

Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Editor: Claire Everett

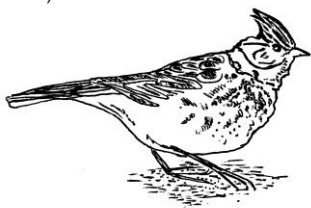
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Submission guidelines: see last page of journal and/or the website. The latter will be updated regularly and will showcase the “Skylark’s Nest” winners and runners up, as well as selected tanka-art/haiga.

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Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Summer 2015: volume 3, number 1

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Editor's Message

It seems to have been a very long winter, particularly as it began with news of the death of Brian Zimmer. Not only was Brian a dear friend (he encouraged me in my early years as a writer of haiku and tanka and also supported me through my eldest son's journey with bipolar) but he was a gifted poet. When I announced the launch of *Skylark*, Brian publicly said, "It is bound to succeed," and that endorsement kept me motivated during those early months of self-doubt. This, the fifth issue, marks *Skylark's* third summer and may it sing to the international tanka community, in memory of Brian, in celebration of life, and love and poetry. In her grief, Joy McCall has written many beautiful pieces to honour and remember her beloved friend and I am delighted to be able to include some of them here. I hope that as many of you as possible will feel inspired to enter the next *Skylark's* Nest Award for which the prompt is a roe deer (or a deer of your choice). Those close to Brian will know that he regarded these exquisite creatures as kinsfolk. Indeed, I like to think he is with them now. Certainly, he possessed the same grace and gentleness of spirit . . . and wherever they are there is poetry

Tanka prose and rengay are both features of this issue. The latter presented something of a conundrum for me, as I have at times questioned its place in a tanka journal. Following a fellow editor's decision to no longer publish rengay, I received an increase in submissions. I thought it would be worthwhile asking some of the leading practitioners why they believe rengay has a place in a tanka journal. I know there are those in the haiku and tanka communities for whom rules and definitions are very important. I am inclined to think there is always room for manoeuvre and am also aware there are few venues for rengay. I am delighted that some of the writers I put these questions to had very clear ideas about the genre and were willing to share them with *Skylark* readers, and David Terelinck kindly agreed to write an article in support of rengay's place in a tanka journal. It is not disputed that rengay has its poetic foundations in the haiku tradition, but it seems that it is a linked form that appeals to many tanka poets, who believe, like me, that it can stake a claim in both genres. Whatever your views (and please write to me, or Jenny, if you feel inclined) you will see that rengay continues to be represented in *Skylark*, the only difference being, I have awarded it its own section.

—Claire Everett, April 2015

all the day long—
yet not long enough for the skylark,
singing, singing

—**Matsuo Basho** (1644-1694)

In Memory of
Brian Zimmer

1957-2014

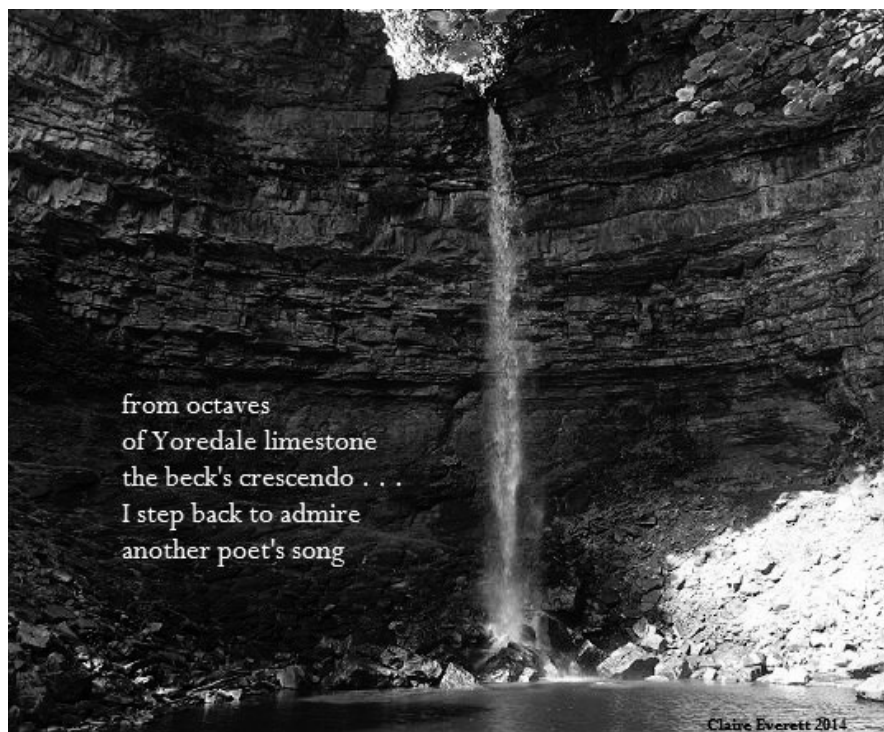
a silent blackbird
with one white feather
in its wing
a poet's way of saying
he's finally found peace

—*Claire Everett, UK*
08.21 am, November 7th 2014

autumn moon—
where the leaves had fallen
I heard the wind
whisper
your name

—*Paul Smith, UK*
10.55 am, November 7th 2014

Journey well, our friend. The deer are waiting.



The Skylark's Nest

The Winners

Selections by Joyce. S Greene, USA

Over sand or snow, on asphalt or tar, through mountains or woods, animal tracks and footprints march across the landscape, followed by hunters and parents, lovers and readers, pet owners and dreamers. The followers, their curiosity piqued by signs of what, or who, has gone before, face the unknown in the hope of understanding others as well as themselves. The tanka, with its invitation to dream, seems the perfect form to frame such quests. The poet sows the seeds of inspiration in five short lines, while the reader tracks his own truth, and, in doing so, may discover the answer to questions long considered. The rock thrown into a pond by the poet may have given his thoughts new directions and successfully ended searches.

The submissions to this issue's *Skylark's Nest* included a fascinating variety of prints, and to choose among them was not easy. The ones I selected made me feel a part of the moments painted by the poets. My critiques of the runner-ups are in no special order.

I was charmed by the sly humor of the first selected runner-up, a tanka by *James Chessing, USA*. I envisioned a cat tracking mud into a newly washed kitchen, eliciting different reactions depending on the viewers' perspectives. For the drought-weary the paw prints are a happy portent of green fields and flowers, but, as the poet playfully suggests in an aside, they are just more work for a tired housekeeper. The last line of a tanka should be its highlight, and the image this poet kept for last was one that made me smile.

muddy paw prints
on the kitchen floor
in a drought
the wet cat is a portent
or just a rascal who's left a mess

The next runner-up tanka, written by *Mary Davila, USA*, touched my heart. Losing a pet is one of life's saddest moments, and what pet owner hasn't felt their beloved late cat or dog lie down next to him or her, in the twilight moments between wakefulness and sleep?

The last two lines of this tanka describe a mysterious scenario for the reader's contemplation. From whence came those phantom paw prints, a supernatural event or the speaker's wishful thinking? Or perhaps there's a less mysterious explanation. Has a new cat become a member of the family? The poet doesn't tell, so it's up to the reader to decide.

half asleep
I feel the bed bounce
as if our cat had jumped up . . .
paw prints
on his box of ashes

The final runner-up tanka, by *Shloka Shankar, India*, is very beautiful. The image of an old diary being dusted off after years of neglect in an attic and the subsequent image of the poet chasing after contrails of memories, are lyrical and striking. This tanka is truly a small song.

dusting
an old diary
from oblivion . . .
i chase the contrails
of my mind

The tanka I selected as the winner of this issue's *Skylark's Nest* award was written by *Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK*. This small gem introduces us to the South Indian custom of dipping young children's feet into rice batter and watching them leave footprint imprints behind in celebration of their deity's birth. The suggestion of happy people and joyous times is made by the poet in these first two lines. The final three lines are very dissimilar in tone yet echo the image painted in the preceding lines. Years have passed and the children have "walked away" from their parents, but this time they have taken the laughter with them. The parents are left behind, lonely and mute. This tanka packs a lifetime of emotion into its short form, and I was very impressed by the image used to close the tanka. It captured perfectly the deep sense of loss experienced by so many empty nest couples:

little feet
dipped in rice batter—
years now
since you walked away
with our laughter

Note: In South India, as part of celebrating Lord Krishna's birthday, there is a tradition of drawing tiny footprints in the home by dipping little kids' feet in rice batter and planting their feet on the floor/ or getting them to walk.

I would like to extend my thanks to all those who submitted tanka to the *Skylark's Nest* for this contest. I enjoyed reading your tanka very much. Also, I would like to thank Beth McFarland for choosing my tanka as the winner of the Great Auk contest, as well as Claire and Amy for their valuable work with *Skylark* and *Skylark's Nest*. And again, congratulations to *Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy* for composing a very special tanka. He will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the Skylark's Nest competition for issue 3:2, Winter 2015.



new year's dream
the clarity
of falling snow
why i am foggy about
our entanglement?

Pamela A. Babusci
2015

kanji for: year of the goat

The Skylark's Nest Prompt
3:2, Winter 2015



The theme for the next prompt is deer, and is dedicated to the memory of our poet friend Brian Zimmer. You may write about roe deer, white-tailed deer, or any deer that inspires you. Alternatively you might choose to focus on the qualities of these beautiful creatures: grace, lightness-of-being, sensitivity, instinct . . . You may wish to write of things we sense, but cannot see, of the 'otherworld' and all that exists "beyond our ken."

You are invited to meditate on Amy's drawing and use it as a source of inspiration. Include your entry in your normal submission, clearly labelling it as your Skylark's Nest entry, or feel free to send your tanka separately when inspiration strikes!

in silence
deeper than the scent
of pine
we listen
for the eyes of deer

—Claire
Presence #43, 2011

Individual Tanka



hydrangea petals
dry and faded
into the soft colors
of times past . . .
Miss Havisham's lament

alone, at last,
under the low skies
of open fields
in the lavender light of evening
I think of you

Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA

dusting
these old books
my mother bound . . .
I find her
Where the Blue Begins

tethered,
my crimson kite soars
in the winter sky . . .
I wind round my fingers
this long strand of years

step by step
I cross the stream
on a fallen tree—
with open arms I balance
childhood and old age

bunching onions—
the roots of our lives
entangled,
clotted with earth
and pungent as tears

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

an august heat wave
we eat a peach all the way
down to its pit
sharing the flesh that once
sweetly filled every indent

arcading
into the summer sky
a sunbow
grounding all my woes
bringing me down to earth

an'ya, USA

spring mists rise
& with them
a blue heron
covered in dew
& leftover moonlight

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

a little water
and the potted plant
stands tall—
with just a word from you
her smile fills the room

Anne Benjamin, Australia

in my sixtieth year
certain things go missing—
I promise
never to lose the person
who plants seedlings in the rain

just one LP
in our record collection—
two blonde sisters
grooving to Van Morrison
wishing we were brown-eyed girls

moonlit path
across the dunes
this summer
she learns the feel
of a different hand in hers

Michelle Brock, Australia

a long air walk
I never would have
reached you
without knowing
how to dream

rocks and sticks
for a little dam
again the mountain stream
finds another way
around me

Randy Brooks, USA

in the depths
of our backwoods
a secret cubby . . .
decades later nothing
but a sougning breeze

a lark sings
in a rose-filled bower . . .
our marriage builds
over the many years
despite what everyone said

Dawn Bruce, Australia

curled leaves
holding themselves
just so—
i know i'm home when
my bearing changes

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

plates clatter
in the cupboard
a train
passes through
my lonesome meal

Matthew Caretti, USA

you light the oil lamp—
a lovely restlessness that grows
in a beloved soul
a life you nourish with
your body's attention

prižigaš oljno luč—
krasen nemir, ki se razrašča
v ljubljeni duši,
je življenje, ki ga hraniš
s pozornostjo svojega telesa

Metod Češek, Slovenia

we talk
of everything
and nothing
the bowl of persimmons
not one of them ripe

a morning glory
entwines the blooming
canna lily
the vagaries
of staying in love

James Chessing, USA

sulphurous heat
of a monsoon night storm
I lie awake
to the delirious ferment
of the nightjar's song

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan



silence . . .
yet how I long to hear
the lyrics
from blooms and butterflies,
the melody of sunlight

little things
bring me to tears . . .
broken scissors
reminding me how much
we relied on each other

within an hour
Mum taught me to knit—
decades later
I'm still learning to go back
and make things right

night settles
into the cracks and crannies
of this old house—
I close my eyes to hear
the slow escape of secrets

Susan Constable, USA

thirteen years
crammed into a U-Haul . . .
we start over
with everything
but a destination

Mary Davila, USA



buying
a garden statue . . .
my slight pause
before I accept
the chip in her angel wing

how I bristled
at ruffles, bows, and hats,
favoring
my baggy play dress
made of pillow ticking

by my knee
a soft thud and rustle—
I pause
to take another look
at an ugly brown bug

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

behind this grey curtain
of winter rain
grey skies grey hills
I sense but do not see
the green of spring

Jonathan Day, USA



a dream comes
to my rescue, golden hued
within a thick-walled
Andalucian house
my dark folly repaired

Susan Diridoni, USA

the harvest moon
burnt gold this year . . .
I begin to learn
things old people know
but cannot say

Rebecca Drouilhet, USA

My grandmother
sent my brother and me
into an orchard
to hunt and cut
the Wild Asparagus

In a field
I touch heads
with a bison
I back away
eyes down

Bruce England, USA

frenzied gulls
follow the tractor
back and forth—
a loveless past
destined to repeat

Tim Gardiner, UK

tell me,
muse of my tanka
world,
where do bluebirds fly
without a rainbow?

