

ATLAS
POETICA
A Journal of World Tanka

Number 31

M. Kei, editor

2018
Keibooks, Perryville, Maryland, USA

KEIBOOKS
P O Box 516
Perryville, Maryland, USA 21903
AtlasPoetica.org

Atlas Poetica
A Journal of World Tanka

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Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka, an organic print and e-journal published at least three times a year. *Atlas Poetica* is dedicated to publishing and promoting world tanka literature, including tanka, kyoka, gogyoshi, tanka prose, tanka sequences, shaped tanka, sedoka, mondo, cherita, zuihitsu, ryuka, and other variations and innovations in the field of tanka. We do not publish haiku, except as incidental to a tanka collage or other mixed form work.

Atlas Poetica is interested in all verse of high quality, but our preference is for tanka literature that is authentic to the environment and experience of the poet. While we will consider tanka in the classical Japanese style, our preference is for fresh, forward-looking tanka that engages with the world as it is. We are willing to consider experiments and explorations as well as traditional approaches.

In addition to verse, *Atlas Poetica* publishes articles, essays, reviews, interviews, letters to the editor, etc., related to tanka literature. Tanka in translation from around the world are welcome in the journal.

Published by Keibooks

ISBN-13: 978-1983510151

ISBN-10: 1983510157

Also available for Kindle

AtlasPoetica.org

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Ten Years and Looking Forward

Here we are, ten years later. Our upcoming Spring 2018 issue will be the tenth anniversary of *Atlas Poetica*. The first issue of ATPO came out in spring, 2008. In those days, it only appeared two times a year (now four) and was published by MET Press, with the subtitle of *A Journal of Poetry of Place in Modern English Tanka*. It was the first journal spun off by the revolutionary *Modern English Tanka*, the journal that launched MET Press and transformed English-language tanka.

Atlas Poetica was founded in response to the tremendous surge of submissions received for the MET Press anthology, *Landfall : Poetry of Place in Modern English Tanka*, edited by Denis M. Garrison, and published in 2007. Poetry of place provided a grounding for tanka that helped it naturalize in English and other languages. Although tanka had been composed in English since at least 1904, dependence on classic Japanese masters made it hard to assert as an independent literature.

As I went to the shelf to read *Landfall* yet again to remember ATPO's origins, I discovered that my copies of the hardback and paperback have disappeared. I feel as if a part of me is missing. The moment of happy reflection has turned to one of anxiety. Ten years have passed, and so has my health. I have narcolepsy, and one of its symptoms is a deterioration of memory.

This moment of triumph—ten years! of publication in a genre where publication can be ephemeral—has become one of loss as well. There is no 'uphill' from here, only a slow decline into the silence that claims us all. I have taken stock of my own mortality and its implications for the journal. I have not been as timely in responding to submissions as I used to be, I am not making my self-imposed deadlines, proofreading is a struggle, and I have shortened the journal from 104 pages to 94 pages to reduce the burden.

Having given it considerable thought, I have decided to accept the fragility of my life and have chosen to carry on with the journal. I am also giving myself permission to be imperfect, to be old, to be slow; and to forgive myself for not

doing what I used to do. Under those conditions, I think ATPO can continue. Perhaps on a more erratic schedule than before, but at the same quality. My eye for editing is still sharp. The skill has not declined, only the memory. I appreciate the patience of my readers and contributors and will be leaning more heavily on it in the future.

When I founded *Atlas Poetica*, my goal was to showcase tanka from around the world. The large size was not only to publish as many poems as possible—more than a thousand per issue—with translation side by side with originals, but to be physically large with striking covers that commanded attention wherever they went. The use of satellite photographs taken by NASA emphasizes both the unique beauty of every place on Earth, and also that we share a common planet. Tanka provides a universal language for poets and readers to understand one another and their place on Earth.

Time and again poets tell me how proud they are to appear in ATPO's pages. Poets and editors with considerable accomplishment of their own have told me what they admire about the journal, so I think that, after ten years, I can announce 'Mission Accomplished.' I set out to create a big, *big* journal that could not be ignored, and whose contents reward readers of all kinds everywhere in the world. I think I have succeeded.

Without further ado, I present to you the latest issue of *Atlas Poetica*. God willing, there will be many more.

~K~

M. Kei
Editor, Atlas Poetica

Four Corners, Southwest United States, where Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. The bright red lines are vegetation, the water is black. The rest is desert.

