

Graham High, ed. *A Silver Tapestry: The Best of 25 Years of Critical Writing From the British Haiku Society*. Kent, UK: The British Haiku Society, 2015. 265 pp. ISBN 978-1-906333-03-4, £12 from www.britishhaikusociety.org.uk

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A more accurate and clear subtitle for *A Silver Tapestry* would be “Selected Essays from the First 25 Years of *Blithe Spirit*.” All the essays, the majority of which are less than 6 pages long, were first published in *Blithe Spirit*, the quarterly journal for the British Haiku Society. In his introduction, Graham High writes that *A Silver Tapestry* includes “features, critical essays, papers on technique or on the history of haiku; articles concerned with haibun, tanka, renku.” While there are some pieces of critical writing in this anthology, they do not make up the majority of the essays. It should also be noted that Jon Baldwin and Margery Newlove, who selected the essays for this anthology, chose to include only one essay per author for “reasons of variety, balance, and equality.” Unfortunately, equality of writing and thought are not the same as quality of writing and thought.

Although it is disappointing as a “best of” collection, *A Silver Tapestry* does offer a selective history of thought about haiku as understood by the contributing writers and editors of *Blithe Spirit* from 1991 to 2015. The essays are arranged chronologically by first publication in *Blithe Spirit*.

In his 1999 article “Haiku in America,” Lee Gurga writes, “Originally, many of the people in the States that were interested in haiku were so because they were interested [...] in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism at it was popularized there in the 1950s and ’60s.” The essays in *A Silver Tapestry* prove that the influence of Zen Buddhism was not isolated to the United States. This influence is most obvious in the essays from 1992 through 1996, when the main subjects are the haiku moment,

Zen Buddhism, and the Englishness of English language haiku. These early essays are time capsules from an era when the British Haiku Society was young, the Internet was accessed through phone lines, and the haiku moment reigned supreme.

Like most time capsules, the vast majority of these essays should not have been unearthed, specifically two essays on haiku and the Internet by Mel McClellan and Matt Morden from 1996 and 1999 respectively. Published the year after the author discovered haiku, McClellan's "Some Thoughts on the Haiku Process" provides descriptions of the Internet (the world wide web is defined as "the graphical, user-friendly major highway of the 'Net'") and a novice's understanding of haiku ("I liked the idea that haiku can have moods and textures, be like watercolours, or oil paintings or precise pen-and-ink drawings."). In "Haiku on the Internet: The Next Great Wave," Morden also provides now quaint descriptions of the Internet ("The Internet is not just for young people"), followed by a list of haiku websites. While the role of the Internet is a small part of the history of haiku, these two essays read now as historic curios and nothing more.

Starting with Jackie Hardy's essay from 1997 showcasing modern Japanese haiku, *Blithe Spirit* shows a receptiveness to different approaches to haiku. In 1999, both Tōru Sudo and Geoffrey Daniel offered fin-de-siècle evaluations of haiku not evolving and adapting through the twentieth century. Since the turn of the century, essays have been on topics including haiga, haibun, Aldous Huxley, Shinto, renga, and tanka. Some later essays reference earlier essays, highlighting the influence of *Blithe Spirit* amongst its readership. Unfortunately, while some of the essays were worthy of publication in a journal but not in an anthology, some are of such low quality of writing and thought that it is surprising that they were accepted for publication in the first place. Also curious is the choice by the selectors to reprint the first part of multi-part essays by Akiko Sakaguchi and Graham High. While the essay on wordplay by High is mostly self-contained, Sakaguchi's essay ends after a too

brief history of haiga. Its inclusion does no service to haiga, Sakaguchi, or the anthology.

Thankfully, there are a few essays worthy of republication in *A Silver Tapestry*, specifically Martin Lucas's "Spooks, Spectres and the Haiku Spirit," and William M Ramsey's "Haiku as Improvisational Play." Lucas's suggestions on writing, reading, and commenting on haiku are as relevant now as they were when first published in 2001. In his essay from 2012, Ramsey argues that "haiku was born in a spirit of play, despite general notions that it is best suited for solitary nature snapshots or private contemplation of Zen profundities and mindfulness." Both of these essays display an understanding of the history of haiku and the need to draw on this history in order for haiku to evolve and adapt in the future. Despite the high quality of the essays by Lucas and Ramsey, it is unlikely that *A Silver Tapestry* will occupy a significant place in the history of thought about haiku.

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