter. To play at renga, rather than working at it, allows the linking to flow with the stream of consciousness, a liberating and energising activity, which, paradoxically, often produces more readable results than is the case with attempts at high art. In the end, the success of a renga depends on generating a 'chemistry' between the participants and there seems to be no magic formula to guarantee this outcome. The examples in section 7.3 (three of which will be discussed shortly) represent a variety of approaches as well as offering a range of styles as far as content and linking qualities are concerned.

Finally, it is necessary to record that although the 36-link group renga has become the accepted standard, variations are increasingly common. 20 links is the most frequently preferred alternative. Some authors have written solo renga (among UK poets, notably Dick

rather than the classical tradition of Shinkei and Sōgi.

Pettit, who has for several years been ‘geographically isolated’ in Saudi Arabia). Numerous other sequential forms have also been invented, as renga spin-offs, each with its own requirements of form and theme. The most widely current of these is the *rengay*, invented by Garry Gay, a Californian haiku poet. This is a highly portable six-link mini-renga, for two or three poets only, usually written to commemorate a particular occasion, and requiring greater thematic unity than the original 36-link form.

8.7 Renga: presentation and analysis

As a record of creative work with which I have been involved, I have presented five renga (in section 7.3). These were written by a variety of methods, with varying numbers of participants, with varying degrees of expertise. In this section I single out one renga, ‘Writer’s Block’, for special attention. In this case, I will go through the renga link by link highlighting the linking methods, and I will give detailed comments on the overall balance. For two of the other renga, representing a considerable contrast in styles, I will provide brief notes emphasising points of particular interest. It would be tedious to give further detailed annotation of the two remaining renga, but I hope my analytical remarks on the first three will suggest modes of interpretation that will be useful in reading these two.

8.7.1. Writer's Block

Authors: Martin Lucas, Stuart Quine. Dates of Composition: 30-31 November, 1997.

Place of Composition: London.

General Remarks: 'Writer's Block' was originally intended as an 'anti-renga'. The term 'anti-renga' was coined by myself and Fred Schofield to describe our joint effort, 'Pulp Friction', which is also discussed below. The aim with the anti-renga was to abandon all dignity, write at speed, and use the first image that came to our minds (while still holding to the renga principles of link and shift). I found that writing with Stuart Quine, Stuart was not as ready as Fred had been to jettison his commitment to the quality of each verse, and he was reluctant to descend into surreality. So 'Writer's Block' remained a more conventional renga, its concession to the anti-renga inspiration being its initial theme of unblocking, and an attempt to write with a degree of speed, with a relative lack of debate over the acceptability of each verse. The result, in terms of both range and flow, was highly satisfactory. No attempt was made to incorporate Japanese conventions, except for the use of 'moon' links which approximate to their traditional placing. 'Writer's Block' was published in *Presence* #10.

Analysis:

ten thirty writer's block another sip of lager

The hokku anchors the poem in the moment, using the time of day in place of the traditional season of the year. It announces the challenge we have set ourselves, the obstacle we intend to overcome. It announces our chosen method: drunken inspiration as opposed to sober recollection; but maybe the choice of 'sip' rather than, say, 'swig', betrays a certain hesitancy. Are we really ready to let go?

ten thirty writer's block another sip of lager

threading through the traffic a thin black dog

The wakiku transforms the 'block' into a traffic jam. The dog becomes a torchbearing familiar spirit, carrying forward the ambitions of the renga. Its progress is patient and careful, but determined.

threading through the traffic a thin black dog

working girl's bare white legs november drizzle

The link is another aspect of the same scene, the camera angle switching, perhaps, from the main road to a nearby street corner. The traditional decorous opening of a renga, already damaged by the hokku's advocacy of drunkenness, is thoroughly punctured now by the reference to prostitution. The 'thin black' adjectives applied to the dog are taken up by the daisan as both contrast ('black dog' to 'white legs') and continuation: 'black' suggests the gloom of 'november'; 'thin' may apply to both the 'legs' and the 'drizzle'. The suggestion of deprivation and desolation in the wakiku is deepened and dramatised. The season of composition makes a belated appearance, but no effort will be made to sustain the seasonal theme.

working girl's bare white legs november drizzle

beneath the burnous painted toenails

Linking by contrast, from the blatant and exposed to the modest and the hidden. Yet, there is a hint of rebellion, a more subtle attraction and a sudden splash of colour after the monochrome opening.

beneath the burnous painted toenails

camera flash four identical shots of a blink

A rather stretched link, punning on 'flash'. There is a movement into humour and mild farce after the mood lift of the previous verse.

camera flash four identical shots of a blink

factory window frames a single star

Stepping back, for a long distance view and a scene without people, into a feeling of emptiness. The link is from 'photograph' to 'frames' and possibly also 'blink' to 'star'. This verse sustains the alliterative quality of the renga, which is a unifying feature of its opening, characterising every verse from 2 to 14. The darkness of verses 2 and 3 returns.

factory window frames a single star

full moon broken on the steps of the weir

After links 6, 18 and 30 the running order of the renga changes (to divide it into four sections of 6, 12, 12 and 6 links), so here Stuart links with his own verse. Verbally, the connection is from 'star' to 'moon', but the atmosphere of darkness and emptiness is sustained; the scent is caught. The direction of gaze is reversed, from looking up to looking down.

full moon broken on the steps of the weir

where the bus was an oily rainbow

Still looking down, now at an alternative puddle and reflection, deflating the lofty poetry of the preceding verse. Colour is reintroduced, but not of a very glamorous kind. The urban dereliction of the opening is proving persistent and will be sustained for two further links.

where the bus was an oily rainbow

distant laughter perfume lingers in the subway

On one level, a straightforward city-scene connection, stepping aside from the street to the underground, this link also superbly captures and reinterprets the mingled attraction / repulsion of its predecessor. The 'perfume' and 'laughter' which, in isolation, are uplifting images are counter-balanced by the sinister overtones of 'distant' and the 'subway' setting. 'lingers' also refers back to the previous verse.

distant laughter perfume lingers in the subway

just a few foreign coins in the flat cap

An extension of the same scene, focusing in on a busker playing, we presume, in the underground passage. This link deepens the mood of poverty and deprivation which has been lurking in the background ever since link 2, as well as being the culmination of a series of ironic links by me, pulling against the greater sincerity and objectivity of Stuart.

just a few foreign coins in the flat cap

rippling the rock pool their last peseta

Here, by means of a solidly obvious connection ('foreign coins' to 'peseta') we are suddenly transported, from the underground to the fresh air, from city to seaside, from familiar home territory to the exotic. (This shift of location perhaps compensates for, and excuses to some extent, the image of 'pool' which otherwise harks back to the weir and puddle of links 7 and 8.) After the bleak tone of the opening phase, we have the first hints of romance.

rippling the rock pool their last peseta

rooks and jackdaws among the brown furrows

The excursion abroad has proved fleeting; I drag us back to home soil, but I sustain the open-air setting, now, for the first time, represented by the rural and arable. The link is from 'rippling' to 'furrows'. The darkness which has hung over the renga ever since link 2 is stressed again here by 'rooks and jackdaws', but the atmosphere is healthier than it was.

rooks and jackdaws among the brown furrows

flooded fields mirror a cloudless sky

This straightforward re-presentation of 'fields' sounds, for almost the first time, a note of brightness with 'cloudless'. Stuart could be criticised here for his continuing obsession with water and reflections, but it is possible to accept this link as the final act of an echoing and empty phase. It has its place, but it does demand a shift, which is what it gets.

flooded fields mirror a cloudless sky

still the sound of snoring - daytime moon

The moon here takes up its classical position at verse 14. It appears in the 'cloudless sky' of the previous verse, but looks down on another scene entirely. For the first time since the hokku we find ourselves indoors, in a comfortable domestic environment, confronting a character who waits to be called into action.

still the sound of snoring - daytime moon

home early pulling the curtains on another morning

Here, we backtrack. Our character creeps in with the daylight, possibly after a hard night's drinking and dancing, more likely (given the monotony hinted at by 'another') after working the night shift.

home early pulling the curtains on another morning

drawn together by their love of books

A recap and development of the romance hinted at a few links back, the uplifting theme somewhat undermined by the wordplay of the connection ('pulling the curtains' to 'drawn together').

drawn together by their love of books

five-year diary four years of empty pages

Utilising an obvious link ('books' to 'diary') to introduce an element of mystery and to reinterpret the background ambience of emptiness which Stuart, in particular, has cultivated.

five-year diary four years of empty pages

saturday circled in red ... but why?

Another obvious link, this takes up the mystery, giving it a twist and a focus. The renga has now been securely anchored in domestic surroundings for five links, and has shaken off the bleakness of its beginning. Halfway has been reached, balanced on the point of a question

which maintains the momentum by demanding some form of response (though, being a renga, this response is unlikely to be direct).

saturday circled in red ... but why?

the President (the only candidate) gets his mandate

Here, having reached halfway, the running order is reversed again, and I link to myself ... which I do by means of a dire double pun ('candidate', 'mandate'). The sights of the renga are now raised to accommodate the higher classes, the public sphere as opposed to the private which has dominated thus far.

the President (the only candidate) gets his mandate

morning frost the first petal falls

By some distance the most tenuous link in 'Writer's Block'. We step (briefly, as it transpires) back from the human world into the natural, with the rare introduction of two season words ('frost', 'petal'. The latter takes precedence: 'frost' is more likely to occur in spring than 'petal' in winter.). 'petal' here is displaced from the conventional placing of a flower link in verse 17 and may not represent any conscious attempt to fulfil the traditional criteria. 'morning', perhaps unnecessarily, recalls verse 15. I think the connection is either with victory, coming 'first', or with 'only', i.e. the singularity of the petal. Although this link is questionable in some respects, it does succeed in introducing colour and light into the renga, creating an opportunity which will be fulfilled by the subsequent development.

morning frost the first petal falls

chocolate egg left in the light melting

Unusually, we actually succeed here in briefly sustaining a seasonal theme. As the sun rises, it melts not only the frost but also the exposed Easter egg. The scope of the renga is now extended to include, by implication, childhood.

chocolate egg left in the light melting

sticky fingerprints on the new sofa

A vivid visualisation of the indoor setting; it is now Stuart's turn to strike a note of irony. We may choose to interpret the 'fingerprints' directly as belonging to the child who has eaten the egg, but actually they remain rather uneasily undefined.

sticky fingerprints on the new sofa

identity parade half the suspects wearing wigs

Using the excuse of 'fingerprints' I transform the location and maintain a lighthearted mood. It is perhaps not a real police station, but a comic drama.

identity parade half the suspects wearing wigs

a flurry of tickertape in the limousine's wake

Again utilising a word link, 'parade', Stuart instigates a further transformation. We are thrust back into the public limelight, perhaps the presidential election of link 19. The haikai ideal of ranging right across the social scale is here accomplished, with an image of opulence to set against the destitution of the opening phase.

a flurry of tickertape in the limousine's wake

America's Team "World Champions" ... which world?

The parade is now interpreted as the victory celebration after the Superbowl (or some other sporting contest). A note of clarification may be required here. I am thinking of the tendency of the victors of American football and baseball tournaments to be labelled as 'World Champions' despite the fact that such contests are a purely intranational affair. This link doesn't qualify as a direct, concrete image in the haiku sense, but occasional descents to a more abstract plane are quite welcome, for the sake of refreshment, particularly in the central sections of a renga. Some authors employ the abstract mode more frequently than others: Dick Pettit does so regularly; Stuart Quine and Brian Tasker almost never.

