

**Nobuyuki Yuasa and Stephen Henry Gill, compilers.**  
*Genjuan Haibun Contest Decorated Works 2012–2014.* Osaka, Japan: Hailstone Haiku Circle Publications, March 2015, 122 pp., 17 illustrations, perfect softbound, 5.75 x 8.25 inches. ISBN 978-4-9900822-7-7. 1,000 ¥ in Japan; \$13 cash (includes package and airmail) from elsewhere. Request from Hailstone Haiku Circle Publications, c/o Hisashi Miyazaki, 54-16 Hamuro-cho, Takatsuki-shi, Osaka-fu 569-1147, Japan. Email: kamechany8@yahoo.co.jp.

by J. Zimmerman, Santa Cruz, CA

*Genjuan Haibun Contest Decorated Works 2012–2014* is a landmark anthology that includes the prize-winning haibun for the first three years of the Genjuan International Haibun Contest, the only international haibun contest held in Japan. This anthology contains twenty-nine of the selected haibun, together with invaluable comments of the contest judges. It also includes four classical Japanese haibun, a haibun by each judge, and seventeen illustrations. Any haibun writer wanting to learn about international haibun, especially if they intend to enter the contest, should read these excellent haibun and the gifted tutorials on what the judges desire to see.

This annual contest began life in 2009 with a different title: the Kikakuza International Haibun Contest. In 2012 it changed its sponsorship and correspondingly changed its title to the Genjuan Haibun Contest, retaining its judges (Nobuyuki Yuasa and Stephen Henry Gill), officers, and rules. The name Genjuan is “the name of the cottage near Lake Biwa where, in 1690, Bashō lived for a time. His residence in this ‘Vision-Inhabited Cottage’ was probably the happiest period of his life, and it was there that he wrote his most famous short haibun.”<sup>1</sup>

The objectives of the contest, which attracts international participation, are:

first, to open a truly international arena for haibun writers all over the world, and second, to revive the tradition of haibun in Japan, for writers have been neglecting it ever since Shiki and his followers began to emphasize the importance of independent haiku.<sup>2</sup>

Each year a single Grand Prize is awarded to one haibun. Two or three entrants receive the *An* (Cottage) Prizes. About half a dozen are given an Honourable Mention.

In 2012 the Grand Prize winner was “Jackdaws” by D.J. Peel (U.K.), a humorous and descriptive work about interactions between humans and jackdaws. Its third sentence (though I wish it were its first) is:

From the dark density of a nearby yew tree comes an incessant racket of clacks and clatterings as if all the world’s fishwives with their sharp tongues and knives were bantering and berating each other whilst butchering the fish.<sup>3</sup>

*An* Prizes for 2012 were awarded to Kala Ramesh (India), Cara Holman (USA), and James Norton (Ireland) while five haibun (from poets in Bhutan, New Zealand, U.K., and USA) received Honourable Mentions.

Yuasa commented for the 2012 entrants that:

human affairs must coexist with natural descriptions to form a satisfactory piece of haibun. A mere sketching of natural phenomena tends to be little more than reporting, which is not haibun. On the other hand, subjective accounts of human affairs alone run the risk of falling into sentimentalism, which is equally dangerous to haibun. . . . I believe that Western writers tend to be centered on human affairs, while haibun by Japanese writers tend to be filled with natural descriptions. In either case, what is important is the balance between the two.<sup>4</sup>

In 2013 the Grand Prize winner was “Towards Burry Holms” (a narrative poem set by the ocean) by Jane Fraser (U.K.). It ends with this haiku:

conch pressed to your ear.  
will you hear me calling you  
across the sea's divide?<sup>5</sup>

*An* Prizes for 2013 were awarded to David Cobb (U.K.) and Doris Lynch (USA), while seven haibun (from poets in Bulgaria, Japan, New Zealand, U.K., and USA) received Honourable Mentions.

