

## A HISTORY OF HAIKU IN AUSTRALIA

by Beverley George & Lyn Reeves

*This article previously appeared on The Haiku Foundation website.*

### EARLY EXPOSURE 1899

It is believed that the following haiku by Robert Crawford is the first published Australian haiku (1899):

Flannel-flow'rs dancing  
To the dawn on the hill-tops...  
The Vision of Spring!

It was published in *The Bulletin* (Sydney) as winner of a competition for haiku with an Australian reference along with 13 other haiku and two haiku sequences. You can find Tessa Wooldridge's article on the competition here:

<https://australianhaikusociety.org/2008/07/07/july-07-2008/>

We could find no further significant reference to haiku in Australia until the sixties.

### REVIVAL: THE 1960s

Two beautifully presented collections of haiku, translated and compiled by Harold Stewart and published by Charles E. Tuttle, became iconic sources for exposing Australian readers to Japanese literature. In 1960 *A Chime of Windbells: A Year of Japanese Haiku in English Verse* appeared, followed in 1969 by *A Net of Fireflies: Japanese Haiku and Haiku Paintings*. Though the poems are presented more as interpretations than translations, and rendered in rhyming couplets, they preserve the 'haiku spirit' of the original verses. They had wide appeal and went into multiple reprints, inspiring many towards an exploration of haiku.

### JANICE M. BOSTOK: PIONEER OF AUSTRALIAN HAIKU

Janice M. Bostok is credited with being Australia's first major haiku poet. In the latter half of the 60s, isolated in north-eastern Victoria, she pursued her interest in writing. The Peter Pauper books of classic translations into English were her introduction to haiku. By the early 70s she was publishing her work, especially in the United States. Her influences range from Basho and Shiki, through Hekigoto and Ippekiro to Michael McClintock, Elizabeth Searle Lamb and Marlene Mountain.

In 1972 Janice founded the first Australian haiku magazine, *Tweed* (1972-1975). She published more than a dozen volumes of poetry and mentored many an aspiring haiku poet. She died in 2011.

## DEVELOPMENT: 1970s-1990s

The Australian poet Robert Gray included haiku in his collections; much of his writing was influenced by haiku. His first published collection was in 1970.

In 1977 Norman Stokes published *The Ostrat Poems*, the first book of haiku by an Australian published in Australia.

1985 saw *The Kelly haiku & other widdershin tracks*, by Norman Talbot, (Nimrod Publications). Talbot had a wide following as an academic, poet and publisher and influenced many writers to enjoy haiku, though in the traditional 5/7/5 mode.

In 1988 – the year of World Expo 88 in Brisbane – Japan Airlines (JAL) sponsored a haiku contest for children. Jacqui Murray, a Brisbane poet and teacher, was selected as coordinator, assisted by John Knight and Ross Clark. Jack Stamm, an American haiku poet and long term resident of Japan, Professor Kazuo Sato, Professor of Comparative Literature at Waseda University and Kaneko Tohta, president of Japan's Modern Haiku Association, visited Brisbane to give a master class to Jacqui, John and Ross. JAL also flew Jack Stamm and Professor Sato to Brisbane to act as final judges, along with Professor Ackroyd. Thousands of children participated. The experience fomented the formation of the Paper Wasp group, which opened to public membership in 1994.

In the early 1990s Clarissa Stein ran an annual competition for haiku with an Australian flavor and published the results in an annual anthology, *Poppy Seeds and Laurel Tree*.

Also in June 1994 the literary magazine, *Famous Reporter*, published its first haiku section under the editorship of Lyn Reeves, who continued as haiku editor until the magazine's closure in 2012. Later in 1994, the Paper Wasp group released an anthology, *Wattle Winds: an Australian haiku sequence* with contributions by John Knight, Ross Clark, Jacqui Murray and Jack de Vidas. A short while afterwards the first issue of *paper wasp: summer 1994/95*, a collection of erotic haiku, appeared.

