

East Meets West

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Edited by

Reiko Aiura, J. U. Jacobs
and J. Derrick McClure

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PROCEEDINGS FROM THE 13TH INTERNATIONAL
REGION AND NATION LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends
of the earth!*

—From *The Ballad of East and West* by Rudyard Kipling

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FOREWORD

REIKO AIURA

It was our great pleasure to hold an RNLA conference for the first time in Asia, beside Biwako (Lake Biwa) in Shiga Prefecture in Japan, in 2010. Biwako is one of the most ancient lakes in the world, the largest in Japan, lying to the east of the ancient capital of Kyoto. It has been a place of strategic importance for transportation by water, and of strategic importance as told in historical accounts of some famous battles; hence it has often been mentioned in Japanese literature. Also in modern days, a strong sense of ecology has been nurtured among the residents around it.

A few towns in Shiga used to be capitals of Japan long ago, even before Kyoto became the capital. Many places around the lake were depicted in the *Tale of the Heike*, an anonymously-written narrative of the rise and fall of the ruling family of Taira (Heike) during the Heian period, the story of which was spread by groups of blind priests in oral tradition and put into written form probably at the end of the twelfth century.

Lady Murasaki, a lady in the imperial court in Kyoto, is believed to have written her famous novel, the *Tale of Genji* (11th century), one of the oldest novels in the world, at least partly while she was living in Ishiyama Temple near the lake.

Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), a famous *haiku* poet of the Edo period (1603-1867), travelled extensively all over Japan, and he left a request in his will that he should be buried next to the grave of a *samurai* called Kiso Yoshinaka, depicted in the *Tale of the Heike*, who fought his last battle near the lake and was buried in a temple near Biwako. Basho died in Osaka while travelling, leaving his last haiku: “Fallen ill on a journey,/ Among withered fields,/ My dreams running around” [my translation]. His body was carried miles away to a place by the lakeside of Biwako.

My own father was born near the lake, and when I was a child he used to tell us many inspiring folk-stories for children from that region, which he had heard from his parents and grandparents. Those historical places were my father’s childhood playground. I particularly recall some stories

about *tanuki* (raccoon-dogs) imitating humans. Such tales may have been told all over Japan, and his stories sometimes blended what he had heard with his own experiences and imagination. He told us how, on a very hot summer night, he and his brothers slept outdoors on a platform near the lake but were awoken by a tremendous, harsh and powerful noise and shaking, as from a giant underneath their platform. They looked for the source of the noise, and discovered a *tanuki*, snoring beneath them. They were terrified, and ran straight back home. That area must have been pitch dark at night, with only the sounds of water, the wind in the pine trees and paddy fields, and the wildlife—a typical Japanese farming area.

People forget, and many of their experiences are lost to future generations if no special effort is made. We suffered a gigantic earthquake in the north-east of Japan in the year 2011, six months after the Biwako conference. It was often described as “astonishing” and “beyond imagination,” but in truth we have suffered such earthquakes and other disasters numerous times, and many were recorded in oral tradition or in literature. If we tend to assume that no such force can strike our modern society, we seem not to have learned enough from our history, much of which is to be read in our literature.

Literature offers knowledge and, potentially, understanding. Many of us study literature, though sometimes I worry that despite calls for “internationalization,” Japanese literature specialists tend not to explore other heritages enough. I have experienced the importance of discovering things which had been unknown to me, or which had seemed uninteresting before.

Late in the preparation of these proceedings, when choosing our cover design, I thought to make use of some of my private experience of East and West. There are two representative components—one from the East, produced by my grandfather, Sosui Nagasawa, who was a traditional Japanese textile designer in Kyoto, and another from the West, by Allan Francis Vigers, my husband’s great-grandfather who was deeply involved in the Arts and Crafts Movement led by William Morris in the Victorian era. I hope the reader will forgive my sentimental choice.

It has taken a long time to bring out this book after the actual conference. There was the great earthquake, which inflicted tremendous damage physically, economically, and emotionally even on those who were not directly hit, even some years after the conference. My co-editors, Johan U. Jacobs and J. Derrick McClure are both experienced and superb editors, and excellent academics who have shown me what a good editor should be. Without their initiatives, I would not have come this far, hence I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them. I would also like to

express my gratitude to the patient and cooperative contributors.

Our gratitude extends to the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, the Biwako Visitors Bureau of Shiga Prefecture, Shiga University of Medical Science, and to Carol Koulikourdi, Amanda Millar, and other staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who have been patient and very helpful.