America's Team "World Champions" ... which world?

raising his cane he points out Andromeda

Using the question in the *maeku* as a springboard, this link instigates a dramatic recontextualisation. What had been a mundane and largely rhetorical puzzle is recast as a profound and abiding mystery. The world of human passions and conflicts has receded as the characters in this link turn their gaze to the heavens. After a previous reference to childhood we are now, perhaps, touching on old age.

raising his cane he points out Andromeda

night of the new moon - seeing so much more than before

I have two criticisms of this link; one general, one specific. The choice of the 'new' moon is an unnecessary echo of the 'new' sofa in link 22. A 'night of no moon' might have been preferable. Also, on a superficial level, this image amounts to little more than a reiteration of the previous action. It is rescued, perhaps, by the way in which 'seeing so much more' points back to the metamorphosis that took place between the previous two links and underlines the sense of awe. The *renga* is entering a new phase of darkness and intrigue.

night of the new moon - seeing so much more than before

scanning the bay from jetty to lighthouse

In one way, this link, also, does not move us very far forward, but it does give a vivid concrete focus to the 'seeing' of the *maeku*. There is a bracing quality to the open air now, and our senses are alert ...

scanning the bay from jetty to lighthouse

in the dark a small boat - creak of the oars

... to the details and drama. An implicit narrative has begun to develop. Are these smugglers, or students on some midnight escapade? There is a consciousness of a surrounding silence which is used to advantage by the link that follows.

in the dark a small boat - creak of the oars

again the sixth stair gives him away

Another dramatic leap, suggested, of course, by 'creak'. We are indoors now, but the action and mystery are undissipated. The renga is moving into its final phase in a state of tension which demands resolution.

again the sixth stair gives him away

advancing down the aisle the fatherless bride

Again a leap, this time prompted by the word association of 'gives ... away'. The hints of romance in links 11 and 16 are here approaching fulfilment.

advancing down the aisle the fatherless bride

with difficulty the ring over the knuckle

A straightforward narrative progression, rendered tangible by the specificity of 'knuckle'. The renga has, since about link 26, acquired a forceful momentum and is pressing on rapidly to a conclusion, as the tradition (of the *kyū*, or finale, phase) recommends.

with difficulty the ring over the knuckle

his gestures more eloquent than his speech

There is a double connection here. The idea of 'difficulty' is taken up and developed; and there is a potential narrative link if we are still following the wedding saga and this is, perhaps, the speech of the best man. This verse has a certain oriental inscrutability about it; a vagueness that imitates the ambiguities of Japanese and helps set the stage for the definitive interpretation that follows.

his gestures more eloquent than his speech

as he exits the press conference the loser's v-sign

This is simply giving one specific form to the preceding generalisation. The co-operation between the poets is becoming increasingly evident, with one setting up targets for the other to hit.

as he exits the press conference the loser's v-sign
arrows of geese fly beyond the distant ridge

A detectable recurrent pattern in this renga is the use of predictable links to instigate a powerful shift. Here, the 'v-sign' very obviously suggests 'arrows of geese', but the result is that the poem takes flight, from a moment of ephemeral preoccupation to the poignancy of a resonant archetype. The camera focus has taken a dramatic step back from close-up to long-distance, and the poem is now in touch with the timeless nostalgia that the Japanese identify as *sabi*.

arrows of geese fly beyond the distant ridge
a wreath of evergreen at the hilltop shrine

Linking from 'ridge' to 'hilltop', the ageku, or closing verse, ends with a peaceful, static image, a reference to a spiritual context ('shrine') and a symbol of closure, durability and accomplishment, the 'wreath of evergreen'. The traditional renga ending on an upbeat note of spring-time evanescence is replaced by a more wintry tone which, nevertheless, carries within it the promise of rebirth.

Conclusions: At first sight, the impressionistic character of this (or any other) renga may leave the reader feeling somewhat dissatisfied. Narratives are reduced to a few vague hints, abandoned just as they begin to form. Transformations which promise progress give rise only to further transformations and numerous threads are left hanging, never to be picked up. It seems impossible to establish a consistency of tone (in renga terms, not necessarily a desirable goal) with, in this case, the pessimism of the opening third gradually dissolving into

scenes of colour, action and excitement. To make any sense of it, it is necessary to read it as musical rather than meaningful, a scattering of vivid images, apparently at random, orchestrated into something approaching harmony by two voices which harness competition in the service of co-operation. To criticise 'Writer's Block' in its own terms, as a renga, it is necessary to ask, how well does it link? And, how well does it shift? The linking can certainly be faulted for paying too much attention to purely verbal correspondences, with few examples of holistic re-readings or metaphorical reinterpretations of preceding verses. From the point of view of shift, it does get rather static and stuck in a loop (or 'pool') between links 6 and 13. But the word-association links are often made to serve the end of a sudden change in direction, as in the movement from 'which world?' to 'he points out Andromeda'. And, judged as a whole, it certainly shifts enough to accomplish a great breadth and balance. It spans the poor and the rich, humanity, the planet and the stars, darkness and light, passing moments and rites of passage, the ephemeral and (symbols of) the everlasting. What is perhaps most satisfying is its even-handed distribution of irony and sincerity (although it is clear that I supplied more of the former, Stuart more of the latter). The two renga which follow in this analysis, 'Kicking the leaves' and 'Pulp Friction', approach the levels of energy and dynamism in 'Writer's Block', but each is committed to its cause, of sincerity and irony respectively, and thus, in terms of totality of tone, they are relatively less successful.

8.7.2 Kicking the leaves

Authors: Martin Lucas, Brian Tasker. Dates of composition: 5 January – 10 August 1998.

Places of composition: Galgate, Lancaster and Frome, Somerset (by post).

General Remarks: In contrast to 'Writer's Block', this was a carefully written renga, taking over seven months to complete by post, with plenty of time allowed for reflection before composing each link. We sought to maintain a haiku-like objectivity, avoiding the abstract and surreal, and we aimed to link as far as possible with the whole of each verse, rather than merely taking up a verbal hint. Although we largely succeeded in our aims, perhaps because of the high standard we set ourselves we found it hard going in places and (as discussed below) the content of some of the links appears to reflect the difficulties we were encountering. Momentum and a smooth flow are not always sustained. Although we do have an appropriately placed moon link (verse 13) and flower link (verse 35) we did not put ourselves under any pressure to fulfil renga conventions.

Analysis: The highlights of this renga are probably its beginning and its end. The hokku disobeys tradition by providing an image of autumn, when the sequence was actually begun in winter, but it gets us off to an excellent start. It is playful, perhaps expressing an aspiration for the renga as a whole (one which is only conditionally fulfilled); it is vividly realised, particularly the detail of the 'string bag'; and it delightfully captures a moment of unguardedness. Although the wakiku takes up the seasonal theme, the impersonal expression of 'thumbs prise open' perhaps fails to fulfil the potential of the hokku.

The run of links from 3 to 8 is possibly the strongest section within the renga. 4 sustains the cosy domesticity of 3. 5 links by contrast, expressing a longing for the 'warmth' of 4. 6 develops the restlessness of 5. 7 transforms the 'feverish' heat of 6 into the spicy heat of 'chilli'. 8 parallels 7 with a further reinterpretation: the heat of an argument. Whether it is acceptable to sustain a theme such as warmth / heat for as long as six links is open to debate, but the precise nature of the 'heat' does at least receive a different incarnation on each appearance.

The final link of the whole sequence is also impressive. Although it provides a satisfactory connection to its *maeku*, its greatest virtue is the sense of freedom which it gives to the closure of the renga as a whole. At several points during the final third a sense of frustration seems to be creeping in: 'he shrugs his shoulders' (link 26); 'all flights delayed' (28); 'deepening shades of grey' (31); 'clouds gathering' (32). The release of the 'trapped butterfly' in the *ageku* appears to enact an escape from these burdens, and it certainly meets the traditional criterion of ending on a positive note.

Conclusion: The greatest strength and weakness of this renga are interrelated. The weakness is that, at times, it moves forward only sluggishly (perhaps most extreme at link 26); it gives the impression of being work rather than play. The strength is the holistic quality of the linking. Compared with 'Writer's Block' there is a much lower frequency of wordplay and a much higher frequency of whole-scene and mood connections. The tension, even incompatibility, between quality and playfulness is further emphasised by the example which follows.

8.7.3 Pulp Friction

Authors: Martin Lucas, Fred Schofield. Date of Composition: 10 November 1997. Place of Composition: Leeds.

General Remarks: This renga was dashed off in a little over an hour, and it shows. It was designed as an original venture, an 'anti-renga'. As mentioned above, the object of the exercise was to follow the flow of thought without resistance, even if it led into the realms of the abstract, absurd, fantastical or surreal. The result does, I trust, have some appeal as zany comedy; it has no pretensions to literary excellence. Yet, notwithstanding its liberated spirit, it is intended to meet the basic renga criteria of link and shift, although finer points, such as the location of moon and flower links, played no part in its construction.

Analysis: In several stretches the linking process in 'Pulp Friction' is clearly discernible. The opening section poses no problems: 'bonfire night' connects to 'banger', in turn connecting to 'erection', in turn connecting to the 'CN Tower'; 'glass floor' connects to 'dregs at the bottom', in turn connecting to 'in vino veritas'; '10% extra free' links to 'refill refills', etc.

The interaction between the participants (who are clearly enjoying themselves, whatever anyone else thinks!) leads to a display of teamwork which surpasses the achievements of the two renga examined previously. From link 12 to 13; again from 14 to 15; and again from 16 to 17, Fred sets up the gag ready for me to supply the punchline. Elsewhere, uninhibited exuberance takes over and links emerge from the murky depths of the subconscious with little apparent relevance, but possessing an endearing grotesque charm. In particular, link 29 ('vandalised lamp-post's / severed head / hits a dog') is a pure bolt from the blue.

In terms of shift, the anti-renga manages quite well, despite making a u-turn in link 16 (recapping link 13) and sidestepping rather awkwardly from link 18 to 19 ('John Wayne' to 'Marilyn Monroe'). The overall effect is a remarkably thorough mapping of the nether regions of the mind (although doubtless vast tracts remain to be explored).

Conclusion: The lesson of the exercise seems to be that an energy lurks on the level of surreality, waiting to be tapped, and careful craftsmanship isn't the best way to tap it. ('Baroque Masterpiece' is another, only slightly more sober, venture in the same mode.) If we are to avoid the oppression that afflicted Octavio Paz, or the repression that dogs 'Kicking the leaves', we need something of this spirit. It may seem as if this would demand the betrayal of our best haiku principles, and to an extent I believe it does: contemplative serenity and uninhibited fun may be mutually exclusive goals. But I do offer 'Writer's Block' as an example of an attempt to balance these conflicting claims; it manages to achieve liveliness and dynamism while remaining grounded in the tangible and credible. In the end, the choice between these three modes, the sober, the drunken, and the slightly tipsy, is probably best left to personal taste or the mood of the moment. It is reassuring to know that this work / play opposition is an enduring paradox. The Japanese tradition also oscillated between the elegant sensitivity of classical renga and the playful freedom of haikai, and it took a poet of the genius of Bashō to reconcile these extremes.

On Haibun

9.1 Introduction

Haibun is haiku prose. It is easier to characterise than define. It is frequently autobiographical and generally incorporates one or more haiku. It may vary in scope from a substantial book-length work down to a few brief lines of introductory headnote. In content it is most typically a diary or journal – in Bashō's hands, famously, an account of his travels – but it may be almost anything that will serve to enhance the setting of its haiku. It is generally at least presented as factual rather than fictional, but Bashō is known to have fictionalised elements of his journals to enhance their aesthetic effect. It seems, therefore, to be a genre open to a wide range of possibilities. I offer below a brief account of the origins of haibun in Japan, followed by a look at some developments of haibun in North America, finally focusing on significant pioneering attempts at haibun by British writers.

9.2 Bashō's haibun

In the traditions of Japanese literature there is nothing exceptional about the integration of poetry and prose. Poetry might be used to enrich a prose account and prose can serve to provide an explanatory context for poetry. In certain circumstances the integration was unavoidable. It seems that the exchange of poems (*tanka*) was almost a ritual requirement in

the conduct of aristocratic love affairs in medieval Japan. A literary report of such a love affair would be regarded as incomplete if it omitted to record the poems that were thus exchanged. Indeed, it is primarily through the poems that we would be given access to the feelings of the individuals involved. From another point of view, an isolated tanka (or haiku) may, because of its brevity, be rather mysterious and ambiguous. It gains clarity, therefore, in a prose setting which serves to elucidate the circumstances of its composition. Hiroaki Sato sums up the situation, for both haiku (hokku) and tanka, as follows:

The problem with the hokku when treated as an independent literary piece was the same as that of its grandparent, the tanka: it was too short. To make up for this deficiency, hokku ... often came with certain explanations – just as tanka had. Indeed, with tanka, there was, from early on, a genre known as *uta monogatari*, ‘poetic tales’ – collections of episodes each explaining the circumstance of the composition of a specific tanka. You might even say that the famed *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji) is a form of *uta monogatari*, interspersed as it is with eight hundred tanka. Tanka were also incorporated into other forms of narrative, such as memoirs and diaries.¹

Sato mentions two travel journals based on a mixture of prose and tanka which served as models for Bashō's unification of prose and haiku. These are the *Tosa Nikki* of Ki no Tsurayuki, dating from 934, and the *Izayoi Nikki* of the Nun Abutsu, dating from 1279. Significant events recorded in these diaries are marked by the characters involved abruptly declaiming poems which the diarists apparently include as an indispensable element of a faithful report. In reading such accounts it can be difficult to decide whether we are objectively witnessing ritualised behaviour or whether the writer is offering a highly stylised version of events; we may suspect the latter. Similar ambivalence attends our reading of Bashō's journals. Strict realism probably did not enter his literary vocabulary.

