

This Week's Montage

—Three Poets of the UK

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

Although R. H. Blyth—whose work as a translator and commentator was perhaps the decisive influence on the development of English-language haiku—was British, the haiku movement he helped foster flourished more rapidly in North America than in the UK. For several decades after Blyth's groundbreaking work, haiku activity in the UK remained somewhat diffuse. Haiku competitions were held in the UK in 1959 and 1967, the first British haiku journal, *Haiku Byways*, thrived for only a few years (1970–73), and a few prominent figures, such as James Kirkup (1918–2009), devoted themselves to the genre essentially in isolation; but it was not until the formation of the British Haiku Society in 1990 and the founding of its journal, *Blithe Spirit*, the following year, that an organized community of poets emerged. Since then, a vibrant haiku scene has flourished, producing journals such as *Presence* (founded 1996) and *Snapshots* (1998–2006) and anthologies such as *The Haiku Hundred* (1992), *The Iron Book of Haiku* (1998), *The New Haiku* (2002), *Stepping Stones* (2007), and *Wing Beats* (2008). This gallery presents work by three outstanding British haiku poets: John Crook, whose interest in the genre was revived in the late 90s during his battle with cancer; Caroline Gourlay, who edited *Blithe Spirit* for three years and has produced a number of distinguished collections, including *Lull before dark* (Brooks Books, 2005); and John Barlow, who founded Snapshot Press and has edited many projects, including the annual *Haiku Calendar*. The occasion for the gallery is King James I's proclamation of Great Britain's unity on 20 October 1604, although the United Kingdom itself would not exist officially until the Acts of Union of 1707.

John Crook (1945–2001)

ancient stone circle
the flow
of a robin's song

a wilted columbine—
the last petal dangling
from a spider's thread

night drive
moonlight slides along
the phone wires

high tide
oystercatchers follow
the curve of the bay

summer solstice—
the sun reaches a new place
on the fridge

sunset on the bay
a gannet overtakes
the ferry

ebb tide
the shell I keep reaching for
carried further away

from *ebb tide: selected haiku* (Snapshot Press, 2003)

Caroline Gourlay (b. 1939)

daylight fading . . .
a curlew's call
lengthens the hill

April breeze—
branches of the ash tree
rearrange the sky

in the small gap
between quivering nettles
still eye of a rabbit

bark of a pheasant
sinking into silence
winter afternoon

white water
bursting from the hillside
thorn blossom

hidden blue tit
his song advancing
branch by branch

turning for home
in the lull before dark
blackberries

1 from *Crossing the Field* (Redlake Press, 1995)
2–4 from *Reading All Night* (Hub Editions, 1999)
5–7 from *Lull before dark* (Brooks Books, 2005)

John Barlow (b. 1970)

early June—
the chack of a ring ouzel
and tormentil everywhere

evening surf . . .
sandpipers waiting
for the seventh wave

something startles
the rabbit field . . .
mackerel sky

nothing to separate
the hill from its mist . . .
oystercatcher calls

dripping waterweed . . .
the great crested grebes
breast to breast

the late flaming
of rosebay willowherb . . .
glide of a jay

lambing begins
in the drystone valley
the mist-bleached bones

1–2 from *Waiting for the Seventh Wave* (Snapshot Press, 2006)
3 from *The Heron's Nest* 8.2, 2006
4–6 from *Wing Beats: British Birds in Haiku* by John Barlow & Matthew Paul (Snapshot Press, 2008)
7 from *Presence* 36, 2008

Previous Montages

October 4: *Animals*October 11: *Looking with the Universe*Next Week's Montage: *Halloween Masque*Clement Hoyt
Tomas Tranströmer
Ann K. Schwader