INTRODUCTION

Although this collection of papers is not a long one, it includes many topics and insights which we trust will interest the reader, and which we might never have thought about if we had not held this unique conference in Japan.

J. Derrick McClure says that Scottish literature has gone through developmental/productive phases in which it has been receptive to literary influences from other languages and cultures. Still, it is amazing to see some influence of Japanese literature in the Scottish. In the Meiji period, Japan was much influenced by various European countries, leading to radical modernization. There are many influences from Scottish culture now embedded in Japan's history. Thomas Glover for example, whose Japanese wife is said to have been the model for Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" (though this was not historically true), was a famous Scot in Japan.

Daniel Bratton, who lived awhile in Kyoto, introduces an American poet, Cid Corman, who observed changes in Japan from post-war misery and poverty to today's economically developed, if somewhat depressed society. We may read how Corman established himself in the visual arts and literary circles in Kyoto.

Rosa E. Penna tells of the world famous Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges and uses his autobiographical notes to show how he was influenced by English and Japanese literature. It is also worth knowing that she was able to observe Borges closely as an acquaintance.

Michele Bottalico casts light on a link between Islamism and the early American foundation days, using Royall Tyler's "The Algerine Captive," in which an American protagonist, captured by Muslim pirates, converses with them about shortcomings of American democracy such as the retention of slavery. Bottalico starts with some visual arts, which are a most approachable way to see the background. He believes that early America was not cut off from the rest of the world but rather "exposed to a series of cross-cultural relations, particularly with Islam"

Itsuyo Higashinaka shows how Byron's frequent use of cataloguing in his poems, following epic traditions from Greek to modern European, ends up "being half serious and half ludicrous." Higashinaka then brings in an aspect of traditional Japanese literature, which, independently of European influence, has developed a rich cataloguing tradition of its own. He demonstrates that the use of cataloguing is universal, and exploited in literatures of all times and places.

Megumi Sakamoto introduces Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short story called "Rashomon," originally based on an old Japanese story. He discusses whether Japan has been taking the wisest course for renovation by centralizing many fundamental standards while struggling to change people's life-styles and ways of thinking in imitation of western cultures; and by a comparison with Grassic Gibbon's novel *Sunset Song* shows that the people's responses to enforced modernization in Japan and in Scotland had features in common.

Laurence Mann argues against Helen McCullough's idea of *Kokinshu* not being "lyrical," showing that "conventionality" and "lyricism" can coexist. Mann shows that after the baptism of post-modern criticisms (e.g., Michel Foucault, et al.), a new form of lyricism became a poetic standard, "and it is by this standard that McCullough . . . judge[s] the *waka* poetry of Early Heian Japan."

Donna L. Potts takes up the Irish writer Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's stories about mermaids. Memories of Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid may lead us to assume that mermaid stories are sad, but Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaids are different; their identity is not split between the two realms, sea and land, natural and supernatural. Potts reminds us of the modern Irish condition underlying Ní Dhomhnaill's stories. Her mermaids are from a different realm, and their world is remote from British culture and language. These mermaids are those who challenge patriarchal and imperialistic hegemonies as well as damage to the environment, warning us from under the waves.

David Clark, a Scot living in Spain and researching Irish literature, describes a peculiar phenomenon in Ireland (once called the Celtic Tiger) when they were doing exceedingly well economically in recent years, and what that has left behind in literature—crime fiction. After the boom, people realize that they have "the most sophisticated crime networks in Europe." The decline of the Celtic Tiger in early 2000 brought "a new series of white-collar crimes based on the flaws in the Post-Tiger." Clark discusses these crime novels in the context of the social situation.

Yuko Yoneyama writes about Edwin Muir, an Orcadian writer who had experienced various different living styles, jobs, and environments due to his parental home situation. He once lived in an idyllic paradise in Orkney, and then was obliged to move to a big city, which he felt was like living in Hell. Yoneyama questions why, in an essential part of Muir's "Autobiography," he sometimes depicts himself at some distance, which produces some strange ambivalence in "objectiveness" in an autobiography.

J. U. Jacobs takes up in his paper the experiences of a Nobel Prize winner, J. M. Coetzee, who emigrated from South Africa to Australia. Jacobs illustrates, using the writer's autobiographical works, what Coetzee must have faced in Australia, belonging loosely to both South African English/Afrikaans cultural backgrounds, and being keenly aware of his diasporic identity.

Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly has been pursuing issues of double linguistic cultural background in Canadian literature. She discusses Alice Munro's stories (having received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013), many of which are set in a particular rural area during the Depression, and shows that Munro succeeded in letting readers detect "universality" through her local stories. According to Hansen-Pauly, "Cultural translation means being taken to surroundings where routines, interactions and institutions with their underlying beliefs and values work differently"

The topics mentioned above were originally not strongly organized, but seeing each contributor's paper, it is surprising for me to realize how they coincide and are intertwined with each other. (R.A.)

PART I:

EAST MEETS WEST

—INFLUENCES AND COMMUNICATIONS—

THE JAPANESE PRESENCE IN MODERN SCOTTISH POETRY

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Scottish literature in its greatest periods has always been cosmopolitan in outlook; and the revitalisation of Scotland's literary and intellectual links with nations in Europe and beyond was integral to the great poetic revival of the twentieth century. The foreign influences to which Scottish literature since the 1920s has shown a new receptiveness are remarkably varied: Russian poetry of the post-revolutionary period suddenly became almost as productive a source for literary translations as the old favourites French and Italian; a laudable attempt to breach the ancient barrier of mutual incomprehension and hostility between the Highland and the Lowland sides of Scottish civilisation was seen in a steadily-growing corpus of translations, in both directions, between Scots and Gaelic; Old Irish and Old English as well as the classical languages, and less familiar modern European languages than the traditional staples, provided poets with productive literary stimuli.

Even in view of the vast disparity between the languages and the cultures of Scotland and Japan, therefore, in this context it is not in principle surprising, though certainly noteworthy, that several recent and contemporary Scottish writers have been stimulated by an interest in Japan and its culture to produce some highly individual and often distinguished work: poems in haiku form, stories with Japanese settings,¹ and occasionally works showing a deeper level of cultural fusion are an integral feature of the modern Scottish literary scene. From another point of view this is again unremarkable: Japanese culture, however superficially appreciated or understood, has of course been a source of fascination for the Occident since the nineteenth-century vogue for Japoniserie both celebrated and satirised in its finest artistic commemoration, *The Mikado*; and in the mere fact of including quasi-haiku poems in its collective literary output Scotland is no different from every other country in the English-speaking world.

In this paper I hope to demonstrate, however, that just as Japan has characteristically and throughout its history adopted cultural features from other countries and transformed them into something very much its own, so the Scottish response to Japanese literary influence has been to create a series of works of which the Scottish identity is as unmistakeable as the Japanese inspiration.

The first modern Scottish poet to acknowledge a specific Japanese influence on his work is Ian Hamilton Finlay; and it is a mark not only of this artist's adventurous method but of the paradoxical effects of the Scottish-Japanese interaction that whereas a general affinity with Japanese culture can readily be seen not only in Finlay's writings but in the sculpture and landscaping for which he is now most widely renowned,² the specific literary connection which he claims has operated in ways which are, at first sight, far from obvious. In a letter to Hamish Henderson³ requesting a contribution to his avant-garde poetry magazine *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse*, Finlay includes Shimpei Kusano in a short list of radical poets;⁴ and his collection *Glasgow Beasts* is dedicated "tae Shimpei Kusano / whae writ / a hail buik o poems / about puddocks / 'The Hundredth Class.'" [*To Shimpei Kusano /who wrote / a whole book of poems / about frogs*] Yet there is no apparent suggestion of Japanese influence in the following:

see me
 wan time
 ah wis a fox
 an wis ah sleekit! Ah
 gaed slinkin
 heh
 an snappin
 yeh
 the blokes
 aa sayed ah wis a G R E A T fox
 aw nae kiddin
 ah wis pretty good
 had a whole damn wood
 in them days
 hen

(Finlay 2004: 223)

[*See me / one time / I was a fox / and was I cunning! I / went slinking / hey! / and snapping / yeah! / the lads / all said I was a GREAT fox / aw, no kidding / I was pretty good / had a whole damn wood / in those days / hen (term of address for a female)*]