¹ Hiroaki Sato (trans.). *Bashō's Narrow Road: Spring and Autumn Passages* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 1996), p.29

Bashō made three lengthy journeys in the 1680s, each of which resulted in a substantial *haibun* travel sketch. The first two of these trips were made westward from Edo (Tokyo) towards Nagoya, his home town of Ueno, and Kyoto. His motives were various: to visit his mother's grave; to meet and work with scattered groups of disciples; and to discipline himself through the hardships of travel.² His third journey, undertaken in 1689, was more adventurous, taking him northward into less populous territory. One of his motives was to visit various *uta-makura*, 'poetic pillows', sites (or sights) that were famous and recurrent in Japanese poetry, each of which triggered its own unique associations. Bashō, as he confessed in a letter to his friend and disciple Kikaku, wanted to '“feel the truth of old poems”.'

The three works that resulted from these wanderings were: 'The Records of a Weather-exposed Skeleton'; 'The Records of a Travel-worn Satchel' and, for the northern adventure, *Oku no Hosomichi*, variously translated as 'The Narrow Road to Oku' (Donald Keene), 'Narrow Road to the Interior' (Hiroaki Sato) and 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North' (Nobuyuki Yuasa). (Oku is the name of the northern region of Honshu. Sato and Yuasa bring out the 'inner' meaning that it held for Bashō.)³

As Bashō worked to perfect the art of *haibun*, his integration of prose and haiku became gradually more complete and effective. Of the first of these attempts (*The Records of a Weather-exposed Skeleton*), Nobuyuki Yuasa notes:

² cf. Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, p.95

³ Yuasa comments:

In the imagination of the people at least, the North was largely an unexplored territory, and it represented for Bashō all the mystery there was in the universe. In other words, the Narrow Road to the Deep North was life itself for Bashō, and he travelled through it as anyone would travel through the short span of his life here – seeking a vision of eternity in the things that are, by their own very nature,

[prose and haiku] are not perfectly amalgamated. Sometimes prose is a mere explanatory note for *haiku*, and sometimes *haiku* stands isolated from prose.⁴

Of *The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel*, Yuasa remarks that it is

a great advance over his previous travel sketches, for here for the first time an attempt was made to bring prose and *haiku* into an organic whole.⁵

Finally, in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Bashō satisfies the competing claims of unity and variety:

In his preceding travel sketches ... Bashō failed to maintain an adequate balance between prose and haiku, making prose subservient to *haiku*, or *haiku* isolated from prose. In 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North', however, Bashō has mastered the art of writing *haibun* so completely that prose and *haiku* illuminate each other like two mirrors held up facing each other.⁶

J. Thomas Rimer explains how Bashō interwove poetry and prose, using the latter to support and enhance the former:

Bashō expands and develops [haibun] into a highly evocative form of narrative that seems to personalize the context in terms of the poet's own intimate thoughts and feelings. By leading the reader through the movement of the poet's own responses to the world he experiences, Bashō prepares the way for the poem, so that the emotional weight of a brief *haiku* can be felt with full impact.⁷

Space does not permit quotation of a lengthy extract, but as an example of Bashō's method I give this description of his meeting with two prostitutes who were travelling the same road. ('We' refers also to Bashō's companion, Sora.) They had shared the same inn as the

destined to perish. (Nobuyuki Yuasa (trans.). *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and other travel sketches*, p.37)

⁴ Yuasa, op. cit., p.30

⁵ Ibid., p.35

⁶ Ibid., p.39

prostitutes for one night, and overheard them lamenting the uncertainties and sinfulness of their way of life:

The next morning, when we were about to start out, the two women approached us, saying, 'We feel so uneasy and depressed at the thought of the difficulties that may await us on the way to an unfamiliar place that we would like to follow behind you, even if out of sight. Grant us this great favor, you who wear the habit of priests, and help us to attain the way of the Buddha.' They were in tears.

I answered, 'I feel sorry for you, but we must stop at a great many places. You'd better go along with some ordinary travellers. You will be under the protection of the gods. I am sure no harm will come to you.' These were my parting words, but for a time I could not shake off my pity for them.

hitotsu ya ni	Under the same roof
yūjo mo netari	Prostitutes were sleeping –
hagi to tsuki	The moon and clover. ⁸

At this intersection of ways we feel the fragility and vulnerability of both pairs of fellow-travellers, and are touched by Bashō's Buddhistic sense that life is unpredictable and fleeting. We sense his compassion, together with its limitations. There is an underlying suggestion that, in sharing a lodging, Bashō recognises that he shares a world with the prostitutes, and the ways they must take reflect their divergent paths through life. There is a moral relevance but no reduction to a single moral point. The haiku, which begins as a straightforward description of events, suddenly opens out in its final line to present a mysterious and indeterminate parallel pair of images. We might deduce that the moon and clover mirror the temporary juxtaposition of Bashō and the prostitutes but it is hard to say exactly how. This brings the passage to a reflective close: the compassion does not give way to a judgmental conclusion but has been transformed into poetic feeling.⁹

⁷ J. Thomas Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1988), p.71

⁸ Donald Keene (trans.), *The Narrow Road to Oku* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), p.131

⁹ For various competing interpretations of this haiku, see Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Haiku with Commentary*, p.261

Not all Bashō's haibun are detailed records of six-month long wanderings. At the other end of the scale there is the single haiku with a brief headnote giving the context of its creation.¹⁰ Nor is Bashō alone among Japanese poets as a haibun writer. Other haiku poets, such as Issa and the woman haiku poet, Chigetsu, practised the art.¹¹ Issa chronicled the birth and death of his daughter Sato in his haibun, 'Spring of my Life' (1819). In this he succeeds in detailing 'his life moment by moment, giving a full day-to-day sense of his humanity.'¹² Thus, through haibun, haiku become less enigmatic and more relevant than they might at first appear. Given something as slight as a haiku it naturally helps to know when, and with what motivations, it was composed.

9.3 Haibun in North America

As with haiku itself, haibun flourished in North America prior to becoming widely practised in Britain. Journals such as *Modern Haiku* (in the USA) and *Raw Nerve* (in Canada) regularly give space to haibun and a first comprehensive anthology of American haibun, edited by Bruce Ross, appeared in 1998: *Journey to the Interior: American versions of Haibun* (Boston: Tuttle).

Two movements in North American literature are identified by Bruce Ross as native precursors to experimentation with haibun. In the mid-nineteenth century the Transcendentalists, Emerson, Thoreau and others, offered

¹⁰ For examples, see Hiroaki Sato (trans.). *Bashō's Narrow Road: Spring and Autumn Passages* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 1996), pp.48-9 and Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson (trans.), *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp.290-296

¹¹ For examples see Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson, op. cit., p.325 (Chigetsu) and pp.392-399 (Issa)

major examples of autobiographical and biographical narrative that evoked episodes of spiritual challenge or revelation in relation to the natural world¹³

In the mid-twentieth century, the Beats, notably Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac, 'attempted to model their lives on the lives of Eastern recluse and pilgrimage poets' and produced a number of Eastern-influenced autobiographical prose works which incorporated the occasional haiku. To these examples cited by Ross one name that I would like to add is Thomas Merton, the Cistercian monk. Merton was a contemporary of the Beats and his own writing provides evidence of the same susceptibility to Eastern thought, notably his fascination with Zen. He published several diaries of his monastic life which combine a seemingly haphazard mix of accounts of daily monastic practice, his thoughts on various issues in current affairs, and nature notes. For example, immediately following two passages reflecting on the latest book he is reading and the forthcoming Presidential election, we suddenly come upon this entry:

Flycatchers, shaking their wings after the rain.¹⁴

This almost qualifies as a haiku as it stands, and it provides a moment of contemplative pause among the surrounding prose passages in just the same way that a haiku should function in haibun.

What is commendable about the place of this 'haiku' in Merton's journal is its value as 'relief', in both senses; that is, it stands out from the background prose and it provides a release from tension. Many of the contributions to the Ross anthology suffer by comparison. Although

¹² Lucien Stryk with Noboru Fujiwara (trans.), *The Dumpling Field: Haiku of Issa*, p.xxii. A full translation of Issa's haibun is available in Sam Hamill (trans.), *The Spring of My Life and Selected Haiku by Kobayashi Issa* (Boston: Shambala, 1997)

¹³ Bruce Ross (ed.), *Journey to the Interior: American Versions of Haibun* (Boston: Tuttle, 1998), p.16

the prose extracts are in general highly readable and succeed in engaging our interest, too often there is insufficient tension between the prose and the subsequent haiku. In the worst case, the haiku does no more than summarise the content of the preceding prose passage, as in this example from George Klacsanzky:

The couple next door just started playing folk songs on guitar and mandolin. Now they have started singing loudly as though giving a performance or welcoming everyone to join them. I envy them for their closeness and the love they share, which is apparent in their voices as they harmonize. Listening to them sing a song together I find myself crying because it is so beautiful and also because I do not have that in my life.

campground
couple next door singing
I sit crying in my tent¹⁵

Reading several such pieces in succession, the haiku begin to become expected and predictable, punctuating the prose with insufficient originality or irregularity. If we are looking for ways in which British haibun might offer a development, rather than a mere continuation, of previous American practice, this seems to be the aspect most in need of attention. Just as with renga linking, the gap between haiku and prose in haibun should be a charged space. The movement from one to the other should involve some shift or leap rather than seamless transition, and the haiku should accomplish a transformation, achieving its full potential as poetry, rather than falling into dull, prosaic recapitulation.

One area, however, where American haibun maintains its lead over emergent British haibun is in its variety of content. As will be seen below, British haibun has yet to stray very far outside the traditional bounds of travel narrative. Although this is also the commonest mode in the Ross anthology there are several significant variations. A frequent and appealing

¹⁴ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), p.125

alternative is autobiographical reminiscence of, for example, a formative incident from childhood. (Examples are Tom Clausen's 'Birds', Cor van den Heuvel's 'The Circus', and Rich Youmans' recollections of his Irish grandfather, 'Sunday Visits'.) More unusual is Patricia Neubauer's meditation, 'The Goldfish Vendor', which takes as starting point a haiku by Shuran Takahashi and develops implications from an opening prose sentence of: 'The moment of pure delight is an ephemeral thing.' Also on the borderlines between haibun and critical appreciation is Tom Tico's reading of other poets' work, 'Reaching for the Rain.' This offers a succession of pairs of haiku, all on the theme of childhood, linked by an imaginative response which attempts to recreate the details of the moments described in the haiku. Although the content of these responses is, in places, disappointingly anodyne (e.g. 'It seems that children of all ages love the circus and especially delight in clowns.'), Tico should be given credit for expanding the scope of the genre and for the selflessness of his engagement with the work of other authors.

9.4 Haibun in Britain

Haibun have appeared in all but the earliest issues of *Presence* and are beginning to become more frequent in *Blüte Spirit*. Among the more prolific contributors of haibun to these magazines are Helen Robinson, Fred Schofield and Ken Jones, each of whom displays a degree of mastery of the form.

In Helen Robinson's haibun, 'Towards the Sea' (*Presence* #5) we have an example of how much is gained through the use of an apt and resonant concluding haiku. The haibun is an

¹⁵ Bruce Ross (ed.), op. cit., p.128

account of a nine-mile walk along the Dee estuary in May 1997. She evokes the invigorating environment by recording the abundant wildflowers and the calls of curlew and skylark. She also notices that, at low tide, 'Small boats lie in the runnels and beached on the mudflats.' The haibun ends with her return home, with the evening scene at the estuary present only to her imagination but powerfully envisaged through the following haiku:

incoming tide
straightening
the tilted boats¹⁶

As well as the clarity of the vision, the haiku has an emphatic cadence conveying an appropriate sense of ebb and flow and the restoration of balance. The imagery does not seem accidental but appears to mirror the inner resolution of the walker / writer.