Sanford Goldstein, Japan

the man
in the moon
and I
spend the night together
a poet is born

Joyce S. Greene, USA

a falling star
as I part the curtains
at cock crow
perhaps I knew
trust would not last

beneath the breakers
a hermit crab chooses
an empty shell . . .
I didn't appreciate
the depth of your pain

Hazel Hall, Australia

hayseeds drift
by the broken window
of a cornfield church—
those dances we danced
that step we never took

Carole Harrison, Australia

digging through
substrata of earth—
my family history
riddled with spirits
rising up to bury me

Devin Harrison, Canada

a final breath
and after a few moments
another
elder brother, always good
at faking me out

dawn light
creeps along the maple limb
imperceptible
each little thing
that leads to love

the lingering color
in the few last leaves . . .
so many what if's,
were his life longer
in his mother's mind

Michele L. Harvey, USA

northern lights
fighting the darkness . . .
in the kindergarten
a woman remarks on my
daughter's foreign appearance

északi fények
harca a sötétiséggel . . .
az óvodában
lányom idegen arcán
egy anya szeme pihen

Judit Katalin Hollos, Hungary

echo
of the arterial flow
growling—
I add more noise
to the universe

west wind
a mountain train roaring
through a tunnel—
the candle in my room
blown out

Ruth Holzer, USA

glittering
in the mountain boulders
periwinkles
here aeons ago
when the stones were undersea

Elizabeth Howard, USA

wrapped around
a spun-glass figurine
so delicate
the calloused hands
of my rustic man

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

barren for now
the rose skimming
her window
persists with promises
of wild moons

Alegria Imperial, Canada

flickering flames
and mopoke calling
voices of frogs
and cicadas . . .
above us the starry night

ripples
on lake waters
blue wrens in the reeds . . .
their upturned tails
mock my mortality

Gerry Jacobson, Australia

I believed
there were fairies
in the boxwood
my fantasy destroyed
black-hearted old man

Carole Johnston, USA

out of nowhere
blowing leaves across the snow
a Russian wind
carves around a cairn
that resists its power

mother has lived,
lost, loved and learned
the truth of things
lightheartedly, she laughs
on this, her 100th birthday

on the wall
the painting of a schooner
in my lap
travel catalogs
with dog-eared pages

Kirsty Karkow, USA

on my wall
cardinals
flit
from stitch to stitch
in Grandma's tapestry

Keitha Keyes, Australia



espresso
by a steamed window
—Monet.
yes, Federal Street
could be Rouen in fog

as the water skier lets go
 slows &
 sinks, so
this epilogue
to a bookman's long career

what do you want?
my truth
Hallmark's truth—
tarnished locust leaves
glitter the curb

Larry Kimmel, USA

the wing feathers
of a young herring gull . . .
it took death
to show me
your beauty

Susan Mary King, UK

the grandchild
she never liked—
only I knew
how much she also
hated her dosas folded

my aunties
quarrelling over
nan's blouse
the one that fits
neither of them

Shrikanth Krishnamurthy, UK

if each raindrop
has the river in it
why can't I remember
my moment
as a sun?

Kat Lehmann, USA



the morning breeze
turns maple leaves to song . . .
alone at my desk
I hear how Mother's words
come home have aged

a shingled house
this small patch of Canada
to which I lay claim—
in a corner of my mind
Ilha Formosa echoes

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Author's Note: In 1544, a Portuguese ship sighted the main island of Taiwan and named it *Ilha Formosa*, which means "Beautiful Island".

a new muse
creeps out from under
the flat grey rock
the kappa slips, muttering
back into the river

in the woods
with shards and dust
and they crept
under my skin
like the tattoos

he writes
of Ryokan
and Han Shan
a fast motorbike . . .
instant fire

Joy McCall, UK

bringing out
the old black vinyl,
polished clean—
thank God, the song it plays
still has its grit and grime

finding the valley
suddenly, at my feet,
surprises me—
the road descends through bracken
with shoes lining both sides

deflated
by bad news . . .
in the closet
I select a change of clothes
without the light on

the owl hoots
it never cries—
you'd think
once in a while
an owl might

Michael McClintock, USA

evergreen
astringent and just
as bumpy
the yuzu— and my New Year
with its list of shoulds

dusk dissolves
among the live oaks
decades later
the same trick of light
this dancing greening girl

Beverly Acuff Momoi, USA

the sudden
news of her death;
I release the catch
of thrashing flounder
from the net

sea otters
anchored by kelp—
the sanctuary
of your arms
in a roiling storm

Marie Louise Munro, USA

stepping barefoot
into the temple
sunshine
on the sisters'
shaved heads

raindrops
on velvet moss
childhood days
touching the soft spots
of my heart

why bother
to reclaim
our maiden names
like everything else
were our fathers'

Christina Nguyen, USA



snow falling
through rush hour traffic
tail lights linked
by the single thought
of return

Al Ortolani, USA

my name
a dress made
of rainbow
only a daughter
inherits it

David Ishaya Osu, Nigeria

snowy woods
scared hares survive
through camouflage
my newest dress
made of winter white

Janet Qually, USA

Lines of gold
trace the cracks
in your soul
more beautiful
for the breaking

~for Brian

Jill Rauh, USA

Kintsugi (Japanese: *golden joinery*) or ***Kintsukuroi*** (Japanese: *golden repair*) is the Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.

three small girls
heads together
legs askew
a starfish on the sand
whispering secrets

Sandra Renew, Australia

I kayak beneath
low mulberry branches—
while I taste the fruit
my paddle slips away
on the tidal stream

Elaine Riddell, New Zealand

Do neighbors
on this street
ever speak—
the sun setting
on persimmon groves.

The waterfall
it doesn't know
it falls
it doesn't know
it has a sound.

By day
he stocks shelves
by evening
a monk who wears
the saffron robe.

Alexis Rotella, USA

like old Greeks
with fairytale riches . . .
lonely and scared
missing all those children
we never had

Djurdja Vukelic Rozic, Croatia

first showers
quench the thirst
of a fragrant earth
each night in my dream
I chase my dreams

Yesha Shah, India

summer poem . . .
i hang my verbs
out to dry
and watch them
bleed

Shloka Shankar, India

snow swirling
over an open field
after the layoff
I miss my turn, and find
a new way home

skipping stones
all those summers
with my brother . . .
the tiny ripples
of a water bug

Ken Slaughter, USA

the staves
of my brittle breast
split open
you set me adrift
in uncharted waters

Debbie Strange, Canada

bullet holes
on the mountain face . . .
for five bucks
a post-card of the valley
before guns took over

Paresh Tiwari, India

winter solstice
this misty morning
my brain
already has tiny buds
facing toward light

a robin
with spring air
lands here
I'll fly to Wonderland
to see my other self

Kozue Uzawa, Canada

to pull away the sticks
and leave the plates
spinning
I have always aimed
for unattainable flight

something lurks
behind the sky
these grey January days
my blown filament
rattles

in search of a chord
to keep the dog
from the door
I lose my fingers
to rusty strings

I take the lines
of Robert Johnson
like the air
my blood blued
with crackling vinyl

Liam Wilkinson, UK

inside a clear glass
globe gold red petals
rose
of a hundred tongues
I'd love to speak

above below
the surface
lotus bloom
for every word I write
one disappears


crows ravish
peaches at Nagoya castle
there is a caw
inside the stone
that falls at my feet

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

old clothes
on bare branches
of a tree—
an owl's encrypted
ode to the wind

at her wake
her eyelids start
blinking . . .
but it is only
the glitter of sunrise

Ali Znaidi, Tunisia



a feathering
of jasmine and wild ginger
upon the air –
so many landmarks
that lead me back to you

David Terelinck

**Tanka Sequences,
Solo & Responsive,
& Tan Renga**



Migration

three nights
I dream of home
with locked doors—
a woman hands me a chart
marking the depths of the sea

my path
littered with the bones
of poems
I couldn't write . . .
a blackbird whistling

a wren calling
in the piney wood
teacher teacher teacher. . .
I read aloud
from a scarlet leaf

my quarry—
a poem without words
dancing
through the green glade
barefoot as music

a wisp
of thistledown drifting
before me
I linger by the brook
to pan for fool's gold

clear notes
rising from my flute—
the gift
of water flowing
in a life without rain

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

this muggy silence

listening
for a reply
whatever it is
in this muggy silence
a dripping gargoyle

mud squelch
underfoot
this *Garden*
called *Eternal*
is neither

flagstones
slippery with clover
the footpath
like time itself
greening with rain

further back
shoulders remember
the heft
of soil on shovel
the hush of umbrellas

in memory's eye
she wears yellow
her dress
no-nonsense marigolds
nodding in the rain

so my mother
has joined me for tea
beyond
leaded glass panes
an afternoon shower

Maxianne Berger, Canada

Circular Dance

starter's gun
spokes shimmer
at midday
as wheelmen vie
for windshadows

peloton
racing only
the self
my heart tapping
its own cadence

bell lap
the rhythm of
missing out
the break gone clear
of my belonging

final turn
passing only
my shadow
the sun wins out
again and again

Matthew Caretti, USA

Long trek to silence

Fleeing
their occupied homeland
Tibetan children
carry fear and grief
in their numbed hearts

the earth
gathers their wounds,
soaks their torment
and germinates
silence

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

From Green to Red

before
disembarking
I turn over
from green to red the disk
with my cabin number

from green to red
so they'll know
I'm ashore
on some rocky outcrop
in some rough port

ashore
one day I will stay
for good
on the board my disk
still red among the green

Ruth Holzer, USA

evensong

vespers,
the night air still . . .
crickets
in summer grass
chirruping at sunset

the choir
(none of whom read music)
tune up on cue . . .
boobooks and wagtails,
pobblebonks in the pond

after dark
the congregation swells . . .
Milky Way,
Venus and the moon,
possums on the fence

holy communion

moonlight
shimmering in the creek
fills gum nuts
empty coffee cups
and an old tin can

Kathy Kituai, Australia

friend

~for Brian

the stone
with his name on it
settles
into the ground
and leans a little

weeds
blur the edges
green stems
of a stray daffodil
cover the date

pale moss
creeps over the top
old berries fall
from the hawthorn
a red stain grows

a big spider
has set up home
in a crack
her pale webbing
is filling the space

the words
are clearer now
stained
by winter rainfall
and grey lichen

it weathers
and leans, crooked
under the tree
spikes catch in my hair
as I pass by

Joy McCall, UK

hedge

~for Brian

autumn sun
slanting across
these small fields
these hedgerows . . .
and he is dead

the hedges
we both loved
divide us now
I cannot get through
the briars and thorns

the creatures
scurry about
on both sides
digging and rooting
in old leaves and soil

I ask them
is he there?
they look at me
with their dark uncertain
anxious eyes

they turn to run
and make no sound
only the rustling
of dry leaves underfoot
the trickle of the stream

oh gentle soul
I need a sign
where are you?
still, still that sad silence
and my slow heavy heart

Joy McCall, UK

things

all these things
that laugh and gather
around the bed
as I settle to sleep,
are left over from the day

when I lay
my tired body down
they climb up
and wander over me
with their little feet

little fingers
little bits and pieces
of all kinds of things
that have lived and breathed
in this long day

and when my eyes close
and the night-door opens
they come into
all my spaces, and fill them
with their quiet songs

the trees
curl their roots inside me
and go on growing
as they do in the day
when I touch the bark

the little stones
tumble and fall down deep
into the bedrock
and lay there, doing nothing
but being stones

the birds
and the beetles
and all the myriad things
I love in the daylight
climb into my sleep

and my love's
last kiss stays on my cheek
and his hand
moves over me
and his eyes keep the night-watch

and the rain
still runs down my face
and the wind
still tangles my hair
and the brown birds peck

and my fingers
still touch moss and bark
and stones
and brick and hair
and skin, and his face

and all my cells
fill with the joy and sorrow
of the day
and the things wander about
all night, in the dark inside

Joy McCall, UK

Overhead

once again
news from afar
talk of revolution
the losers we know
will be the poor

whispered reports
of mass graves
how is it
the sins of the past
are repeated?

