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# THE SELBORNE HAIBUN



*Irish/English Haibun*

GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK

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THE SELBORNE HAIBUN  
GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK

# THE SELBORNE HAIBUN

A bilingual haibun sequence, in Irish and English,  
extracted from Gilbert White's classic *The Natural History of Selborne*.

*Irish/English Haibun*

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## A BRIEF NOTE ON HAIBUN

Haibun combines a prose poem with a haiku. The haiku usually ends the poem as a sort of whispery and insightful postscript to the prose of the beginning of the poem. Another way of looking at the form is thinking of haibun as highly focused testimony or recollection of a journey composed of a prose poem and ending with a meaningful murmur of sorts: a haiku. The result is a very elegant block of text with the haiku serving as a tiny bowl or stand for the prose poem. A whole series of them in a manuscript look like neat little signs or flags—a visual delight.

Though Bashō coined the word *haibun*, the form as it is today existed in Japan as prefaces and mini-lyric essays even before the seventeenth century (when Bashō first popularized the form). After his famous journey to Mutsu, he crafted a sort of guideline to the form in order to plunge deeper into the *aware* (pronounced ah-WAR-ay) spirit of haiku. Thus, another important feature of the haibun is not simply to provide a writer a shape in which to jot mundane musings of landscape and travel but also to evoke that sense of *aware*—the quality of certain objects to evoke longing, sadness, or immediate sympathy . . .

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

1

Our wells, at an average, run to about sixty-three feet, and when sunk to that depth seldom fail; but produce a fine limpid water, soft to the taste, and much commended by those who drink the pure element, but which does not lather well with soap.

*cupped hands . . .  
mysteries of the deep  
glisten*

Ar meán, is thart ar thrí troithe is trí scór ar doimhneacht iad ár gcuid toibreacha, agus is annamh a theipeann siad orainn ag an leibhéal sin; tugaid uisce breá glé bog blasta dúinn agus ardmholadh faighte aige uathu siúd a ólann an dúil ghlan, ach is beag sobal a bhainfeadh gallúnach as.

*lámba cuachta . . .  
mistéirí an duibheagáin  
ag glioscarnach*

2

In the centre of the village, and near the church, is a square piece of ground surrounded by houses, and vulgarly called the Plestor. In the midst of this spot stood, in old times, a vast oak, with a short squat body, and huge horizontal arms extending almost to the extremity of the area. This venerable tree, surrounded with stone steps, and seats above them, was the delight of old and young, and a place of much resort in summer evenings; where the former sat in grave debate, while the latter frolicked and danced before them. Long might it have stood, had not the amazing tempest in 1703 overturned it at once, to the infinite regret of the inhabitants, and the vicar, who bestowed several pounds in setting it in its place again; but all his care could not avail; the tree sprouted for a time, then withered and died.

*felled oak  
somewhere a druid  
sighs*

I lár an tsráidbhaile, gar don séipéal, tá cearnóg agus tithe mórthimpeall uirthi; an Plestor mar a thugann muintir na háite air. Bhíodh dair ollmhór ina lár, tráth; íseal leathan, agus géaga móra cothrománacha ag síneadh uaithi fad le himeall na cearnóige, geall leis. Bhaineadh idir óg is shean sult as an seanchrann úd a raibh céimeanna cloiche ina thimpeall, agus suíocháin os a gcionn san in airde, agus bhíodh triall go minic air tráthnónta samhraidh; na seanóirí sáite i ndíospóireachtaí tromchúiseacha, na rudaí beaga ag léim thart is ag damhsa os a gcomhair. Bheadh sé ann inniu murach spéirling iontach na bliana 1703 a leag ar an toirt é, rud a chuir cumha ar na háitreabhaigh agus ar an mbiocáire, a chaith airgead mór ag iarraidh é a chur ina sheasamh arís; ach saothar in aisce ab ea é; phéac an crann ar feadh tamaill, ansin chríon is d'éag.

*dair ar lár  
draoi áit éigin  
ag ligean osna*

3

*woodcocks*  
*their prominent beaks . . .*  
*silence*

. . . Hares, partridges, and pheasants abound; and in old days woodcocks were as plentiful. There are few quails, because they more affect open fields than enclosures; after harvest some few landrails are seen.

*creabhair*  
*na ngob fada . . .*  
*tost*

. . . Giorraithe, patraiscí, is piásúin go flúirseach; agus ní bhíodh aon easpa creabhar orainn sna seanlaethanta. Níl mórán gearg ann; b'fhearr leo siúd na páirceanna oscailte ná na himfháluithe; feictear corr-thraonach nuair a bhíonn an fómhar istigh.

4

The village of Selborne, and large hamlet of Oakhanger, with the single farms, and many scattered houses along the verge of the forest, contain upwards of six hundred and seventy inhabitants.\* We abound with poor; many of whom are sober and industrious, and live comfortably in good stone or brick cottages, which are glazed, and have chambers above stairs: mud buildings we have none. Besides the employment from husbandry the men work in hop gardens, of which we have many . . .

It appears that a child, born and bred in this parish, has an equal chance to live above forty years.

*first thing  
in the morning . . .  
smell of hops*

Tá breis is sé chéad seachtó áitreabhach ina gcónaí i sráidbhaile Selborne agus gráig mhór Oakhanger, leis na feirmeacha aonair, agus scata tithe scaipthe ar feadh chiumhais na foraoise. Ní beag é líon na mbocht inár measc; go leor acu is dream stuama saothrach iad, agus saol compordach acu i dteachíní maithe cloiche nó brící, fuinneoga acu, agus seomraí thuas staighre: níl puinn foirgneamh dóibe againn. Taobh amuigh d'fhearachas, bíonn na fir ag obair sna gairdíní leannlusanna; níl aon ghanntanas leannlusanna anseo . . .

Is cosúil go bhfuil gach seans ag leanbh a saolaíodh agus a tógadh san áit seo an dá scór nó thairis a bhaint amach.

*an chéad rud  
ar maidin . . .  
boladh leannlusanna*

5

*red deer  
once brightly mysterious  
as the dawn*

There is an old keeper, now alive, named Adams, whose great-grandfather (mentioned in a perambulation taken in 1635), grandfather, father, and self, enjoyed the head keepership of Wolmer-forest in succession for more than an hundred years. This person assures me, that his father has often told him, that Queen Anne, as she was journeying on the Portsmouth road, did not think the forest of Wolmer beneath her royal regard. For she came out of the great road at Lippock, which is just by, and reposing herself on a bank smoothed for that purpose, lying about half a mile to the east of Wolmer-pond, and still called Queen's-bank, saw with great complacency and satisfaction the whole herd of red deer brought by the keepers along the vale before her, consisting then of about five hundred head.

