**Haiku Sangha 2016**

*“Only connect.” –* E. M. Forster

**Participants at this year’s sangha were Heather Dyer, Stuart Quine, Jane Spray, George Marsh, Jim Norton, Sean O’Connor and Jane Whittle.**

We gathered again this year at Ty’r Gawen to renew old connections and forge new ones. The loss of both Ken Jones and Bill Wyatt this year has been felt deeply. In the words of George Marsh: ‘The British haiku world lost its most prominent *alazon* last year with the death of Ken Jones, and now we have to mourn the passing of our loveliest and most humble *eiron*, Bill Wyatt’.

Years spent tying a rope  
to the wind – years spent sewing  
a net full of tears

* *Bill Wyatt*

George read his appreciation for Bill Wyatt, and described him as a man who, ‘had a remarkable way of being funny but profound at the same time, without showiness’.

With old friends and new  
in the singing of birds  
our faithful departed

* *Sean O’Connor*

It was lovely being back at Ty’r Gawen – the dewy autumnal mornings, the quiet, dark nights, and the way the house seems to embrace us while we sit in meditation. Names of those not with us were spoken often, and their presence was felt. A theme that seemed to develop over the course of the weekend was ‘connections’, or ‘the relations between things’.

Over dinner Sean O’Connor sparked a discussion about the differences between Japanese and Western culture. Might some of these differences be explained by the constant earthquakes in Japan, which seem to heighten an awareness of the impermanence of life?

a minor earthquake  
we look at each other  
the cat and I

* *Sean O’Connor*

suddenly staggered by stars  
my footing lost  
on this spinning world

* *Jane Whittle*

**SATURDAY**

**Martin Lucas on Lee Gurga**

In the first workshop, Stuart Quine read Martin Lucas’s response to Lee Gurga’s guidelines for writing haiku (*Haiku: A Poet’s Guide - http://haikupresence.org/essays/art-craft*). We debated the ways in which ten haiku selected by Stuart demonstrated these principles.

long evening –  
the cloud’s ragged edge  
becomes rain

* *Alison Williams*

This workshop initiated enthusiastic discussions about readers’ subjectivity, showing vs. telling, and to what extent the author’s intentions need to be realized for a work to be considered successful. These themes ran throughout the weekend.

**Japanese vs. Western Haiku**

After a wholesome lunch of vegetable soup, bread and cheese, the differences between Japanese and Western culture became the focus again with Sean O’Connor’s workshop on the effects of Japanese language and culture on their writing and appreciation of haiku.

Subtleties are often lost in translation as sometimes there is no comparable word available in English. Sometimes translators add words that don’t exist in the original. Sean explained that in Basho’s famous frogpond haiku, the essence of the Japanese version (which captures the poised leap of a river-frog, followed by the movement of the previously still water), is sometimes lost in English translations.

Furuike ya  
kawazu tobikomu  
mizu no oto

* *Basho*

**Perception**

This, just this – the outhouse, the rain.

* *Stuart Quine*

Heather Dyer led a couple of exercises in perception that linked creativity with mindfulness. We examined a plum to notice ‘novelty’, thereby experimenting with opening our minds to what is new rather than leaping to ‘mindless’ assumptions. Then, an exercise drawn from Daido Loori’s book *The Zen of Creativity* asked us to ‘feel’ our responses to abstract art. A discussion then followed about the ways in which we can apply intuitive feeling to our actions in daily life, thereby living in a creative, mindful way.

Half dark  
the stone Goddess  
her open lap

* Sean O’Connor

Dinner on Saturday was herb omelette, Portobello mushrooms topped with cheese, and polenta followed by apple and blackberry crumble. Afterwards, we stepped outside for a rare glimpse at the night sky in a place without light pollution.