The quality of the inner significance of external observations is one that a haibun writer gains by achieving. It imparts organisation and purpose to what might otherwise be random jottings. Fred Schofield, in his haibun 'Light and Shade' (*Presence* #4), notices the patterns cast by sunlight as it shines through a railway bridge crossing a Leeds canal:

The sun comes through in squares and appears to drift along the water. The squares of light are so bright that they seem to be as opaque as the shade – until you look closer and see, through the clouded translucency, vague shapes of whatever has been thrown in or is growing at the bottom.¹⁷

Throughout the haibun he maintains a stance of apparent objectivity, reporting the details of the urban landscape, the weather conditions and his encounters with passers-by without intrusive comment. But 'light' and 'shade' can be seen as metaphors for the positive and

¹⁶ *Presence* #5 (September 1997), pp.34-5

¹⁷ *Presence* #4 (May 1997), p.19

negative aspects of this environment. As such, they are subtle, mutable and interdependent; each is necessary to the other. This imparts a comparable subtlety to our appreciation of the environment; even the superficially negative aspects ('the commercial wasteland'; the buzz of pylons; depressed, miserable and inconsiderate strangers) contribute to the integrity of the whole. Nowhere is this conclusion preached. It arises naturally as an inference from the choice and the presentation of the imagery.

Most of Ken Jones' haibun are also based on walking excursions, typically in his native environment, the hills and mountains of Wales. Often he does as Bashō did, recalling the associations of local history and legend, to enhance our appreciation of both place and time. In *Presence* #8, however, he offers a departure from his typical mode, a comic haibun account of a refined and pampered hotel weekend entitled 'Luxury Spring Break.' The atmosphere is captured by reference to the pastel shades of the decor ('sage', 'apricot', 'salmon pink'); by occasional elevation into French ('bonnet de douche', 'appareil de bain', 'objets de vertu') and by an epicurean interest in the cuisine ('glazed monkfish', 'Loch Fyne kippers', 'coddled eggs'). The humorous purpose takes precedence over strict objectivity, as in this two-line haiku: 'In the immaculate bath / a well-groomed spider'. But the demands of the real world are not forgotten and present an ironic perspective on this temporarily protected existence:

Red-headed waitress
serves the lamb --- then
back to the lambing¹⁸

These three examples are representative of the shorter haibun that appear in magazines, but longer and more ambitious haibun are also beginning to emerge. Again, I have selected three examples as particularly noteworthy. These are: Jackie Hardy's '7.50 from Hexham'; a group

work entitled 'In the Autumn Wind', edited by Stephen Henry Gill and Fred Schofield; and – the most thorough and significant haibun by a British writer thus far – David Cobb's book, *The Spring Journey to the Saxon Shore*.

Jackie Hardy's '7.50 from Hexham' is, in fact, no more substantial than the magazine haibun described above, but it carries weight by forming the conclusion to her haiku collection, *The Dust is Golden* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1999). It is the record of a train journey from Hexham to Carlisle, which prompts thoughts on the choice of direction in life and the necessity for being prepared 'to recognise life chances when they happen.' Unusually, the haibun is written in the past rather than the present tense. There may be a slight gain in naturalness and a slight loss in immediacy as a result but, apart from challenging convention, the main effect is a disjunction between the prose and haiku (which are, as usual, in the present). However, the haiku capture well the sudden movement and intensification of attention as she gazes through the window of the train. Most significantly, in view of my preceding remarks on American haibun and the need for contrast and tension between haiku and prose, we feel that each of these haiku achieves more than mere stress and repetition. The haiku here add to our stock of images of the journey and build up a fuller picture of her surroundings. The most effective single instance is this, in which her musings are abruptly interrupted by the sudden clarity of observation:

How one route we take in life excludes another; one route may be narrow and confined,

in the cutting
fireweed seeds
gust in the wind

another opens up new vistas, ideas.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Presence* #8 (December 1998), p.19

¹⁹ Jackie Hardy, *The Dust is Golden: Haiku*, p.44

This haiku offers a perfect metaphorical complement to her speculations: the 'narrow and confined' course of the railway cutting, the drift of the 'fireweed seeds' – and, simultaneously, her own consciousness – into 'new vistas, ideas'. It also provides that quality of 'relief' that I noted as desirable in my comments on Thomas Merton's journals; the space between prose and poem is 'charged.' As a postscript to this appreciation it is also worth mentioning that this discussion of chance and preparedness is centrally relevant to Jackie Hardy's own talent as a haiku poet. Her readiness to take advantage of the instantaneous opportunity of the haiku moment is noted as a characteristic skill in my discussion of her work under section 6.1, 'Major British Haiku Poets.'

'In the Autumn Wind' is the account of a five-day walk along Offa's Dyke undertaken in the autumn of 1994 by members of the British Haiku Society in commemoration of the tercentenary of Bashō's death. Stephen and Kazue Gill walked all five days, with ten other companions (including Fred Schofield, who assisted in the editing of the haibun) joining for a day or two at a time. Haiku incorporated into the haibun include contributions from all the walkers, and the prose, though primarily the work of Stephen Gill, is also, to some extent, a composite creation. Like '7.50 from Hexham' it is also in the past tense, and the same critical comments apply. The pace of the prose is rather gentle and urbane, with occasional descent into the passive ('A rest was taken ...'). Also, integration of the haiku is often achieved at the expense of a sentence or two of preparatory introduction, which tends to rob the subsequent poem of some of its force:

He looked up at the distant hillside and saw a blurred clump of figures nearing the top:

The size of my thumbnail
friends disappear
around the hill

(Fred Schofield)²⁰

²⁰ Stephen Henry Gill and C. Andrew Gerstle (ed.), *Rediscovering Bashō: A 300th Anniversary Celebration* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 1999), p.144

The haibun, then, has its shortcomings, but it also has a major strength: it has been researched with exceptional thoroughness and references to local geography, history, folklore, geology, botany, literature and the precedent set by Bashō ensure that each step and landmark of the walk is felt to be imbued with significance. We are given the legend underlying the origin of the Welsh church name, Llanfihangel Ystern-Llewern, translating as ‘St Michael the Archangel and the Burning of the Will-o’-the-Wisp.’ Or,

We were soon to see where the wizard, Jack O’Kent, had landed after his five-mile jump from the Sugar Loaf Mountain beyond Abergavenny. His heel mark was there stamped into the summit on its northern face, a great cleft that others say was formed by an earthquake at the Crucifixion. Until the early nineteenth century, people would take a little soil from this hollow to sprinkle on coffins or to scatter on farmland, for they considered that it brought good luck.²¹

We are told when the walkers ‘crossed the geological boundary between the Carboniferous and the Devonian.’ We encounter the famous Discoed Yew, ‘thought to be one of the three oldest in Britain.’ We feel the presence not only of Bashō but also of Wordsworth (at Tintern Abbey) and others who sought communion with the natural world:

Thoreau had said: ‘A writer is the scribe of all Nature – he is the corn and the grass and the atmosphere writing.’ And the British poet, Taliesin ... put it another way: ‘I have been a torrent on the slope, a wave on the shore, ... a drop in a shower of rain.’²²

The haibun may fall well short of the poetic intensity of Bashō’s journals, but it successfully imitates Bashō in the location of its wanderings against the vertical axis of history and tradition. It accomplishes the dual purpose of evoking nostalgia for both the British past and Bashō himself, just as Bashō evokes nostalgia for the Japanese past and his own poetic predecessors.

²¹ Ibid., p.142

²² Ibid., p.136

David Cobb's *The Spring Journey to the Saxon Shore* (Shalford: Equinox, 1997) matches 'In the Autumn Wind' in its location against the historical axis. It is, however, a more densely textured work, constituting a more satisfying achievement because of the vigorous quality of its prose. It is the record of a bicycle ride from the author's home in Essex northwards through the heart of East Anglia to his holiday cottage near the north Norfolk coast, the Saxon shore. Whereas 'In the Autumn Wind' dwells on the practical details of walking – the heaviness of rucksacks, the struggle against wind and rain in the Black Mountains – in 'Spring Journey' the practicalities are largely forgotten. This may be because, on a bicycle, the journey passes more smoothly, but it has more to do with the self-consciousness of this work as a literary creation. The haibun is structured around the succession of passing villages or small towns. Each place becomes the focus of an anecdote recounting a fragment of local folklore, a biographical snippet about some associated literary figure (Clare, Cowper, Robert Bloomfield, Edward Thomas and Henry Williamson are all dealt with) or the record of a fleeting encounter with one or more inhabitants.

At bicycle speed, events from long ago come into focus out of obscure memory, happenings of today drift away into the uncertainty of fable.²³

The 'bicycle speed' imparts pace to the narrative, but what really unites the work is its bittersweet tragicomedy, awareness of the minor ironies of life and the major irony of death. There is a fascination with the careers of such local heroes as the Rector of Stiffkey, for example: defrocked for his 'ministrations' to Soho prostitutes, he subsequently

Got a job doing an act in a circus. Preached sermons inside a lion cage. Did not have Daniel's happy knack with a king of the beasts called Freddie. One fancies him singing as he died like William Blake.²⁴

²³ David Cobb, *The Spring Journey to the Saxon Shore* (Shalford: Equinox, 1997), p.52

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46

The humour is expressed both in asides ...

Wake up in a mist called Suffolk. Time and time over losing the way to Stowlangtoft
and then coming upon it entirely by chance.²⁵

or 'Where Suffolk and Norfolk meet the border is marked on both sides by sheep'²⁶ and also
in sustained passages such as the potted history of 1812 – 'so many evidences of the civilising
works of man' – and this Music Hall funeral:

'No laments for Lily, now. Best we send her on her way with some of her own
favourite tunes.' ... congregation find themselves singing *Knocked 'em in the Old Kent
Road*. Later, the organist plays us out to the waiting grave with *Don't dilly-dally on the
way*. Pallbearers in apprehension of *The Lambeth Walk*.²⁷

From the point of view of haibun, however, the difficulty with such energetic prose,
entertaining though it is, is that it relegates the haiku to a secondary role. The poems tend to
come to mark the occasional pause for breath; they struggle to compete and to sustain the
level of interest. The funeral passage above, for example, is immediately followed by the
enigmatic

from the tumulus
the lopped oaks file away
in twos and threes²⁸

The author seems to be striving hard here to produce a poem which parallels and reinforces
the funeral scene: there is presumably some metaphorical connection between the trees and
the mourners. But the desire to avoid a too-obvious link seems over-done. The poem

²⁵ Ibid., p.23

²⁶ Ibid., p.27

²⁷ Ibid., p.32

²⁸ Ibid.

demands an extravagant leap in attention, and it is in turn followed by a further scene-shift, a search for the grave of Boudica. The poetry is, at least, never predictable. It succeeds in varying the mood while maintaining the accent of the prose and, to that extent, fulfils the haibun ideal of uniting prose and poetry in an 'organic whole', but few examples stand out as being individually memorable. Among the more striking exceptions are these two, which sustain the humour and capture the flavour of rural life:

in the green lane
where they walk the dogs, even
the grass off its lead²⁹

froth on his whiskers
a man in the pub explains
how high the tide was³⁰

David Cobb's haibun has thus established a standard as a substantial work of haiku prose, against which future attempts in the genre can be judged. If there is scope for improvement it is in the poetic half of the formula which is capable of withstanding greater emphasis than it is entrusted with in 'Spring Journey.' As with other haiku related forms, including even haiku itself, English haibun is still at the prototype stage, but the energy with which it is being developed is encouraging.

