
*Irish Haiku*, available June 15, 2005, features the literate and thoughtful prose of one of Ireland’s critically acclaimed writers, the award winning poet and essayist, Chris Arthur. Arthur’s writing blends the intensely personal with the abstractly philosophical in his explorations of the meaning of what happens, what has happened, and what may happen. His writing has been favorably compared with figures as diverse as Hubert Butler, Joseph Campbell, Seamus Heaney, C.S. Lewis and V.S. Naipaul.

As he has done in previous collections, *Irish Nocturnes* (1999) and *Irish Willow* (2002), in *Irish Haiku* Chris Arthur explores the world as it unfolds to his senses. As Arthur listens, touches, watches, tastes, and thinks about his world we are invited to join him in his historical, cultural, natural, philosophical, scientific, sometimes humorous, and always intellectual ruminations.

In his Foreword, “Beginning by Blackbird,” Chris Arthur writes:

“Instead of any words at all, I would rather start with a blackbird singing in a County Antrim garden. Whether at dawn or dusk is of no matter, so long as the light is minimal enough to veil the detail of the landscape, still the restless eye, so fixing attention on the liquid resonance of this clear-sung scale, letting it, if only for a moment, hold consciousness spellbound in delight at the pure perception of this ancient liltimg music. Sounding such a tuning fork might help to counter the expectations that attend beginnings, those most artificial of literary devices. Beginnings promise the order and progression that we crave. Their wordy lifelines suggest the existence of sufficient anchorage to reel ourselves towards habitable meanings from whatever fixed points of apparent genesis they seem to offer. They give the impression that sentences can be so ordered as to still the oceans of complexity and mystery that underlie us, subduing them into linear solidity and the believable fiction of logical progression from A to Z. But language falls upon the waters like reds and golds, creating only the illusion of a surface we might walk upon. The beginnings it can be used to craft provide no more than a film over what is fathomless; the appearance of dependable solidity is familiarity’s trompe l’oeil. A blackbird’s solitary singing should not create any expectations of what comes next, what went before. Like a clear bell in a meditation hall, it just punctuates the silence, focusing the mind on what passes before it now, this moment that will never come again...

“My third point of orientation, to complete the triangulation that may help to bring the nature of this book into focus, is almost a denial of the other two. It comes from that great classic of creative non-fiction writing (if indeed you can categorize it in any genre), Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* At the outset of his extraordinary odyssey, Pirsig says, “what follows is based on actual occurrences.” It must therefore “be regarded in its essence as fact.” However, it should “in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice. It’s not very factual on motorcycles either.” His book is about Zen and motorcycles (though both are frequently ignored) and about much more besides. Though I make no claim to travel in the same heady realms, or with the same wisdom and assurance as does the admirable Pirsig, there is a parallel sense in which *Irish Haiku*, whilst drawing on the mindsets behind both components of its title, is not always about Ireland and has often little directly to do with haiku. I hope it over-reaches both these markers at the same time as being born out of them. It is certainly “based on actual occurrences” and should “be regarded in its essence as fact.”


Chris Arthur was Gifford Fellow at the University of St. Andrews and is a winner of the Akegarasu Haya International Essay Prize, the Beverly Hayne Memorial Award for Young Writers, and the Theodore Christian Hoepfner Award. He teaches at the University of Wales, Lampeter.