

POME: A working introduction

Port Victoria, Labuan 1964-1965

Falling head over heels in love with Rose, barmaid at the 'Happy Bar', *Port Victoria, Labuan*, might seem an unlikely setting to start of an introduction to a form of poetry I have called 'pome'.

However, Rose was Chinese, about 20 years old, absolutely beautiful – and absolutely unobtainable. Rose knew a lot about Chinese calligraphy and poetry. I received a first hand, hands on introduction to both in the form of the haiku.

The sessions were translating things like – “I Love You” and cheeky military ditties and such - from English into Malay and Chinese and Chinese/Malay into English.

There were many illuminating times. I will always be grateful for those first hand, hands-on experiences.

During 1967-1969 the form took shape. A pome would be the fusion of a haiku and a tanka, the English sonnet, its traditions and techniques.

www.wikipedia.org

Chelmsford 1966 – 1967

There had been conversations with friends and so on, and then partying after a gig at Essex University in the autumn of 1966, Les Bridger, Bert Jansch, Gil Smyth and I got to talking about “Creativity” . . . craftsmanship, discipline and style; the “Troubadour” - firm roots in tradition, pushing at the barriers.

Troubadour! Minstrel! - but what of the poet?

Paris 1967

George Whitman, Shakespeare and Company, Paris and I hit it off straight away and I was allowed to both use the library upstairs and stay over in January, 1967. George and I left American and British Literature for a while and talked about Chinese/Japanese literature – especially the Haiku. It was here that I was able to get a look at some early volumes of R.H. Blyth's *Haiku*.

Colchester 1967 -1968

However, it wasn't until one afternoon in October, 1967 when Ivan Day, (friends Norma and Hazel) and I were sitting at the riverside pub in *Rowhedge, Essex* that the form gelled. Ivan was playing the mouth harp and we were enjoying each others company. *The Newmarket Tavern, Colchester* pivotal.

Leicester 1968-1973

G.S. 'George' Fraser and I met in 1968 when I was arranging a poetry reading at The Phoenix Theatre, Leicester. George Fraser was both Reader In English at the University of Leicester, Department of English, President of Leicester Poetry Society and a poet. It was only natural that I enlist his help. George was generous with his help. We got to talking. He had a strong background in Chinese/Japanese poetry. He had spent many years studying Japanese verse and had a volume of poetry '*Leaves Without A Tree*' published by Hokuseido Press.

With his extensive knowledge of Japanese/Chinese poetry he saw the haiku, tanka and sonnet connection straight away – lightly dubbing it “the Lichfield sonnet” and wrote an encouraging letter on my departure for Europe.⁽¹⁾

Collections in this period – The Weighing of an Eye-Lash

a Blind Man would be Pleased to See it, 1966-1969*

Riding the Ghost Train, 1971

Four Leaves, 1967-1973

Rococo Garden II, 1972-1973**

*Rowhedge (Phoenix Broadsheet 225, 1983) and

**Mermaid, Mouse and Map (Phoenix Broadsheet 29, 1973)

were handset & printed by Toni Savage of Leicester.

Denmark 1973-1985

Being abroad and surrounded by other languages and sounds would give me the opportunity of distancing language. and developing the pome's 'on'. The daily experience of new rhythms, new sounds in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual Copenhagen. In Copenhagen I was soon able to read Scandinavian and European poets in the original.

In Denmark I was fortunate enough to meet the very patient and talented designer, Peter Barber. His was paramount in realizing the pome in book form for the first time - a small pocket edition "Rococo Garden" in 1982. Experiments with the pomes in the Danish language appear in the '*Uro i Uret*' collection

Collections in this period – The Restless Timepiece

Odd Ball in the Corner Pocket, 1973-1978

Labanotation (Picnic in *Folkets Park*), 1973-1978

Sunless Sundays . . . – at the *Café au Lait*, 1978-1980

Uro i Uret, 1978-1984*

a NO MICHAEL JACKSON weekend, 1980-1984

The Shuffle, 1984-1985**

* Pomes in Danish

**The title pome, *The Shuffle* (Phoenix Broadsheet 265) was handset & printed by Toni Savage of Leicester in 1985.

England 1985-1996

Hanging out with Spike Hawkins (mostly at *The World's End, Camden Town* 1991-1994), was the sun coming out from behind a cloud. In 1991 Spike was already weaving his journal on servers provided by Nick Green. The exchange of ideas was one of the richest periods for the pome. That friendship, our dialogue and being allowed to write on the Menu blackboard at *The Buck's Head, Camden Town* after lunch allowed me the freedom to push barriers even further, resulting in the *Elephant & Cuckoo* collection.