*an fía rua  
tráth chomb geal mistéireach  
leis an gcambhóir*

Tá báirseoir seanchríonna ann, maireann sé fós, fear darb ainm Adams, agus a shin-seanathair siúd (luaitear é i siúlóid chigireachta ón mbliain 1635), a sheanathair, a athair agus é féin ba bháirseoirí i bhforaois Wolmer iad, duine acu i ndiaidh a chéile, ar feadh céad bliain. Deir mo dhuine gur minic a d'inis a athair dó nár síleadh foraois Wolmer a bheith róshuarach dá mórgacht, an Bhanríon Anne, agus í ag taisteal ar bhóthar Portsmouth. Mar tháinig sí amach ón mbóthar mór ag Lippock, atá láimh linn, agus lugh ar an mbruach a bhí déanta mín di chuige sin, bruach atá leathmhíle soir ó lochán Wolmer, agus ar a dtugtar bruach na Banríona go dtí an lá inniu, agus ba le mórshásamh a dhearc sí ar an tréad iomlán d'fhianna rua a bhí tugtha os a comhair tríd an ngleanntán di ag na báirseoirí, tuairim is cúig chéad fía ar fad.

6

*insects*  
*in dung . . .*  
*God's in His Heaven!*

. . . In summer all the kine, whether oxen, cows, calves, or heifers, retire constantly to the water during the hotter hours; where, being more exempt from flies, and inhaling the coolness of that element, some belly deep, and some only to mid-leg, they ruminates and solace themselves from about ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, and then return to their feeding. During this great proportion of the day they drop much dung, in which insects nestle; and so supply food for the fish.

*in the eye*  
*of the fish*  
*a floating insect*

*feithidí*  
*i mbualtrach . . .*  
*Dia sna flaitbis!*

. . . Sa samhradh, síos leis an mbólacht go síoraí seasta go dtí an t-uisce, na daimh, na ba, na laonna nó na bodóga, le linn an bhrothail; is gainne iad na cuileoga ann agus súnn siad isteach fionnuaire na lochán, iad sáite go bolg iontu, nó cuid acu go dtí na glúine, agus iad ag cogaint na círe dóibh féin go sólásach óna deich ar maidin nó mar sin go dtí a ceathair san iarnóin, sula bhfilleann siad ar an bhféarach. Sa chuid fhada sin den lá, fágann siad go leor bualtraí ina ndiaidh ina nedaíonn feithidí; agus sa tslí sin, beathaítear na héisc.

*i súile an éisc*  
*feithid*  
*ar snámh*

7

*they flutter and rise  
into darkness  
their true home*

On the face of this expanse of waters, and perfectly secure from fowlers, lie all day long, in the winter season, vast flocks of ducks, teals, and widgeons, of various denominations; where they preen and solace, and rest themselves, till towards sunset, when they issue forth in little parties (for in their natural state they are all birds of the night) to feed in the brooks and meadows; returning again with the dawn of the morning.

*ripples . . .  
the ducks  
have come home*

*siad  
ag eiteallach leo sa dorchadas  
is baile dóibh*

Ar aghaidh leathan na n-uiscí seo, gan baol ó fhoghlacairí, an lá ar fad i séasúr an gheimhridh, faightear scata mór lachan, praslachan agus rualachan, de gach aicme; á bpiocadh is á gcíoradh féin go sólásach, is ag glacadh scíthe, go dtí am luí na gréine, nuair a éiríonn siad amach ina ngrúpaí beaga (mar is éin oíche iad ó dhúchas) chun iad féin a bheathú sna srutháin agus sna móinéir; filléann siad arís nuair a bhreacann an lá.

*cuilithíní . . .  
tá na lachain  
tagtha abhaile*

8

*terrible commotion!  
blood in torrents . . .  
tranquil now the woods*

General Howe turned out some German wild boars and sows in his forests, to the great terror of the neighbourhood; and, at one time, a wild bull or buffalo: but the country rose upon them and destroyed them.

*hurlamaboc!  
fuil á doirteadh  
agus síth dá béis*

Scaoil an Ginearál Howe roinnt torc allta agus cránacha ón nGearmáin ar fud a chuid foraoisí, agus bhí muintir na háite sceimhlithe ina mbeatha; agus tarbh fiáin, nó buabhall, uair eile; ach d'éirigh an chosmhuintir amach agus dheineadar léirscios orthu.

9

A very large fall of timber, consisting of about one thousand oaks, has been cut this spring (viz., 1784) in the Holt forest; one-fifth of which, it is said, belongs to the grantee, Lord Stawel. He lays claim also to the lop and top: but the poor of the parishes of Binsted and Frinsham, Bentley and Kingsley, assert that it belongs to them; and, assembling in a riotous manner, have actually taken it all away.

*the poor . . .  
what lord for them below  
what Lord above?*

Leagadh lear mór darach, thart ar mhíle crann, in earrach na bliana seo (1784) i bhforaois Holt; deirtear gur leis an deontaí, an Tiarna Stawel, an cúigiú cuid de. D'éiligh seisean an barr agus na géaga freisin: ach maíonn na boicht i bparóistí Binsted is Frinsham, Bentley is Kingsley, gur leosan iad; agus bhailigh siad le chéile go círeibeach agus thugadar leo iad.

*na boicht . . .  
gan tiarna ceart acu  
ná Tiarna*

# 10

*in our blood too  
an ancient call . . .  
migration*

As to swallows (*hirundines rusticae*) being found in a torpid state during the winter in the Isle of Wight, or any part of this country, I never heard any such account worth attending to. But a clergyman, of an inquisitive turn, assures me that, when he was a great boy, some workmen, in pulling down the battlements of a church tower early in the spring, found two or three swifts (*hirundines apodes*) among the rubbish, which were, at first appearance, dead, but, on being carried toward the fire, revived. He told me that, out of his great care to preserve them, he put them in a paper bag, and hung them by the kitchen fire, where they were suffocated.

*ionainne chomb maith  
gairm ársa . . .  
imirce*

Maidir le fáinleoga (*hirundines rusticae*) a dtángthas orthu agus iad faoi thámhneál sa gheimhreadh ar Inis Iocht, nó in aon chuid eile den tír seo, níor chuala mise cuntas ar bith ina thaobh sin arbh fhiú dom trácht air. Ach dearbhaíonn ministir dom, a bhfuil nádúr fiosrach ann, go raibh sé ina gharsún mór nuair a leag roinnt oibrithe forbhalláí thúr eaglaise, go luath san earrach, agus tháinig siad ar dhá ghabhlán gaoithe, nó trí, (*hirundines apodes*) i measc an bhruscair, a bhí marbh, ar an gcéad fhéachaint, ach ar tháinig beocht iontu nuair a tugadh gar don tine iad. Dúirt sé liom go raibh an-fhonn air iad a shábháil, gur chuir sé i mála páipéir iad agus gur chroch taobh le tine na cistine iad, is gur plúchadh iad.

11

*plop!*  
*a rat?*  
*quite likely*

I suspect much there may be two species of water-rats. Ray says, and Linnaeus after him, that the water-rat is web-footed behind. Now I have discovered a rat on the banks of our little stream that is not web-footed, and yet is an excellent swimmer and diver.

