



Review of *Stepping Stones: a way into haiku* Martin Lucas, published by British Haiku Society £12.00

by Judy Kendall

This lovely anthology acts as a calendar, presenting one haiku for each day of the year – including the leapyear day as it's 2008. Each day also includes a fairly short commentary on each piece by Martin Lucas, the editor and selector. It is aimed at those who love haiku but want more of an entry into them, and it also seems to double up as a kind of meditative guide to the year, with a miniature thought for each day.

Martin Lucas is the right person for this job – his doctorate is in haiku, he has been president of the British Haiku Society, he is editor of the beautiful and modest haiku magazine *Presence* and knows the English form very well – so well that he is unafraid in his introduction to admit the difference between an English 'haiku' and the Japanese haiku. Rightly so. The English tend to split their haiku into three lines instead of the one dropping line of the Japanese. English, unlike Japanese, is a language in which stress is more important than syllables, and consideration of the fact that English words tend to be much shorter than Japanese words makes enforced imposition of the strict 5-7-5 syllable count of the Japanese feel a little redundant.

Perhaps it is in order to distinguish these English 'haiku' from their Japanese cousins, that Lucas chooses not to select according to season, and also to link haiku rather closely by subject-matter rather than working from the base of a more free and diverse association. The result is strange however. I miss the dissonant gapped disjuncture between separate pieces that I tend to find in haiku anthologies, a disjuncture that reflects the gaps that occur inside each haiku between words and phrases.

Lucas's commentaries too sometimes seem a little heavy. Lucas's knowledge of haiku is not in doubt nor his sensitivity to them as his beautiful *Presence* issues demonstrate so clearly, and his comments can be highly illuminating, as in his discussions on the difference between haiku and tanka or haiku and senryu, but often I want more space not less, and less or nothing said. In this sense I feel the anthology is less successful than its sister anthology in the British poem world – Ruth Padel's poem a week collection of commentaries that originally ran in the Sunday Times. I am not sure the brief glimpse of text and vision that a haiku promises can really bear so very much annotation, and perhaps at times a lighter touch would have been more illuminating as a reflection of the haiku spirit. Occasionally opinions appear to dominate too much. Lucas's comment on May 20's haiku, for example, seems mainly geared to reinforce his position that 'a haiku is a reflective, not a descriptive, poem'.

However, these carping do not ruin what is in fact a wonderfully sensitive collection. Lucas keeps his comments short enough to allow enough space on each page for the haiku so that I found it fairly easy to riffle through the whole book as I searched for my favourite English haiku of all time. I nearly gave up and was ready to damn the

book because of it – how could he leave this haiku out? I did, however, eventually, find it, although I had to wait till November 30 to do so, and this more than anything convinced me of the book's value. particularly since, in the process of reaching November 30 I came across several other haiku that I could also deeply admire.

So here is the November 30 entry, written by Ken Jones, details of whom I would love to have seen – but of whom, like all the other haiku writers in the book, we only learn the name:

Bad day ahead  
I spread honey  
To the far corners of my toast