Renga
4×2

Four 36-move Poetry Games

Colin Blundell
and
Dick Pettit

With DIY Instructions

Price £3.50

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by
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Hub Editions

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What is Renga?

Renga is a Japanese invention. Two or more players – over a dozen becomes unmanageable – take turns to make verses which are linked to each other by narrative, theme or feeling. The connection is often so close that each two together make a little poem. On the other hand, there should be no such link between verses one and three, though the same topic may continue. In Japanese the first verse is usually made of three phrases of 5 + 7 + 5 syllables, and the second of 7 + 7, which are written vertically with no breaks. English language magazines usually set the verses out as in this book. In our four renga, CB uses the syllable counts, his regular style in haiku, while DP uses free-form based on stress, roughly equivalent in weight and feeling.

Renga may be of any length, but there are two classical forms, the 100 verse medieval *hyakuin* of courtly circles, and the 36 verse *kazen* which became popular in the expanding towns after about 1600. All that have survived of the first are serious, refined, and intense, though there were other kinds; the later *haikai no renga* (light-hearted linked verse) can be vulgar and farcical, but the well-known renga by *Matsuo Bashō* (1644-94) and associates aim for a balance of fun and refinement.

Nevertheless there are many similarities between the two. The verse form is the same, and they have similar structures: a 'quiet' 6-8 verse opening, a main section which can go where it will, and a final 6-8 verse coda which can be 'fast' or diminishing. There were expected but movable positions for the Autumn moon and Spring flowers (plum or cherry blossoms), and all the seasons appear for a few verses each time. Of the set topics of the medieval renga, only Love is a regular in the kazen, but the other medieval categories such as Travel, Laments and Buddhism appear there in traditional or altered forms, as do many of the topics listed in modern *saijiki* (handbooks of poetic topics for haiku writers).

Introduction to 4 X 2

The medieval renga, like the contemporary *No* plays, is slow-moving until the final section. The model for our four renga is the 36-verse *haikai no renga*, or light-hearted linked verse of the 17th century. This had flexible rules: the first and last 6-8 verses were respectively 'slow' and 'fast' sections, though neither always. The moon appeared at 5th, 14th, and 29th, and blossoms, usually cherry, at 17th and 35th: all these were markers, and places of emphasis, or repose. All except the 35th were movable, but a certain amount of fun could be had from observing fixed places (Is that the moon I see?). The renga started in one season: the moon was usually the Autumn moon, the blossoms, Spring; and a partly fixed progression was made around them. Winter and Summer had 1 or 2 verses, Spring & Autumn, 3; with the last two most likely to recur. Matters of love, not always sad in the style of the old renga, came in no more than twice. Otherwise the renga was free to go where it liked.

Present-day English language writers pick and choose which of the renga traditions to follow. The only constant is the alternation of writers, with some kind of link. This may be because the full set of rules is too Japanese, or too difficult—though renga have always been experimental to some extent. Our four have loose structures, but are conservative in relation to many appearing in, for example, the Californian magazine *Lynx*, which is the leading publisher of renga.

All three current types of traditional Japanese poetry, *tanka, renga* and *haiku* derive from *waka*, a verse form which has been current for over 1200 years and still thrives. The modern tanka is much the same as waka. The first two verses of a renga usually make a tanka, as do those of *Repairing the Fence* and *Black Cloud*:

Repairing the fence—
four smart blows with a hammer
on galvanised nails.
My good neighbour waits
until they're in to reply.

No knowing,
from the way the wind blows,
if the black cloud's coming.
Walk from here to the lighthouse—
from the lighthouse back again.

Each presents a little situation: in the first, the hammer-wielder is working off energy, or gaining time; in the second, someone anxious about the weather is perhaps waiting for a seafarer. These situations are possible in the opening three lines, but fixed by the following two.