*plap!*  
*francach?*  
*seans maith*

Táim den tuairim láidir go bhfuil dhá speiceas den fhrancach uisce ann. Deir Ray, agus Linnaeus ina dhiaidh, gur cosa scamallacha iad cosa deiridh an fhrancaigh uisce. Táimse tar éis teacht ar fhrancach ar bhruacha an tsrutháin seo againne nach bhfuil cos-scamallach, ach fós is snámhóir agus tumadóir den scoth é.

## 12

*could they but see  
their actions mirrored . . .  
boys' cruelty*

The most unusual birds I ever observed in these parts were a pair of hoopoes (*upupa*) which came several years ago in the summer, and frequented an ornamented piece of ground, which joins to my garden, for some weeks. They used to march about in a stately manner, feeding in the walks, many times in the day; and seemed disposed to breed in my outlet; but were frightened and persecuted by idle boys, who would never let them be at rest.

*dá bhfeicfidís  
a ngníomhartha féin . . .  
cruálacht na ngarsún*

Na héin is neamhchoitianta atá feicthe agamsa sna bólaí seo ná péire húpúnna (*upupa*) a tháinig chugainn roinnt blianta ó shin, sa samhradh, ar feadh cúpla seachtain, agus thaithíodar paiste talún ornáidithe atá teorantach le mo ghairdínse. Ba ghnách leo máirseáil thart go hardnósach ar na cosáin, á mbeathú féin, go minic i rith an lae; agus ba chosúil go raibh fonn cúplála orthu anseo, ach go rabhadar scanraithe sceimhlithe ag buachaillí díomhaoine nár thug faoiseamh ar bith dóibh.

# 13

Having some acquaintance with a tame brown owl, I find that it casts up the fur of mice, and the feathers of birds in pellets, after the manner of hawks: when full, like a dog, it hides what it cannot eat.

The young of the barn-owl are not easily raised, as they want a constant supply of fresh mice: whereas the young of the brown owl will eat indiscriminately all that is brought; snails, rats, kittens, puppies, magpies, and any kind of carrion or offal.

*will we run out of them  
some day?  
fresh mice*

Tá cur amach áirithe agam ar an ulchabhán donn ceansaithe, agus feicim go gcaitheann sé aníos clúmh luiche, agus cleití éin ina millíní, ar nós an tseabhaic: más lán atá a bholg, cuirfidh sé bia i bhfolach, ar nós an ghadhair.

Is deacair óg na scréachóige reilige a thógáil, mar go mbíonn síorsholáthar luch úr uaidh: óg an ulchabháin, áfach, íosfaidh sé aon rud a thabharfaí dó; seilidí, francaigh, piscíní, coileáin, snaga breaca, agus splíonach nó conamar ar bith.

*an rithfimid astu  
lá éigin?  
lucha úra*

# 14

I was much entertained last summer with a tame bat, which would take flies out of a person's hand. If you gave it anything to eat, it brought its wings round before the mouth, hovering and hiding its head in the manner of birds of prey when they feed. The adroitness it showed in shearing off the wings of the flies, which were always rejected, was worthy of observation, and pleased me much. Insects seem to be most acceptable, though it did not refuse raw flesh when offered: so that the notion that bats go down chimneys and gnaw men's bacon, seems no improbable story.

*fragments of the night . . .  
bats searching  
for home*

Bhaineas an-sult an samhradh seo caite as ialtóg cheansaithe, a thógfadh cuileoga as do lámh. Dá dtabharfá rud éigin le hithe di, thabharfadh sí a cuid sciathán timpeall os comhair a béil, í ar foluain agus a ceann á chur i bhfolach aici mar a dhéanann an t-éan creiche agus é á bheathú féin. B'fhiú breathnú uirthi agus an bealach cliste a bhí aici chun sciatháin na gcuileog a bhaint: ní bhacfadh sí riamh leo; bhaineas an-sásamh aisti. Feithidí is mó a thaitin léi ach níor leasc léi feoil amh a ithe dá dtabharfá di í: mar sin, is dócha nach aon áibhéil le rá é go n-eitlíonn an ialtóg síos an simléar chun bagún an duine a bhlaiseadh.

*blaghanna na hoíche . . .  
sciatháin leathbair  
a mbaile á lorg acu*

15

*its shade plays  
among ears of wheat . . .  
fieldmouse in brandy*

I have procured some of the mice mentioned in my former letters, a young one and a female with young, both of which I have preserved in brandy. From the colour, shape, size, and manner of nesting, I make no doubt but that the species is nondescript. They are much smaller and more slender than the *mus domesticus medius* of Ray; and have more of the squirrel or dormouse colour: their belly is white, a straight line along their sides divides the shades of their back and belly. They never enter into houses; are carried into ricks and barns with the sheaves.

*a scáth ag spraoi  
i measc na ndias cruithneachta . . .  
luch fhéir i mbranda*

D'éirigh liom cuid de na luchá sin a fháil a luas i litreacha roimhe seo leat, luch óg agus luch bhaineann lena hóg, iad araon caomhnaithe agam i mbranda. Ón dath, ón gcruth, ón toirt, agus ón modh neadaithe, is speiceas neamhshuntasach iad, gan dabht. Is lú agus is caoile go mór iad ná an *mus domesticus medius* de chuid Ray; agus is mó de dhath an iora nó an luch chodlamáin atá orthu: bán atá a mbolg; scarann líne dhíreach ar a dtaobh an imir ar a ndroim ón imir ar a mbolg. Ní thagann siad isteach sa teach riamh; iompraítear isteach sna stácaí agus sna sciobóil iad i dteannta na bpunann.

16

*trapped  
and then eaten . . .  
the wheatear*

Mr. Stillingfleet, in his *Tracts*, says that ‘if the wheatear (*oenanthe*) does not quit England, it certainly shifts places; for about harvest they are not to be found, where there was before great plenty of them.’ This well accounts for the vast quantities that are caught about that time on the south downs near Lewes, where they are esteemed a delicacy. There have been shepherds, I have been credibly informed, that have made many pounds in a season by catching them in traps.

*gafa i ngaiste  
itear ansin é . . .  
an clochrán*

Deir Mr Stillingfleet sa *Miscellaneous Tracts* aige, ‘mura bhfágann an clochrán (*oenanthe*) Sasana, is cinnte go n-athraíonn sé áit; mar thart ar aimsir an fhómhair ní bhíonn fáil orthu, nuair a bhí an t-uafás díobh ann roimhe sin’. Míníonn sé sin an líon mór díobh a mbeirtear orthu ar na míchnoic ó dheas. gar do Lewes, áit a bhféachtar orthu mar shólaiste. Tá sé ó údar creidiúnach agam go dtuilleann aoirí áirithe pingíní maithe i séasúr ceaptha na gclochrán.