The connection, however, resides first in the minimalist scale of the writing. Finlay does not adhere to any prescribed number of lines or syllables, but this and all the eleven poems in the sequence are very short: nine words, in the case of one of them. Next, the sequence appears to narrate a series of identities assumed by the persona: “an wan time / ah wis a moose /... this time / ah wis a bed-bug ... anither / time / ah wis a / minnie [minnow]” and so on; making the sequence suggest a comic parody of the doctrine of successive reincarnations. And though none of the reincarnations is as a frog, a specific debt to Kusano is at least suggested by a comparison with the selection of his poems in the anthology *The Poetry of Living Japan*:⁵ *Queroque the Frog: an Autobiography*, in which the amphibian narrator relates his own death; *Conversation on an Autumn Night*, in which (at least as far as can be gathered from the English translation) the speakers are imaginatively identified with insects and their fate; and *The Frog*, in which the exalted “Your back / is a trap for the heavens” is ironically undercut by the next line “(Yes, that’s right)”. Finlay’s comic exuberance in this sequence is decidedly unlike any characteristic mood of Japanese poetry (or the low-key, ironic humour of Kusano) but in a poem such as *Dalchonzie* [the name of a village] the sensory vividness, imaginative force and emotional loading of the images, as well as the tiny scale of the poem, are more reminiscent of Japanese models:

Hot day
 the pines say Wheesht!
 along the railway

 Night
 the mill has two wheels, a red, a black — one
 is the sun.
(ibid. 244)

—and the Scots exclamation *Wheesht!* [hush] delicately emphasises the location of the scene. It is tempting, too, to conjecture that the concrete poetry of which Finlay went on to become a leading figure was inspired at least in part by Kusano’s use of nonsense syllables representing natural sounds (of frogs and other things) and the arranging of his words and non-words in visually-recognisable patterns on the page.⁶

I do not think it likely that Finlay’s pioneering use of phonetically-spelt Glasgow basilect is an aspect of Kusano’s influence, though the presence of non-standard Japanese in the latter’s work is reflected to some extent in the English translations. Finlay’s language usage in this set of poems arose from (and exacerbated) ongoing controversies in the Scottish

literary scene, and no foreign influence was necessary to prompt him to experiment in this particular direction. The poet who followed Finlay's lead in writing small-scale poems in Glasgow patois with the greatest degree of enterprise, individuality, productivity and distinction, Tom Leonard, has a tiny sequence called *four football haiku* in his oeuvre: the first is

Bovril Zen

hawf time
n wan hawn clappin
whair the fuck um ah

(Leonard 2009: 135)

[*half time / and one hand clapping [!] / where the f— am I*]

—but as this is fully of a piece with much of his other work, his styling it “haiku” is a witticism rather than a serious claim to be writing in a quasi-Japanese style to a greater extent here than elsewhere; and though Leonard's overall debt to Finlay is unmistakable it would be special pleading to argue that any degree of Japanese influence, direct or even indirect, is recognisable in his poetry.⁷ Several other Scottish poets, however, of different degrees of renown and distinction, have written poetry in haiku form.

It must be noted that the very validity of attempting to transfer the haiku form to other languages is a topic which would lead us far beyond the scope of this paper. On a purely technical level, the form itself is specifically suited to Japanese, with its strongly syllable-timed rhythm and its abundance of di- and trisyllabic words, which easily form compounds, and monosyllabic particles to link them; and will of necessity have a different auditory effect in a stress-timed language and present different problems (and by the same token, offer other possibilities) in a language with a different grammatical structure. The existence of a poetic form which combines, as essentials, extreme brevity with sensory vividness, emotional force and depth of philosophical implication arose and developed in the wholly unique cultural ambience of Japan, with the mutual influencing of the Zen form of Buddhism, derived from India and China, and the indigenous Shinto;⁸ and though what might be called the externals of haiku poetry can perhaps be replicated, or at any rate represented by the nearest possible counterparts, in languages with phonological and grammatical structures which are not those of Japanese, there is no possibility of their arousing the same response in readers from different literary, philosophical and religious traditions.