In 2014 the Grand Prize winner was “Well of Beauty” (a travel and historical reminiscence) by Margaret Chula (USA). The final paragraph and haiku of this winning haibun are as follows:

I feel the darkness of Ono no Komachi's heart as I descend the spiral of stones leading to the water in her Well of Beauty—  
imagine leeches clinging to her milky white skin, ghost lovers  
entering the cavity of her heart.

from the mountain forest  
I hear the cuckoo's call—  
its blood-red tongue<sup>6</sup>

Judge Yuasa commented: “I could not be completely impartial to this haibun because it reminded me of my own visit to this temple [Zuishin-in] years ago.”<sup>7</sup>

Stephen Henry Gill gave a concise summary of why this haibun is so successful:

In Margaret Chula's exemplary haibun, *Well of Beauty*, the relationship between the prose and the haiku is extremely well wrought. The piece begins with a rooting in the present moment and place. There follows a famous but succinctly told story, which is necessary for comprehension of the final poem. The paragraph that refers to the Hanezu Festival helps to widen the gap between the story and the final verse, adding a little brightness for effective contrast. Then, back to the present moment and on into the imagination of the author. . . . Another break, and we read the haiku, so assured both in its imagery and in its cadence.<sup>8</sup>

Prefacing those comments, Gill observed:

One point, however, came up several times during the judging process: it is generally better *not* to describe too fully in a haibun. Many pieces were written captivatingly, even brilliantly, but perhaps rather too comprehensively, as if no detail was going to be allowed to slip away. We were looking for gaps or leaps in the narrative in which the reader's imagination could go to work.

The comments of Hisashi Miyazaki, a third judge appointed in 2014, included:

Chula's prose elegantly tells this story [of Ono no Komachi], mixing past and present states of the well [at temple Zuishin-in] with her own deep emotion, finishing with an excellent haiku. The gap she has left between the end of the prose and the subsequent haiku poem is quite effective: neither is the poem too close nor too far in feel from the prose.<sup>9</sup>

*An* Prizes in 2014 were awarded to Sonam Chhoki (Bhutan), Margaret Dornaus (USA), and John Parsons (U.K.), while six haibun (from poets in Australia, Bulgaria, Japan, India, U.K., and USA) received Honourable Mentions.

The anthology includes four classical Japanese haibun, to give context to the modern haibun. The selections comprise an excerpt from Matsuo Bashō's *Saga Diary*, Mukai Kyorai's "Record of the House of Fallen Persimmons," Yosa Buson's "A Visit to Uji," and Kobayashi Issa's "Haikaiji Temple: an Account of Its Poet-Priest."

Haibun by the three judges close the main portion of the book: Yuasa's "Wartime Evacuation," the three-part "A Visit to Ghandrung" by Gill (writing as "Tito"), and Miyazaki's "Scarecrow." Each shows by example how to link the haiku to the prose delicately.

Gill completes the book with his "Postscript" written in Kyoto:

all three of us [judges] feel that there is still an enormous amount of work to be done, both here [Japan] and in the West, in order for haibun to begin to find its place in English literature and to re-establish its credentials in the land of its birth. . . . Life is full of small wonders . . . and we need their stories told.<sup>10</sup>

The book is beautifully presented on pale ivory paper. It is enriched with seventeen illustrations, including art in the classical *nanga* (or *bunjinga*, i.e., literati painting) and haiga styles by Buson, Bashō, Taiga, and Goshun.

I recommend this illustrated collection of award-winning haibun amply elucidated by experienced judges who have the wisdom and confidence to mix criticisms that we can learn from with praises that we can celebrate.

(Go to the Icebox website: <https://hailhaiku.wordpress.com/> for contest results, guidelines, and publications information.)

#### Notes

1. Stephen Henry Gill, “Genjuan International Haibun Contest 2014 Guidelines.” Retrieved Sep. 11, 2013 from <http://hailhaiku.wordpress.com/genjuan/>.
2. Nobuyuki Yuasa in preface to *Genjuan Haibun Contest Decorated Works 2012–2014* (Osaka, Japan: Hailstone Haiku Circle Publications, 2015), 5.
3. D.J. Peel, *ibid.*, 7.
4. Nobuyuki Yuasa, *ibid.*, 20.
5. Jane Fraser, *ibid.*, 32.
6. Margaret Chula, *ibid.*, 65.
7. Nobuyuki Yuasa, *ibid.*, 83.
8. Stephen Henry Gill, *ibid.*, 90–91.
9. Hisashi Miyazaki, *ibid.*, 95.
10. Stephen Henry Gill, *ibid.*, 118.



*J. Zimmerman was a selected poet for A New Resonance 8, 2013. For four weeks in 2013 and 2014 her haiku were featured at the international DailyHaiku website. In 2014 she was the inaugural Poet in Residence for the international Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, where her new e-chapbook, the poetry of music, is downloadable at <http://cabrillomusic.org/guestartist/2014/j-zimmerman/>.*