17

*he no longer breathes  
through nose, mouth or ears . . .  
Aristotle*

Writers, copying from one another, make Aristotle say that goats breathe at their ears; whereas he asserts just the contrary:

—*Ἀλκμαίων γὰρ οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγει, φάμενος ἀναπνεῖν τὰς αἰγας κατὰ τὰ ὠτά.*

*ní análaíonn sé níos mó  
trína shrón, bhéal ná chluasa  
Harry Statail*

Scribhneoirí a bhíonn ag cóipeáil óna chéile, deir siad go n-análaíonn an gabhar trína chluasa, dar le hArastatal, nuair is é a mhalairt a mhaíonn seisean:

—*Ἀλκμαίων γὰρ οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγει, φάμενος ἀναπνεῖν τὰς αἰγας κατὰ τὰ ὠτά.*

# 18

I had remarked, for years, that the root of the cuckoo-pint (arum) was frequently scratched out of the dry banks of hedges, and eaten in severe snowy weather. After observing, with some exactness, myself, and getting others to do the same, we found it was the thrush kind that searched it out. The root of the arum is remarkably warm and pungent.

*winter . . .*

*thrushes, too,  
must keep warm*

Tá tugtha faoi deara agam le blianta anuas gur minic an bod gadhair (cluas chaoín) scríobtha amach ó bhanc tirim na dtor, agus go n-itear é nuair a bhíonn aimsir chrua shneachtúil ann. Nuair a scrúdaíos féin go mion é, agus nuair a thugas ar dhaoine eile an rud céanna a dhéanamh, fuairamar amach gurbh iad na smólaigh faoi deara é. Tá teas iontach agus géire i bhfréamh an bhoid ghadhair.

*geimbreadh . . .*

*caithfidh an smólach leis  
teas a choimeád ann féin*

19

*rarely do they stare  
these days . . .  
country folk*

. . . **W**hen a quack, at this village, ate a toad to make the country people stare; afterwards he drank oil.

I have been informed also, from undoubted authority, that some ladies (ladies you will say of peculiar taste) took a fancy to a toad, which they nourished summer after summer, for many years, till he grew to a monstrous size, with the maggots which turn to flesh flies. The reptile used to come forth every evening from an hole under the garden-steps; and was taken up, after supper, on the table to be fed. But at last a tame raven, kenning him as he put forth his head, gave him such a severe stroke with his horny beak as put out one eye. After this accident the creature languished for some time and died.

*is annamb anois  
iad ag stánadh . . .  
muintir na tuaithe*

. . . **P**otráláí ar an mbaile seo, d'ith sé buaf chun muintir na tuaithe a chur ag stánadh air; ina dhiaidh sin d'ól sé ola.

Chuala mé chomh maith ó fhoirse iontaofa, gur thug scata ban taitneamh do bhuaf (nárbh ait iad mar mhnál), agus chothaíodar í samhradh i ndiaidh samhraidh, ar feadh roinnt mhaith blianta, gur fhás sí ina harracht, agus cruimheanna inti a d'iompaigh ina gcuileanna feola. Thagadh an reiptíl aníos gach uile thráthnóna as poll faoi na céimeanna gairdín; d'ardaítí í, tar éis suipéir, agus leagtaí ar an mbord í le go mbeathófaí í. Ach bhí peata fiaigh acu agus nuair a chonaic sé ceann na buaife ag bogadh amach, thug sé buile trom dá ghob garbh di a d'fhág ar leathshúil í. Ní bheadh sí ar a seanléim go deo arís agus cailleadh i ndeireadh báire í.

## 20

*some of them  
look like toads . . .  
snake-oil merchants*

I was not very far from Hungerford, and did not forget to make some inquiries concerning the wonderful method of curing cancers by means of toads. Several intelligent persons, both gentry and clergy, do, I find, give a great deal of credit to what was asserted in the papers: and I myself dined with a clergyman who seemed to be persuaded that what is related is matter of fact; but, when I came to attend to his account, I thought I discerned circumstances which did not a little invalidate the woman's story of the manner in which she came by her skill. She says of herself 'that, labouring under a virulent cancer, she went to some church where there was a vast crowd: on going into a pew, she was accosted by a strange clergyman; who, after expressing compassion for her situation, told her that if she would make such an application of living toads as is mentioned she would be well.'

*cuma na buaife  
ar chuid acu . . .  
lucht bréagleighis*

Ní rófhada a bhíos ó Hungerford, agus níor dhearúdas fiosrúchán a dhéanamh faoin modh iontach atá ann chun ailse a leigheas le buafa. Tacaíonn go leor daoine éirimiúla, idir chléir agus tuath, de réir mar a thuigim, le tuairim na nuachtán ina thaobh: agus chaitheas féin béile le duine den chléir a cheapann gur fíric ghlan an méid atá ráite; ach nuair a d'éist mé lena chuntas san ar scéal na mná, bhraitheas go raibh gnéithe de a mbeadh amhras ort ina dtaobh, maidir leis an mbealach ar shealbhaigh sise an scil áirithe sin. Deir sí mar gheall uirthi féin, 'go raibh ailse nimhneach ag cur isteach uirthi, go ndeachaigh sí chuig séipéal áirithe a raibh slua ollmhór ag freastal air: nuair a fuair sí suíochán di féin, bhuail ministir strainséartha bleid uirthi; tar éis dó comhbhá léi a chur in iúl faoina cás, d'inis sé di go mbeadh gach rud i gceart ach leas a bhaint as buafa beo, mar a mholtar.'

21

*birdsong!*  
*this world of hours*  
*completely upside down!*

It is, I find, in zoology as it is in botany: all nature is so full, that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined. Several birds, which are said to belong to the north only, are, it seems, often in the south.

*ceiliúr éan!*  
*an domhan seo*  
*bunoscionn ar fad!*

Is é an scéal céanna sa zó-eolaíocht agus sa bhitheolaíocht é: tá an dúlra chomh lomlán sin, gurb é an ceantar is mó éagsúlacht ann ná an ceantar sin is mó a scrúdaítear. Tá scata éan ann, éanlaith a bhaineann leis an taobh thuaidh den tír amháin, deirtear, ar fáil go minic, leis, ar an taobh ó dheas, de réir dealraimh.

## 22

*swans will sing  
when jackdaws are silent . . .  
ah, the Greeks!*

Another very unlikely spot is made use of by daws as a place to breed in, and that is Stonehenge. These birds deposit their nests in the interstices between the upright and the impost stones of that amazing work of antiquity: which circumstance alone speaks the prodigious height of the upright stones, that they should be tall enough to secure those nests from the annoyance of shepherd-boys, who are always idling round that place.

*canfaidh ealaí  
nuair a bheidh cága ina dtost . . .  
á, na Gréagaigh!*

Áit eile nach mbeifeá ag súil leis mar ionad póraithe na gcág is ea Stonehenge. Cuireann na héin sin a gcuid neadacha sna spásanna idir na clocha ingearacha agus na clocha mullaigh den leacht iontach sin ón seansaol: insíonn an méid sin féin cé chomh hard is atá na liagáin sin, iad ard go leor chun na neadacha a chosaint ar na haoirí óga a bhíonn i gcónaí ag crochadh thart ansin is iad ag caitheamh an lae go díomhaoin.