Directly overhead  
the whole of the milky way  
killed by a porch light

* *Sean O’Connor*

Sean entertained us all that evening by singing in the old Irish style (Seān Nós). The non-Irish among us were charmed to learn that these sort of evenings still take place in pubs in Ireland. Individuals volunteer to sing (unaccompanied and without written lyrics) in one of five styles, and the audience either listens in respectful silence or (with certain songs) joins in.

the hearth god practices tummo  
flame and shadow  
up the same chimney

* *Jane Spray*

Those who could keep their eyes open sat up and watched a Japanese film shared by Stuart. The rest of us retired to bed to mull over the day’s lessons and prepare for the following day.

Today’s rain  
in the dead of night  
still plop plopping

* Sean O’Connor

**SUNDAY**

Behind the roof ridge  
this morning’s sun  
about to dawn again

* *Sean O’Connor*

**The Art of Juxtaposition**

# In Jim Norton’s workshop we discussed the importance of the wider cultural traditions on haibun, and the links between prose and haiku in a haibun. We drew on *The Art of Juxtaposition* in *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Basho* and *Beyond the Haiku Moment* ([*http://www.haikupoet.com/definitions/beyond\_the\_haiku\_moment.html*](http://www.haikupoet.com/definitions/beyond_the_haiku_moment.html)*),* both by Haruo Shirane.

Basho believed that a poem had to work on both the horizontal (present, contemporary, everyday) landscape, as well as the vertical (historical, broader cultural, literary or traditional) landscape.He suggested that there is a horizontal/vertical relationship occurring, in which the prose could be seen as working on the horizontal plane, reflecting a narrative unfolding from the perspective of the egoic mind. The haiku provides a glimpse of a larger, less personal context, representing the intersection of the vertical axis. Jim observed that the same two axes or landscapes are also reflected within a haiku itself, with the (first) two lines representing the horizontal present, followed by a leap to a third line that brings us to the vertical.

George then read two of his own haibun that stretch the conventions of perspective. *Fragments of dream* played with the dreaming mind, imagination, the unconscious and consciousness itself. We noted how the links between the prose and haiku reflected the horizontal and vertical landscapes, and that the haibun as a whole followed a typical narrative arc that itself incorporates horizontal and vertical components. A second haibun adopted the voice of a humorous ‘persona’ which worked beautifully when juxtaposed with haiku that transcended the horizontal, egoic axis. The consensus was that we are pushing the boundaries of what is possible with haibun.

It was such beautiful weather that we then set up tables and lunched outside.

discussing reincarnation –  
dandelion seeds  
passing overhead

* *Heather Dyer*

After lunch we all drove down the coast to Aberdovey, to eat ice creams and wander on the beach:

snagged in machair a gull feather unzipped by the wind

* *Stuart Quine*

every sound  
even as it arises  
autumn stillness

* *Jim Norton*

rounding the headland home  
the shushing of ripples  
licking the hull

* *George Marsh*

George cooked an incredible potato and haloumi curry on the final evening, with pilau rice, nan bread, and dahl. Amazingly, most of the group still had room for plum and apple crumble.

After dinner Jim facilitated a haiku workshop called a ‘kukai’. We limited our contributions to three haiku each, and initialled those we liked most. We then worked our way through the wall of haiku, sharing why we liked our chosen haiku and learning much about what worked, and why. At the conclusion, writers of haiku that hadn’t been initialled could ask why people felt these haiku didn’t work. This was a positive, efficient and useful way of workshopping.

I am a soft throne  
for an elderly cat.  
Rain upon rain upon rain

* *Jane Spray*

Afterwards, we retired to the lounge to listen to a haibun written by Jim Norton and performed by Jim Norton and Sean O’Connor, complete with sound effects and music – a new and experimental way to deliver a haibun that incorporates two stories: one a present-day narrative on the horizontal landscape, and another on the historical, vertical axis.

Stuart then revealed his new tattoo – a Chinese symbol that means life is a dream.

entering the picture through a dark hole  
where does it all end?  
the clock chimes its own time

* *Jane Spray*