Following on the success of *Famous Reporter*, whose circulation increased as a result of the haiku pages, Dane Thwaites invited Janice Bostok to edit a haiku section in 1997 in *Hobo* poetry magazine. Jan also wrote a series of articles, "The Gum Tree Conversations" for each issue, explaining the features and techniques of writing haiku. Also in 1997, Pat Kelsall founded the literary magazine, *Yellow Moon*, which published haiku, tanka, haibun as well as other poetic forms. In 2000, Beverley George took over the editing of the magazine until its closure in 2006, extending its reach and initiating a supplement, *Young Yellow Moon* for children. Beverley George organized competitions for each genre in every issue, publishing the best of the entries as selected by independent judges.

Over the course of the years 1997-1999 editors John Bird and Janice M. Bostok created *The First Australian Haiku Anthology*.

*Haiku sans frontiers: une anthologie mondiale*, (1998) edited by Andre Duhaime was a bilingual anthology representing countries around the world where haiku was being written. It showcased the work of Janice M. Bostok, Ross Clark, Jack de Vidas, John Knight, Jacqui Murray, Lyn Reeves, Sue Stanford and John Turner in its Australian section.

## AUSTRALIAN HAIKU SOCIETY (HaikuOz) AND BEYOND

In 1999 the haiku group, Watersmeet, formed in Hobart. Its convenor, Lyn Reeves, invited Jim Kacian to give a workshop when he visited in 2000. As part of his visit to Australia, Jim Kacian met with leading haikai in several States and spoke of the creation of the World Haiku Association. Because of the interest this stirred, John Bird felt it was the ideal time to initiate an Australian Haiku Association. The idea of a national haiku body had been around for some time and by the year 2000 some prerequisites were in place. In particular, *The First Australian Haiku Anthology* (FAHA), created 1997-1999 and edited by John Bird and Janice Bostok, had published a respectable body of Australian-authored haiku by 82 Australian authors and had drawn attention to the possibility of a national haiku identity. At the end of 2000 John had gathered a number of haikai from around the country to form HaikuOz, an online organization. He served as the first Contact Officer/Secretary for the first few months, and handed the role to Lyn Reeves in April 2001. From 2002, Sue Mill, Janice Bostok, Katherine Samuelowicz and Ron Moss successively filled this position, each for a term of approximately one year, until a new committee-based structure was implemented in 2006.

In early 2001, John Knight and Lyn Reeves selected Australian haiku content for the World Haiku Association website, and also for an Australian edition of the ezine, *Underground Testing*.

2001 also saw the beginning of Pardalote Press, (owned and operated by Lyn Reeves). Pardalote published a series of six haiku collections – by Lyn Reeves, Graham Nunn, Jodie Hawthorne, Watersmeet, Beverley George and Peter Macrow. Post Pressed, operated and edited by John Knight, published many haiku titles by Australian and New Zealand poets, beginning with Ernest Berry's *162 Haiku: a Korean war sequence*, in 2000. Other haiku poets published by Post Pressed included Janice M. Bostok, Katherine Samuelowicz, Lorin Ford, John Knight, Susan Stanford and Jeffrey Harpeng.

In July/August 2002 *Stylus Poetry Journal*, an online magazine, was launched by editor Rosanna Licari. It featured a haiku section edited by Janice Bostok, later succeeded by Duncan Richardson.

Peter Macrow began his haiku column in *Poam*, the newsletter of Melbourne Poets' Union, in 2005. A year later John Bird started the web anthology *Haiku Dreaming Australia* in response to some unwanted effects of the globalization of haiku.

In 2006, Paper Wasp published the *Second Australian Haiku Anthology*, edited by Janice M. Bostok, Katherine Samuelowicz and Vanessa Proctor.

Also in 2006, John Bird, Ron Moss and Lyn Reeves conducted a review of HaikuOz. HaikuOz was restructured and the positions of President, Vice-President and Secretary replaced those of Contact Officer/Secretary. Beverley George, who was in 2007 a guest speaker at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Haiku Pacific Rim Conference in Matsuyama, Japan, filled the position of President, with Lyn Reeves as Vice President and Graham Nunn as Secretary. Dawn Bruce replaced Lyn in 2008. Cynthia Rowe became President (2011), Lynette Arden Vice-President (2012) and Greg Piko Secretary (2010). Currently, Vanessa Proctor is President, Lynette Arden is Vice President and Rodney Williams is Secretary.