23

*creaking sound  
of daylight dying . . .  
goat-sucker!*

There is no bird, I believe, whose manners I have studied more than that of the *caprimulgus* (the goat-sucker), as it is a wonderful and curious creature: but I have always found that though sometimes it may chatter as it flies, as I know it does, yet in general it utters its jarring note sitting on a bough; and I have for many an half hour watched it as it sat with its under mandible quivering, and particularly this summer. It perches usually on a bare twig, with its head lower than its tail . . .

*díoscán  
is an lá ag gabháil ó sholas . . .  
tuirne lín!*

Níl aon éan eile, creidim, is mó a bhfuil staidéar déanta agamsa ar a iompar ná an *caprimulgus* (tuirne lín), mar is neach iontach é, neach inspéise: agus tá faighte amach agam go mbíonn sé ag cabaireacht uaireanta le linn dó a bheith ag eitilt, go deimhin; mar sin féin, tríd is tríd, cloistear an nóta míbhinn sin uaidh agus é ina shuí ar chraobh; agus is iomaí leathuair an chloig a chaitheas-sa agus mé ag breathnú air is é ina shuí, a mhandabal íochtair ar crith, go háirithe an samhradh seo. Is gnách go suíonn sé ar chraobhóg lom, an ceann níos ísle aige ná an t-eireaball . . .

# 24

*all night  
it sang  
and then . . .*

It is a size less than the grasshopper-lark; the head, back, and coverts of the wings of a dusky brown, without those dark spots of the grasshopper-lark; over each eye is a milk-white stroke; the chin and throat are white, and the under parts of a yellowish white; the rump is tawny and the feathers of the tail sharp-pointed; the bill is dusky and sharp, and the legs are dusky; the hinder claw long and crooked. The person that shot it says that it sung so like a reed-sparrow that he took it for one; and that it sings all night . . .

*the night singer  
is no more . . .  
empty universe*

*an oíche go léir  
a chan sé  
is ansin . . .*

Is lú é ná an ceolaire casarnaí; dath donn crónbhuí ar an gceann, ar an droim agus ar chlúdach na sciathán, ach níl na spotaí dubha sin air a fhaightear ar an gceolaire casarnaí; tá stríoc lachtbhán os cionn an dá shúl aige; is bán iad an smig is an scornach, agus is bánbhuí iad an chuid íochtarach de; ciarbhuí atá an prompa agus is biorach iad cleití an eireabaill; dath crónbhuí atá ar an ngob géar agus an dath céanna ar na cosa; is fada cam é an crobh deiridh. An té a lámhaigh é, deir sé gur chan sé ar nós ceolaire cíbe agus gur mheas seisean gurb é sin a bhí ann; agus canann sé an oíche ar fad, dar leis . . .

*ní hann níos mó  
don cheolaire oíche . . .  
folamb í an chruinne*

## 25

In June last I procured a litter of four or five young hedgehogs, which appeared to be about five or six days old; they, I find, like puppies, are born blind, and could not see when they came to my hands. No doubt their spines are soft and flexible at the time of their birth, or else the poor dam would have but a bad time of it in the critical moment of parturition: but it is plain that they soon harden; for these little pigs had such stiff prickles on their backs and sides as would easily have fetched blood, had they not been handled with caution.

*newspaper headline:  
a million species  
to disappear!*

Hedgehogs make a deep and warm hibernaculum with leaves and moss, in which they conceal themselves for the winter: but I never could find that they stored in any winter provision, as some quadrupeds certainly do.

Imí an Mheithimh seo caite, fuaireas áil gráinneog, ceithre nó cúig cinn, agus an chuma orthu go rabhadar cúig nó sé lá d'aois, nó mar sin; tugaim faoi deara go saolaítear dall iad, ar nós coileán, agus ní raibh radharc acu ar aon ní nuair a tháinig siad chugam isteach im' lámha. Caithfidh gur bog solúbtha iad a ndealga nuair a thagann siad ar an saol nó is olc a raghadh sé don mháthair ag an nóiméad sin: is léir nach fada go dtagann cruas iontu; mar bhí dealga righne ar dhroim na muicíní sin a bhainfeadh fuil asat, mura láimhseálfá go cúramach iad.

*ceannlíne nuachtáin:  
milliún speiceas  
i mbaol!*

Cruthaíonn an ghráinneog gnáthóg gheimhreachais di féin atá domhain agus teolaí, le duilleoga agus caonach, agus téann i bhfolach inti ar feadh an gheimhridh: ach ní bhfuairéas amach riamh an stórálan sí soláthar geimhridh inti, mar is gnách le ceathairchosaigh áirithe a dhéanamh.

## 26

On Michaelmas-day 1768 I managed to get a sight of the female moose belonging to the Duke of Richmond, at Goodwood; but was greatly disappointed, when I arrived at the spot, to find that it died, after having appeared in a languishing way for some time, on the morning before. . . . I found it in an old green-house, slung under the belly and chin by ropes, and in a standing posture; but, though it had been dead for so short a time, it was in so putrid a state that the stench was hardly supportable.

*even dukes  
and their menagerie . . .  
all must die*

*an diúc, fíú,  
is a phaca ainmhithe . . .  
níl aon éalú ón mbás*

Lá Fhéile Michíl 1768, d'éirigh liom spléachadh a fháil ar mhús bainean arbh le Diúc Richmond í in Goodwood; ach bhí an-díomá orm nuair a bhaineas an ball úd amach, nuair a tuigeadh dom gur cailleadh í an mhaidín roimhe sin, tar éis di a bheith leice le tamall . . . Tháinig mé uirthi i seanteach gloine, rópaí faoina bolg is faoina smig, agus í ina seasamh; ach cé nárbh fhada marbh í, bhí sí chomh morgtha sin nárbh fhéidir cur suas rófhada leis an mbréantas.

27

*false rain . . .  
airy dance  
of turnip flies*

The insect that infests turnips and many crops in the garden (destroying often whole fields while in their seedling leaves) is an animal that wants to be better known. The country people here call it the turnip-fly and black dolphin; but I know it to be one of the coleoptera; the ‘*chrysomela oleracea, saltatoria, femoribus posficis crassissimis.*’ In very hot summers they abound to an amazing degree, and as you walk in a field or in a garden, make a pattering like rain, by jumping on the leaves of the turnips or cabbages.