By this argument, it is simply impossible to write anything in English, Scots, or indeed *any* other language which will arouse the same response in a speaker of that language as a haiku does for a native Japanese. That does not mean that the practice of writing quasi-haiku in other languages is pointless: it goes without saying, however, that for an activity performed with the linguistic medium of English, or Scots, to be sensibly described as writing haiku poetry, it must entail far more than producing constructions of five-plus-seven-plus-five syllables. Anybody can write a seventeen-syllable squib, and most of the things that have been produced in this form, even if they have merits of any other kind, are not haiku. To be worthy of consideration, a quasi-haiku by a Scottish poet must have something at least of the qualities listed above: sensory vividness, emotional force and depth of philosophical implication. On the other hand, a rigid syllable-count of seventeen need not be insisted upon, nor the Japanese prescription that each five- or seven-syllable line must be a grammatically self-contained unit: since the actual haiku form, as already noted, is specifically tailored to the linguistic structures of Japanese, there is no obligation on poets writing in other languages to replicate it precisely. A syllable-count of *approximately* seventeen (certainly not much exceeding it) and some hint of a tripartite structure may be taken as the requirements. On this showing, some Scottish poets have achieved undoubted success in the transplanted haiku form: we will proceed to examine three, from different generations and different culture-areas of Scotland.

George Bruce, a poet from the fishing town of Fraserburgh in the North-East, produced a notable collection of haiku poetry. Bruce has a reputation as one of the finest of twentieth-century Scottish poets, and certainly he is one of those to whom it is easiest to respond.⁹ His precise and economical style, developed in his early poems in evocations of the sea and coast and of the dangers and hardships of the fishing trade to which his father belonged, are combined in his poetry with a profound empathy with, and ability to arouse strong emotional responses to, not only the joys and the tragedies of life but all aspects of human interaction with the natural world. Sparseness of expression and intensity of perception are of course integral to haiku poetry; yet it was a form to which Bruce became attracted only late in his long and productive life (he died at the age of 93, writing steadily until his last days.) According to his own account in his haiku collection *Through the Letterbox* (Bruce 2003), although he had found that among the students of Glasgow University, where he served for a time as Fellow in Creative Writing, “haiku was an addiction which spread like measles” (8), he himself was not tempted:

until a stray thought took him back to a recollection of stealing a cherry in his aunt's garden as a child. The poem which this prompted is the centre of a triad of linked haiku headed *North Coast Cherries* and dedicated to his wife Elizabeth:

All around salt in the wind
a mile from the sea
salt on the tongue

Against the wall that
faced south, red cherries
enjoyed by stealing boys

When I think of you
through many winters
cherries ripen in the sun (14)

To appreciate the force of the central poem it must be remembered that the setting is the chilly, windswept Scottish North-East: the cherries are ripe and enticing despite their surroundings, and necessarily on a south-facing wall. The first of the “frame” poems sets the scene, evoking a sea-wind strong enough to blow the taste of salt far inland—a taste which is countered by the sweetness of the cherries, as in the last poem the cold wind is by the sun. The implications of the details mentioned form a network of ramifications, enticing the reader both to construct and to respond to an entire miniature narrative.

Bruce's previously-published work had included a small number of poems in haiku form, one being the witty *Scots Haiku* (though this one, by the arguments previously given, does not qualify as a haiku), written to commemorate the completion of the twelve-volume *Scottish National Dictionary*:

Noo a' thae words
are in their tomb
whan will be the resurrection?

(2001: 193 and 2003: 118)

[*Now all those words / are in their tomb / when will be the resurrection?*]

—in its original context, the last of three poems in Scots (which he used much less often than English for his poetry) commenting ironically on the undaunted survival of the language despite its receiving more of the sterilising attention (it is suggested) of academics than the potentially life-giving attention of poets. *Through the Letterbox*, however, contains over a

hundred and fifty, grouped as “Haikus for Humanity”, “Seasonal Haikus,” “Philosophical Haikus,” “Catspeak,” a set which includes the phonaesthetically flawless

She does not walk. She
moves with sinuous ease.
She glides, is smooth as silk (44)

and so on. The poems are matched with illustrations by Elizabeth Blackadder, each one beautifully adapted to its specific poem, in what is presumably intended as a counterpart to the Japanese *haiga* tradition.

Technically expert, Bruce’s haikus are placed in their Scottish context by frequent cross-references to iconic Scottish poets: knowingly or not, he is thus in tune with the Japanese tradition, in which each haiku is part of an intricate network of mutual influences and allusions between poets throughout the history of the form. A haiku which appeared in *Today Tomorrow* becomes the first in a sequence of four dedicated to William Soutar, a lyric poet of outstanding merit who for the last years of his life was unable to rise from his bed: the second in the sequence,

He who watched time
from his bed for thirteen years
saw green grass grow greener (19)

recalls Soutar’s poem *June 1943*:

The simple things which do not pass
Are shining here:
Grass, and the light upon the grass...
(Soutar 1988: 53)