²⁹ Ibid., p.40

³⁰ Ibid., p.50

Haiku in Context

10.1 Haiga

There are three main ways in which the traditional Japanese haiku could be supported by the context of a larger scale work of art. These are: as the hokku in renga; as part of a journal or other prose work (haibun); or, accompanied by illustration. The artwork which presented calligraphic haiku alongside a brush-drawing was known as *haiga*. R.H.Blyth gives the following brief description of haiga and its origins:

Haiga are small sketches, either in indian-ink, black-and-white, or in simple colours, that endeavour to express in pictures what haiku do in words. Haiga as such seem to have begun their independent existence about the time of Sōkan, 1458-1546, that is to say when haiku began to be separated from renku. By the age of Teitoku, 1570-1653, they already had their rather innocent, unprofessional air, as pictures by poets, not artists.¹

Blyth, as usual in his writings, focuses on internal qualities rather than externals, and is keen to pursue the characteristic spirit of haiga, through which it is unified with haiku:

The simplicity of the mind of the artist is perceived in the simplicity of the object. Technical skill is rather avoided, and the picture gives the impression of a certain awkwardness of treatment that reveals in hiding the meaning of the thing painted ... Moments of deep significance in our perceptions of the outer world are shown in crudeness, brevity, humour, with a certain inartistic art, an accidental purposefulness.²

¹ R.H.Blyth, *Haiku Vol 1: Eastern Culture* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1981), pp.88-9

Alan Watts gives a similar characterisation, describing haiga as

spontaneous, artless and rough, replete with all those 'controlled accidents' of the brush in which they exemplify the marvellous meaninglessness of nature itself.³

It is this amateurishness that distinguishes haiga from classical painting; the virtue of it is that it roots haiga in objective, everyday experience. Haiku and haiga are further unified by the necessity for close observation and by the recognition of the inevitable incompleteness, the unfinished quality, of artistic expression (which we have identified as 'wordlessness' in haiku):

... haiga justifies its existence in two ways, by its humour and its roughness. The insistence on the fact that humour is to be seen everywhere, under all circumstances, which is the special virtue of haiku, is also the distinguishing quality of haiga, and one which keeps it most closely connected with this world and this life. Art comes down to earth; we are not transported into some fairy, unreal world of pure aesthetic pleasure. The roughness gives it that peculiar quality of *sabi* without age ... It corresponds in poetry to the fact that what we wish to say is just that which escapes the words. Haiku and haiga therefore do not try to express it, and succeed in doing what they have not attempted.⁴

Just as with renga linking there are two possible approaches, direct and indirect (that is, association by language or by feeling) so also with the relationship between picture and poem in haiga. The picture may provide a straightforward illustration of the content of the haiku, or the two may be connected more obliquely.

The haiga may be an illustration of the haiku, and say the same thing in line and form; or it may have a more independent existence, and yet an even deeper connection with the poem.⁵

² Ibid.

³ Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.201

⁴ R.H. Blyth, *Haiku Vol. 1: Eastern Culture*, pp.102-3

⁵ Ibid., p.90

10.2 Western haiku; western art

The affinity of haiku for pictorial accompaniment has begun to be explored by Western poet-artists. The same possible two approaches apply as with haiga: either illustration or harmonisation (i.e. the picture and poem appear superficially unrelated). Such artwork may be divided into two broad categories: brushed ink drawings in the sumi-e style which derive their inspiration directly from Eastern antecedents; or sketches or paintings, whether in colour or black-and-white, which fall in line with Western artistic traditions.

In talking about their work, Western poet-artists are often keen to stress the value of incompleteness, the necessity for an observer to make an imaginative leap in connecting image and poem, which would be undermined by a too-direct illustration. Each issue of the Canadian haiku journal, *Mirrors*, (edited by Jim Force) features a poet-artist discussing their art. In the 1996 issue, Karen Klein writes:

... in a haiku about a heron, people asked me if the image was intended to be the bird. It wasn't. The image and the poem were both gestures and that's where the similarity ended.⁶

(I think Klein exaggerates here. There is presumably at least an intuitive correspondence between the gestures.) In the 1997 issue, Ion Codrescu reminds us that values that have always been applied to haiku apply also to haiga: "The more suggestive and simple the image, the more ideas, feelings, relationships and meanings are generated ..."⁷ In the 1998 issue, Keith J. Coleman comes to a similar conclusion:

⁶ *Mirrors* (1996)

⁷ *Mirrors* (1997)

Since haiku and sumi-e are not about definition, but all about suggestion, the final crucial aspect in the connecting of the two is the active, insightful participation of the reader-viewer ...⁸

The sumi-e artwork of Keith J.Coleman has been featured prominently in *Presence*. He has supplied three centre-page pictures and numerous smaller-scale illustrations. In editing *Presence* I have always paid attention to the value of artwork, in the belief that it plays a complementary role alongside haiku, going beyond the merely decorative. As well as Keith J.Coleman, my other main contributor has been Helen Robinson, who supplied cover drawings for #7, #8 and #9. Helen Robinson's sketches are detailed and precise, in a more Western style, but in their delicacy, understatement and balance they make a fine accompaniment to haiku. (Some examples of illustrated haiku are appended to this thesis.)

Helen Robinson is also responsible for the most significant attempt thus far to bring haiku and artwork together for a British audience. This work is the *Haiku Presence* touring exhibition, organised by Fred Schofield. It used twenty haiku, mostly by various contemporary British poets (but including one by a Canadian, George Swede, and also two translations from the Japanese), presented on hanging banners in modules designed by Simon Andreanof, a student at Leeds Metropolitan University. Each haiku is accompanied by a colour image supplied by Helen Robinson. Although a majority of the images reflect the specific content of the haiku to some extent, the aim is more to support the mood and tone of each poem. The restful overall design of the banners ensures that a meditative background is created, providing time and space to allow a thoughtful appreciation of the poetry.

⁸ *Mirrors* (1998)

One spin-off from the Haiku Presence exhibition has been a series of postcards reproducing these haiku and images. Other haiku poets to have produced illustrated postcard versions of their work include Jackie Hardy and Brian Tasker. Illustrated collections of haiku by British poets are infrequent, but one such example is Caroline Gourlay's *Crossing the Field*, published by Redlake Press. Artistic presentation of haiku is not restricted to illustration. Other possibilities include calligraphy or computer graphic effects, to enhance the text of the poem. Examples can be found in the special issue of *Blithe Spirit* (Vol.7 No.1) devoted to varieties of visual presentation. A photographic accompaniment is another avenue, which has thus far been only tentatively explored. (A couple of photographs by Helen Robinson have appeared in *Presence*, but the photocopied reproduction has perhaps not done them full justice.) Concrete haiku, which have been attempted from the earliest days of haiku in the West, would also qualify as a mode of visual presentation.⁹ *Mirrors* has been a forum for many of these possibilities since it allows the contributor total control over the appearance of their work. (Submissions are photocopied, unedited, for publication.)

10.3. Haiku and Music

I know of four separate and unrelated attempts to set haiku to music. Jōji Hirota, a professional Japanese percussionist, has given performances accompanying readings of haiku on at least four occasions: at the Waning Moon Press book launch at the Poetry Library in September 1997; at a public reading in Portsmouth; at the launch of the *Iron Book of British Haiku* in February 1998; and at a public reading at the BHS conference in Ludlow in April 1998. His music at these events was entirely improvised, supporting sets of haiku which had been grouped into sequences specially for the occasion. The effect of the drums, clashing

⁹ See sub-sections 4.3.1 and 4.4.2 for more on concrete haiku

cymbals and bells tends to be to emphasise mystery, thus harmonising with the more empty and impersonal haiku rather than with more homely haiku or senryu. A review by David Steele of the first of these events appeared in *Presence* #6:

Master percussionist Jōji Hirota accompanied the readings on a whole range of instruments, from tinkling tubes to gigantic gongs and including drums, cymbals and flutes. The accompaniment was sensitively done, never intrusive, and added an extra dimension to the experience by providing a medium in which the poems were able to live fully without being diminished.¹⁰

Fred Schofield has experimented with backing haiku with classical guitar. He has set his own haiku sequence, 'Sway,' to guitar composition (the theme of most of the haiku in 'Sway' is sounds, or musical performance), and also my sequence, 'Horton-in-Ribblesdale' (the record of a walking holiday in the Yorkshire Dales). We have performed both these pieces at public readings on several occasions (I read, Fred plays guitar) notably at Lancaster Litfest in October 1998. One advantage of the musical setting is a 'binding' effect: it tends to enhance the sense of unity and progression between the separate poetic elements.

Colin Blundell has set haiku to the accompaniment of several instruments, including the recorder, on which he improvised to support a reading of my poems at the 'Bashō Bash,' the prize-giving evening for the *poetry postcard quarterly* 'UK Haiku Championship' in May 1996.

Brian Tasker has pioneered a form of haiku reading which employs sound but is not strictly musical. He intersperses a careful and patient reading of a series of haiku with striking a Tibetan bowl. This has a gong-like effect, a single note which hangs in the air, fading only

¹⁰ *Presence* #6 (January 1998), p.34

slowly. It provides the poetry with both weight and space, creating the background necessary for a meditative appreciation of each haiku.¹¹

10.4. Haiku sequences

During forty years evolution in North America and ten years intensive development in Britain, haiku has established its own niche within the wider poetic ecology (which some may fear is not so much a niche as a ghetto!). Although the tendency is for haiku poets and mainstream poets to keep each other at a safe distance, it is important not to neglect opportunities for bridge-building. One such exercise has been the series entitled 'Points of Differing Views' which has appeared in *Blüte Spirit* under the editorship of Caroline Gourlay. In this series, various established poets talk about haiku, how they relate to it and value it, and to what extent an appreciation of haiku has informed the practice of their own style of poetry. The series has attracted contrasting responses from BHS members, with some feeling that such a move is valuable and timely, while others are critical of what they see as an often limited grasp of haiku revealed by these mainstream poets. While these tensions are not susceptible of immediate resolution, it is nevertheless necessary to point out that there is scope for interaction between haiku and mainstream poetry on a more practical plane. This interaction may represent a movement from either direction; that is, haiku that approaches the condition of poetry, notably through the haiku sequence; or poetry that approaches the condition of haiku by embracing the haiku values of objectivity, direct presentation of the image, and concision.

¹¹ An account of one such reading, given by Brian Tasker at SOAS in July 1994, can be found in Stephen Henry Gill and C. Andrew Gerstle (eds.), *Rediscovering Bashō*, pp. 104-6

The haiku sequence differs from renga in possessing a greater thematic unity and exhibiting a cumulative, rather than haphazard, progression. It may be unified by a narrative thread or by expressing the character of a particular time or place. *Presence* has featured haiku sequences by, among others, Hannah Mitte and Ken Jones. *Blithe Spirit* Vol.7 No.3 featured a sequence section, which included contributions from Frank Dullaghan, Keith J.Coleman, Bill Wyatt, Patricia V.Dawson, and Arwyn Evans. *The Iron Book of British Haiku* included three sequences, by Caroline Gourlay, Claire Bugler Hewitt and Jackie Hardy. Caroline Gourlay's 'Intensive Care' and Claire Bugler Hewitt's 'Eight Weeks,' an imagistic record of pregnancy, both show how difficult and emotive subjects can be encompassed by a sequence, when they might have been beyond the scope of a single haiku. Such subjects imply development over time, and demand treatment which can give weight to this aspect. The fleeting moment captured by a single haiku may be insufficient. Jackie Hardy's 'Making Sense' also shows how the sequence allows consideration of a subject from a number of angles:

Making Sense

across the meadow
 wind ripples the grasses
 warm breath on her neck

summer's first rose
 inhaling the bouquet
 of his sweat

sea spray
 veiling the cliffs
 salt's tang on her lips

from a glass vase
 a fall of wisteria –
 low sound in her throat

spring dawn –
 his withdrawing member
 still glistening¹²

Here it is the erotic interaction that is developed by using the natural images characteristic of haiku to objectify each of the senses in turn – touch, smell, taste, sound and sight. Notice how the third stanza in particular acquires an erotic charge, an additional level of meaning, because of its placing within the context of the sequence. As an isolated haiku it would have remained ‘innocent.’ Although each of the stanzas, considered individually, meets the criteria for haiku, nevertheless it is clear that the whole sequence is greater than the sum of its parts. The tendency of an isolated haiku to seem fragmentary and insufficient has been overcome.