Renga moves in a way which seems to make logical development impossible. Each verse links with the one before in whatever way it likes, making either a single picture or two parallel ones: the link may bring out the deepest meaning of the first, or pick up on an unimportant detail; it may keep close in tone or situation, or move to a distant scene. Modern English language renga often cannot play upon expectation, do the Bashō *haikai*, and so appear even more to wander. However, progressions can be seen in these sections: -

from *The Stumps*

clinical consultation—
the surgeon all for the chop

tree-lined avenue
leading to the old folly,
the sound of linnets

down the gloomy ride,
turn, and back again

from *Lawnmowers*

quick sideways glance of a child
caught fingering rose petals

our bullets
kill a dozen more—
we're being persecuted

Borges' Secret Miracle
freeze-frames the firing squad's shot

Babylon looks strange
in the flow of candle-light
—children's story-time

reckless cavaliers
plot at an inn table

The consultant's brisk and raffish tone become that of the tree-surgeon. Any folly in what the avenue leads to is unspecified; the linnets at least are cheerful and the verse gives three possible lines of continuation. Chosen is the neglected Big House grounds and an enclosed routine. The fourth verse, possibly still in the house of a noble family, connects on 'How far is it to...?' —and offers any kind of fantasy for the fifth verse, which is a scene from a children's historical romance.

smooth grass
rolls up to the redoubts
of Dybbol field

the meeting is plain sailing
until he starts playing snake

The child, innocent from the previous verse, but vulnerable and perhaps guilty, is slain by a righteous murder squad. This suggests a firing squad and Borges' story, in which God gives the man to be executed 24 hrs between the pulling of the trigger and the arrival of the bullet to complete his doubtfully great play. The next verse picks up only the topic of war, and describes the present-day site of the battle of Dybbol (1864): the last stand of the Danes in the Slesvig-Holstein war with Germany. Three verses are the limit for one topic, so the next verse leaves 'war'.

There are different degrees of allusion in renga: How far is it to Babylon? is probably familiar to most; Borges and Dybbol can be looked up by those who don't already know them; and there is a hidden allusion (familiar to haiku readers) in the Dybbol verse to a Bashō hokku about a battle-site: *All that remains / where warriors passed / summer grasses.*

The four renga in this collection are a first attempt at working/playing together. We exchanged four verses at a time, one for each renga by post, CB writing in 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, as is his wont. There is a certain amount

of getting used to each other: the ploys of one may be completely ignored by the other, and some friendly advice is covertly passed across. CB at times deliberately cross-referenced horizontally: that is, two or more of his verse 10 & 11s may relate to each other as well as to the previous verse in their own renga. DP noticed that some of his verses picked up themes from the other three. All four are 'fool's renga': i.e., they set off cheerfully not knowing where they are going, and traverse miscellaneous themes. Moon and flowers come in only when thought of, and there are no deliberate seasons. In this they are typical of what is common, in UK, USA, and elsewhere today.

Nevertheless there seem differences between the four, corresponding to the hokku. *Repairing the Fence* announces a determination to get down to work, and in what follows both players seem to throw up a succession of balls to the other to see what shot they will make in reply. *Black Cloud* suggests something ominous, and darker shades continue until the 32nd and are still offered, though refused, at the 35th (A renga normally ends on an up-beat). *The Stumps* has many explorations and new things, with some danger, mostly positive, but an ambiguous ending. *The Lawnmowers* is the most thematic, on the subject of the dead, and has the most interplay between what the players see of the character of the other.

We had a lot of fun and excitement in making these renga, as well as some distraught moments. We hope they will be of general interest, and, most of all, encourage those within and outside haiku circles to experiment. The form, as well as being a party game, has unlimited possibilities as an art, both for self-discovery, and as a way of determining truths about oneself and the world.

REPAIRING THE FENCE

REPAIRING THE FENCE

repairing the fence
four smart blows with a hammer
on galvanised nails

my good neighbour waits
until they're in to reply

a mountain detour—
they come down to the hostel
in late evening light

spaghetti bol on the table
and limitless homemade wine

telephone ringing
in the stillness of the house—
such great potential

"Come in now on the deal—
it's going over the moon!"