As President, Beverley George organized and convened a major international haiku conference, the 4<sup>th</sup> Haiku Pacific Rim conference at Terrigal, NSW in 2009. More than 57 participants from 7 countries attended this four day event, which also brought together haikin from all over Australia to share their experience and enjoyment of haiku. Eighty delegates attended the presentation of papers day, at which Martin Lucas, assisted by Stuart Quine, presented for the first time his now well known paper, 'Haiku as Poetic Spell'. One hundred people were in attendance at a kukai and readings at Gosford/Edogawa Gardens, which was attended by the Mayor of Gosford, and the consul and vice-consul of Japan in Sydney.

In 2011 the *Third Australian Haiku Anthology*, edited by Jacqui Murray and Katherine Samuelowicz, was published by Paper Wasp; and in 2013 *Windfall: Australian Haiku*, the first annual journal of Australian haiku, edited by Beverley George and published by Blue Giraffe Press (Peter Macrow), debuted.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF AUSTRALIAN HAIKU

The Australian Haiku Society (HaikuOz) is web-based and made up of many components. Its leadership comprises a patron, president, vice-president, secretary, web manager and a small committee. Most input to the site comes from the leaders of the various small Australian haiku groups and from outside sources who send news of events and publication and competition opportunities. The position of President is for a four-year term.

As in Japan, small groups are at the heart and soul of Australian haiku writing. These are poems of observation, so it is fitting that the groups are regionally based, where members share urban or rural landscapes. These groups include Cloudcatchers (Northern New South Wales, led by Quendryth Young); Bindii Japanese Genre Poetry Group (Adelaide, led by Lynette Arden); Mari Warabiny (Perth, led by Maureen Sexton); Red Dragonflies (Sydney, led by Vanessa Proctor); Watersmeet (Hobart, led by Lyn Reeves and Ron Moss); Red Kelpie Haiku Group (Melbourne, led by Lorin Ford); and Ozku (Sydney, led by Dawn Bruce). The 'paper wasp' group (Brisbane, led by Katherine Samuelowicz) is currently not meeting regularly but it is hoped they will resume soon. (It is not unusual for groups to go a little quiet and then reinvent themselves).

Activity and reporting on the AHS website is usually local rather than state-led. However, in South Australia Lynette reports for other events, as well as for the Bindii Japanese Genre Poetry Group. Western Australia is remarkable for its breadth of poetic activities, which include public readings and displays of haiku, regularly reported by Maureen Sexton, and in Tasmania Lyn Reeves is an ambassador for haiku on many levels of involvement, while Ron Moss's artwork takes Australian images to the world through his haiga.

As another means of interacting with haiku information we also have a facebook page.

It would seem that from the beginning of haiku history in Australia there has been a desire to capture our own landscapes within this form of poetry – see, for example, *The Bulletin* competition in 1899, Clarissa Stein's competitions for haiku with an Australian theme, paper wasp's first anthology *Wattle Winds: an Australian haiku sequence*. *Famous Reporter* also encouraged haiku that reflected

the Australian experience. However, for many Australians influenced by the preponderance of haiku writers in the northern hemisphere, there was a reluctance to write on themes closer to their own environment. John Bird's work with *Haiku Dreaming Australia* has done much to dispel this reluctance and to encourage the richness of Australian imagery and idiom in haiku. Haiku that is true to Australian culture and themes finds ready publishing outlets overseas. While it is good to see the work of many Australian poets published overseas, it is hoped they will also support those Australian outlets that exist. The work of individual poets has also made a major contribution. Quendryth Young's collection *The Whole Body Singing* came second in 2008 in the Mildred Kanterman Award in the USA. In 2009, Lorin Ford's *A Wattle Seedpod* earned first place in the same award. Lorin has served as haiku editor for *Notes From the Gean* and from 2011 as managing editor, haiku editor and publisher for *A Hundred Gourds*.

