

The Deborah Hunn Haiku Competition

Although I never had the privilege of being taught by the wonderful Elizabeth Jolley I do have the humbling good luck to teach in her old department at Curtin University and I am told by those who were her students that she was fond of referring them to the mantra – less is more. While Elizabeth was, of course, famed for her work in prose fiction, nowhere is this gnomic reminder timelier than in the writing of haikus, a venerable poetic form of Japanese origin usefully described by William Higginson on page 172 of his text, *The Haiku Handbook*, as a mode of writing that, ‘presents an event in an image, SHOWS us what happened, does not tell us about it or tell us what emotions to feel [...] It shows us [...] and that makes us feel.’ And so to the business of the haiku competition, which forms part of the second issue of *dotdotdash*, and which, in the process of judging, I was pleased to discover yielded a crop of thoroughly engaging entries. The best of these worked thoughtfully – as good haikus always do – to economically deploy tightly contained, finely observed sensory detail within the smoothly wrought structure of 5/7/5 – or judicious variations thereof – producing seemingly simple, yet thematically resonant meditations on natural phenomena and the quirks of the contemporary quotidian landscape, to evoke (but never explain) the texture of underlying emotions. Some of the entries I have selected for preference exhibit characteristics that might raise an eyebrow from extreme haiku purists who wish to monitor syllables per line (failing to acknowledge in this that a Westernised model of a Japanese language form could never be an entirely accurate approximation) or strictly bow to the absolute prohibition on titles, or the use of simile and metaphor. It is, however, experimentation, skillfully applied, with pertinence and judgement, and in affinity with the spirit of the form, that has allowed the haiku its ever-rippling appeal and kept it vibrant, most famously as it underwent transformation in the loving hands of writers such as Jack Kerouac, whose edgy brand of American Haiku can be enjoyed in collections such as *Book of Haikus* and *Scattered Poems*, and listened to, courtesy of some extraordinarily resonant readings by the writer himself, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJdxJ5llh5A>

In a tight squeeze, Sara Elderfield’s thoughtful and delicate ‘Boudnath, Nepal’ was the winner, but all the commended entries were worthy of note.





As Above, So Below

By late afternoon
small white flowers light the path
shining like dead stars.

-Sara Elderfield

Summer Love

I was sunburnt so
he filled his mouth with ice blocks
kissed and kissed my back

-Rebecca Higgin

Boudnath, Nepal

Circling the stupa,
a rain-proofed child like a bead
strung between their hands.

-Sara Elderfield (winner)

The Silver River

the silver river's flow
reflects grey rainclouds
and a still white sail

-Annie Otness

Spring

apple blossoms
shaft of sunlight on green leaves
a white face

-Gail Willems

Ready

dockland
gantry crane angled skyward
grasshopper poised

-Gary Colombo De Piazzi

Zenith Beach

morning light
a school of fish suspended
between the waves

-Gavin Austin

Pile of Husks

pile of husks
sunflower seeds vanish
one fat mouse

-Jo Mills