a young boy
with his AK-47
poses for a photo
a frame of reference
for the war

after a week
we all become
bored with the news
the scandal of death
forgotten

a fall rain
washes away
a pool of blood
where a child
once lay

jets streak overhead
a mother hangs
the day's laundry
cease fire
still in effect

Mike Montreuil, Canada

hokianga nui a kupe

the returning place of kupe

crossing on the ferry
from picturesque Paihia
into Russell
where my friend's ancestor
built the first church

my daughter points out
several musket holes
in the wooden cladding
fired during a battle
between Maori and settlers

in the fishing village
of Rawene there's a newly built
art gallery
where the curator recalls
an artist friend of mine

along the waterfront
we walk the mangrove boardwalk
pick out shorebirds:
herons, dotterels and sandpipers
fossicking in the mud

a surfer seeks
the next set of waves
as gannets whirl
in the air above him
keening and crying

relaxing over coffee
in the harbour café
overhanging the sea
the deep sea diver like
a mermaid out on the reef

from the top
of Hone Heke hill
we point out
the ochre coloured roofs
of historic chapels

in the garden
on an early summer evening
the screech
of possums in a nearby
avocado tree startles us

a pod of dolphins
swimming in the harbour
shrieks of children
echo along the beach
in a moment of intensity

the two largest trees
in New Zealand, Tane Mahuta
and Te Matua Ngahere
around which our party of five
cannot join hands

a hawk circles
over the mountain
a song
from the valley whistling
through the pines

Patricia Prime, New Zealand

Wedding Meditations

ice shimmers
on their wedding rings
the shower
of scarlet rose petals
starts a fire

russet roses
wither in a crystal vase
how sassy
the autumn highlights
in bride's hair

luscious petals
swirl around her
wedding dress
a finely brushed poem
for our eyes only

strawberry lipstick
shines on her lips
he doesn't hesitate
to say yes
to ripeness

ready
to be thrown back
and travel forward
in someone else's time—
her bouquet of roses

Luminita Suse, Canada

Tracks

~for Brian

Claire Everett, UK
& Joy McCall, UK

the telltale tracks
of one who hears the earth
in a heartbeat
the year and a day
of a roebuck's gaze

*gentle deer
the most common roadkill
in his land
the ones the earth needs most
leave us much too soon*

perhaps we love
to stake some small claim
on infinity . . .
roe-rings oversewn
with the pine's soft rain

*trampling circles
in the chase for love
my head spins
I sit in the clearing
and wait for the night*

long years
in and out of velvet . . .
deer-rub
sweet sorrows I return to
time and again

~ ~ ~

Free-wheeling

Amelia Fielden, Australia
& Jan Foster, Australia

yellow
not my favourite colour
and yet
who would want a world
without sunflowers or wattle

*entranced, I watch
tiny honey-eater chicks
dip and dart
among the flax spikes
I almost dug out last week*

my chic friend
a French sophisticate,
confides
her greatest pleasure is
hard labour in the garden

*in my dream
you whispered a secret
sadly
now I'm awake
I can't recall what it was*

with only one
remembering shared events
how lonely
this marriage has become—
time to deadhead the roses

*sitting in sunlight
I let my mind drift
free-wheeling
a single heron
cruises a thermal*

brolgas dance
through his mystical landscapes
the artist
Sydney Long releases
my mind from the mundane

*waltzing together
our rhythm is flawless
a pity
we step on each other's toes
in our daily life*

riding the storm
a cockatoo keeps faith
with its branch
of a huge eucalypt
that wildly dips and sways

*the air softens
winter unclenches its fist
as life stirs
hope raises its head
. . . I search out my passport*

~ ~ ~

Fluttering Gold

Amelia Fielden, Australia
& *Genie Nakano, USA*

Zen Garden
crammed with solemn tourists
photographing
the first few crimson leaves
on a small maple tree

October
leaves crunching under my feet
the bite
of a first red apple . . .
the day you died

across the world
spring flowers in bloom
Halloween
kids tricking or treating
on a bright warm night

oh, the wind
the wind is what sets us free
on a dark autumn night
spirits fill the air
swirled with van Gogh stars

sunflowers
ablaze in their frame
at the Gallery
and in my memory
of last summer's hot fields

all the poems
we wrote together
memorized
we're here now to sing them
as gingkos flutter gold

~ ~ ~

From a Distance

Jan Foster, Australia
& *Beatrice Yell, Australia*

sorting out
my mother's papers
I find
a passionate love letter
. . . not from my dad

*she preens and asks
if she is still beautiful
in an instant
I picture my father
and his struggle to learn French*

all attempts
to interpret your moods
fail me—
the elevator bumps
to a stop in the basement

*the vertical view
from the canyon rim
takes my breath away—
several photographers
climb through the safety railing*

one flip
as you wave goodbye—
springtime
and migrating whales
. . . hard to resist responding

*once
you loomed so large
beside me
but now all I can see is
a speck in the blue vastness*

~ ~ ~

Smoke and Fire

Margaret L. Grace, Australia
& Carmel Summers (travelling in France)

*for days
bush fires coloured our sky
he roped his horses
and rode them to safety
the last one's tail on fire*

another
smoke-fogged morning
no rain
just the gentle drip of leaves
from the wintering tree

*cicadas
chorus the sweaty dusk
first bite of summer
dark red plum juice
trickles down my chin*

amongst the stubble
of slashed maize and mud
sparrows flock
to bird-coloured fields
harvest forgotten grains

*in rising heat
shoppers pick through
street stalls
the air is filled with strains
of 'Joy to the World'*

taking down
tinsel from my windows
I pack my bags
why am I so fearful
about this new destination

*a dragonfly
tightly woven in a web
over the pond
as bound as I am here
on this hill above the sea*

smoke and cloud
through the valleys below
merge and drift
the choice— fire or water
never an option for me

*today
is our flag waving day
barbeques and fireworks
people dance and sing
fall about with patriotism*

place of surrender
this centuries-old tower
framed
by an azure sky
I walk away, dry my tears

~ ~ ~

Wombat's Passage

Carole Harrison. Australia
& Hazel Hall, Australia

in father's robe
a smell of gunpowder—
eagle soaring
on thermals
of blue morning light

*two whales
breaching off the bow
suddenly
I know where I sit
in the bigger scheme*

return
along your ocean path
green turtle,
I'm never tracking back
those footsteps in the sand

*if only
I could read their stories
like you . . .
a wombat's passage
through the bush last night*

all my years
seeking fulfilment—
the wagtail
with beak overloaded
still sings her yellow song

*a kingfisher
glides into the stream
effortlessly—
the child in tears
by the playground slide*

from under my feet
a young wallaby
leaps away
without me noticing
you grow into a man

*shadows
of sugar gliders skim
through my dreams . . .
the door that swings
when you think I'm asleep*

scales rippling
beneath a placid surface—
the silken touch
of your cheek
after botox

*silver lizard
slips between the rocks—
I try to tame
curling ribbon
on your Christmas gift*

~ ~ ~

prayers

Matsukaze, USA
& Joy McCall, UK

this Shabbat
alone in the front room
an impression of you
snags my attention—
smell of freesias, i smile

*slight snow
falling on the well
I think of you,
make a wish and watch
as the stone sinks*

post-winter leaves
scattered and brittle
they seem to
portend your health
—murmured prayers

*I hear
your quiet brown voice
on the wind
my heart falters, once,
then beats steady again*

beneath a blazing sky
thick night darkness—
an old woman
rebukes seductive death,
you keep on your shadow

*the shade
slips sideways
holding on
with thin threads
the spider keeps spinning*

morning sun
shining aslant
in the front room
on the table, a book
by Kafka

*I was out
when you called
at sun-down,
gathering snowflakes
on my tongue*

~ ~ ~



Hatsugama

*Giselle Maya, France
& Amelia Fielden, USA*

*chirashi sushi
with sweet black and white beans
fastidiously served—
oh for those days and nights
Arashiyama moonrise*

first dream
of the new year,
alone
on a curved bridge, waiting
for my old professor

*blown together
by random breezes
blue feathers
and an autumn waka
in my wooden skiff*

in the distance
mountains appearing
and disappearing . . .
reality and illusion
jostle in my memory

*visiting
potters in Bizen
at o-shogatsu
we are invited to help
pound and roast mochi*

more than the scents
of traditional Japan
it is the tastes
I long for, breakfasts
with white rice and miso soup

*high above Kyoto
in a remote hamlet
the artist Akeji
boils plants, berries and bark
to make dye for washi*

calligraphy class:
copying the kanji
yuki, 'snow'
on white papers imprinted
with plum blossoms

*after tea lessons
I go a Kannon temple
praying
my knees may hold out
for the month-long course*

bronze vases
of small chrysanthemums
on Buddhist altars . . .
seasonal flowers always
for ikebana at home

*Kyushu—
just arrived by shinkansen
I am welcomed
by a host of violets
a bowl of green macha*

Authors' Notes:

hatsugama: first kettle of the new year, refers to the first tea whisked and offered to guests.

chirashi sushi is a vinegared rice dish, very tasty, with shiitake mushrooms, carrots, a thin omelette, nori (seaweed), shoga (ginger), all cut very fine mixed into rice.

o-shogatsu: Japanese New Year.

washi is handmade mulberry bark paper, used for sumi-e (ink painting), calligraphy even wrapping paper.

mochi :pounded rice paste, shaped into cakes and roasted on a grill over a fire or in an oven, eaten with grated daikon (radish), shoyu etc. especially at New Year's.

shinkansen: the 'bullet train' connecting major cities and areas of Japan. In our case, my friend and I travelled from Kyoto to Fukuoka in Kyushu.

ikebana is the art of flower arranging.

trptych

Joy McCall, UK
& Jonathan Day, USA

*the sun
is sinking here
slanting
across all the mosses
between the bricks*

here
the first rosy
glow of dawn
is touching
the clouds to the east

*the earth
is endlessly
circling
keeping us apart
holding us together*

~ ~ ~

In and Out of Tune

David Rice, USA
& Joy McCall, UK

that small cracked skull
in an owl pellet . . .
if you hear
the morning chorus
join in— off-key or not

*bones can sing
all kinds of songs
in and out of tune
fractured and toneless
my stump is humming*

tuners
keep my violin on pitch
I've never had to learn
to play
sharp or flat

*across the field
the wild music carries
on the wind
the dervishes
are dancing again*

customizing my fiddle
with cello-octave strings
I want
a deeper sound
to penetrate the surface

*sitting
by the cold river
a sliver of moon
and from a moored boat
Mozart's night music*

~ ~ ~

Slipping Across that Blue Horizon

David Terelinck, Australia
& *Kathy Kituai, Australia*

silk road sunrise
across the Bosphorus
how to describe
this taste of spice
you bring to my life

*Turkish delight
at the Farmers' Market
dusted in sugar
always much sweeter
when shared . . .*

cathedral bells
on the hushed night air
crossing the gulf
muezzin to monk,
stranger to friend

*light years away
the measure of each star
not realised . . .
centuries later
your poetry still shimmers¹*

dispelling darkness
with every page that's turned
woad-stained blood
of tonsured monks inscribed
upon each sheet of velum²

*the cover
spotted with ink and frayed
his signature
loops and half-learned letters
my fingers trace*

declarations
of love and independence
those people
who leave you long before
their bags are packed

*heathered hills
in the wake of the ship
what would she make
of my anchored life,
wattles, gums, dry creeks?*³

slipping across
that blue horizon
out of sight
the darker cargo
of a homesick heart⁴

*the shadow
of her picket fence
without fail
tick-tock at midnight
falls the other side*

neighbours
exchanging gossip—
the stains
that appear beneath
a thin coat of whitewash

*scent of lemons
fresh sheets on the line
will all mum's
simple remedies remove
blemishes she conceals*

the tinsel
of dew-soaked cobwebs
on eucalypts—
those women who choose
to marry for love . . .