*fearthainn bhréige . . .  
damhsa aerach  
na gcúileanna tornapa*

Ba chóir go mbeadh eolas níos forleithne ar an bhfeithid sin a inmhiolaíonn tornapaí, agus go leor barr gairdín (goirt iomlána á milleadh aici go minic, nuair a bhíonn sí sna duilleoga síolóige). Tugann muintir na tuaithe anseo an chuil tornapa uirthi, nó an deif dhubh, ach tá a fhios agamsa gur leis an *coleoptera* a bhaineann sí: an *chrysomela oleracea, saltatoria, femoribus posficis crassissimis.* Is iontach ar fad a líon má bhíonn samhradh an-te ann, agus má ghlacann tú siúlóid i ngort nó i ngairdín, chloisfeá mionchnagaireacht ar nós fearthainne agus iad ag preabadh ar dhuilleoga tornapaí nó cabáiste.

## 28

Weasels prey on moles, as appears by their being sometimes caught in mole-traps.

*for sale:  
deadly mole trap  
(used once only)*

Creachann easóga caocháin, mar is léir nuair a bheirtear orthu uaireanta i ngaistí caochán.

*ar díol:  
gaiiste caochán marfach  
(úsáideadh uair ambáin é)*

29

Wrens sing all the winter through, frost excepted.

*singing wren!  
does your throat  
never get sore?*

Canann dreoilíní an geimhreadh go léir, ach amháin le linn an tseaca

*a dhreoilín an cheoil!  
nach mbíonn scornach thinn  
riamb ort?*

## 30

*the secret life  
of fishes . . .  
how little we know*

In the garden of the Black Bear Inn in the town of Reading is a stream or canal running under the stables and out into the fields on the other side of the road; in this water are many carps, which lie rolling about in sight, being fed by travellers, who amuse themselves by tossing them bread: but as soon as the weather grows at all severe these fishes are no longer seen, because they retire under the stables, where they remain till the return of spring. Do they lie in a torpid state? if they do not, how are they supported?

*saol rúnda  
na n-iasc . . .  
nach beag atá ar eolas againn*

In gairdín Thábhairne an Bhéir Dhuibh i mbaile Reading, tá sruthán nó canáil atá ag rith faoi na stáblaí ann agus amach sna páirceanna atá ar an taobh eile den bhóthar; tá go leor carbán ann, iad le feiceáil ansin agus iad ag rabhláil thart, á mbeathú ag taistealaithe a chaitheann grabhróga aráin chucu mar spraoi: ach má éiríonn an aimsir dian, ní bhíonn radharc níos mó ar na héisc sin, mar cúláíonn siad isteach faoi na stáblaí agus fanaid ann go tús an earraigh. An támhach dóibh ansin? Murab ea, conas a mhaireann siad?

31

*wonder of wonders!  
a nun sits  
on a dung-heap*

The blue titmouse, or nun, is a great frequenter of houses, and a general devourer. Beside insects, it is very fond of flesh; for it frequently picks bones on dung-hills: it is a vast admirer of suet, and haunts butchers' shops.

*iontas na n-iontas!  
bean rialta ina suí  
ar charn aoiligh*

Is breá leis an meantán gorm, nó an bhean rialta, cuairt a thabhairt ar thithe, agus d'íosfadh sí rud ar bith. Seachas feithidí, tá sí an-cheanúil ar fheoil; mar is minic ag piocadh na gcnámh í ar charn aoiligh: tá sí scafa chun geire, agus bíonn sí ag taithiú na siopaí búistéara i gcónaí.

32

*wood pigeons . . .  
their flesh  
easily penetrated*

I have consulted a sportsman, now in his seventy-eighth year, who tells me that fifty or sixty years back, when the beechen woods were much more extensive than at present, the number of wood-pigeons was astonishing; that he has often killed near twenty in a day. . . .

The food of these numberless emigrants was beech-mast and some acorns; and particularly barley, which they collected in the stubbles. But of late years, since the vast increase of turnips, that vegetable has furnished a great part of their support in hard weather; and the holes they pick in these roots greatly damage the crop. From this food their flesh has contracted a rancidness which occasions them to be rejected by nicer judges of eating, who thought them before a delicate dish.

*coilm choille . . .  
ní deacair criathar a dbéanamh  
dá bhfeoil*

Chuas i gcomhairle le fear spóirt, atá anois ocht mbliana déag d'aois agus trí scór, agus deir sé liom nuair a bhíodh na coillte feá i bhfad ní b'fhairsinge ná mar atá anois, leathchéad nó trí scór bliain ó shin, go gcuirfeadh líon na gcolm coille iontas an domhain ort; is minic a mharaigh sé scór díobh in aon lá amháin . . .

Feámheas agus roinnt dearcán is mó a d'ith na himircigh úd gan áireamh; agus corna ach go háirithe, a bhailíodar sa choinleach. Ach le blianta beaga anuas, ó tharla méadú an-mhór a theacht ar thornapaí, is é an glasa sin is mó a chothaíonn iad nuair a bhíonn an aimsir crua; is mór an damáiste don bharr iad na poill a chuireann siad sna rútaí. Is é an bia sin is cúis leis an mblas camhraithe atá ar a bhfeoil, agus diúltaíonn an beadaí dóibh, an té a mheas go dtí seo iad a bheith dea-bhlasta.

33

*midnight . . .  
a bird shifts  
in its cage*

Once knew a tame red-breast in a cage that always sang as long as candles were in the room; but in their wild state no one supposes they sing in the night.

*meán oíche . . .  
corraíonn éan  
ina chás*

Bhí eolas agam ar pheata spideoige i gcás a chanadh fad is a bhí coinnle sa seomra; ní cheapadh éinne, áfach, go gcanfaidís istoíche ina dtimpeallacht nádúrtha.

# 34

As to the matter of long-billed birds growing fatter in moderate frosts, I have no doubt within myself what should be the reason. The thriving at those times appears to me to arise altogether from the gentle check which the cold throws upon insensible perspiration. The case is just the same with blackbirds, etc.; and farmers and warreners observe, the first, that their hogs fat more kindly at such times, and the latter that the rabbits are never in such good case as in a gentle frost.

*unheard . . .  
a frost flower  
breaks in two*

Maidir le héin ghobfhada a éiríonn níos raimhre nuair a bhíonn sioc measartha ann, níl aon amhras orm faoin gcúis a bheadh leis sin. Feictear domsa go mbíonn rath orthu toisc go gcuireann an fuacht cosc beag ar allas neamhbhraite. Is é an scéal céanna é i measc na lon, etc.; tá tugtha faoi deara ag feirmeoirí agus maoir choinicéir é – an chéad dream, deir siad go ramhraíonn an collach coillte go deas ag amanna mar é, agus an dara dream a mhaíonn nach mbíonn na coiníní riamh chomh breá is a bhíonn siad nuair a bhíonn sioc measartha ann.

*níor chualathas é . . .  
bláth seaca  
a bhris ina dhá leath*

35

You wonder, with good reason, that the hedge-sparrows, etc., can be induced to sit at all on the egg of the cuckoo without being scandalized at the vast disproportioned size of the supposititious egg; but the brute creation, I suppose, have very little idea of size, colour, or number . . .