Sunday in the City:
people at their business
as if new-born

cycling through deserted streets
to another rendezvous

a foot-patrol
glance at the whistling
paper-boy

Berlioz' Grande Messe des Morts—
trombone & piccolo chords

they stand together,
the son's head
at father's waist

heron at the wheatfield edge
gaunt above the idling fish

a dragonfly
eases closer to
the bullrush tip

a thousand years hence watching
among stars—risky docking

strange birds
wheel and cry around
the stranded ship

a stillness of staring eyes
above the glistening rail

cold and ignoring
questions and invitations
dans le pissoir

deckchair on a summer lawn
its occupant gone missing

a pair of blackbirds
hop out on their grass
at opposite ends

echoing dance-hall frolic
eyes hurriedly passing by

sneaking behind
the backs of the watchers—
street theatre

wary audience becomes
a key part of the drama

the renga master
slides out of the circle
in the second half

with something better to do
than sit there being all-wise

underchin up
the cat wriggles its back
on the tight pile

nestling into a chinwag
with her earnest mobile phone

double glazing
frames the frosted landscape
and dull sky

Breughel over the fireplace
better than a flight of ducks

abracadabra—
the living room's revamped
as a grownup playground

crackers becoming firestorms;
thimble turning into mine

through antres vast
skirting, in perfect dress,
bottomless perdition

fathomless to man and all—
bright mystery of sunrise

a shallow pond—
the Lady's velvet form
in moon-shadow

risky to approach her thus
but oh the old memories

the apple blossom
one tree behind the house—
an epiphany

dilapidated palings
threaded with honeysuckle

❦

BLACK CLOUD

BLACK CLOUD

no knowing
from the way the wind blows
if the black cloud's coming

walk from here to the lighthouse—
from the lighthouse back again

metallic rocks:
holes and curlicues for
a day's wonder

ideas cruising through dead stars
on the celestial screen-saver

it has a planet:
seas, mountains, grass—
and a moon

tempest straight from the North Pole
bending the garden sideways

her absence noted—
the sudden death in the house
in the afternoon

Nurse Skillet's gone
to a new post in Morden

across the valley
the hill-town seems bathed in light—
this shadowy hill

the walker's dog finds
an overgrown path

pausing at the bend
just to reassess the way—
glimpsing the full moon

each an arm round each
full to bursting

meeting my son now
a very old friend indeed
with his tender years

a phone call fixes it
while the Old Man talks

this is the Way Out—
nail it to the rotting fence
& wait for evening

cobwebs on a bramble
in the overgrown pleasure-ground

burst of paper flowers
in the abandoned fire-place
carefully treated

flat embroidered cushions
line a wooden settle

in the old hallway
the shadows of ancestors
come out for sunlight

the veterans troop across
as the pub door opens

jangling of glasses
clattering of dominoes—
Aunt Edith in charge

a girl in a white dress
sits at the side and dreams

what will he be like
when he steps into my life
and fifty years hence?

sixty-four next year
as indispensible as ever

the Rhinegold flashing
in the watery sunlight—
brasswind leitmotif

whispers of Nazi treasure
in the mountain lake

she told him: never
ask about my former life:
when he did she left

carrying only a handbag
for the 6-hour walk

through empty cities
across the singing deserts
adjusting her stride

a long pleated skirt
dark, with a hint of tartan

the intersection—
wondering which way to go;
where are the natives?

an hour till sundown
and then we're here for the night

anticipation
of the glories of the flesh
moonlit hide & seek

a Rubens in shadow
along the long gallery

opening this door
and then the other—surprise
following surprise

Bobo grinning on the steps
back just before the rain

❦

THE STUMPS

THE STUMPS

cut back
to bareness the stumps show
buds of leaves

he abandons old thinking
clearing out space for tomorrow

Cash for life!
Books and clothes all packed
to go back to Oxfam

after the dust has settled
comes the new dispensation

not knowing
how to walk
in the new white rooms

clinical consultation—
the surgeon all for the chop

tree-lined avenue
leading to the old folly;
the sound of linnets

down the gloomy ride,
turn, and back again

Babylon looks strange
in the flow of candle-light
—children's story-time

reckless cavaliers
plot at an inn table

on the swaying bridge
arrested movement of troops
on a night foray

no movement in the shadows
as the moon comes clear again

exploring the house
at midnight—one room's white light
another's blackness

bright eyes at the work-top
as she fixes the picture

a clear summer day—
down the wheatfield a column
of assorted clowns

the pub's garden full
of thirsty processioners

the sky's distant blue—
writing to a long-lost love
enclosing a rose

thick clothing thwarts an embrace
as the winter sun levels

rolling downhill now
in a great bundle of furs
hopelessly laughing

now an imp, now a queen—
the daughter of quiet parents

that night before birth
the peace of the house waiting—
snow-covered garden

their week-old child
travels on its own passport

a risky descent
to the narrow cliff runway—
passengers applaud

down the chute holding
stiff old limbs from a tangle

digging the garden—
one day older than father
when he upped and died

flourishing rows of veg
in front of the sweet peas

enter the French horn
then the same tune on the flute—
Brahms' First Symphony

"They are monuments of Thought
in a free-er medium"