*no longer spinning
tales about their vows
she weaves
the pokies and bingo
into too many spare corners . . .*

her daughter
tells her that her luck's
run out—
a letter in the post
from the breast scan clinic

*your postcards
seldom read in haste
yesterday
the shoreline enthralled,
not so today . . .*

Authors' Notes:

¹ for Buson

² the *Book of Kells*

³ for Elizabeth Pollick (Kathy Kituai's great grandmother)

⁴ for Annie Moore (first Irish immigrant processed at Ellis Island, USA)

leftover moondust

Paresh Tiwari, India
& Pamela A. Babusci, USA

the shape of
your face on the pillow . . .
it's been a while
since i tried to hold
moonbeams in my palm

*in my reveries
we are floating
on nebulas
a deep indigo-green light
envelops us*

pour pour
into this night
a sliver of
your unborn thoughts
the howl of my dream

*when i awake
i find you resting
in the folds
of my flesh
& my open canyon*

embers on
the tip of your tongue
i trace the fall
of a morning star
on your bare midriff

*lingering on
leftover moondust
ashes of our affair
sapphire droplets fall
& we embody them*



In Winter Light

A Sequence with Eight Voices

we've walked
on parallel paths
never talking
about things that matter—
these falling leaves

moon dark night—
I recall every feature
of your face
the way secrets stayed
hidden behind your smile

notes pencilled
in the margins of your book
cracked edges
of the letter I refold
and tuck back into place

a discourse
on the silent lives of plants
in your study . . .
you light a cherry pipe
I slowly sip my tea

my mother's diary
from when my father served
in World War II
unread these seventy years
now waits on my shelves

end of summer—
our family re-unites
on the shore
a rising tide covers
crabs, clams and empty shells

she fingers photos
in the sturdy house that
held their lives . . .
sympathy cards
catch the winter light

a journey
between hemispheres
one fragrant leaf
pressed by these ink-filled pages
my only anchor to home

Poets, in order, by tanka:

Susan Constable (Canada) Carole MacRury (USA) Beverley George (Australia) Maria Steyn (South Africa) Dorothy McLaughlin (USA) Kirsty Karkow (USA) Carol Raisfeld (USA) and Julie Thorndyke (Australia)

Granite Island

A Tan Renga

Beverley George, Australia
& *Simon Hanson, Australia*

January 2015

orange lichen
clings to granite boulders
crashing waves
within a stony crevice
Blue Fairy penguins

into evening
the coolness of pebbles
underfoot
unharnessed, the Clydesdale
plods from causeway to stable

greying timbers
a fishing boat moored
to sturdy pylons
a lone pelican
eyeing every passer-by

incoming swell
mirrors the curve
of the bay
from the Bluff
hump-backed whales head south

oil lamps
lined up on dusty shelves
in the antique shop
rippled glass and leadlight
the Anchorage Hotel at sundown

along the Esplanade
Norfolk Island pines
strung with coloured lights
a receding tide traces
its design of weed and wave

Rengay



Childhood Memories

Yvonne Hales, Australia
& *Matthew Paul, UK*

twilight conversation
stirs childhood
memories

*faces in the cafe window
watch the rain tip down*

weekend training ride
espressos all round
ease tired legs

*in the corner
of my bloodshot eye:
cantering horses*

racing at Epsom
top hats confer with trainers

*Indian summer
I add a pinch of salt
to the soup*

~ ~ ~

Noir

David Terelinck, Australia
& Carol Judkins, USA

mango moon
the way the organza
clings to her thigh

*at the nape of her neck
a hint of Shalimar*

this longing
for a woman who's more
noir than nice

*praying mantis—
a guy in a trench coat
duped by a dame*

her fingers caress
each pearl on the strand . . .

*on Scarlett Street,
a flashing neon sign
and that glint of steel*

~ ~ ~

from my window
I saw him standing
in the storm
conversing with corvids
and shadow-bruised snow



©DStrange

Tanka Prose



Alone in India

Anne Benjamin, Australia

I open the windows with anticipation: the air shifts. Tree shadows are soft-edged, leaves yellowing and dusty. The old mango tree outside our first floor kitchen window scarcely moves, but the fronds on a distant coconut tree toss. Smoke glazes a pewter sky. In the space between an overhanging tree and the black iron gate, the air quivers with medallions of falling leaves.

leaves drift
from the mimosa tree
as I wake, you float
from me on the gossamer
of my dreams

~ ~ ~

Recipes for Eating Fruit

Michelle Brock, Australia

Cape gooseberries are best eaten between the bushes under the next-door neighbour's stairs, picked while crouching, peeled and bitten directly from the pouch. The empty pouches must be stashed where they can't be found.

Plums are best eaten from the fist while scampering out the back door, having stolen one from the box in the laundry.

Strawberries must be picked wherever they are found, crimson warm, and popped straight into the mouth. Mulberries should first be applied as lipstick around the outside of the mouth and drizzled on the tongue before swallowing.

Pawpaws are best avoided altogether unless you like the taste of school milk that's stood too long in the sun.

And mangoes. Ah! Mangoes are best eaten in the upper branches of the tree itself, plucked golden, peeled with the teeth, flesh sucked and juice left to dribble in golden rivulets down both arms.

harvesting the last
of the summer produce—
impossible to carry
a full bowl of raspberries
all the way to the back door

~ ~ ~

Land's End
Dawn Bruce, Australia

I take my *black dog*
for a walk . . . lose him
in the street fair,
only to find him
waiting on my doorstep

The sun hangs low like a bloodshot eye. Heat has drooped the balcony plants. I'll water them later, perhaps after dinner. Dust lines the furniture except where my friend laid the brochures.

Tonight I watch the stars, look for the moon and wonder if there is a heaven and if that's where you are , my darling, and if you are at peace.

Morning. I make a decision, ring my friend and agree to her travel plans. If she can forget and find a kind of happiness through new places, new everything, why can't I? The *black dog* whimpers but I turn my back on him and start packing.

sea salt tangs the air
I journey from country
to country
on the grand tour,
on the grand search . . .

~ ~ ~

Wayfarer
Matthew Caretti, USA

My internal clock off again. Waking long before dawn to brew a pot of tea. Each sip more bitter than the last.

first rays
the ridges gloam
elsewhere
my soles planted
here and there

Is it the water? The long abandoned leaves? Or something about what's been left behind?

autumn morning
finding your scent
on folded blankets
a donation
before the move

~ ~ ~

I know the clatter of your rails
Susan Diridoni, USA

before I can learn your routes, your narrow lanes
your foot-falls of shale just an hour wide
haven't raised glasses with any
only peered through the pages of your poets
the cigarettes now the peat
the novelists now the dreams
the Reformation on lips that speak
no foreign language I hardly knew you but
I gathered your fogged nights of
yelling boys

village once
that birthed Dedalus
the nest flown
my teenage longing
winging again

~ ~ ~

That Longhaired Dawn
Gerry Jacobson, Australia

wistful
staring out to sea
dreaming
in ancient sunlight . . .
did he catch that wave?

Those were the days. Those golden surfers of 1969, 1975. 'Lean and male and unencumbered.'* Roving the east coast. Looking for waves. This strange nostalgia. For a time and place. Arcadia. But where was I then? Sabah. PNG. Doing geology. Being a dad.

bare-topped bliss
in that longhaired dawn
bleached
by sun and surf . . .
oh that we were there

they say
you never surf
the same wave twice—
what never was
what might have been

Author's Note:

* John Witzig, 'Arcadia: Sounds of the Sea'. Photographs. National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 2014

~ ~ ~

Rolling Stones
Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK

It is the evening before *Akshaya Tadhige*. We are busy packing things rather noisily— brass pots, huge copper vessels, pans, ladles, banana leaves, areca sheets, betel leaves, grass mats, blankets, pillows, not to forget the food for the night. Tomorrow is our car festival at Ramanathpura. Each year, on this day, our family serves God by feeding thousands of devotees; a day the Sankethi community gathers around.

We set off on the bumpy road from Konanur.

the jangle
of the bullock cart
as dusk falls
i hold on tightly
to the pickle jar

As we reach the Rameshwara temple, my cousins and I jump off and run inside, each claiming a room in the temple. One of us proclaims that her *Nandi* is the biggest, another boasts that hers is the best. I stake a claim for the strongest one. By the time the elders finish unpacking things, we are hungry.

the music
of my mother tongue
by the lamp
grandma hands out
one more ball of rice

The grass mats are unrolled side by side. We quickly grab our favourite blankets and pillows and settle down to stories. The elders continue chatting into the night.

crescent moon
on our faces
the Kaveri
gushing by gently
shushing us to sleep

Author's Notes: *Akshaya Tadige*: a holy day falling on the third day of the second month of the Hindu calendar.

Nandi: the bull, steed of Lord Shiva

~ ~ ~

Six pièces sur très peu de choses

Six pieces about very little

Gary LeBel, USA

I. Putty

There's the stone on which a boy will leave his footprints.
He thinks of nothing but water and of gliding under it

as if it were deep space that somehow knew his future.
Time is like that, Einstein said,

soft as putty, pink
as the soles of a young boy's feet

climbing out of the water
and over a stone

to dive again.

II. Ticket

The cypresses are remembering Van Gogh
and won't stay still. The wind

is making a movie
that stars itself.

We're invited to the premier
but we must come entirely naked. It insists.

III. Missing Her

I don't want to go up to my hotel room
because the light show's just beginning. Spring leaves

being X-rayed by the sun are contending
for the best shade of green in an Irishman's mouth.

Among themselves the trees are glad the day is over,
seeing how noisy it was, how smoky.

Their leaves are clapping uproariously but unlike
trained seals the applause comes naturally.

The big maple nearest the parking lot wonders
if the woman in 215 will ever come back. Like a dog

it's always unsure and worries. She had such
beautiful eyes, the maple remembers,

when she looked out her window that evening
before closing the drapes.

IV. Notion

In the parallel universe that poetry makes possible
you appear to me holding your lyre.

I don't know what Locri looked like in your day
but I'm sure in that kingdom

the sun and the sea were its king and queen,
and you, Nossis, their daughter of song.

I'm tired of everything that's not
of the body. All that my century

has given me is a longing for you,
even after twenty-three hundred birthdays.

Physicists say that nothing is destructible, thus some day
when I least expect it, a strain of voice

will break the air and its honey will flow
from lip to ear, the shortest path

to the soul.

V. Sparing the Rod

The blossoms are exhausted. They are like the old men
and women I once cared for in a nursing home.

Their sweetness and color is gone, and some believe
their purpose.

Purpose? You may as easily inquire what cruelty is for,
but you can't for it quivers and turns into a green switch,

the divining rod of the cosmos.

VI. The Value of Pi

Sirens tonight. I hear them from my hotel room.
Someone has wandered

into the exact center of their life. There's
no compass-arm to follow, no widening of the arc

by a geometer's hand
as the circle closes,

the wail of a siren,
all that escapes.

ENVOY

The tinkling of manacles
as they handcuffed
and led her away
that day I learned to hate
the Dracos of my state.

~in memory of Jean Follain (1903-1971)

~ ~ ~

What it wants
Gary LeBel, USA

When I crept into her room, she was sleeping. Night's fingers had closed the curtains. Having lost her father not two days before, she had cried herself to sleep.

And just as the Tahitian girl had lain in Gauguin's famous painting, her hands rest palms-down on the pillow, her legs crossed lightly at the ankles. With her face lost in a storm of hair, she looks nineteen at forty-six. Death, too, sits nearby in a chair at the foot of the bed. It smiles vaguely up at me and nods in her direction. Somehow I know what it wants, and so I leave. From outside the door, I can hear the room rearrange itself as my sister sleeps on with all the unwitting indolence of a girl a third of her age . . .

and everything's lost
in the moment between
 what was
and is
 no longer.

~ ~ ~

Tidying the Garage on a Spring Day

Michael McClintock, USA

Clovis House, May 2014

This morning I worked in the garage tidying things, resigned not to visit the raccoon den by the creek. There is no need to be punctual or loyal or predictable relating to a raccoon busy with motherhood.

My task is here—
the relics of second thoughts,
ten years of gleaning
possible future uses
for the odd tool, the dead gizmo.

The vehicle, of course, stays where it is— but this other stuff! What the hell was I thinking, saving the Clinton doll? Or this rock lifted from the beach at Alcatraz? The waterpipe from Dubai is cobwebbed, full of bugs. There are three dozen pens, all ballpoints, dry as reeds— a lifetime of poems and tales unwritten.

It's all gone
in an hour or two.
The place gleams.
At dinner I will say
the raccoon thrives by the creek.

~ ~ ~

Rang Utsav Yesha Shah, India

Be-jeweled are our brides in the gold of the sun, the silver of stars, the diamonds of dew, the pearls of rain drops . . . Be-decked are they in the red of roses, the white of moonlight, the greens of lush meadows, the scarlet of henna, the carmine of vermilion, blushing a deep cherry pink and glowing like the turmeric sky. Our festivals are a riot of colours: the *gulaal* of *Holi*, the *rangoli* of *Diwali*, the *Pookalams* of *Onam*, the *Sindoor khela* of *Durga Puja* . . . Our weavers weave the festivity of rainbow colours into nine yards of sheer magic. Draped in their prized *kanjeevarams*, *patolas* and *selas* our women celebrate feminism every single day of the year.

Paryushana
anointing Mahaveer
with saffron-sandalwood
repentant of our sins
we kneel before Him

bangle seller's kiosk
at the spring fair
jingling
the rainbow colours
my little daughter's hands

Author's Notes:

Rang: colour

Utsav: celebration

Gulaal: dry colours of Holi festival prepared naturally from flowers or other products having dyeing properties.