*Paper wasp's* long contribution to the haiku scene will continue in electronic format now that it has ceased print publication. Of note were the haiku pages in the general poetry magazine *FreeXpresSion*, edited first by Quendryth Young and then by Cynthia Rowe. Online outlets include *Creatrix* and *Bindii Japanese Genre Poetry Group*.

The Cloudcatchers group has a ginko-based structure for members who walk, write, feast and workshop in northern NSW, and the Red Dragonflies in Sydney enjoys an occasional ginko at a park or beach. In Adelaide the Bindii Japanese Genre Poetry Group enjoys the diversity and beauty of the Botanical Gardens as have Watersmeet in Hobart. No doubt other groups have done much the same elsewhere. The Red Kelpie Haiku Group, established in 2014, meets seasonally in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens to discuss haiku and haiku topics (for which pre-reading is required), go on a ginko and share draft haiku. Members' haiku developed from the day are shared by email and receive comments and criticism from all who attended the meeting.

Ginko with Lysenko is a series of about four walks a year in various places around Melbourne. The ginko, led by Myron, have taken place in locations such as cemeteries, the beach, the botanical gardens, The Shrine of Remembrance and the Yarra River. Poets pay to attend this event, the aim being to encourage the writing of haiku and then to work on them so that they become suitable for publication. Anyone is welcome to attend. Poets who have participated include Kevin Brophy, Emily Zoe Baker, Matt Hetherington, Di Cousens, Maria Leopoldo and Rob Scott. In December 2012, Cynthia Rowe organized a ginko in Melbourne with visiting poet, Penny Harter.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Haiku Pacific Rim Conference two of the events were ginko-based, one at Edogawa Gardens, Gosford, and one in the arboretum at Pearl Beach. The poems were pasted up and peer-judged in a kukai. Also included was a people's choice for the additional day when delegates came to listen rather than write. An unheralded red dust storm provoked a further batch of haiku written in real time in response to natural phenomena! A visit to the Australian Reptile Park elicited some lively haiku too.

Haiku practitioners continue to promote haiku in the community through activities in art galleries, haiku walls, haiku graffiti on bookshop windows involving the participation of passers-by, readings in gardens, agricultural shows, poetry festivals, haiku on trains, interviews on radio, workshops in schools and with writers' groups, and through collaborations with other artists and photographers.

Music and the reading of haiku from prominent haiku poets were featured on *Poetica* on national radio in 2008, and repeated in 2010. Beverley George read bilingually with visiting poet Mariko Kitakubo in November 2010, and also in Australia on the Central Coast and in Sydney, Canberra, Tamworth and Adelaide, while the International Festival of Literature in Melbourne gave a bilingual presentation of haiku by Australian poets in English and Japanese.

In this outline of the history of haiku in Australia the authors have drawn on postings and articles on the HaikuOz website as well as their own experience and knowledge through interaction with haiku writers. They apologise for any inadvertent omissions and encourage haikai who may have more information to share to round out the picture by contributing their own perspectives to HaikuOz by contacting the Secretary (currently Rodney Williams).

<https://australianhaikusociety.org/2016/05/19/history-of-haiku-in-australia/>

We also invite you to read Lynette Arden's article, "A Short History of Haiku in South Australia".

<https://australianhaikusociety.org/2014/10/19/october-19-2014/#more-1514>

Prominent haikai, Sharon Dean and Rob Scott, have contributed greatly to the discussion of our haiku history through their PhD theses. Dean received the Chancellor's Medal (Griffith University) for excellence in the Doctor of Philosophy for *White Heron: the authorized biography of Australia's pioneering haiku writer Janice M. Bostok*, an excerpt of which is published in issue 1.1 of the online journal, *A Hundred Gourds*. 'Australian Haiku in the Global Context', an abridged version of Rob Scott's book manuscript and thesis, *The History of Australian Haiku and the Emergence of a Local Accent*, is featured in *A Hundred Gourds* 4:1.

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