Cover Image courtesy of Earth Observatory, NASA.
<http://eoimages.gsfc.nasa.gov/images/imagerecords/52000/52242/fourcorners_ast_2001162_lrg.jpg>

tanka love stories

ai li

years ago
coming home
from the movies
we stopped to look
at the stars

in disguise
i find
another moon
to seduce me
with its light

tonight
i can hear my heart
and my bones
yearn for
another lifetime

without you
i shadow
every dusk
every window has
my silhouette

late night film
i close my eyes
and hear
all
your promises

will i dream of you
tonight of all nights?
reading out loud
your letters
to the stars

new skin
your betrayal
has not
touched
this finger

all afternoon
my body warm
but autumn
whispers
rose hip red

you start to unbutton
my blouse
i smell the starch
of
your dog collar

stockings
for the night
you ladder you tear
before we leave
the house

he loves me
he loves me not
he loves . . .
the new gardener
with his shirt off

i send you
to
the land of nod
i now need
to undress you

fog deepens
i do not have
to see your face
when
you lie

i now
cook for one
eat for one
but a night
is made for two

love the dark you said
and you would give me
fireworks
at the window
to muffle your leaving

~London, UK & Singapore

cherita *trouvé* from my
childhood

ai li

i was a 10-pound baby

a ten-month arrival
i was heavy, i was loud

i was loved
an imported black
english perambulator

flies

around
your open mouth

as you sleep
one flies in
and you wake

class is over

i can go home now
but that was decades ago

mother at the front door
waiting to take
care of my shoes

memory's garden

the colours of
a perfect childhood

all fallen leaves
and fruit
swept away

i remember

hearing my voice
calling you stupid

or something worse
i'm sorry i didn't
hear the echo

forgiving is easier

forgetting is like
trying to move

an elephant
who has pooped
everywhere in the room

~London, UK & Singapore

chop suey

a small menu of tanka and cherita

ai li

from
the roses
i get
the scent
of betrayal

i was your root

and all you
could think of

was hemlock
and the separation
by decay

in the cup

could be my
lips reflected

in tap water
not fit
to drink

frost
i turn to you
for a cuddle
the silhouette
of your absence

no one

will hear me
go down

to the river
i'm already
breathless

putting up
my tent
for
the stars
i'm dreaming

the breath
of spring
a magnolia
in
my chignon

~London, UK & Singapore

tanka *k'ik-k'ik k'ok-k'ok**

ai li

your unfinished painting
sits
on the easel
your family
sold yesterday

i buy a box of haw flakes
the sweetness
from childhood
is only a corner shop
away

the winter sun
on your dressing table
one gilt hand mirror
one used powder puff
time is not on your side

rain dark alley
i've been there
twice without you
but with
your best friend

the weight on my heart hurts
it is only january
there are milestones
yet to cover
with dark knights

old dreams folded away
like today's dry laundry
in the folds and creases
a crushed tutu
the lake without its swan

on the seabed
an old wreck
let it lie in its quiet
don't disturb
its longing

this long night
i won't be travelling
i have ashes to talk to
lighting one small lantern
to see you again

in the wee hours before dawn
i fold my wings
shrink my halo
who believes
in angels anyway?

i linger
with the last
chrysanthemums
this north wind
chills

i sip you sip
this tea from china
above us a crane flying
fresh dew
on its feathers

down memory lane
i find grandma
we do not speak
i take her hand
and it starts snowing

~London, UK & Singapore

**k'ik-k'ik k'ok-k'ok is the straits chinese peranakan word for
miscellaneous in the hokkien dialect*

a dream by Bosch

a tanka malam [tanka of the night]

ai li & larry kimmel

tonight i'm going brazilian
for the carnival
every bearded man
i see in the crowd
has got me excited

*with twisted sheets
wet between her legs,
she wakes
from a dream by Bosch—
the angst of half-remembered pleasures*

mind games at 3 am
he tells me he has a gun
in his pocket with one bullet
i show him a photo of a 4 year old
with his face and curls

*barred owls question the night,
I lie beside her easy sleep
sated yet troubled—
the answer
that was not an answer*

in the favela
a black cat and
his shadow of three legs
the blind fortune teller
singing *fado*

*insomnia.
pacing pacing the streetlit rooms,
thank god for cigarettes—
the obsessed mind
a prayer wheel of heartache*

blowing out the candles
one by one it will be darker
where he will be going to
when the lid of the casket
is in place