Likewise, *Haiku for Katie on her departure for Canada* —

Remember the white rose
of Scotland. Water it
with tears and laughter (15)

quotes a lyric by Hugh MacDiarmid:

The rose of all the world is not for me.
I want for my part
Only the little white rose of Scotland
That smells sharp and sweet—and breaks the heart.
(MacDiarmid 1967: 248)

A many-layered haiku refers to the distinguished Scottish actress Edith MacArthur's reading of a poem by the great mediaeval poet Robert Henryson; Henryson is again evoked in a four-haiku sequence *In the Garden*, for which a quotation from his poem *The Preiching of the Swallow* forms the epigraph:

Grite fule is he, that will not gladly heir
Counsail in tyme while it avails him nocht. (30)¹⁰

—and Burns's drinking song *O, Willie Brew'd a Peck o' Maut* inspires a cryptic haiku pair. In the manner of Yeats, who appears to be subliminally present in the haiku *To Lucina*.¹¹

Wind-blown. I am
the tatters of time, but
heart is with you already (74)

the timeless quality of artistic achievement is celebrated: several of the poems are addressed to artists (including Elizabeth Blackadder); and one haiku which evokes the transcendent awareness suggested in Zen-inspired poetry:

Suddenly but gently
you stopped time.
There was no before nor after (26)

is headed *On hearing Yehudi Menuhin*.¹² The poems in Bruce's haiku collection are varied: many suggest Scottish scenes or are specifically associated with Scottish places (and a few are in Scots); some are vividly descriptive and others abstract and philosophical, many are addressed to acquaintances and are touchingly intimate:

Dear Heidi, wind blew
sun shines brightly
I am lifted up. Thank you (35)¹³

but the best of them (and most of them are excellent) combine, in a fusion that is both stimulating and profoundly moving, elements from the world of nature and familiar emotions with questions that search to the limits of human understanding. Bruce, unlike other writers discussed in this paper, made no serious study of the haiku tradition; but his work in the form surely rings true to Japanese sensitivities.

A writer whose work is more extensively and consciously influenced by Japanese thought and literature than Bruce's is Alan Spence. Like Finlay (in his Japanese-influenced poetry) and Leonard (throughout), Spence is strongly associated with Glasgow: his reputation was first founded on his short stories about young boys in an impoverished area of the city, and made expert use of the local patois for dialogue—a life-style and environment if possible even further removed, one might imagine, from the world of Basho and Issa than Bruce's Fraserburgh; but whereas Bruce's adoption of haiku as a poetic form emerged, as we have seen, late in his life and not as part of a general interest in Japanese culture, Spence developed a serious and lasting attraction to Oriental philosophy in his student days, has made several visits to Japan and has some acquaintance with the language (the door of his office in Aberdeen University is adorned with a paper reading アラン スペンス),¹⁴ and in addition to his literary activities runs a Buddhist meditation centre in Edinburgh, named after Sri Chinmoy, the Indian teacher who was his inspiration.¹⁵ His interest in and personal experience of Oriental, and particularly Japanese, thought and culture emerge in his work in many forms: his novel *The Magic Flute*, about the growth from boyhood to manhood of a group of friends and their contrasting life paths, contains fictionalised accounts of his own experiences including mistaken association in student days of LSD hallucinations with Zen enlightenment, two of his recent books are a carefully-researched novel about Thomas Blake Glover and a quasi-autobiography of the eighteenth-century Zen master Hakuin (Spence 2006 and 2013), and he writes haiku-influenced poetry contrasting in some respects with that of George Bruce.¹⁶

Spence's first Japanese-influenced poems appeared in the pamphlet *Glasgow Zen*. The title piece in the collection is a joke: it begins

On the oneness of self and universe

IT'S AW WAN
TAE ME

(2002: 1)¹⁷
[It's all one to me]

and proceeds to four more examples of the same trick, associating a maxim of Zen thought (deliberately over-simply expressed, no doubt) with a cliché of Glasgow demotic speech and thus implying a potently ironic contrast between the banality of the utterances and the profundity of the thought with which they are now linked. Here Spence applies his familiarity with Glasgow speech in a different context from the dialogue in his short stories; and the focus is not on the Zen element but on the

reductive force of the juxtaposition. However, the pamphlet also includes his first ventures into the haiku form. The set is entitled *Rain and things — 12 haiku*, and the opening poem is

rain falling
 especially
 on me (2000: 103)