Holi: a spring festival, called as the festival of colours or festival of love

Pookalam: flower designs of Onam

Onam: Hindu festival celebrated by the people of Kerala state marking the homecoming of legendary king Mahabali

Sindoor Khela: the last day of the Bengali festival of Durga Puja, the worship of Goddess

Durga, is celebrated by married women by applying vermilion (*sindoor*) on one another

kanjeevarams, patolas, selas: types of sarees

Paryushana: Jain festival of meditation, fasting and prayer celebrated for 8-10 days

~ ~ ~

Keeping it Figurative

Charles Tarlton, USA

*Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.*

—T.S.Eliot

1

a working artist
tries to stay out of sight

Working behind the scenes, making up bird fantasies
of multi-colored birds, painting tree bark with a blend of blue
and silver pigments mixed in milk,
and calling golden spiders into the road.

forbids the words
to fasten onto real things
express personal feelings

2

But, there are topics, you know, that won't move over for poetry;
for them it's enough simply to relate in detail events
like car wrecks at high speed or dying of lung cancer.

here is a case where
the poet's silver scalpel
and cool retractor

On a beach in Spain at sunset, just as it goes dark,
you can glimpse the little known unit of time
that encompasses all of forever in an instant.

serve only to exsanguinate
what the mind's eye's awakened

~ ~ ~

Our Times
Charles Tarlton, USA

—*Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit;
And at the corner where the stable is
Delays only to urinate, and spit.*

—T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (unpublished)

What does it mean when you read a lovely girl has died at 29 of an unpronounceable disease? Or, that enough young bodies to fill the rosters of a hundred college football teams are now without arms and legs? When an old man worries about ringing in his ears or counts out loud the fingered beatings of his pulse?

this is our own time
the roughness of it kept at bay
by asses braying

We live now without guidance; the lore and regulations of the past are worn out, and no one listens. We go through elaborate motions learned from the movies and TV, but the salty taste is gone. Little will bear close scrutiny.

the social fabric's edges worn
with amnesia and anger

between vacuity
and numbing labor, our faces
glimpsed in bar mirrors

Imagine an arc of life on which we are curving upwards to find happiness. The sides of the ascending road are littered with birds that flew into windshields, with wrappers tossed from windows, with dreams left behind like abandoned luggage in cold hotels or at bus stops.

the next day may be the last
make it more of the same!

~ ~ ~

Special Feature

Developments in Rengay and Tanka Prose



Tanka Prose Grows . . .

Claire Everett

It has been heartening to see tanka prose growing as a genre and finding its place in more journals, albeit often as part of the Haibun section. Of course, there is nothing new about tanka prose— its roots are ancient— but it is only just establishing itself in English-language circles. That is why it is refreshing to see initiatives like Amanda Dcosta’s “Where Tanka Prose Grows” contest in September 2014, details of which can be found at her website:

<http://www.mandys-pages.com/>

It was a small contest by most standards, attracting eight writers, most of whom were drawn to enter via Facebook. Amanda was assisted in her endeavour by Susan Burch, and Kala Ramesh provided a short introduction to the genre which can be viewed at **Mandy’s Pages**. While many of Kala’s observations are valid, and of course, tanka prose in English is still very much in its nascent form and, as such, is open to many interpretations and discussions pertaining to construction, style and language, etc., I do feel there is a tendency to regard tanka prose as being an offshoot of haibun and to believe, on a simplistic level, that it is nothing more than prose whose lyric companion is tanka, rather than haiku. I strongly recommend that writers new to the form refer to Jeffrey Woodward’s numerous articles, interviews and essays, concerning the key elements of tanka prose and how it differs from haibun; these have now been archived by Ray Rasmussen in the haibun and tanka prose resources section of his website:

<http://raysweb.net/haibunresources/pages/tankaproseresources.html>

The tanka prose entries for the competition were judged blind and by peer review. I think this method of adjudication has its place, especially in what was very much an experimental venture and although I have not seen all eight entries, it is highly likely that the overall winner was indeed the pick of the crop. If Amanda Dcosta were planning to run a second contest, however, I would recommend that she appoints a judge, or two.

I was pleased to see that the First and Second place winners both incorporated more than one tanka. While many excellent tanka prose

pieces have been, and continue to be written, following the basic template of one paragraph of prose and one tanka, I believe that the prevalence of this particular method of construction is one of the factors that inclines writers new to the form to believe that all one need do to become proficient in the genre is merely place a tanka where one might normally write a haiku. As I said above, this is a form that lends itself to many subjects, styles and interpretations. One might choose to keep the prose style simple so that the tanka almost stand out in relief, but equally, a writer can make use of a highly lyrical prose style, allowing the tanka to lift the piece to a higher octave, or even serve as a different voice or viewpoint to the prose element. The possibilities are endless.

The overall winner was David Terelinck with his piece “Orbiting Grief.” I was impressed with the choice of subject matter as David has tackled a difficult but contemporary issue, focusing on an incident that made international news. It is always refreshing to see writers departing from traditional pastoral or Japanese themes (although, of course, these still have their place) as I believe the future of tanka prose lies in its potential to push the bounds of style and content, especially in the hands of writers like Gary LeBel and Charles Tarlton, so that while it is steeped in tradition it is also mercurial and difficult to define. If it is to continue to grow as a genre, we must not allow it to become stale. David Terelinck’s piece is more lyrical in style and, a master of imagery, he has made good use of this in order to elicit the reader’s empathy. There are times when the language is somewhat overwrought, as in this sentence:

Silence shatters on the anvil of morning as night’s kohl is quickly replaced with the cinnabar of day.

A sense that the writer is trying just a little too hard detracts from the power of the piece. I would also suggest that the last sentence of the prose could have been safely eliminated, as the imagery of the final paragraph already resonates with the title and this would allow the reader some “dreaming room.” With such powerful subject matter, I think it is important that the writer’s voice does not inveigle its way into the reader’s mind; we need space to draw our own conclusions, feel our own emotions. Contrast this with the beautiful, uncluttered mid-section:

Who else notices the elder girl’s colouring would have been perfect for saris of gold silk trimmed with silver and purple thread? Instead she

wears cotton, a shalwar kameez the shade of a mango that will never ripen.

This is David Terelinck at his best.

I have chosen to also publish the second prize winner as not only was it commendable in its own right, but I also think it is a useful exercise to contrast the two pieces. Hazel Hall has a very direct, unembellished prose style which immediately engages the reader. I would venture to say that it is 'easier on the ear' than David's prose and is well-paced and visual. I think character study is something that Hazel would do well to experiment with further, as she seems to have a natural flair for it. However, by contrast, the tanka are a little lacklustre; they don't particularly move the story on, nor do they convey anything that might have been said just as well in prose. With a spare prose style like Hazel's it is important to decide what is the purpose of your tanka? How are you going to utilise the poetic element of your piece to good effect? It is interesting to note that Hazel abandoned punctuation and syntax for the final paragraph of her piece. I am undecided about this; as it differs from the rest of the prose, it is too easy to conclude that this was in error, but I am inclined to think it is meant to represent the way in which the children's mother blurted out the news. Might it have been more effective if it had been italicised? Or perhaps this is where tanka might have given the piece a completely different feel? How might tanka have been used for the revelation, or as the mother's voice itself? How much impact does the closing tanka have on the piece?

I am continuing to see an increase in submissions of tanka prose both to *Skylark* and *Haibun Today* and initiatives such as this by Amanda Dcosta are to be welcomed and supported. I believe we will continue to witness new and exciting developments in the field of tanka prose and I thank the community as a whole for its enthusiasm and support.

And thank you to David and Hazel for allowing me to publish their winning entries in *Skylark*.

* * *

First Prize:

Orbiting Grief

David Terelinck, Australia

A soft breeze fashions halos of dust motes in the dawning light. The thick crop of lime-green leaves in the fields bodes well for a good harvest. Their prayers to Parvati and Manasa have been answered.

But no amount of prayer will help today.

Silence shatters on the anvil of morning as night's kohl is quickly replaced with the cinnabar of day. The congregation shuffle about and look up, their footprints creating calligraphies of shame in the dust.

on the branches
such an extravagance
of flowers . . .
the chill of seasons
spinning out of time

Who else notices the elder girl's colouring would have been perfect for saris of gold silk trimmed with silver and purple thread? Instead she wears cotton, a shalwar kameez the shade of a mango that will never ripen. Her sister's outfit is a rainbow of red and violet.

But this is not the afterglow from a sun-shower. The storm is yet to come. The anger of the crowd is so densely woven that it cannot be rolled up and stored away until next time.

The morning breeze slowly twirls the bodies on the thin hemp ropes. Tomorrow it could be their daughter. Or perhaps their sister. Murmurs of shock and disbelief spill quietly from the lips of the onlookers. No one remains untouched by this orbiting grief.

the sun
fades behind a shiver
of clouds—
a group of women
chanting Kali's name

[On Wednesday 28 May 2014, villagers gathered around the bodies of two teenage sisters hanging from a tree in Katra village in Uttar Pradesh state, India. The two teenage sisters in rural India were raped and killed by attackers who hung their bodies from a mango tree. This became the scene of a silent protest by villagers angry about alleged police inaction in the case.]

~ ~ ~



Second Prize:

Starting to Corrode
Hazel Hall, Australia

water marks
on floral patterned
wallpaper—
an empty vase
once a wedding present

We live in the old double-fronted house where my mother grew up. Further down the street live the Thornes. The two boys are wild and noisy. We're afraid of them. Mr Thorne keeps racing pigeons in the back yard. Mum informs us that he drinks. Mrs Thorne is thin with hair like chaff and a rasping voice. She's not averse to a sweet sherry and usually has a cigarette perched between nervous fingers.

early morning
a cough grates over
the smell of toast—
jam sandwiches
for lunch again

We've just arrived home from school. Mum calls us. i want to talk to you girls mrs thorne has put her head in the oven now if you ever feel like that get out of the house do something go to a park and look at the flowers feed the birds but get out of the house

for sale sign
starting to corrode—
climbing roses
in an un-kept garden
over empty cages

~ ~ ~

Thoughts on Tanka Prose

Charles Tarlton, USA

First of all, let me say that I am a firm believer in the discipline of form; at the same time, however, I am not devoted to the perpetuation of any particular established forms. Thus, while I try to adhere to certain regularities in tanka prose—the five-line tanka written mostly in the form 5/7/5/7/7, but always in the form S/L/S/L/L, in which the middle line seeks, to the extent it can do it smoothly, to pivot between the first and last two lines—I am reluctant to submit to rules regarding appropriate subject-matter, for instance, or rules against ordinary poetic devices like musicality, enjambment, or naturally occurring rhyme or slant-rhyme. I started out thinking of the tanka part of tanka prose as more a genre of five-line lyric poem. For me, this meant that it had to contain elements of music; it had to be a little song of sorts. This is not meant to criticize anyone else's tanka, but to push back against often dogmatic conceptions about the tanka form. Dogma about tanka is always a little ironic because the stricter rules usually involve an extrapolation from ancient rules of tanka in Japanese, another language with its own music.

On the other side, the prose passage must equally seek to be, if not poetic, at least arresting. It must compete with the verse in its style, aiming to be inventive and expressive in its own right. In other words, the prose must also contain material and be written in a style that is itself poetic (an aspiration I would be the first to admit is mostly honored in the breach). The motive underlying all this has been a desire to bridge the distance between tanka prose, on the one hand, and the tendencies of poetry in English, on the other. My models in this regard have included modern and contemporary American and British verse. Among older poets, I have in mind the earlier work of Eliot, Pound, Berryman, Stevens, Roethke, Bunting, and Seamus Heaney, to name just a few off the top of my head. I am enamored of a verse that is open, “projective” (in Charles Olsen's sense), and that reaches for something beyond the merely narrative forms that dominate contemporary MFA poetry. Ideas like these have led me to want to collapse most of the formal architecture of tanka prose and to search for a subtler relation between the prose and the verse. In pursuit of these goals I am looking (still looking!) for a way to write tanka prose so that the whole, rather than being constituted by the bang-bang of the tanka off the prose, is melded into a single poetic form.

The line in modern poetry, as for example in the work of Charles Olson, is “adjustable,” in that its length varies not by adherence to any regular number of feet or beats, but according to the strength of the poet’s breath, the force and momentum of the ideas themselves, and how interesting they look on the page. Thus, between the two elements of tanka prose, the prose passage and the verse, any number of relations can exist. The prose can establish a field and then the verse can ricochet off any or all aspects of that field; or, it might even seek more subtly to extend or refine what had been said there. And, either one can lead the way— the tanka prose can begin with a prose passage or with a five-line lyric poem (or any combination of the two in any rhythm or sequence).

Questions about the difference between prose and poetry arise in this connection, and cannot be avoided. This is a question that has already generated an extended discussion in relation to that other genre-hybrid, the prose-poem. I have had tanka prose rejected, for example, because an editor complained that the tanka seemed to just carry on what was being said in the prose. My reaction is— so what? It is not the conceptual content that distinguishes the poetry from the prose, is it? Traditionally, we may imagine some sharper contrast between the prose and the poetry, calling again upon medieval Japanese examples, but I believe modern poetry in English provides many other more fruitful solutions to this problem.