10.5 The haiku / poetry interface (1)

In addition to three sequences, *The Iron Book of British Haiku* also included three additional short poems (by Kevin Bailey, Anthony Knight and Colin Oliver). These appear to reveal clear haiku influences in their construction and give a limited indication of ways in which haiku and the wider poetic world might inform each other. One poet who has come close to developing forms which unify the values of haiku and conventional poetry is Chris Mulhern. His collections, *Cloud Blunt Moon* (Iron Press, 1994) and *Water* (Acom, 1998) present both haiku and longer pieces with no visible demarcation between the two. Some of his poems capture single moments of sensory experience with a restraint which is minimalist even by haiku standards.

the bubbles
left
after the wave ...¹³

axe
knock
and echo¹⁴

¹² David Cobb and Martin Lucas (eds.), *The Iron Book of British Haiku*, p.49

¹³ Chris Mulhern, *Cloud Blunt Moon* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1994), p.43

¹⁴ Chris Mulhern *Water* (Tadworth: Acom, 1998), p.12

What he cultivates here is a space and a silence which surrounds and highlights the given details. In other poems, the expression expands slightly, with increasing detail in the information, without trespassing on this surrounding space:

morning sunshine:

a bucket clanks ...

even
the caged birds
singing¹⁵

footsteps
and the farm
falls silent¹⁶

Given the effectiveness of this mode, there seems to be no reason not to expand it still further, beyond the conventional limits of haiku, to give a fuller picture. In these two examples, there is a departure from the form of haiku, but a maintenance of contact with the spirit:

sunlight

in the courtyard

seeping
through half-shut
blinds

the almond tree
is still

and dreams
sliding back
into sleep¹⁷

the shadow
of each leaf

a dark fleck
on the white-washed wall¹⁸

Both *Cloud Blunt Moon* and *Water* are actually sequences of love poems. Along with the more objective haiku-like examples which I have highlighted, there are a number of other poems which are more personal, intimate and erotic. But again, Chris Mulhern's expansion into this

¹⁵ Chris Mulhern, *Cloud Blunt Moon*, p.36

¹⁶ Chris Mulhern, *Water*, p.15

¹⁷ Chris Mulhern, *Cloud Blunt Moon*, p.34

¹⁸ Chris Mulhern, *Water*, p.57

territory is accomplished effortlessly, without strain. However we define these short poems, they are grounded in the senses, as haiku should be:

entering ...

your eyes
close
around me¹⁹

snuggling against your back

in my hand
the plump, softness
of your breast²⁰

Even when he enters the realm of the symbolic, there is no sense of a wrench. These final examples go beyond the limits of haiku, linking the sequences to the unifying metaphors of, respectively, moon and water. But, being surrounded by the vivid detail of concrete images, they are given an impact which we can touch and sense, which, without the haiku context, they would lack:

her tides
no man
can understand²¹

water:
your seeking for dryness, for thirst
for all that is arid in me²²

Here we clearly have a poet adapting the method of haiku, making it serve the purposes of his personal communication, not afraid to transcend its limitations when the need arises. If an individual poet can thus learn from haiku and use it, without being bound by it, there is no reason why this option cannot be equally available to the wider poetic community. There may, of course, be poets (like myself) who prefer to specialise in haiku and its related forms, but there is no justification for our preferences being used to limit the possibilities for others. Whatever the wider poetic world makes of haiku, it is necessary for the haiku community to

¹⁹ Chris Mulhern, *Cloud Blunt Moon*, p.29

²⁰ Chris Mulhern, *Water*, p.56

²¹ Chris Mulhern, *Cloud Blunt Moon*, p.48

²² Chris Mulhern, *Water*, p.83

be open to poetry and susceptible to its influence. It need not mean abandoning the unique strengths of haiku.

10.6 The haiku / poetry interface (2)

The publication of the Scottish haiku anthology, *Atoms of Delight* (Edinburgh: pocketbooks, 2000), edited by Alec Finlay, has provided a fascinating opportunity to see haiku set within the wider context of the short poem. Over one-third of the book is devoted to haiku and senryu. The quality of this material is very variable, spanning such extremes as these two:

the hovering kite
snaps back
the wind

(Gerry Loose)²³

Dawn: in the garden
The wakening birds compile a
Palimpsest of song

(R.L.Cook)²⁴

Loose's haiku is vigorous and admirably economical. Cook's poem, however, fails to meet my standards for the form: 'Palimpsest' is crudely metaphorical and lacks any concrete application, and 'compile' is stridently anthropomorphic when used of 'wakening birds.'

In addition to the haiku section, however, a further eighty pages are devoted to other short poetic forms, some of which are akin to haiku while others have only brevity in common. These other categories are: Concrete Haiku; Three Line Poems; Epigrams & Epitaphs; Proverbs; Spaces; Two Line Poems; One Line Poems & Monostichs; One Word Poems. I

²³ Alec Finlay (ed.), *Atoms of Delight: an anthology of Scottish haiku and short poems* (Edinburgh: pocketbooks, 2000), p.49

²⁴ Ibid.

will select a few examples from these sections and examine their closeness to, or distance from, haiku.²⁵

Prozac

So bright and buoyant –
hard orange plastic buoy
bobbing on a flat calm sea.

(Andrew Greig)²⁶

The young woman looks left, then right

before picking her neighbour's flowers

(Larry Butler)²⁷

'Prozac' is a Three Line Poem. As a vivid description of a seascape it closely resembles a haiku, although the abundance of adjectives, particularly the tautological 'buoyant', is excessive from a haiku perspective. What really marks it as a poem, rather than a haiku, is the enigmatic title which invites a metaphorical reading rather than a straightforward appreciation of the literal scene. Larry Butler's poem is one of the Spaces. The form of Spaces is two lines, with a gap between the lines, presumably to encourage a pregnant pause, with the conclusion as a punchline. This particular example meets every test of a haiku (or, more accurately, senryu). It is concrete action, in the present tense, precisely conveyed in the minimum necessary detail. The unconventional layout would be no barrier to including it in the broad category of haiku. Other examples of Spaces in the anthology are much more abstract in content, so it is clearly optional whether the form is put to haiku-like use.

coming down to the water's edge
remembering an old tune

(Thomas A.Clark)²⁸

²⁵ I will ignore Concrete Haiku because the examples given are few and offer nothing to add to the sections on this subject earlier in this thesis (see 4.3.1 and 4.4.2). Epigrams, Epitaphs and Proverbs are also too distant from haiku to merit any further interest here.

²⁶ Ibid., p.106

²⁷ Ibid., p.135

²⁸ Ibid., p.149

This is a Two Line Poem. In content, it meets every test of a haiku. The correspondence between the two halves suggests, without stating, some emotional force, thus operating exactly as a haiku should. Where it differs from a typical haiku is in the form of expression. The parallel between 'coming down' and 'remembering' is clearly a desired feature of the poem but such repetition would be thought excessive in a haiku. A re-write of the poem as a haiku might read: *at the water's edge / remembering / an old tune*. I find this arrangement appealing, although the criticism is hardly appropriate since the poem was not intended as a haiku.

A One Line Poem for a Postie

On the uneven road the bobbing red sail of the postvan

(Ian Hamilton Finlay)²⁹

This is an example, as it states, of a One Line Poem. The other examples in the anthology vary between concrete moments and the abstract and epigrammatic. There are three features of this poem which distinguish it from a haiku: the title, which seems superfluous; the slight flippancy suggested by 'Postie', which is appealing in its way; and the metaphor of the 'sail' which I find hard to criticise as it is so clearly evocative. The complete sentence form also goes against the haiku grain: a simple remedy would be to remove 'On the' from the beginning. Despite these points of divergence, the snapshot effect is distinctly haiku-like.

The Crucified Gentleman
scarecrow

(George Mackay Brown)³⁰

mist
mint

(Thomas A.Clark)³¹

²⁹ Ibid., p.154

³⁰ Ibid., p.167

³¹ Ibid., p.174

George Mackay Brown's 'scarecrow' is a One Word Poem, the form apparently allowing for a title of any length. Although the scarecrow itself, as a concrete noun, is a proto-haiku, the title, as an inductive parallel, bears no resemblance to any feature of a haiku: in a haiku its place would be taken by another concrete image drawn from the same moment of experience as the scarecrow. Clark's two-word parallel is one of four such poems grouped under the title, Dicotyledons. Although the interest is as much in the form of the two words as in their significant content, there is a distinct relish in the evocative quality of the juxtaposition: an atmosphere has been conjured, and the poem would not look out of place in the company of haiku.

The significant observation to be made on the basis of these examples from *Atoms of Delight* is that the boundary between haiku and other short forms is indistinct and mutable. While haiku retains its own characteristic emphasis, there is nothing to prevent poets writing in other forms from converging on haiku qualities, whether by accident or design. It may be more valuable to see haiku as a mode of reading rather than a mode of writing, a way of relishing the impact of words on the sensory imagination. As such, questions of definition diminish in significance; we can judge a poem on its intrinsic merits. Haiku is not so much a category of poetic object as a resource available for our appreciation, as readers, and our expression, as writers.

10.7. Haiku Events

Haiku can also be considered in its social context, under the heading of 'haiku events.' During its first five years, the British Haiku Society benefited from the energy of Stephen Gill, who organised a series of memorable events, on both a local scale (in the London area)

and a national scale. Since Stephen Gill's emigration to Japan in 1995, the task of British Haiku Society Events co-ordinator has been taken over by Fred Schofield and the level of activity and frequency of meetings has continued.

Haiku events can be divided into two broad types: local and national. National events include the BHS AGM, national conference and 'haiku hike.' The AGM, held in November at Daiwa Japan House in London, usually includes one or more papers with discussion, and a workshop, in addition to the business of the meeting. It attracts 25-30 participants. In recent years, papers have been given by Geoff Daniel, David Platt and myself, and workshops have been led by Annie Bachini.

The BHS national conference, held every two years, usually in April, features a varied programme of papers, workshops, walks and public readings. Venues have included Durham (1992), London (1996), Ludlow (1998) and Bristol (2000). Participants usually number 30-40. Guests from the USA (Lee Gurga, 1998), Germany (Rudolf Thiem and Klaus-Dieter Wirth, 1996) and France (Daniel Richard, 1992) have attended.

The annual 'haiku hike' began as the inspiration of Stephen Gill, with a five-day walk along the Offa's Dyke path from Chepstow to Knighton in October / November 1994, to commemorate the tercentenary of the death of Bashō. A haibun account of the walk, 'In the Autumn Wind,' can be found in *Rediscovering Bashō*. It has been discussed in the previous chapter. Following the success of this adventure, the hike became an annual event, and subsequent walks have taken place in Pembrokeshire, the Yorkshire Dales, the North York Moors, the north Norfolk coast and, in 2000, along the Ridgeway. Organisers have included Matt Morden and Fred Schofield (both of whom have subsequently produced haibun

accounts of the walks) and participants have numbered between 4 and 15. The 1999 walk in Norfolk included three foreign guests: Cyril Childs (New Zealand), Marshall Hryciuk (Canada) and Karen Sohne (USA). This walk also produced what is believed to be the first-ever 100-verse renga written in the UK, 'Wind-blown Sand.' Following the example of the traveller Bashō, the participating poets hope that long-distance walking will stimulate a state of mind conducive to haiku. Any poems written while hiking are usually shared with the party during lunch, beer or dinner breaks.

Other one-off national events have included the SOAS³² symposium in 1994, the papers of which are collected together in *Rediscovering Bashō* (speakers included Nobuyuki Yuasa from Japan and George Swede from Canada).

Local events are generally one of three kinds, either workshops, 'ginko' or renga parties. The format for haiku workshops varies. One idea which has been tried is based on a system used for Japanese haiku meetings (*kukai*). This requires each participant to submit three or four haiku in advance. The haiku are collected together, mixed, typed without names attached, and then circulated to the group. Each participant then chooses their favourite(s) among the anonymous poems and says something about why their chosen poems appeal. A variant on this system has been developed by Fred Schofield and is now used frequently by the Yorkshire-Lancashire BHS group which I attend. Each participant chooses two poems, one of their own and one which they admire by somebody else. These are then submitted, again anonymously, to a scribe for display, and the group looks at each poem in turn, discussing its merits. This system has also been tried using poems which we *don't* like, giving rise to possibly even more lively discussion.

³² School of Oriental and African Studies, London University

A *ginko* is a 'compositional stroll,' an open-air walk in a park or some other scenic area thought likely to inspire haiku. The walk should not be too strenuous, allowing plenty of time for pausing and reflection, notebook in hand. Any haiku written on the day are shared at the end of the session. Sometimes these poems are compiled together into a commemorative sequence (see *Rediscovering Bashō*, pp.107-9, for an example).

For an account of renga parties, see Chapter Eight, 'On Renga.'

While some of the activities described above could equally well utilise any kind of poetry, there are aspects of haiku which render it uniquely suitable for social interaction. Haiku are portable: a single notebook can carry numerous examples. In writing, haiku often emerge fully-formed, or nearly so, and are therefore able to be shared shortly after composition. Haiku are accessible: although some haiku undoubtedly improve after study and reflection, appreciation of many haiku can be instantaneous. Also, haiku written on a *ginko*, for example, describe, and appeal to, shared experience. Haiku first evolved in a social context – the *hokku* of *renga* was both greeting and compliment – and through hundreds of years of subsequent development (uprooting from *renga* in the nineteenth century, globalisation in the twentieth century) the social value of haiku has been retained.