Two recurring features of his haiku are apparent even from this opening poem. They often take the prescription of brevity to an extreme: this has nine syllables, one in the collection *Seasons of the Heart* has eight:

the last leaves
 the first snow
 falling (ibid. 112)

and one in *Clear Light* seven:

breathe in
 this moment
 breathe out (2005: 107)

(A set collectively called *Football haiku* in *Glasgow Zen* (2002: 53-62) consists each of three words, printed one below the other in large capitals (HERE / WE / GO); but his calling these “haiku” is of course simply for fun). Indeed, when one occurs which attains to normal haiku scale it stands out somewhat for this reason:

damp leaves drift to earth
 the sun hangs tangled
 in the branches of a tree (2000: 88)

though this one also stands out for its assonance and alliteration (neither infrequent in the poems, but not always this conspicuous) and the prosodic contrast of the prevailing heavy syllables in the first two lines and the race of light ones in the last. The other feature is his frequent use of rain as a topic. (I trust that no-one would think of suggesting that this is a Scottish-inspired aspect of his poetry: no-one having any acquaintance with Japanese poetry would, since it is a recurring image in the native tradition too.) The noise of falling rain appears frequently: the collection *Seasons of the Heart* includes several poems evoking rain drumming on roofs of different types and one consisting of the line “the sound of the rain” repeated three times (2000: 104); and in the later collection *Clear Light* it

is even more conspicuous and often associated with a darker mood: one poem in this set is

just the cold
just the rain
just the night (2005: 122).

The haiku in *Rain and things* are imaginatively varied in form, subject matter and tone: some simply evoke a visual image of striking clarity:

the dark field
puddles reflect back
the last light (2000: 69)

or an auditory one:

the call and call of
invisible seagulls
in the fog (ibid. 122)

and leave it to make its own emotional impact on the reader; others record a memorably idiosyncratic subjective impression, whether by simply stating it:

japanese landscapes
in the damp patch
on the ceiling (ibid. 72)

or by a nonce device such as punctuation:

fourteen donkeys
in a field
fourteen donkeys! (ibid. 10)

Spence in these poems shows a sure understanding of the need for a short poem, in order to qualify as a haiku, to contain a charge of emotional and/or intellectual energy out of proportion to its size; and this is continued and developed in his later collections.

In his first publication devoted entirely to haiku poetry, *Seasons of the Heart*, the 150 poems are arranged to suggest the sequential changing of the seasons; but the selection of images or thoughts on which to focus is as diverse, both in themselves and in the impressions they arouse, as in the earlier set. The first in the series:

first warmth of spring
 I feel as if
 I have been asleep (2000: 1)

with no pictorial content, is of an elemental simplicity: the second, by contrast—

first warmth of spring
 under the cracking ice
 the jawbone of a dog (2)

is much more complex, with its strongly tactile images (auditory too in the case of the ice), the contrasts between fragile ice and tough bone and between the life-giving power of spring warmth and the irreversible deadness of the jawbone, and the emotional shock of the unpleasant discovery in the context of returning spring. A similar, though less extreme, effect is obtained in one which follows shortly by a reference to a “yellow oil drum / bobbing down the river”; and the discordant juxtaposition of two things with opposed emotional connotations has a positive rather than negative overall effect in

rainbows
 in the spray kicked up
 by the lorry (46)

Juxtaposition of this kind is combined with another recurring effect, that of repeated or strongly contrasting colours, in an autumn poem:

red on red
 fall of dead leaves
 on rusting scrap (90)

The whiteness of clouds, swans and sails are associated in another poem, perhaps also with other features such as softness and instability of shape; and one begins “Grey earth, sea, sky...” and goes on to focus on a heron (which is also grey). Intensity of colour is the key image in such poems as

the yellow gorse
 making the sky
 more blue (17)

the grass is so very green
 the poppies are
 so very very red (30)

and by implication, white of snow and brilliant yellow and purple of
crocuses, in

crocuses
where last week
the snow lay thick (3)

Other senses besides the visual are evoked: animal cries, the rustle of
wind, the “sing” of a stone spun across ice. The familiar sound of rain is
once associated with impressions of taste and smell:

sipping tea
burning incense
listening to the rain (89)

and the device of making each line refer to a different sense impression
recurs in

sunlight through stained glass
fragrance of oranges
the sound of a bell (14)

The collections *Clear Light* and *Morning Glory* maintain this high
level of artistry. *Glasgow Zen* (the later collection with the same title as
the pamphlet, containing some of the poems in it and others) has much in a
different vein, emphasising the Scottish aspect of Spence’s writing. A set
of nine haiku are adaptations from Issa, using Scots; and the vastly
different overtones of Scots as compared to English are at once evident.