Collections in this period – The Forget-Me-Knot

Wishful Thinking, 1985-1987

When your Heart Breaks Down In Traffic, 1987

Elephant & Cuckoo, 1991-1994

Shootout In Highgate, 1984

Shopping Centre Blues, 1995

Paradiddle, 1995

- *?hvor er klokken*, 1995*

Trick or Treat, 1995-1996

After the Matinee, 1995-1996

Toward an Indian Summer, 1995-1996

The Muswell Hill-Billy, 1995-1996

This is London Calling, 1995-1996

* Pomes in Danish

Denmark 1996-2006

Collections in this period – The Merry-Go-Round

Chinese Whispers, 1997-1998

Déjà Who, 1997-1998

A Journal of Sorts, 1996-1998

blah.blah.blah., 1998

déjà vu, 1999

What goes Round comes Around, 1999

Rosemary's Dream, 2000-2002

PKz Nutz, 2000-2004

Strange Fruit, 2006

Form

The pome then is a fusion of the haiku and tanka, using traditions and techniques from the sonnet. It is English.

The form could then be a first verse with 17 syllables and a second verse of 31 syllables

The result might be

i.e.

First verse – haiku 5,7,5

1st haiku - 1st. proposition

Second verse - tanka 5,7,5,7,7

2nd haiku - 2nd proposition
conclusion

with rhyming sequence of a-b-c + a-b-c-d-d

or

1 st . stanza lines 1,2,3	haiku 1 st . haiku	1 st	proposition (hypothetical imperative)	a b a
2 nd stanza lines 4,5,6	tanka 2 nd haiku	2 nd	proposition (hypothetical imperative)	a b a
lines 7,8			categorical imperative/s	c c

but not always . . .

Acknowledgment: Many thanks to the British Arts Council, East Midlands Arts Association (EMMA) for its support in 1972.

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Thank you



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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Professor P. A. W. COLLINS

Professor A. R. HUMPHREYS

5th September, 1973

Dear Boyd,

The form in fact is a haiku followed by a tanka, syllabic count verse: 575 57577 and it seems to me a good invention, giving an English poet more room to turn than haiku or tanka taken by themselves. I can also see what you meant when you compared it to a sonnet; it is like a condensed version of a reversed Petrarchan sonnet, one in which the sestet (equivalent to your haiku) preceded the octet or octave (your tanka). 3 lines followed by 5 lines instead of six followed by 8.

I think you could set yourself more hurdles by setting yourself the task of rhyming it, the rhymes being of course as in the syllabic verse of Marianne Moore, B.S. Johnson, and some of Auden's and some of Thom Gunn's poems on syllables of minor stress. I will try and invent a poem like this at the end of the letter.

Of the four poems in the form, "Scarflless Song" and "Snail" seem to me immediately moving, because both the sense and the feeling come straight across, without any difficulty. "Anthem for a Dead Man" and "Swan at the PTO

FOUR

I feel that you have nevertheless made an important formal invention. I may seem very old-fashioned in my demand for clear meaning, for poetry saying something definite, but I feel, for instance, that the great modernists, Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Stevens -- let alone great modern poets who are not modernist in this sense, like Frost or Hardy -- are always attempting to do

SIX

I don't think Methuen publish poetry, though they publish critical books about it. The best English poetry publishers are still, in that order, Faber, Chatto and Windus (or the Hogarth Press, with which Chatto is now incorporated) and Macmillan (more for its back list, Yeats, Hardy, Kipling, than for anybody who has been published by them recently). Then, but at some distance, the O.U.P. Of the smaller presses, the Carcanet, which also publishes good critical volumes and is launching a poetry magazine, sounds promising. It might be worth trying out Snail and Scarflless Song in turn on Encounter, The London Magazine, The New Statesman, the Listener. Alan Ross of The London Magazine, by the way, publishes volumes of verse nicely produced and printed, though usually paperbacked, but choices that interest me -- Gavin Ewart, for instance.

Are you going to EMMA next Wednesday afternoon and have you still a car? If so I would be very grateful for a lift, though Paddy can probably spare the time to run me there, though not back. Please let me know. By the way, I should have also said that I found the little printed one "Mermaid, Mouse and Map" funny and charming.

Much love,

Yrs, *George*

P.S. The time to send off a volume to a publisher would be when have you have forty to sixty poems in your new form, with all of which you are satisfied.