10.8 Haiku web sites

Two more spheres of haiku activity remain to be mentioned: contests, and the internet. Haiku has been claimed to be the commonest form of poetry on the internet. It is perhaps more conveniently suited to screen display than longer forms, and haiku sites abound. Every British haiku magazine, with the exception of *Time Haiku*, has its own web site, and George

Marsh has created a site that teaches the art of writing haiku. As with all other forms of internet use, haiku on the web looks set for further, possibly exponential, expansion during the next decade. At present such sites are of interest only to a minority – an increasingly large minority! – of readers and writers. In this retrospective account of the decade of the 1990s I feel it is appropriate simply to acknowledge, rather than discuss, internet developments: the story belongs to the future rather than the past. Over the decade to come, this form of haiku activity seems certain to grow in relevance.

10.9 Haiku contests

Regular haiku contests in the UK include the British Haiku Society's annual James Hackett Award (which, because of the preferences of its judge, James Hackett, tends to favour haiku which approximate to the 5-7-5 form) and *still's* bi-annual The Haiku Award. My own magazine has recently instituted the Haiku Presence Award, but whether this becomes an annual event remains to be seen. One-off contests, over the past ten years, with significant prize funds, include the Welsh International Haiku Contest of 1991 (won by David Cobb, with Dee Evetts and Jackie Hardy as runners-up) and the *poetry postcard quarterly* UK Haiku Championship of 1996 (won by myself, with ai li and Chris Mulhern as runners-up). As might be expected, some haiku poets are competition enthusiasts, entering contests at every opportunity, while others of a less competitive nature ignore their existence. The standards of most of these awards are encouragingly high, minimising the inevitable influence of subjective preference, but there does seem to be something fundamentally unsatisfactory about any such contest, reducing haiku to the level of a sport rather than an art. One interesting variant on the contest theme is the Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar Competition, which selects twelve monthly winners (with cash prizes) and displays these, together with

runners-up, on a desk calendar, with poems placed in their appropriate season. Mention should also be made here of the British Haiku Society's recently instituted Sasakawa Prize, which carries the substantial reward of £2,500 in the form of a return visit to Japan. This prize is awarded for a substantial contribution to the understanding, or appreciation, of haiku. The winner in the inaugural year was David Platt, for his development of a computer program to assist the taxonomic classification of haiku.

10.10 The future of haiku (1)

How might haiku transform in the twenty-first century? In 2000, a burst of media activity was initiated, apparently as a result of publicity associated with the World Haiku Festival event held in London and Oxford in August of that year. There were articles in national newspapers, a haiku week on Radio 3 and a haiku contest in *The Times*. Also, haiku discussion on the internet has increased at a rapid pace, making many converts to the form. Such a level of activity brings with it unpredictability, as new voices seek out new directions without deference to the haiku establishment (if the British Haiku Society can be caricatured thus!). *The Acorn Book of Contemporary Haiku*, published in 2000, seems to point to closer co-operation with the network of 'real' poets and includes authors such as Dannie Abse, Alan Brownjohn, Peter Dent, Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Peter Redgrove. Their selected poems are, in one way or another, haiku-influenced, despite not being classifiable as haiku from a purist perspective. Does it matter if, as a result of such dialogue, the boundaries of the form dissolve? In this thesis, I have attempted to present a coherent view of haiku, as a counter to such trends, but too great an emphasis on coherence can lead to narrowness, timidity and repetition. It is necessary to disillusion the uninformed opinion that a haiku is

merely any arrangement in 5-7-5 syllables and point to the value of presence and a sense of the moment. But if we hold to these values, we need not be inhibited by form at all. It is as the poetry of presence that haiku has a future; its form can shrink to a word or two, or flow well beyond the confines of three lines, as my discussion of Chris Mulhern's work has shown. Contrivances in seventeen syllables are beside the point, though whether the haiku world is robust enough to withstand the influence of such misconceptions remains to be seen.

Whereas haiku is by now well-known in the West, the terms senryu, tanka, haibun and renga are less widely current. What of the future for these related forms? Opinions vary on the necessity for preserving senryu as a separate category. William J. Higginson has promoted the distinction (for example, in *Haiku World*) whereas Hiroaki Sato has argued for its abolition. Sato's approach lacks subtlety, while Higginson's tends towards the pedantic. At present, we can only observe how things develop. Tanka, meanwhile, is still struggling for recognition as an independent genre in English. Iron Press plans the publication of an anthology, to be edited by Brian Tasker, which may do much to add impetus to the creation of a tanka identity. Whether the magazine *Tangled Hair* becomes firmly established may also have a bearing on the outcome of this process, in Britain at least. The future for haibun may be more promising. The prose half of the formula has familiar Western antecedents and adapts readily to Western idioms, although the poetic half – the haiku – may perhaps strike the non-specialist reader as affected and in need of some justification. Renga will continue to thrive as a sport among the initiated but its chances of reaching out to a wider audience would, at first sight, seem to be slim. However, Fred Schofield and I organised a series of public renga at various venues in the north of England between September 2000 and March 2001, and the

success of this project suggests that the form could have a wider appeal than might be anticipated.

10.11 The future of haiku (2)

I have noted that the pace of change in the haiku world is rapid. In Chapter Six (Section 6.1) I selected nine haiku poets for close attention and, as a retrospective assessment of the 1990s, I think these selections are fully valid. But, as I write now in early 2001, only a year or so into a new decade, it seems that other names are emerging and claiming attention. So, it may be well to bring this account to a close by looking forward and selecting nine poets who have potential to become leaders in the field in the next ten years.

In early 2001, the Haiku Society of America journal, *Frogpond*, produced an international issue, with representation from haiku communities across the globe. Of the ten poets chosen from England, Jackie Hardy, Fred Schofield and Brian Tasker have been discussed in some detail in this thesis. The remaining seven poets have all come to prominence within the last three or four years, and they immediately suggest themselves as 'names to watch'. They are: Keith J. Coleman, John Crook, Claire Bugler Hewitt, Matthew Paul, Stuart Quine, David Rollins and Alison Williams. To complete a list of nine, I would add the Welsh poet, Matt Morden, whose *A Dark Afternoon* (Liverpool: Snapshot Press, 2000) was a strikingly successful first collection, and the Snapshot Press publisher, John Barlow, who shows a keen sensitivity as both a writer and editor.

At this stage, I think it is sufficient to appreciate the haiku without further analysis. So I present this short selection of the work of these nine poets with no comment other than to suggest that if anyone comes to write a similar account in ten years' time, they might take this as a starting-point. Is this a guide to the future of haiku?

summer morning
the riverbed stones warm
beneath my feet

(John Barlow)³³

spring darkness:
in a world that drips & trickles,
scent of the conifer grove

(Keith J. Coleman)³⁴

mid-autumn
the fridge magnet
slides to the floor

(John Crook)³⁵

thunder at twilight
the rusty tin roof
begins to brighten

(Claire Bugler Hewitt)³⁶

first day of term
the students compare
pierced navels

(Matt Morden)³⁷

equinox
a family of refugees
feeding the ducks

(Matthew Paul)³⁸

wind-blown rain slotting another stone into the cairn

(Stuart Quine)³⁹

³³ unpublished, due in *Presence* #14

³⁴ *Presence* #11 (March 2000), p.16

³⁵ *Frogpond* XXIV: 1 (2001), p.20

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Matt Morden, *A Dark Afternoon* (Liverpool: Snapshot Press, 2000), p.23

³⁸ *Frogpond* XXIV: 1 (2001), p.20

³⁹ Ibid., p.21

harvest moon
the cat shapes itself
in the empty pot

(David Rollins)⁴⁰

this summer dusk
it doesn't matter, not knowing
the names of things

(David Rollins)⁴¹

storm clouds -
the deep red of the rose
in his tattoo

(Alison Williams)⁴²

long evening -
a cloud's ragged edge
becomes rain

(Alison Williams)⁴³

10.12 In Conclusion ...

Donald Keene identifies the deceptive simplicity of the Japanese tanka and haiku, thus:

As may well be imagined, it is no great problem to compose a verse in only 31 or 17 syllables, without rhyme or metre, but it must be added that it is as difficult in Japanese as in any other language to write anything of value.⁴⁴

If we are to accept, as I have suggested we should, that the future of English haiku is as a free verse form, rather than a strict seventeen syllable arrangement, the complexity of the task of composition would appear to be reduced still further. Even if we stiffen the challenge by requiring the presentation of a single moment of actual experience, in the present tense, it does not appear particularly demanding. But the first thing we should note when assessing this demand is that it is the very simplicity of the exercise that causes aspiring haiku poets to stumble. Stripping out imaginative excesses and rhetorical flourishes is an ascetic practice which appears, for many, to go against the grain. The Western poetic palate

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *The Haiku Calendar 2001* (Liverpool: Snapshot Press, 2000), quoted in review, *Presence* #13 (January 2001), p.41

⁴² *Presence* #13 (January 2001), p.21

⁴³ *Presence* #12 (August 2000), p.8

tends to crave exotic flavours whereas haiku is as understated as a bowl of boiled white rice. What succeeds in haiku, what startles, is honesty rather than innovation. As in Cor van den Heuvel's

hot night
turning the pillow
to the cool side⁴⁵

what moves us is the unifying power of shared experience, presented so as to be immediately accessible. It is this quality of naked awareness which is the value, and the difficulty, of the art. I admit that both as a magazine editor and as a practising poet I do find it necessary to seek out novelty in haiku. Without new images and new angles the art will stagnate, but the novelty that succeeds best is that which expresses what we knew but did not (until this poem) know that we knew. I trust that I have done enough, in my choice of examples, my commentaries and my own creative work, to show clearly the value that is worth cherishing in this lightest and most evanescent of forms. Beyond that aim I do not wish, or need, to go. I prefer to return to the enduring simplicity of haiku, to end on that note, and relish it:

river in the hills
the graduate
learning to skim stones

⁴⁴ Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers*, p.26

⁴⁵ Cor van den Heuvel (ed.), *The Haiku Anthology: Haiku and Senryu in English*, 2nd edn., p. 247

Appendix: Haiku with artwork

This appendix contains examples of haiku with artwork taken from two haiku magazines, *Presence* and *Mirrors*. These examples are intended to illuminate the discussions contained in Section 5.3.4, “The place and value of artwork” (in *Presence*) and Section 10.2, “Western haiku; western art.”

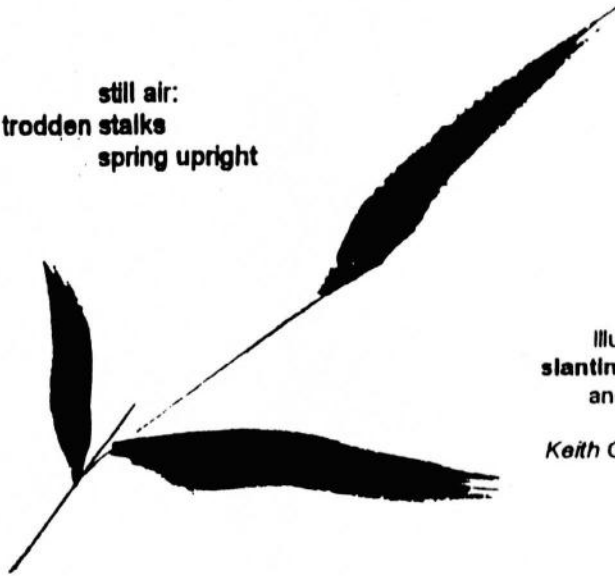
The six examples presented are as follows:

- (1) ‘still air’ Poem and illustration: Keith J.Coleman, *Presence* #5, p.7
- (2) ‘lampshade fly preens’ Poem and illustration: Keith J.Coleman, *Presence* #4, p.19
- (3) ‘long-haired old cat’ Poem and illustration: Helen Robinson, *Presence* #6, p.22
- (4) ‘willow branches bend’ Poem: Martin Lucas; Illustration: David Lucas, *Mirrors* 1996
- (5) ‘sunlit bamboo’ and ‘cutting across’ Poems: Martin Lucas; Illustration: Noriko Kajihara, *Mirrors* 1997
- (6) ‘gentle light’ Poem and illustration: Ion Codrescu, *Mirrors* 1997

still air:
trodden stalks
spring upright

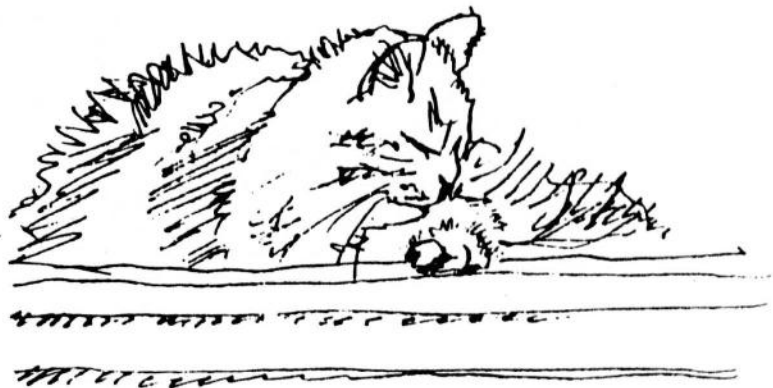
Illustration,
slanting grass
and Poem:

Keith Coleman



lampshade fly preens
his antenna - through the autumn evening
dust motes fall

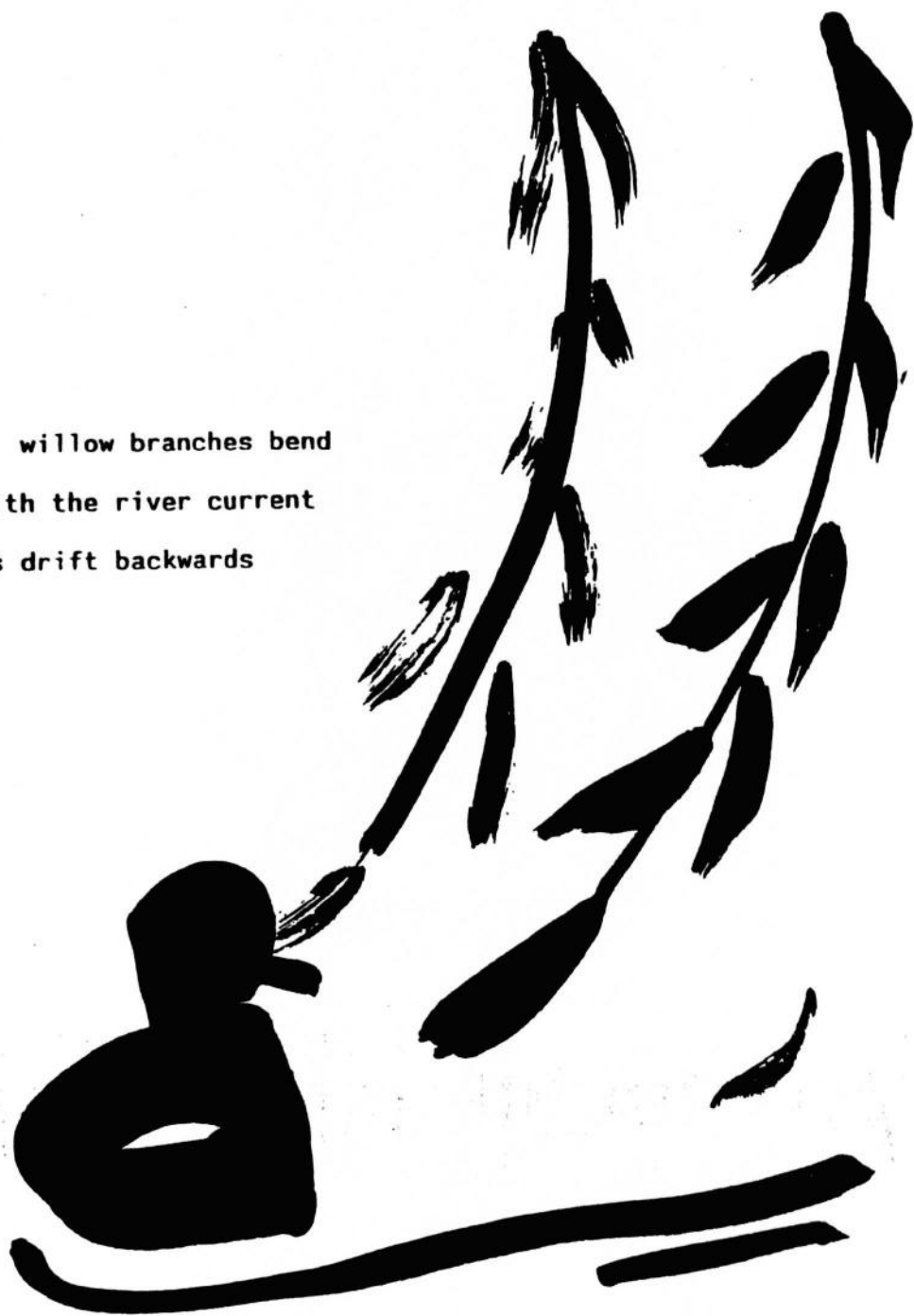
Illustration, fly & Poem: *Keith Coleman*



long-haired old cat
on the windowsill:
early morning shade

Poem + Illustration: *Helen Robinson*

willow branches bend
with the river current
ducks drift backwards



Poem: Martin Lucas

Artwork: David Lucas

sunlit bamboo;
steam from the kettle
drifts ...

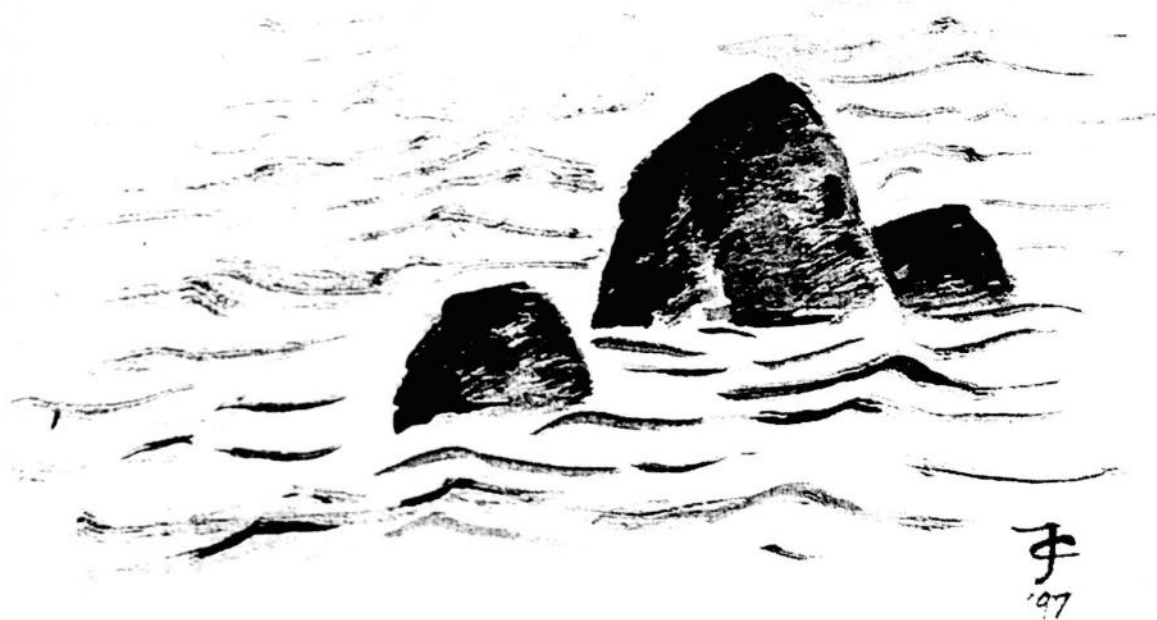


cutting across
my winding tale:

snake

Poems: Martin Lucas
Artwork: Noriko Kajihara

gentle light --
watching the sea
only the sea



♫
'97

haiku and sumi-e by Ion Codrescu

A note on pronunciation

Japanese vowels are pronounced as follows:

a is between 'cat' and 'cart'.

e is between 'set' and 'say'.

i is between 'sit' and 'see'.

o is between 'cot' and 'coat'.

u is as in 'soup', but shorter.

Long vowels are formed by combining short vowels, including as follows:

ai as in 'sigh' but short.

ao as in 'cow'.

ei approximately as in 'say'.

A macron indicates a doubled vowel, i.e. the short vowel is lengthened.

Consonants are pronounced approximately as in English. (**f**, **g** and **r** can differ noticeably, but an English pronunciation will be understood.) Note that:

ch is always as in 'church'.

g is hard, as in the first **g** in 'garage', not the second.

y is always as in 'yellow'. It maintains this value even in combination with a consonant, such as in 'Kyoto', which is not kee-oto or kai-oto.

Stress should be as even as possible, e.g. avoid the English tendency to emphasise the third syllable in four-syllable words. Don't say HiroSHEEma or NagaSAAki.

Glossary

[page numbers refer to fuller definitions or primary references]

- Ageku.** The final stanza of a renga. [p.275]
Aware, also **mono no aware.** A poetic mood with connotations of pathos or melancholy. [pp.104-5, p.280]
Chōka. A long poem on a 5-7 syllabic pattern, ending with an extra 7-syllable line. [p.8]
Daisan. The third stanza of a renga. [p.275]
Ginko. A 'compositional stroll', i.e. a walk which inspires haiku. [p.340]
Ha. The central phase of a renga. [p.275]
Haibun. A prose work which incorporates haiku. [p.3, also Ch.9]
Haiga. Artwork incorporating haiku. [p.4, also pp.323-4]
Haikai. Originally a literary classification denoting 'light' or 'unconventional' work, subsequently both shorthand for *haikai no renga* and a family term for haiku-related literature. [pp.3-4]
Haikai (no) renga. A 'light' or 'unconventional' variant of renga. [pp.3-4, also Ch.8]
Haiku. A poem in 5-7-5 syllables, including a season-word. [p.2]
Hoi, also **hon'i.** The conventional associations or connotations of poetic imagery, particularly season-words. [p.144, p.280]
Hokku. The opening stanza of a renga. [p.3]
Jo. The opening phase of a renga. [p.275]
Kaori. Literally, 'scent'. Used to denote the method of impressionistic linking in renga. [p.83]
Karumi. The poetic value of 'lightness' or non-attachment. [p.19, p.23]
Kigo. A 'season-word'. [p.4]
Kireji. A 'cutting word' used to denote a pause or emphasis within a haiku. [p.4]
Koan. A Zen 'riddle' used as a topic to focus meditation. [p.50]
Kokoro-zuke. Renga linking based on associations of feeling or imagination, literally 'heart-linking'. [p.274]
Kotoba-zuke. Renga linking based on word association. [p.274]
Kukai. A poetry meeting, or workshop on the Japanese format. [p.339]
Kyū. The final phase of a renga. [p.275]
Maeku. In a renga, the 'previous verse', i.e. the stanza with which a connection is made. [p.278]
Makoto. Sincerity or truthfulness in poetry. [p.16]
Mujō. Impermanence, or its evocation in poetry. [p.33]
Mushin. A term applied to (early) renga to denote light-heartedness. [p.273]
Nikki. A diary or journal. [p.307]
Renga. Linked verse, particularly the more 'serious' variant. [pp.3-4, also Ch.8]
Renku. Haikai no renga, or linked verse of the modern period. [pp.3-4]
Sabi. A poetic mood with connotations of loneliness. [p.104]
Saijiki. An index of season-words or seasonally arranged almanac. [p.80]
Sedōka. A poem in 5-7-7-5-7-7 syllables. [p.8]
Senryū. A poem in 5-7-5 syllables, with a human / social reference rather than a season-word. [p.3]
Shasei. The poetic method of 'sketching from life', i.e. realism. [p.28]
Sono-mama. 'Suchness' or the thing-as-it-is. [p.101]
Sumi-e. Brushed ink drawing. [p.139]
Tanka. A poem in 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. [p.4]
Tan-renga. A two-part linked poem of tanka length. [p.272]
Tsukeku. In a renga, the 'following verse', i.e. the stanza which has been connected. [p.278]
Ushin. A term applied to renga to denote seriousness or literary decorum. [p.273]
Uta-makura. Literally, a 'poetic pillow', i.e. a place name famous in Japanese poetry. [p.11]
Uta-monogatari. Literally, a 'poem tale', i.e. a prose account of the origins of a tanka. [p.307]
Wabi. A poetic mood with connotations of humble or understated beauty. [p.104]
Waka. Originally denoting Japanese verse, as opposed to Chinese, in practice usually meaning tanka. [p.4]
Wakiku. The second stanza of a renga. [p.275]
Yojō. Literally, 'surplus meaning' i.e. poetry which goes beyond the superficial. [p.23]
Yūgen. A poetic mood with connotations of mystery or depth. [p.105]

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