I think the matter might easily be determined whether a cuckoo lays one or two eggs, or more, in a season, by opening a female during the laying-time. If more than one was come down out of the ovary, and advanced to a good size, doubtless then she would that spring lay more than one.

I will endeavour to get a hen, and to examine.

*cuckoo!*  
*will you not sing once more*  
*in my lifetime*

Conas, a deir tú, agus cúis mhaith agat, conas a mhealltar donnóga, etc., chun suí ar ubh na cuaiche gan fearg a bheith orthu faoi mhéid díréireach na huibhe strainséartha; ach is dócha nach bhfuil tuairim ag ainmhithe faoi mhéid, ná dath, ná líon . . .

Measaim go bhféadfaí a fháil amach an ubh amháin, dhá ubh, nó níos mó a bhíonn ag an gcuach in aon séasúr amháin trína hoscailt am goir. Dá dtiocfadh níos mó ná ceann amháin amach síos tríd an ubhagán, agus í sách mór, is cinnte go mbeadh níos mó ná ceann amháin aici an t-earrach sin.

Tiocfad ar chearc chuaiche, más féidir, chun í a scrúdú.

*a chuach*  
*nach gcanfá uair amháin eile*  
*le linn domsa bheith abbus*

# 36

In former letters we have considered whether it was probable that woodcocks in moon-shiny nights cross the German ocean from Scandinavia. As a proof that birds of less speed may pass that sea, considerable as it is, I shall relate the following incident, which, though mentioned to have happened so many years ago, was strictly matter of fact: — As some people were shooting in the parish of Trotton, in the county of Sussex, they killed a duck in that dreadful winter 1708-9, with a silver collar about its neck,\* on which were engraven the arms of the king of Denmark.

*crossing  
the silver mirror of the sea  
woodcocks*

I litreacha roimhe seo, mhachnaíomar ar an gcreabhar: an mbeadh ar a chumas, ar oícheanta gealaí, muir na Gearmáine a chur de ó Chríoch Lochlann? Mar fhianaise ar éin nach bhfuil chomh tapa leis siúd, agus a thrasnaigh an mhuir chéanna, dá mhéad í, inseoidh mé an scéal seo a leanas, agus cé go ndeirtear gur roinnt mhaith blianta ó shin a tharla sé, níl amhras ná gur tharla a leithéid – Agus daoine áirithe amuigh ag foghláireacht i bparóiste Trotton, i gcontae Sussex, mharáodar lacha le linn dhrochghheimhreadh úd 1708-09, lacha a raibh coiléar airgid thart ar a mhúineál agus ar a raibh armas rí na Danmhairge greanta.

*thar scáthán airgid  
na farraige anonn  
creabhair*

# 37

*the music  
of owls...  
what is it?*

A friend remarks that many (most) of his owls hoot in B flat: but that one went almost half a note below A. The pipe he tried their notes by was a common half-crown pitch-pipe, such as masters use for tuning of harpsichords; it was the common London pitch.

A neighbour of mine, who is said to have a nice ear, remarks that the owls about this village hoot in three different keys, in G flat, or F sharp, in B flat and A flat. He heard two hooting to each other, the one in A flat, and the other in B flat. Query: Do these different notes proceed from different species, or only from various individuals?

*ceol  
na n-ulchabhán . . .  
cad é féin?*

Deir cara liom gur in B maol a scréachann go leor (formhór) dá chuid ulchabhán: ach gur scréach ceann amháin díobh leathnóta faoina bhun sin. Ba le gnáth-fheadóg airde leathchorónach a thriail sé a gcuid nótaí, an sort a úsáideann máistrí chun cruitchora a thiúnadh; gnáth-airde London.

Deir comharsa liom, a bhfuil cluas mhaith aige, deirtear, deir sé go bhfuil trí ghléas dhifriúla ag ulchabháin an tsráidbhaile seo, G maol, nó F géar, B maol agus A maol. Chuala sé dhá ulchabhán ag scréachaíl chun a chéile, ceann acu in A maol, agus an ceann eile in B maol. Ceist: An ó speicis éagsúla a thagann na nótaí éagsúla sin, nó díreach ó éin éagsúla?

38

*perhaps  
it remembers the Flood . . .  
rain-fearing tortoise*

No part of its behaviour ever struck me more than the extreme timidity it always expresses with regard to rain; for though it has a shell that would secure it against the wheel of a loaded cart, yet does it discover as much solicitude about rain as a lady dressed in all her best attire . . .

*an é  
gur cuimbin léi an Díle . . .  
toirtís ag teitheadh ón mbáisteach*

Níl aon chuid dá hiompraíocht is mó a chuaigh i bhfeidhm orm ná í a bheith an-seachantach ar an mbáisteach; mar cé go bhfuil blaosc uirthi a chosnódh í ar roth cairte is í faoi ualach, mar sin féin is geall le bean faoina gúna Domhnaigh í a bheadh buartha faoi bhraon báistí . . .

39

About nine an appearance very unusual began to demand our attention, a shower of cobwebs falling from very elevated regions, and continuing, without any interruption, till the close of the day. These webs were not single filmy threads, floating in the air in all directions, but perfect flakes or rags; some near an inch broad, and five or six long, which fell with a degree of velocity which showed they were considerably heavier than the atmosphere.

On every side as the observer turned his eyes might he behold a continual succession of fresh flakes falling into his sight, and twinkling like stars as they turned their sides towards the sun.

*some kind  
of trap, is it?  
gossamer*

Thart ar a naoi a chlog ar maidin, tharla rud neamhchoitianta a tharraing ár n-aird, cith téad damháin alla ag titim as réigiúin an-ard, agus a lean ar aghaidh gan stad gan staonadh go deireadh an lae. Ní téada fíneálta aonair a bhí iontu, ar snámh san aer i ngach treo, ach calóga nó ceirteacha foirfe; cuid acu beagnach orlach ar leithead, agus cúig nó sé horlaí ar fhaid, agus a thit chomh gasta sin go gcaithfidh go rabhadar cuid mhaith níos troime ná an t-atmaisféar.

Ar gach taobh de, d'fheicfeadh an breathnóir calóga úra ag titim agus iad ag lonrú mar réaltaí de réir mar a d'iompaíodar a dtaobh i dtreo na gréine.

*gaiste  
de shaghas éigin, ab ea  
téada an phuca! \**

\* *strings of the pooka, in Irish; the pooka is an inauspicious goblin*

# 40

Avenues, and long walks under hedges, and pasture-fields, and mown meadows where cattle graze, are her delight, especially if there are trees interspersed; because in such spots insects most abound. When a fly is taken a smart snap from her bill is heard, resembling the noise at the shutting of a watch-case; but the motion of the mandibles are too quick for the eye.