New Year—
ma dump ae a hoose,
jist the same (2002: 85)

[*New Year / my rubbish-dump of a house / just the same*]

The insistent suggestion of a speaking voice—and not only that but even
the facial expression of the speaker—which the Scots conveys in one
sense counters the ideal of universal applicability to which a haiku poem
might lay claim. Conversely, it could equally well be argued that the voice
of Issa in the original poem may have been equally individual and
distinctive to his original hearers (certainly the invaluable scholarly
collection which was Spence’s source (Blyth op.cit.) expounds in full the
differences in poetic persona among the various haiku poets), that the
illusion of a generalised impersonality which a non-Japanese reader is
liable to receive is an artefact of his having to read them in standard

literary English translation, and that suddenly and unexpectedly hearing them in a Glasgow voice conveys something of the shock which the first hearing of Issa's poems conveyed to their audience. This is another question too far-reaching for discussion here; but undoubtedly Spence's Scots naturalisations ring true—painfully so, it may be, as in

poor auld bugger
 beggin in the rain
 for a few bob;
 sorry pal, ah'm skint tae (91)
 [*poor old bugger / begging in the rain / for a few shillings / sorry pal, I'm
 broke too*]

Haikus by other poets are similarly treated: after Santoka, Spence produces among others

this is me —
 nae money nae teeth
 nae nothin (111)

and his set of ten from Ryokan concludes with one of the most concentrated of all:

it aw slips away
 lik a drunk dream —
 ach! (104)

Another witty and original section of the book is headed *Joshu's Mu*, referring to the character 無 (pronounced *mu*), which according to Spence's note (13) means “nothing, no-thing, emptiness”¹⁸ and was given by the monk Joshu as the answer to “Does a dog have the Buddha-nature?” In

*What is the square root of minus one?
 How many angels on the head of a pin?
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
 and thou no breath at all?*
 Mu. (16)

the obvious differences in status between the three unanswerable questions are by implication negated as the set is collectively dropped into nothingness; on another page of the same section, the momentous implications of *mu* are catapulted from the sublime to the ridiculous by

Does a cow have the Buddha-nature?

Mu. (19)

followed on the next page by a tiny drawing of a cow with a speech-bubble containing a mighty 無.¹⁹ The individual use made by Spence of Japanese literature and philosophy results in work which is both highly entertaining and—in a variety of ways—thought-provoking.

As Bruce's poetic background is the fishing towns of the North-East and Spence's the tenements of post-industrial Glasgow, the third and youngest of the Japanese-influenced Scottish writers we are discussing, Kevin MacNeil, comes from the Gaelic-speaking Isle of Lewis: his novel *The Stornoway Way* (2005) is a bleak, scathing, and crazily amusing picture of life in the agoraphobic-yet-claustrophobic, angst- and whisky-ridden island community. Like Spence and unlike Bruce he has a long-term fascination with Zen and Oriental thought, and with Japanese haiku poetry and modern fiction; and the combination in his work of this with the island landscapes and Gaelic language produces, in his slim but fascinating book *Love and Zen in the Outer Hebrides* (1998), a remarkable blossoming of Japanese-inspired vision in its transplanted setting.

The book contains a range of short pieces in a variety of formats: short stories (very short indeed— anecdotes or sketches rather than stories in some cases), poems ranging in length from a page to a few words, Gaelic poems with English translations in poetry or prose, translations from Basho and from miniature poems by Paul Claudel (a poet in whose work direct Japanese influence is a key factor). Original haiku poems form only a small proportion of the book's contents; but though *Love and Zen* is not a haiku collection the interspersing of haiku among writings of other kinds is in fact a regular practice in Japanese literature, in which a common form from earliest times has been a continuous story with poems embedded in the prose passages. (This precise device appears on a miniature scale in the tiny story *Hiort*,²⁰ in which the poem

grandfather
history
pinned on your breast
in a way
the stars really do hold up the sky (10)

is said to have been written by the unidentified protagonist.) It appears that in the renderings from Basho the English as well as the Gaelic versions are MacNeil's own (i.e. he has not simply taken an existing English version