Plato to Sartre
and in between all manner
of strange flourishing

from the church-tower's top
the village lies at peace

azure then grey clouds—
at the horizon a storm
over wrinkled trees

in the high pub's car park
a land-rover rocks on its springs

just came for a drink
and now look at her bouncing
with sheer ecstasy

the bitch treads a circle
before she flumps on the floor

high up on the plain—
man & horse weaving the stones
in the setting sun

a last tripper lingers
below the peat-stained falls

❦

LAWNMOWERS

LAWNMOWERS

hum of lawnmowers
between rows of gravestones
quickening the dead

no comment from beneath
they've heard it all before

in the theatre
before the curtain rises
on a well-known play

the famous actor plays
a perfect dream of himself

pretending to rage
Bogart in 'Maltese Falcon'
sees his hand tremble

yet another ghastly
neurological complaint

no response
to the usual stimuli—
not even the moon

new shelves in the library—
now where the hell is that book?

at last
I hold in my hands
the final secret

keeping myself to myself
no hole in my consciousness

a boy P.I.
stalks his suited prey
through lunchtime shopping

in the station multitudes
keeping my eye on your hand

a quick flick
and again we're clambering
the criss-cross ruins

searching for early settlers
& the things they left behind

why such whorls
and strange interior spaces
for an incense pot?

currently preoccupied
with all that the brain can do

not considering
the lilies of the field
scattered in grass

come down to earth with a bump
checking an ungainly limp

the director rages:
"Who's lost my wild horses?—
we'll do the quarrel"

shouting across the valley
—wondering if that will do

a murmured blessing
meant, but not meaning
to be heard

quick sideways glance of a child
caught fingering rose petals

sprays of bullets
kill a dozen more—
we're being persecuted

Borges' 'Secret Miracle'
freeze-frames the firing squad's shot

smooth grass
rolls up to the redoubts
of Dybbol field

the meeting is plain-sailing
until he starts playing snake

highly instructive—
but what does he think should be
our next move?

serendipity? better
the way of cybernetics?

spider
in a corner of the web
looks tangled up

the adventurer at last
caught by his own devices

the century
gives a sudden lurch
and leaves him behind

at the end of love-making
consider its beginning

the day she looked
as a smiling madonna
streaming with light

the moon across dark water
emotion now suspended

after three days
returning to a house
full of flowers

rising from the dead again
wondering where to go next

❦

A Theory of Renga

Renga poets once had an honoured position in Japanese society. In medieval times, special renga were placed in shrines, where they were read by monks, the oracles of the day. There was a yearly Emperor's New Year renga, started by the emperor, who may or may not have stayed for the next 99 verses, but listened to the result. The Bashō renga collections, published after the introduction of printing in Japan, were read by all classes of society. A loose analogy is with the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, which was also taken to Court, and was a barometer of public feeling and private judgement. Shakespeare and Co had a limited freedom to comment obliquely on current events which the renga poets, given Japanese codes of decorum and the strict ordering of society, would not have taken. Nevertheless, as until recently in the Communist countries, readers must have been alert: for changes of tone and mood, often lost in translation; and veiled allusions which, as Dr Johnson put it, 'now only darken the pages they once illumined'.

An art form cannot reach the standing and popularity renga once had without having evolved into something profound, wide-ranging and ingenious. Another analogy is with TV series and serials: successes set new standards for those that follow. There are regressions, new waves and changes of fashion; but each high tide leaves some good things on the beach, for the anthologist of the classic golden oldies. So with renga.

Modern renga are often disappointing. If there are no obvious rhythms or progressions, no apparent dialogue between the verses, and the verses are trite or eccentric, the reader loses interest. What are these people playing at?