*the time  
it takes a swallow . . .  
to catch a fly*

Is aoibhinn léi ascaillí, siúláin fhada faoi sceacha, agus móinéir lomtha nuair a bhíonn na ba ar iníor, go háirithe má bhíonn crainn ann chomh maith; mar is sna háiteanna sin is líonmhaire iad na feithidí. Nuair a bheirtear ar chuileog, cloistear cnag géar óna gob, ar nós cás uaireadóra á dhúnadh; ach is róghasta don tsúil iad oibriú na mandabal.

*an t-am  
a thógfadh sé ar áinle . . .  
breith ar chuil*

## AFTERWORD

When, as a young adult, I first read Gilbert White's exceptional work, I was only open to its perfections. Now I see some of its imperfections, such as a commonly held jaundiced view of the Irish:

Some future faunist, a man of fortune, will, I hope, extend his visits to the kingdom of Ireland; a new field, and a country little known to the naturalist . . . The manners of the wild natives, their superstitions, their prejudices, their sordid way of life, will extort from him many useful reflections . . .

In a similar vein, the language of birds is of more interest to our pastor-naturalist than the languages of Britain. There's only one reference to Welsh – among an abundance of Latin and Greek – and the Gypsies are said to speak a 'harsh gibberish!'

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

But let us set linguistic arrogance aside, for it sours everything. And anyway, society was stratified somewhat differently then. Class differences exist now, as then, but language has changed: White was the first to use the word 'golly' in print, "much in use among our carters and the lowest people." You couldn't refer to 'the lowest people' today, so let's park this shortcoming and praise the work.

How utterly charming he is when he writes about birds! Was he the first ornithologist to note that swifts copulate on the wing? His notion of swallows hibernating (rather than emigrating) is pure fancy, however.

Few naturalists, before or since, have given the reader such a sense of sharing the observations and discoveries of the writer, a sensation of being there; this, too, is the sheer delight of the haiku moment, being wonderfully alive to an instance of seeing.

In an edition (1938) of White's works, H.J. Massingham wrote:

With the exception of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, there can hardly be another English man of letters to whom a larger body of comment and criticism has been devoted than Gilbert White . . .

This will come as a surprise to many (at least outside of England) as White is hardly a household name today. More is the pity. His patient, dutiful recording of the world of nature in his parish of Selborne is a literary wonder.

The haikuist will immediately see many ‘found’ haiku and monoku (one-line haiku) in White’s captivating writings:

*sun chilly      cold white dew*

*strawberries dry and tasteless*

*quail calls*

*in the field*

*the mare lies out      St Foin begins to blow*

*myriads of tadpoles*

*traverse Combwood pond*

*in shoals*

*soft wind      the woodpecker laughs*

No journal entry of his seems to be more significant than the next. For instance, equal importance and equal length (more or less) is attached to the following announcements:

Jan.28: *Bees come out and gather on the snow drops.*

Feb.1: *The Republic of France declares war against England and Holland.*

I had initially thought of extracting vignettes from White’s Natural History and placing them on the page as ‘found,’ bilingual haiku and senryū, more or less in the manner pursued in a previous book, *The*

*Stars are His Bones* (Cross-Cultural Communications, New York) with Indian photographer Debiprasad Mukherjee, a work which takes an early translation of the Upanishads as source material.

Resisting the temptation of plundering the text of his Natural History for ‘found’ haiku and senryū (haiku’s carefree first cousin), I convinced myself that White’s writings could well serve the purposes of haibun.

Why not metamorphose selected passages of his Natural History in an unexpected way, namely, taking his sketches as a haibun platform for the creation of complementary haiku. Using the work of another in this way is, after all, a form of self-effacement, an action which is prerequisite to authentic haiku.

Haibun is now taking its place among various minimalist literary arts that have become popular in this digital age. But what is haibun? In its notes towards defining the genre, the Haiku Society of America came up with this:

Most haibun range from well under 100 words to 200 or 300. Some longer haibun may contain a few haiku interspersed between sections of prose. In haibun the connections between the prose and any included haiku may not be immediately obvious, or the haiku may deepen the tone, or take the work in a new direction, recasting the meaning of the foregoing prose, much as a stanza in a linked-verse poem revises the meaning of the previous verse . . .

In her insightful note which prefaces this book of haibun, Professor Aimee Nezhukumatathil, echoing Bashō, speaks of natural phenomena which ‘evoke longing, sadness, or immediate sympathy’. The immediacy of White’s vivid (and mostly accurate) descriptions of natural phenomena, especially birds – which have been known to fly in and out of my own *oeuvre* – allowed me to write haiku to his prose passages, not in some mechanical or formulaic way, but as though I myself had been a trustworthy witness to his avian musings and keen observations.

Could this slim volume inspire other haijin and haibunists to “cannibalise” favourite prose texts as demonstrated in these pages?

When interviewed in March 2008 by Jeffrey Woodward in *Contemporary Haibun Online*, Ken Jones, a Welsh Zen-Buddhist, remarked:

“I don’t doubt that at least some stories by the likes of Chekhov and Beckett could be turned into haibun either by the insertion of haiku or maybe even by folding out key phrases into three liners . . .”

Jones qualified that statement by saying that true haiku spirit was a necessary ingredient of successful haibun.

Had he known of haibun and haiku, Gilbert White himself might readily have tried his hand at the genre, for he peppers his own prose with much Greek, Latin and English poetry. But would he have the necessary Buddhist empathy for all sentient beings, or would his scientific exactitude and pragmatic objectivity have partly or fully doused the core ingredient of haiku spirit?

Gabriel Rosenstock  
Baile Átha Cliath (Dublin), 2022

## ABOUT THE POET:

**G**abriel Rosenstock (born 1949) is a prolific writer, in Irish and English, for adults and children alike. He lives in Dublin, Ireland. He is a poet who also writes haiku, tanka, essays, novels and plays, author-translator of over 200 books.

Recent titles by the author include *Daybreak: poem-prayers for prisoners*, a volume of tanka, *Conversations with Lí Hè*, a bilingual volume of poems, and *A Sweater for the Tayfel* a collection of ekphrastic Irish/English haiku celebrating the art of I.B. Ryback.

## ABOUT THE SOURCE FOR THE PROSE:

*The Natural History of Selborne* was written by Gilbert White (1720-1793), an English parson and naturalist. It is comprised of a series of letters, both real correspondence with other contemporary naturalists and letters written expressly for inclusion in the book. It was published in 1789 and because of its charm, simplicity, and detailed depiction of pre-industrial England, has been continuously in print since.

## ABOUT THE SELBORNE HAIBUN:

At this time of threat to the natural world of which the human is a small part, Gabriel Rosenstock brings a welcome and timely addition to the haibun lover's bookshelf. Consisting of a long sequence of Jikai, with the paragraphs of prose extracted from Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* and the haiku provided as intuitive responses to each, by the creator of this new oeuvre, it is a collaboration between writers separated by centuries but united in their affinity with non-human creatures. In the haiku, the reader will find the influence of both Bashō and Issa and in the whole, evidence that as poets we are together weaving one huge poem.

Diana Webb  
guest editor *Drifting Sands Haibun*

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