The line in English-language poetry is a flexible instrument— think of the differences between Whitman and Dickinson, among older poets, or C.K. Williams and Rae Armantrout more recently. The long line and the short line are, on the surface at least, something suggestive of the possibilities within tanka prose. And compositions mixing prose and verse are, indeed, part of modern poetry— think of William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson* or the work of Robert Duncan (not to mention Dante and Shakespeare).

My interest has been to draw tanka prose (my own, of course, no one else’s) away from too close an adherence to the Japanese and traditional frames of reference and toward modern poetry in English, to bridge between the two “genres.” There is a kind of insularity among some writers and publishers of tanka prose as if they meant to mummify the form. But poetry either grows and changes or, like the sonnet or the villanelle, becomes more or less a curiosity. Even a little experimentation with tanka prose can open it up to a wider range of

interesting approaches. Tanka prose can escape from the Zen garden and the tea ceremony and come to terms with subjects of wider significance in contemporary culture.

The mechanics of what I have myself been trying to do in this sense was to make the prose sections of my tanka prose at once shorter (a brief sentence or two rather than the short essay that is more common) and more poetic in themselves, more figurative and evocative. In addition I have aimed to create tanka which were less disciplined by traditional “rules” of tanka and which aimed for more lyricity. At the same time, I have tried to enhance the evocative power of the poems by dividing up the tanka into one, two, and three line segments between the shorter prose passages. Often my prose elements have been intended to be more like Whitmanesque poetic lines than small paragraphs.

The elements of the tanka when they are separated often reach, then, both forward and backward to pick up color and implication from the different prose sections. The shorter prose sections become less mere backdrop for the verse and more like poetic lines in their own right. The juxtaposing of elements in this way creates at once a more complicated poem (as the seemingly casual and undirected alignment of images in a painting by Cy Twombly or de Kooning reflect upon and enhance each other). I am surprised over and over by how much more meaning is achieved by these simple alterations in form and mood or tone.

In conclusion, let me leave you with a recent example of what I am talking about.

Stereotypicals

CARMODY: But, doesn't it have to make sense?
BLIGHT: It makes sense to me!

At first, the sunlight could hardly reach us through the miles of
interlaced and leafless forest branches.

where the river bends
outside currents abrade the bank

But later, we could separate willow withes from maple boughs and
thin oaken twigs deeply in the woods.

there the flood comes through

Imagine, then, a stickle world turned to browns— darkest in the forest
shadows, palest on the faded fence.

while slower inside vectors
build and push the river out

~ ~ ~

Rengay: A Foot in the Door of the Tanka World

David Terelinck, Australia

There has been some interesting, and highly appropriate discussion recently, on where rengay best aligns; in the haiku world or the genre of tanka.

For me personally I came to rengay through exposure in tanka circles. The rengay workshops I have been a part of have all been sessions on collaborative responses within much larger tanka workshop spaces. These have included sessions with Beverley George's Bowerbird tanka group, on retreat with the Limestone Tanka Poets, and in other smaller collaborative tanka groups that met on a regular basis.

Having never considered myself a haiku poet by any stretch of the imagination, I saw rengay as a natural extension of tanka, albeit a different format that comfortably aligned with my tanka beliefs. This seems not unreasonable given the comments of Marilyn Hazelton where she says *In the Shallows* (a rengay between Beverley George, Kirsty Karkow & Maria Steyn) "is a rengay that looks like a sequence of tan renga among three poets" [*red lights* 11:1, 2015 p67]. I can confidently say that in two-person rengay I also see subtleties and similarities to the tan renga format.

For me I don't see the three and two lines of a rengay as individual 'haiku.' I see them simply and distinctly as 'rengay verses' that also sit well in a tanka or tan renga existence. There can be strong use of metaphor, dreaming room, poetic devices and 'poetry' within those lines . . . the very things I look for in a quality tanka. There can be employed extremely effective link and shift that we are looking for in a tanka sequence and a harmony of voice. Again these are qualities that are also valued in renku.

The rengay I write are not written with a conscious observance to employing kigo and cutting words as traditional haiku are. I do employ a natural observance of the world where appropriate. But I feel rengay is more open to invoking the human emotion in the piece and this is not always favoured in haiku. I find rengay is a user-friendly format to comment on the human condition.

I have read many of the articles on rengay that are found on Michael Dylan Welch's website: <http://www.graceguts.com/rengay>

These have a balanced and informed commentary about this form and its evolution. I encourage everyone to read them. And in deciding where the allegiance lies in respect to placement of rengay, one has to balance the history of this form with its new and evolving nature. Yes, it has stemmed from a haiku background and was created by masters of the haiku genre. And I believe one of the most significant rengay competitions is run by the established and respected HPNC. This is a history that is not to be dismissed flippantly.

Rengay has become an extension of these established renga and haiku traditions . . . but it continues to evolve. Coming from a renga background is it a far leap across the tracks to sit comfortably with tan renga? A comment on Michael Dylan Welch's website struck home to me: "rengay will become what poets make it."

Do we make it sit with tanka or with haiku by definition? I have to bow to more experienced poets to answer this. I do know that with publication in tanka venues, a wider audience may be able to appreciate this engaging form of expression. The loss of the tanka venues may see some rengay poets with limited outlets for publication. This debate also begs the question of whether rengay has truly come of age and has earned its dues in being worthy of a rengay-only journal or on-line venue? Again, not a question I feel I am competent to answer.

However I can find sufficient within rengay that it sits very easily for me with a foot in both camps. Not wholly haiku, and not strictly tanka. I see enough that I can justify its inclusion in both worlds. But I do appreciate not everyone will come to the same conclusion and may see my reasoning as very base and overly simplistic.

Ultimately the decision on where to publish quality rengay rests with each editor and journal alone. And I believe all poets who submit should respect this as these decisions are not made lightly. And the job of an editor can be a thankless task of many unpaid hours and can come down to time-consuming labour of love. Each soundly based decision on content inclusion may come at a price for those who submit and we need to accept this price gratefully.

Thank you to everyone who has published my rengay to date. Your belief in the quality of my collaborations is not taken for granted, regardless of the venue they have appeared in.

* * *

Thoughts on Rengay

My fellow poet and friend David Terelinck introduced me to rengay in October 2013. He gave a workshop at our Bowerbird tanka group meeting (which is convened by Beverley George). Since then I have been hooked and, together with my writing partner, have been asked to read our rengay aloud at Bowerbird meetings. The collaborative writing experience is fun. Writing rengay with another poet across the other side of the world (Matthew Paul) is an opportunity to reflect on the experience of living in very different landscapes.

As David reminded us, rengay is just one of a number of forms of collaborative writing: tan renga, rensaku, tanka response as well as tanka sequences by a single poet. It is not haiku. It is not tan renga. It is a form in its own right and as such cannot be re-shaped into another form.

I have never written haiku. Yet there seems to be a tendency to pigeonhole rengay into either haiku or tan renga. While Garry Gay acknowledges that rengay is closely aligned with the haiku form, the collaborative effort of two or three writers gives rengay more depth. Indeed, he goes so far as to say rengay is '*more likely to be published in the various haiku journals.*'

(<http://www.graceguts.com/essays/rengay-an-introduction>).

We are excited about your decision to make *Skylark* available to rengay poets and particularly at the idea setting aside a section in the journal for rengay. Good for you! It is just one of three journals for us to share and appreciate the work of others— the other two being *Kokako* (New Zealand) and *Presence* (UK).

—Yvonne Hales, Australia

* * *

How I feel about rengay is that it's a modern US invention that doesn't have much to do with old style tanka and I like to keep to the old waka traditions— just a personal thing and I think pretty well anything can be tanka and be fair game to publish. If I was an editor I'd be welcoming all kinds of things that looked like tanka and calling them tanka or sequences or sets or strings— it's all Japanese tradition poetry, short

songs, whatever name we give it.

I never know why people get hung up on names for poetry. It's all poetry.

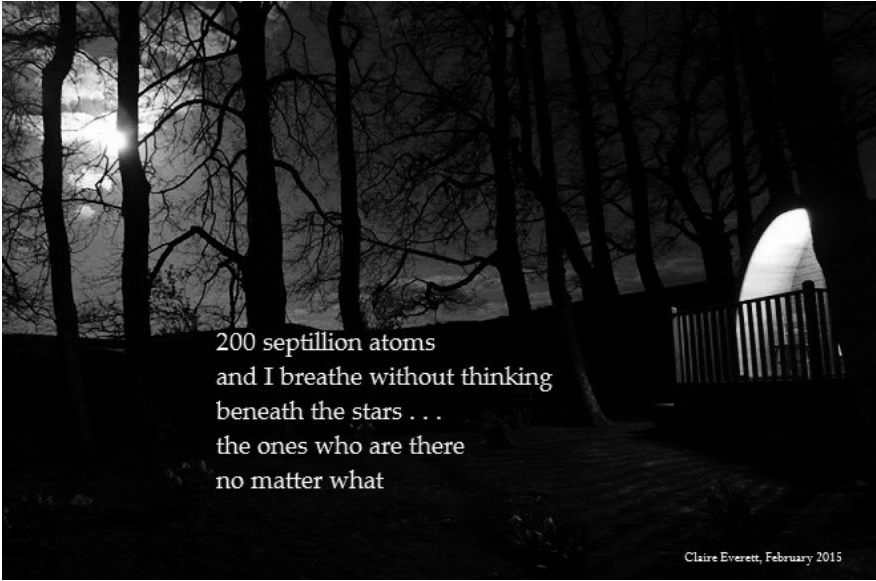
—*Joy McCall, UK*

* * *

I agree with Yvonne that rengay is and must be a form in its own right; and I feel that any literary 'quality' that they possess is secondary to the fun that is had in writing them, which mostly derives from the fact that you never know where your writing partner is going to take the next verse and so you're always happily surprised; and you never know where you're going to take the one after that yourself. I also like the fact that there are no set themes for any of the verses. As Yvonne also says, in our case our geographical polarity adds a further layer of interest and intrigue. Unlike longer collaborative forms, there's less scope for the flow of the verses to become stale.

—*Matthew Paul, UK*

~ ~ ~



200 septillion atoms
and I breathe without thinking
beneath the stars . . .
the ones who are there
no matter what

Claire Everett, February 2015

Articles, Essays, Reviews

Jenny Ward Angyal
Editor



'I Meet You Far from Home'

**A Review of *Conversations in Tanka*
by Amelia Fielden, Jan Foster and Friends**

Ginninderra Press (limited edition), Port Adelaide, Australia, 2014, 125 pages, paperback, 5.6 x 8.0, introduction by Patricia Prime. ISBN 978-1-74027-874-4. \$US 20 or 10 pounds stg. (including postage) from anafielden@gmail.com

Only connect! —E. M Forster, *Howards End*

Only a tiny proportion of human conversation is of the purely instrumental, “please pass the salt” variety. Most of what we say to one another seeks to fulfill a need at once more subtle, more complex, and more essential to the human heart— the need for connection. The “conversations in tanka” in the present volume both explore and fulfill that need. Although the poems were sparked by as wide a range of subjects as in any collection of this extent, themes of connection and disconnection run throughout the book, and its very method of composition reflects the deep desire to connect.

The better part of face-to-face communication is nonverbal, so they say— the glance, the gesture, the tone of voice that convey unspoken meanings. Yet none of that need be lost when a conversation is carried out with words alone— not when the words flow from the pens of poets. The magic of tanka lies in its ability to imply much with just a few well-chosen words, so conversations in tanka can convey a rich undercurrent of unstated meaning.

In face-to-face conversation over a pot of tea, friends may travel together over a universe of different topics, but effective participants take care to signal topic shifts and link their remarks to what went before— *oh, yes, that reminds me . . .* Tanka have no room for such overt linking devices, yet the conversations in this book demonstrate the many subtle ways in which skillful poets can help the reader connect with the mental leaps that bind separate poems into a coherent thread.

Such conversations in tanka have a long history, dating back to the first exchanges of *waka* between lovers in eighth-century Japan. But in the age of email and instant messaging, connections among friends and poets can grow, blossom and intertwine in all directions. This little book

includes 50 conversations among 23 tanka poets across the world. Forty of the conversations are responsive tanka sequences, three of them with multiple authors. Also included are four tan renga, three rengay, and three “tanka chains,” in which the last word of each tanka becomes the first word of the next.

With over 400 individual poems squeezed into 125 pages, some of the sequences are laid out with six tanka to a page; readers may wish there were more empty space between the poems, in which to ponder each one before rushing on to the next. But the book *is* about connection, among both poems and people.