Let's start at the top. The modality of a renga is set by the hokku, and the following 99 or 35 verses take up its physical or implied themes. Each

verse adds comment: by continuations, narrative or descriptive; by parallels, which may be metaphorical; and by changing the meaning of what went before. Other variables are closeness or distance of link, and weight or lightness of verse. Satire, jokes, an afflicting scene, or a serious truth may come in. And there is course-correction: if a player feels the last verse stayed too long or heavily on a topic, or veered off too sharply, he or she may tack, or put in a steadying verse.

The aim is that the renga should flow, and also make an overall impression. A successful renga needs to be read a number of times. One reading is to work out the links. Others to note the sections, and the transitions in and out of them. Also to catch the music, which is polyphonic: at any point there will be two or more movements: one perhaps positive in tone, the other negative. Finally, a reading, hopefully not the last, in which all is familiar and an overall realisation is obtained: what is the world which this production shows?

Let's look at parts of two renga. The first, "Broken Beneath Snow", 100 verses, hokku by Shinkei, with Sogi, Soetsu and eight others, written in 1468,the 2nd year of a disastrous civil war. The second "The Summer Moon" (1690), in peace and prosperity: hokku by Boncho, with Bashō and Kyorai.

Reeds broken beneath
snow across the plain's horizon—
there is no path.

Above a town
Filled with the odours of things
The summer moon

In both there is a shift of viewpoint. The broken reeds must first have been noticed close at hand. The plain's horizon lifts us a little, but this is a despairing verse. Boncho seems above the town, but no, it's the moon, and he is down among the smells. The summer moon (promoted to 1st verse) is neutral, but the town smells are, perhaps humorously, the everyday world. Which way will the next verses go?

Not a moving figure in sight
across a frozen twilight.

Bleak, but not necessarily hopeless.

As plovers cry along the
river shallows, a boat glides up
beneath the moon.

Rejects the gloom completely, though plovers are a winter bird. Now there life in the scene, unusual so early in . 100 verses. Also, a promoted moon.

Listening I feel the night wind
drifting past my pillow.

A quiet verse to balance the strong movement of the last. 'Pillow' is an invitation to Love or Travel.

Cherry blossoms—
already in flower yonder?
a wafting fragrance

The moon may be equivocal, but the (promoted) blossoms are heartening. Hope and relief are insisted on. Love & Travel, both usually sad, are rejected.

Spring comes late to the village
in the mountain's shadow.

Spring, yes, but in the gloomy village. This pulls back. How much?

"It's hot!" "It's hot!"
Murmurs are heard in the front yards

Brings activity; ignores the smell

Though the second weeding
Is not yet over, rice plants
Shoot out their ears.

Moves into the country. The crop is well on, but they're behind with the is weeding. It's still hot, and work is pressing

Ashes are brushed off a dried sardine
Just taken from the fire.

A convivial break from labour. Nice for them, but a bit grimy to the outsider. More heat from the fire

Those who live in this area
Have never seen a silver coin.
What a wretched place!

A Town-Fop in the sticks: but these 'poor' people have all they need, and the place is probably not wretched to them.

The fellow wears at his waist
An absurdly long sword.

The city-slicker's scorn provokes ridicule from the workers. He is perhaps the Braggart Soldier now.

Hazy booms the bell
on a peak where a woodman
calls out to his fellows.

Possibly the townsman eulogizing country life, but the heavy bell in thick air is real observation. Peace, industry and religion are asserted.

Will it return as well?
The cloud bank left behind.

The cloud may disperse, but a fine future isn't certain. The tremulous balance continues in the next 2 verses, before despair returns.

The courtly renga uses stereotypes. To take Martin Lucas' distinction (BS10/1) it is *convergent.* The same figures appear in all the available renga: the boat, the river calm or in flood, the old mountain village, the lone traveller, his rough lodging, and pillow or sleeves, leading to sad loves and lamentations, the wood-cutter, huntsman, temple bell, wild geese, withered grasses, dying insects, and all the varieties of doubtful weather and lonely landscapes. It has a built-in tendancy to melancholy, usually seen as meritorious. The continual allusion to tanka and aristocratic novels is also sad and plangent. The linking, often almost impossible to reproduce in translation when it depends on word-play and allusion, is prescribed if not

From the cluster of grass
A frightening creature - a frog
In the evening dusk.