The human desire to connect can overcome many obstacles, as in these two poems from “Ruffling Feathers” by *Jan Foster & Margaret L Grace*:

the fall of rain
misty and soundless
obscures the bay—
playing blind man’s bluff
touched by an unseen hand

*deaf friends share
animated gossip
fingers flying
their silences alive
. . .unlike mine*

These two poems are beautifully linked, the first exploring connection without sight, and the second, connection without sound. Grace’s poem leaves the reader to ponder whether the unseen hand connects the narrator with another person, or with something larger. Foster’s poem celebrates the connections among deaf friends but ends on a wistful note of loneliness, a frequent theme throughout the book:

*bored
with my own company,
I eavesdrop
on the dealings
between finches in the hedge*

dawn, so lonely
if it weren't for the birds
singing me awake
another dreary day
if it weren't for the birds

~from "Loop Line," by Amelia Fielden & *Jan Foster*

Here the poems are linked both by the theme of loneliness and by the consolation offered by the natural world, represented by birds. The effective use of repetition in Fielden's poem adds a further note of poignancy.

Human connections are ephemeral, and many of these poems explore themes of change, loss, and memory:

on my window
the ghosts of friends past
swaying
tapping their branches,
dark-leafed, ominous

*at the edge
of memory, hovering—
the name
of that boy
who first loved me*

~from "Winds of Change," by Amelia Fielden & *Jan Foster*

These two tanka are linked by their evocations of a half-remembered presence, whether ominous or tender, hovering just outside the window of memory.

Connections with the past may span many generations, as in these two poems from a tanka chain entitled "Summer Here, Winter There," by Amelia Fielden and *Mari Konno*:

keeper
of family traditions
and falsehoods,
my grandmother smiling
as she told her tales

*Tales of Genji author
living here a thousand years ago
gazes at
the fresh green growth
on this mountain*

Tanka chains, an experiment in linking by using the last word of each poem as the first word of the next, are most successful when the tanka share a more intuitive link as well, as in this example where the grandmother in the first poem evokes the literary “grandmother” in the second. The poems are also linked by their exploration of “tales” as tradition, as fiction, and even— most interestingly— as falsehood.

Human connections reach into the future as well as the past, as explored in these two poems from “Passages” by Anne Benjamin & *Jan Foster*:

a plastic bird
bobs its red and orange head
until it stops
time again to wind-up
my rainbow dreams for you

*the clock ticks on
hands move steadily
forward
taking you to a future
where I may not be*

Linked by the ticking of toy and clock, both tanka evoke parents thinking and dreaming of their children’s futures— but with a whisper of apprehension, expressed in the lines “until it stops” and “*where I may not be.*”

“So Much Rain,” a sequence of four tanka by four poets, explores similar themes of growth, change, and the inevitable loss of connection:

your text message
says he's moved out
no forwarding address—
this morning's paper
still unread

~*Dianne Garcia*

I shelter the boy
under my umbrella
holding his hand—
so much rain ahead of him
after I'm gone

~*Amelia Fielden*

Garcia's poignant poem, with its "text message," "no forwarding address," and "paper still unread" explores the *failure* of words to keep us connected, while Fielden's tanka, extending the theme of moving out and moving on, takes an exquisite turn into metaphor in its concluding lines.

Where *do* people go when they vanish from our lives? Is our connection with them permanently severed? Or not . . .

*that startled look
on the newborn's face—
perhaps
he is an old soul
who has been here before*

round and round
in opposite directions
underground trains
on Tokyo's loop line
a metaphor for thee and me?

These two poems from "Loop Line," a remarkably sustained, 44-tanka sequence by Amelia Fielden and *Jan Foster*, are linked by the idea of recurring cycles, even as the two poets muse in opposite directions

concerning the possibilities for human connection. We muddle along through our daily lives missing chances to connect with one another—yet perhaps our souls do cycle through new bodies, giving us an infinity of chances to meet.

The fifty conversations in this book amply demonstrate the possibilities of forging connections across time and space, even within the constraints of this life. Here poets from Australia, France, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA offer glimpses of their inner and outer lives, and respond from the heart to the glimpses offered by friends—thus weaving together a complex tapestry of interconnected threads. *Conversations in Tanka* may well inspire others to enrich their own tanka lives by connecting and conversing with fellow poets. The poems that emerge from such exchanges may surprise and delight their writers as well as their readers.

come true
my dreams of travel
writing poems
I meet you far from home—
roses, more roses

*petals rush
to another shore
one by one
I pluck them at low tide
are they yours or mine*

~from “Smilin’ Through” by *Kath Abela Wilson* and
Amelia Fielden

~ ~ ~

Prisms in the Sun

**A Review of *All the Shells:*
Tanka Society of America Members' Anthology 2014,
Edited by M. Kei**

Published by The Tanka Society of America in cooperation with Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2014, 120 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, foreword by Margaret Chula, introduction by M. Kei, cover photo by Garry Gay. \$10 plus shipping through Lulu.com .

Trying to define tanka in a way that would satisfy all its practitioners is like trying to pour a rainbow into a bucket. The present anthology reflects the many shades and hues of English-language tanka as currently practiced by poets across the globe.

words
scattered in the air
sparkling
like prisms in the sun
after an evening shower

~Aya Yuhki, Japan

All the Shells includes over 200 tanka— one to three poems by each of 130 poets. All are members of the Tanka Society of America, yet they represent a dozen different nations. Any TSA member who submitted five or more poems was guaranteed the inclusion of at least one, and Editor M. Kei had the formidable task of making his selections from nearly a thousand tanka. He has arranged the poems in 16 sections “based,” as he says in his introduction, “on themes, echoes and progressions.” Any anthology of this scope is necessarily somewhat uneven, but the volume’s appeal lies in the breadth of its spectrum, which includes both brilliant sparks of light and richly colored shadows.

quiet Saturday
I dip the old silver pen
into claret ink
at my grandmother’s desk
darkened varnish worn smooth

~Sharon Hammer Baker, USA

the red neon
exit sign
glows above
my grandmother's
coffin

~*Grunge, USA*

Two meditations on a grandmother who has passed from the narrator's life— but could they be more different? Baker's poem, written in two parts, structured in traditional S/L/S/L/L form, replete with visual and auditory images and a generous use of adjectives, evokes a mood of tender reminiscence. Grunge's minimalist one-part sentence poem, with its non-traditional line lengths and breaks, offers a single stark image to express the narrator's grief and, indeed, horror at death. The first poem suggests the continuity of life, as the narrator begins to create anew, using her grandmother's things; the second suggests the abrupt discontinuity between life and death. Each poet seems to have found, within the elastic bounds of tanka, the form that best suits his or her intention to express one facet of human experience.

casting my cloak
over these rotting reeds
at the river's edge
lest the harvest moon
become entangled

~*Julie B. Cain, USA*

placing one rock
on another
just so
all the notes
of a waterfall

~*Don Miller, USA*

Here are two poems that express each poet's exquisite sensitivity to the natural world, as well as the impulse to gently alter it in creative ways. Cain's tanka is written in traditional form and uses slightly archaic language (*cloak, lest*) that lends the poem an old-fashioned charm well suited to the romantic beauty of the scene. Miller's poem, shaped like the channel of a stream, is written in the simplest possible language,

allowing readers to hear for themselves the notes of the waterfall. So different, yet each poem provides readers with an *aha* moment as we perceive the familiar with new eyes or ears.

Tanka at its best can also pack whole stories into a scant five lines:

there are stories
a mother shouldn't tell
her daughter—
that cloudless summer day
when you told me

~*Marianne Paul, Canada*

Last days
of her life
she cooked dinner
dusted
and slept.

~*Alexis Rotella, USA*

Here again the contrasts in structure are obvious, but both tanka give us evocative bits of story that make us want to know— or imagine— more. Paul's poem uses careful understatement— we don't need to know exactly *what* mother told daughter to catch the emotional impact of the revelation— as well as a single, strongly contrasting visual image— the cloudless summer day— that leads us to feel the sudden chill of a psychological cloud. In just eleven words, Rotella's poem paints a portrait of a life as spare as the poem— form and content work together, inviting us into the poem to wonder and care about the life portrayed.

Some of these small poems tackle large questions, but do so in very different ways:

winter night
the things
i need to know
before
I die

~*Dorothy Coraggio, USA*

raking leaves
only to make room
for more . . .
how can something this light
burden us so?

~Janet Lynn Davis, USA

Coraggio's minimalist poem makes effective use of a single, simple image— *winter night*— to suggest darkness and the ending of a year— or a life— and to imply that the list of things the narrator needs to know may be as long as the longest night. Davis's poem, more traditional in form, also uses one simple image— *raking leaves*— but makes a subtle turn into metaphor in the last two lines. How did we lose the lightness, the ease, the joy, of life? The answer is surely one of those things that all of us need to know.

Questions also arise in the following three poems, all of which concern mothers who are in some way hidden:

sheets hang
in the sun
my mother's shadow
dances
from one to another

~Joyce Futa, USA

what did he make
of his mother leaving
when he was seven?
my husband, calmly cutting
rune staves from poisonous yew

~Claire Everett, UK

widening ripples
as we breast-stroke softly
across the lake
the child confides she might
search for her birth mother

~*Amelia Fielden, Australia*

In Futa's brief poem, the mother is literally hidden from our view, creating an image of sunlit mystery. Who is— or was— this woman, known to us only by her dancing shadow? The next two poems, more traditional in form, make wonderful use of images that double as metaphors. "Poisonous yew" suggests the bitterness of that long-ago relationship; yet the husband calmly turns it to practical use, suggesting, at least in part, an answer to the question posed in the upper verse. The "widening ripples" in Fielden's poem are not only ripples in the water but the potential ripples that may radiate through many peoples' lives if the child does decide to pursue her search.

The narrator's mother is "somewhere else" in another sense in this poem:

humming something
strange to me
my mother is somewhere else
the steady fall
of hibiscus blooms

~*LeRoy Gorman, Canada*

The steady fall of hibiscus blossoms becomes a metaphor for the accumulating losses of a failing mind. Although not S/L/S/L/L, Gorman's poem does make traditional use of contrasting line lengths, while another tanka on a similar theme is more minimalist:

dementia
never knowing
what comes next
the dark side
of the moon

~*Stevie Strang, USA*

This tanka also makes effective use of a single image as metaphor: the dark side of the moon is like the darkness of dementia, and like the darkness of not knowing “what comes next.”

In a lighter vein, many of the anthology’s tanka (kyoka, if you wish) display self-deprecating humor:

off season
romance
now
I understand
deciduous
 ~*Bob Lucky, Ethiopia*

he lived in the age
of near perfection
of the seedless watermelon
yet remained dubious—
put that on my stone

 ~*William Hart, USA*

Quite different in form, both tanka point out some of life’s ironies through the use of images that are fresh, apt and relatable. In Lucky’s poem, the unexpected last line suggests a lover shucked off as easily as last year’s leaves. Hart’s poem encapsulates the absurd expectations and pervasive anxieties of modern life in an image that makes us laugh out loud at our own foibles.

This scattering of poems reflects only a glint of the rainbow-hued diversity captured in the pages of this anthology. Readers of *All the Shells* may agree that the last two lines of the following tanka could well describe the contents of this engaging volume:

old friends—
we used to talk about sex
nowadays
life, death and the gradations
of a peony’s petals

 ~*Margaret Dornaus, USA*

Serving Sadness at the Waffle Shop

A Review of *This Short Life: Minimalist Tanka* by Sanford Goldstein

Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2014, 164 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, afterword by M. Kei. ISBN 978-1494845599. \$15.00.

“A poet is by the very nature of things a man who lives with entire sincerity . . . “
—W. B. Yeats

Decades ago, Sanford Goldstein, often considered a founding father of English-language tanka, expressed the wish that “my own single line will spring fully armed from the head of Zeus.” (*Gaijin Aesthetics*, 1983.) The image seems akin to his definition of “minimalism” in the introduction to his latest book, *This Short Life: Minimalist Tanka*, which he has published at the age of 88. Many poems in this volume are quite brief— as few as nine syllables— but others range up to at least 28. When he calls his tanka “minimalist,” Goldstein is not referring to the number of words or syllables— he has always been more concerned with content than with counting. Instead, he observes that “concentration is limited,” and that when we are preoccupied with counting syllables or adjusting line lengths, “something happen[s] to the original feeling we had.”

No, minimalism is a state of mind. Something appears in the mind and before one realizes it the poem has been formed. Of course it may be revised or rewritten at times, but the core of the image remains. And I think spontaneity is the major clue.