The poseur gets his come-uppance The fright and menace are farcical, but could be taken up in the next verse.

The lady hunting for butterburrs
Jerks her lantern, & the light is gone

More farce: the delicacy and religious overtone of 'light is gone' link to the next verse (Chaucer's Prioress); after that come the rigours of ascetic life.

The 17 C renga is always out for new characters, vignettes, and ways of linking: in ML's sense *divergent.* However, in *SM* there is a change of feeling roundabout halfway. In the first half serious notes are few, and the incidents, mainly fun and farce, are strongly depicted. An assign-ation from *The Tale of Genji*; the. maids peeping, but when they knock down the bathroom screen, no-one is there; and the monk who may have been up to something. But after the autumn moon of v 17 come less gay scenes.. First, three worthy figures, though none without ambiguity: the monkey showman; the man who pays his taxes, if only in rice, & the public-spirited man who has used

predictable. Meaning comes from the placing and handling of the stereotypes: slight divergences from the usual are significant. At the same time there is also new observation and unusual viewpoints.

"Broken Beneath Snow" is particularly desolate, even desperate. This is mainly due to Shinkei, 15 of whose 19 verses are mainly or wholly negative. Three of the other players are biased this way, and three the other. Sogi, who is a moderating influence, usually follows Shinkei, and can't escape his tone. This situation can be interpreted in different ways: are they trying to lift him out of gloom and foreboding; or deliberately taking parts? The renga's tensions are more than the play of personality.

The last eight verses of the 100 verse renga are a special section: the *kyu*. This is alleged to move fast, though it's hard to see what 'fast' means. It's including
signalled at v 90 by the Autumn moon. Verse 93 is preceded by 10 verses of lamentation. This continues for two more, then Soetsu gives a call to wake from illusion. Shinkei replies that knowledge about Poetry (= Truth), does not bring enlightenment: things are still obscure—(though *obscure* can also mean *empty*; only from being which can poetry come).

new timber for a walkway through a pool. The sword-bearer trying to keep up with the horseman and the boy spilling water are strugglers. The shut-up house for sale, pepper pods, making sandals by the moon (promoted), and shaking out fleas maintain suspense: which way is it going? Next come the mouse-trap which catches nothing, and the lid which no longer fits the box—both emblematic. Then some gentle humour at the futility in the first two verses quoted below

There is little difference in the roles of the players; but much play in their responses—fun in doing the unexpected, or keeping up a topic when it might have lapsed.

The *kyu* in the kazen renga is normally six verses, signalled by the moon at v 29. But the moon is at v 25, so the final run may be the last ten,

the Mousetrap and the Unfitting Lid. The man who didn't stay at the monastery could be a useless dilettante but, between the lid and the OAP poet, is light and amusing. Next, the *blasé* anthology reader leads to a daunting thought: we could all end like the dazzling poetess Komachi; and then comes a picture of real grief and

Sogi's verse is beautiful, but ambiguous. Now, which way will it go? A 'murmur of spring' is followed by full reassurance, but 'in the flowers (blossoms) *alone*'. The final triumph rings hollow. Can we trust the apparent optimism? Also, there are 84 more verses not yet looked at. More than a matter of counting up the positives and negatives.

desolation. What happens?: The sadness lessens to the wife left alone for a while, becomes indifference in the bored man under the blossoms, and expires in the close, static spring(!) day. Is *Summer Moon* 'Life in all its Variety' or an illusion which cannot sustain itself? Please read again before deciding.

93 Not I alone
weep these tears—
I solace myself.

Desire takes various forms, yes,
But 'tis all one world of misery!

95 Awake and be amazed:
the six realms of illusion are
right before your eyes!

The principle of poetry remains,
despite all one's study, obscure.

97 Remotely, mysterious
across the bay, Isle of Jewels
enveloped in haze.

Spring is audible in the sound:
Soft murmur of the pine breeze

99 With the flowers alone
breathes the heart at ease
this glimmering dusk.

May it span through long years
This life at its glorious height.

29 At a hermitage
The man stays for a while
And then takes off again.

He is happy, living to an advanced age
And hearing of a new poetry anthology.

31 Various types of lovers
Who appeared in the past
Are recalled to mind.

In this fleeting world, no one can escape
The destiny of the famed Komachi.

33 Why is it
That her eyes are filled with tears
Over a bowl of porridge?

How spacious the wooden floor looks
When the master is away from home!

35 Under cherry blossoms
A man watches a louse crawling
On the palm of his hand.

Not a breeze to stir the thin haze,
The drowsiness of a spring day...

Of the two hokku which lead to these resolutions, that of *Reeds broken beneath snow* gives a despairing comment through accurate description It 'holds up the mirror to nature', and says "This is how things so disastrously are: can you see any way out?" The *Above a town* hokku sets a balance between the transcendent & the everyday, between positive and negative and between the real and the illusory. The dynamics are roughly equal: what will happen as this hokku goes through 35 rapid transformations?

The renga poets were passing messages to each other, deciding meanings by poetic logic, and thus creating networks from which their audiences could make interpretations. There are shot-silk effects—the thing may appear differently from different viewpoints.

This account, however over-schematised, has analogies with haiku, which is a hokku without its long tail of verses. Leaving aside self-preparation and attunement, haiku begins with what's perceived. It may fit into previous personal categories, or the poet may have to struggle to find the language to express it. The percept may have intrinsic interest, or maybe just the 'telling it as it is' creates this: putting it into words has extended the writer's sensibility. The haiku is then received by another, who may give or withhold understanding and assent.

In renga, the haiku moment is the previous verse, and the writer draws not on direct observation, but on memory, wit and his own past haiku. Although telling things as they are is essential, the rengista is often like an actor improvising a part; he creates not just a picture, but tone, emphasis and point of view. He realises and interprets one verse, and offers possibilities to the next.

Modern renga, in the UK & America, may not look like knowledge-nets, but patience, good people: we are still all beginners, learning to use all five fingers on the keyboard, or how to skate straight before trying curves. As

can be seen everywhere, not excluding these four, we're still learning how to link. And yet the final hearing of a renga will hardly notice the links any more. Think of a favourite music recording: you no longer listen for points of structure and technique.

Renga goes part of the way with haiku. For the rengista, as for the haikist, there will be dearth, failure, setbacks—and heartening moments: good times and bad times. However, the reward from even a good section of four or five verses are great.

Translations are from

1) Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen *Heart's Flower* (Shinkei) *(Stanford)*
2) Makoto Ueda *Matsuo Bashō (Kodansha).*

The commentaries of these authors are as good as anything on renga.

Reference

3) Martin Lucas: *Convergence and Divergence: valuing variety in haiku* (*Blithe Spirit*, Journal of the British Haiku Society 10/1 March 2000)

Other Useful Books

4) Earl Miner *Japanese Linked Poetry (Princeton)* A full study with 2 Hyakuin and 3 Haikai.
5) Hiroaki Sato *One Hundred Frogs (Weatherhill)* Examples from all periods. A book one returns to for its freedom & variety of insight
6) Bill Wyatt *Renga from 'The Monkey's Raincoat' (Hub Editions)* Vivid & idiomatic versions of four Bashō renga. There is another translation of these by Earl Miner & Hiroko Odagiri *(Princeton)*, not seen.
7) Steven D. Carter *Traditional Japanese Poetry* – An Anthology *(Stanford)* Two complete renga and many extracts.
8) William J Higginson *The Haiku Seasons (Kodansha).* Ch. 3 gives

some new translations. This and other distributed writings advocate the traditional seasonal renga.

9) Jane Reichhold *Narrow Road to Renga*. About 50 renga, mainly experimental, with helpful essays.

Websites

10) Lynx *eds Jane & Werner Reichhold.* A mainly renga journal. Now only at http:/www.ahapoetry.com — the best renga website.

11) Other prolific writers are:-

Carlos Colon – ccolon@smltnet.sml.lib.la.us
ai li – still@into.demon.co.uk
Martin Lucas – martin.lucas@talk21.com
Marlene Mountain
Francine Porad – FJPorad@aol.com
Alexis Rotella – ROTELLA@compuserve.com
Elizabeth St Jacques – esj@sympatico.ca

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