Thus by “minimalist tanka,” Goldstein means tanka that spring fully armed from the head of the poet, uncontrived and unvarnished; direct, genuine expressions of the poet’s lived experience. He credits Takuboku with teaching him that “tanka are a diary of the emotional changes in a poet’s life” (*This Penny World*, 2005), and he has long endeavored to express that emotional life in the simplest possible language. In *This Tanka World* (1977), he wrote that when a colleague

“calls my language commonplace, the poems capable of being written by anyone, I regard this as lovely praise.” Well— “anyone” may be capable of jotting diary entries in five lines, but few writers can sustain across decades the honesty, clarity and reflective depth of Goldstein’s poems. His latest book is no exception.

not just
mere
winter description
oh, a minimalist depth
is what I want

. . . and depth is what he often achieves. The poems in *This Short Life*— over 350 of them— were drawn from Goldstein’s yearly tanka notebook for 2008, suggesting that he wrote on average one poem a day, every day. Naturally not every tanka in the collection attains equal “depth,” but Goldstein’s willingness to keep his tanka-mind alert, and to spill directly into tanka-form the little things of daily life that most of us ignore— this willingness often allows him to capture the profound hidden in the mundane. Cumulatively, the poems present the candid and multi-faceted record of a life lived in keen awareness of each passing moment.

the wind
might as well take
these five lines down,
so fleeting,
the infinitesimal fraction of now

Anyone who has been alive and awake for a quarter of Goldstein’s years will have noticed that even the happiest of lives is tinged with sadness. Spilling his tanka in coffee shops, Goldstein captures again and again the bittersweet flavor that makes us treasure every moment, every poem.

startled
to find chocolate
with my coffee,
and the waitress
fills my cup again

Such a simple observation, but so much is left unsaid about loneliness, about kindness, about connection. Human loneliness and its compensations are threads that run throughout the nine loosely thematic sections of the book, the first of which is called “Kids.”

my son heaps
bowl on bowl
with rice,
head down
he devours the world

how short
my son's
miss you,
at the close of
today's letter

Any parent can identify with these two brief, simple poems, which together poignantly express the perennial tension between wanting to send our children forth to “devour the world” and wanting to hold them close.

my kid
carrying it
home,
her lopsided
heart

Here a concrete description of a young child's artwork, perhaps a proud offering for Valentine's Day, is transmuted into a metaphor for the whole human condition— which of us does not carry a “lopsided heart”?

The thread of loneliness continues through the following section, ironically entitled “Minimalist Sexuality.”

something
in this April light
tells me
this celibacy
will last and last

Goldstein's honesty about himself is blunt and unsparing:

I spit
on tonight's lonely
maneuver,
I floss,
I scribble poems

Loneliness and its compensations: Goldstein does not hesitate to write about writing, a topic many poets avoid. But for this poet, tanka is not a game, a hobby, or an art pursued for its own sake. It is a lifeline and he explores its limitations and its power.

cramming
a fall universe
into five lines down,
pen in hand,
the seaside bench hard

I want to push
these lines out,
out,
out into this October light
to the very edge!

To cram a universe into five lines, to push to the very edge of what the form can do, the poet must be willing to spill thousands of tanka. Those of us among his readers who also attempt to write— those of us who tend to think “*Oh, I already wrote about that,*” and then *stop*— we might learn something from Goldstein's willingness to return to the same themes, the same images, even the same words, in multiple poems. In the section entitled “Death,” for instance, he gives us these two poignant poems:

sudden
as rain,
as desire,
I see her
cloth-covered face

that white cloth
covering her face
again remembered,
tonight
sixteen years

. . . which beautifully capture the way in which grief resurges when we least expect it, even after many years. On neighboring pages Goldstein offers two more poems that use the image of “her cloth-covered face,” two others that mention “sixteen years,” and two more that speak of the death of “that young bride.” It is as if he holds an experience up to the light and examines its every facet, trying again and again to grasp its essence and to express the inexpressible. The many similar poems resonate against each other, ringing the experience into the depths of the reader’s memory as it rings in the poet’s— and keeping alive “chains of connection:”

almost broken,
broken,
chains of connection,
some having died,
some corridor silent

Goldstein also shares his acute perception of what other mysteries may lie hidden under a white cloth:

sudden
as if from behind
a magician’s cloth
winter’s
radiant snow

Living with nerve endings equally exposed to sorrow and to beauty, Goldstein is denied the consolations of conventional religious faith. Among his most resonant attempts to cram the paradoxical universe into five lines occur in the section called “Zen, God, Faith, Doubt.”

today
I picked up
and dropped them off,
so many bundles
of religious regret

He is unable to find “heavenly belief” in either the Judaism of his own background or in the Zen of his adopted country, Japan. And yet . . .

how neat
the straw slippers
at the Zen meeting,
they speak
the wordless

. . . just as the poet himself attempts to “speak the wordless” in poems that employ the bare minimum of words. The power of that bare-bones approach to poetry— to life— is reflected in the section entitled “Cleanliness, Whiteness, Purity.”

to clean
even a closet,
a bedroom floor,
this October light
steadies me

my colleague
invites me in
for tea,
wordless,
we lift the white bowls

In the simplicity of a life scrubbed down to the essence, fewer and fewer words are needed to forge “chains of connection

It is thought-provoking that the poet chose to include the following poignant poem in the section “Cleanliness, Whiteness, Purity,” rather than in “Food, Drinks,” or “Kids:”

I want
to tip
my daughter,
she serves sadness
at the waffle shop

Aware that sticky sweetness cannot nourish us, Goldstein offers instead the purifying flame of existential sadness.

put
my sad now
out to dry,
how white
this April sky-light

In his introduction to *This Short Life*, Goldstein writes “I offer these [poems] to my readers in what may perhaps be my last book, though I said that about my previous book . . . [and] here I am again . . . “

it’s useless
I know
and still, still,
these five
lines down

eighty-eight
is close enough
for death,
and still, still,
a few people say *stay*

Readers of *This Short Life* will surely echo those “few people” who say “*stay*”— and, despite the poet’s modesty, readers can assure Sanford Goldstein that his life-long practice of deep and honest exploration of his life through tanka is far from useless.

~ ~ ~



A String of Emeralds

A Review of *un renard roux/a red fox: tanka* by Maxianne Berger

Editions des petits nuages, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 2014, 90 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5.25 x 5.5. ISBN 978-0-9921097-5-2. \$12.00 from petitsnuages@bell.net

To write tanka is to translate feelings into images, then images into words. In such short poems, this must be done with the precision of a jeweler setting precious stones. This is difficult enough in any one language, but Montreal poet Maxianne Berger has accomplished it in two: challenging herself with a third layer of translation, she presents each of her gem-like poems in both English and French.

Writer and editor Berger has published two previous books of lyric poetry, and her tanka have appeared widely in both French and English-language tanka journals, but *un renard roux/a red fox* is her first tanka collection. Each page presents both French and English versions of a single poem. Though my ancient college French is rusty, I know just enough to suspect that the French versions are as graceful and highly polished as the English ones.

The book offers 58 poems arranged in nine short sections. From the first section, entitled “merely wishing”:

Peruvian mask
a string of emeralds
escaping the eyes
how wealthy I would be
if I had such tears

The wealth she speaks of is not material wealth but the wealth of compassion, of human feeling. The concluding lines of the poem may be more than “merely wishing,” as Berger’s poems consistently display a wealth of emotional sensitivity.

drawers wardrobes
emptied when he left me
will I be judged?
I quickly shut myself
into my own closet

This poem from the second section, entitled “nestled in,” deftly turns the literal image of the upper verse into an apt psychological metaphor in the lower verse: *shut the door on that thought*. “Nestled in,” which tells a complete story in just six tanka, is one of two sections designated as sequences, although the poems in *each* section have been chosen and arranged with such care— like strings of emeralds— that each section displays clear thematic coherence, and several approach the narrative coherence of true sequences.

The section called “sea glass” moves from this poem:

a phone call
everything goes blurry
outside
the neighbor’s little girl
waving her bubble wand

. . . which could, of course, be read quite literally, but which is also layered with a powerful metaphor for the gut-wrenching impact of sudden bad news. . .

. . . through three more poems with references to death, to conclude with this one:

morning on the beach
too young to be a widow
sea glass
shards smoothed by time
a comfort to her hand

. . . another beautifully layered tanka which makes us feel that the “shards” are not only polished fragments of sea glass but the remnants of a life, as well. Although Berger has not labeled this section as a sequence, it can easily be read as one.

The fourth section, entitled “what remains,” offers eight poignant meditations on what remains after loss. Several allude to war, including the last poem in the section:

*where have
all the flowers gone?*
progress
their daughter's homecoming
her flag-draped coffin

Quietly understated images give us a powerful evocation of grief—centered around the biting irony of the single word in line three.

Understatement that says much also characterizes this poem from the next section, entitled “under the falling snow,” a tender collection of seven love poems:

Lapsang souchong
its rough smoky flavor—
your tea
my porcelain cups
our pause

In the simplest possible language, this tanka evokes the interesting, smoky, delicious flavor of that shared pause so freighted with meaning.

“Final walk through” explores the narrator’s complex feelings surrounding the death of a difficult parent (“dad the bully”):

final walk through:
the emptied living room
harbours its sunbeams
in the corner where Dad
insisted on dying

The word “insisted” speaks of conflict . . .and yet, paradoxically, the corner harbours sunbeams, like memories of the love that glimmered through a troubled relationship.

“Cobblestones,” the second section that is specifically designated as a sequence, offers five poems about “the anguish” of another loved one’s final days:

the bridge
she is crossing
those years
peeling from its frame
what can nurses do

As “she” crosses the bridge from life into death, one by one the years of her life peel from the derelict structure. This powerful, haunting image contrasts poignantly with the narrator’s cry of despair in the last line.

“Only the scent of rain” offers beautiful and moving images of the narrator’s mother nearing the end of life:

vague memory
mother as a young woman
lingering
in the rose garden
only the scent of rain

Here the poet has made effective use of a pivot in lines three and four— is it mother who lingers in the rose garden, or is it only the scent of rain? Or has the memory of mother become like the scent of rain— refreshing, evocative, ephemeral?

The book’s final section, called “a red fox,” continues the poet’s lyrical reflections on love, loss, memory, and what remains:

our kiss
in a yard sale loveseat
lasts forever
will my elderly self know
which memories to keep?

Here line three explores in just two words the paradoxical, elastic nature of memory.

A *red fox* is a small, square book, which arrives in a little red envelope, like a gift. Its readers will surely offer a resounding “yes” to the question in the poem above, as Berger’s beautifully crafted tanka are like a string of emeralds, highly polished and carefully selected memories very well worth keeping.

On the book's cover (designed by Luminita Suse) is a stunning close-up photograph of the face of a red fox snoozing in the sun—the poet's persona, perhaps?— and that persona muses on one more question in the book's final poem, wherein sunbeams both warm the wary sleeper and illuminate the inevitable reality of loss. I think we can say “yes” to this query, too:

will they enjoy
visiting me here?
March sun
a red fox snoozes
on top of a tombstone

~ ~ ~

News

Marilyn Humbert writes:

On November 23rd Beverley George, editor of *Eucalypt— a tanka journal*, hosted a biannual meeting at Pearl Beach NSW for members of the Bowerbird Tanka Group. Seventeen tanka poets took part in the five hour programme.

In the morning, Marilyn Humbert presented a workshop on tanka prose which began with guidelines to consider when writing this genre and concluded with examples and group discussion of published tanka prose. These ranged from works by early Japanese masters to those by modern western writers. The examples comprised an extract of Sanford Goldstein's *Tanka Walk*, tanka prose by Claire Everett and by six Australian tanka poets: Jan Foster, Keitha Keyes, Anne Benjamin, Amelia Fielden, David Terelinck and Marilyn Humbert, thus giving a broad cross section of styles and subjects.

A summary of the complete Bowerbird Tanka Group programme can be found at <http://www.eucalypt.info/E-bowerbird.html>

Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 3:2, winter issue of *Skylark* will be read through June and July and will close on August 1st 2015.

Kindly submit up to ten original, previously unpublished tanka &/or one sequence, tanka prose, tan renga, articles etc. with the subject heading “Skylark tanka submission” to

skylark.tanka@gmail.com.

At the end of your submission, please include your full name and country of residence.

All rights revert to authors upon publication. Your tanka must not be under consideration elsewhere, or submitted to any contest.

In addition to your regular submission, you are also invited to submit **one** tanka for the “Skylark’s Nest” prompt (see page 13). Unfortunately, we are not able to reproduce colour images in *Skylark*, but poets wishing to submit tanka-art may do so; coinciding with the publication of each issue, a selection of the best will be added to a haiga gallery on the website. Alternatively, black and white tanka-art may be considered for the print journal.

The website **skylarktanka.weebly.com** will be updated regularly. Back issues will be available as PDF files as each new issue is published. The “Skylark’s Nest” winners and runners up will also be archived.

Jenny Ward Angyal is the *Skylark* Reviews and Features Editor. If you would like your book to be considered for review please contact

skylarkreviews@gmail.com

Similarly, submit all articles for consideration to the address above.

Any queries should be addressed to the Editor:

skylark.tanka@gmail.com



Friends of Skylark:

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