*NyQuil; Valium; Benadryl:
time, a red blur on the nightstand,
more Valium—
something's wrong . . .
waiting to see which way it goes*

she wears black and quietly
slips out of the house
it is still dark the cobblestones
wet with rain she is free
of the sleeping dragon

*by moonlight
her need finds a helping hand
as she lies beside
her snoring sot
in silent desperation*

son et lumiere
the sphinx in shadow
the time lost in desert sand
uncovering sacred scarabs
and faience ushabtiu

*a log settles . . . the cat
scrunches . . . I finger
the uncut pages
of a new acquisition . . . flickering
sonnets surround me*

~London, UK & Singapore/Colrain, Massachusetts,
USA

*ai li is a Straits Chinese short form poet from London and Singapore
who writes about Life, Love and Loss bringing healing and prayer to her
poems. The creator of cherita, co-editor and publisher of the cherita,
founding editor and publisher of still, moving into breath and dew-on-
line, she is also an evidential spiritualist medium, an urban
photographer, and a surrealist collage painter. Find her essence in the
quiet of her inner rooms at: [https://www.amazon.com/ai-li/e/
B0080X6ROC/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1469884842&sr=1-2-ent](https://www.amazon.com/ai-li/e/B0080X6ROC/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1469884842&sr=1-2-ent).*

*Larry Kimmel was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He lives quietly
in the hills of western Massachusetts. His most recent books are
"shards and dust" and "outer edges." "this hunger, tissue-thin" is free
to read online at: < [http://www.winfredpress.com/books/this-hunger-
tissue-thin](http://www.winfredpress.com/books/this-hunger-tissue-thin)>.*

Aju Mukhopadhyay

close to evening
back home he stands
boozed
like umbrella in stand—
for hours

a famished dog daily
quenches its thirst from dripping water
of a damaged roadside tap
beyond routine supply hours
when no man's around

fallen leaves
suddenly gather
momentum—
whirling in unison
jingling through the air

silently
in the vast sky
a star throbs as if
afraid of falling
at any moment

in death's embrace
two tattered bodies in darkness
struggle to win;
vultures wait
patiently

~India

*Aju Mukhopadhyay, an Indian bilingual award-winning poet, author
and critic, a regular contributor to national and international journals,
has authored 34 books; 12 books of poems including two books of
Japanese short verses, five books of short stories and a novel. He has
contributed more than 200 essays in books and journals; literary and
environmental. He writes travelogues, on animals, and Nature. His
poems and short stories have been widely anthologised.*

Alegria Imperial

threadbare sheets . . .
on the window a dance
of Luna moths
the night we spent
figuring out who's who

monarch butterflies
trespassing
fenced-in wombs
in patchwork lawns . . .
in a dream, I unlatch mine

the bearded shore
washing off rivers of foam
with foam . . .
I scoop remains
of our laughter

finding
chewed up bones
in the campfire . . .
still we take
our hearts home

pretending
we don't believe in fairy tales . . .
in secret
a tin soldier's heart
births in us each day

~Canada

Alegria Imperial writes all forms of Japanese short poetry, but she considers tanka as the closest to her inner voice. A former journalist in Manila, she now lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Alexis Rotella

In a red flannel jacket
the tall lanky figure
is there again
walking among the graves
in thick morning fog

Georgie O'Keefe Museum
the docent
tells us how to look
where to stand
and what to think

The cemetery
in the rearview mirror
where I leave
my mother
in blue chiffon

Nothing of use
in our family attic
but plenty
of cobwebs
to photograph

A walk through
the old neighborhood
people I once partied with
now rake leaves
looking like birds of prey

Open minds
but closed
for repairs
an attempt
at talking gun control

~United States

Wedding Reception

Alexis Rotella

For my wedding reception
Mother carves radishes
into roses
arranges each in a spiral
on a white china plate.

Cousin Annie hangs a white bed sheet
from a clothesline
to hide the beloved coal stove
that was in the cellar kitchen
long before I was born.

Step Aunt Olga and I
take a walk to the creek
she tells me
the family always seems
to cater to me.

My parents offer us
their bedroom
but I refuse
telling them I'll sleep
on one couch, spouse on the other.

Catholic cousins leave early
without saying goodbye
they visited us once
in California
while we were living in sin.

The wedding cake cut
I take my piece
and smoosh it in his face
mother flabbergasted
clicks the shutter.

Grandma sits quietly
the secret of my illegitimate birth
wrapped in a tight ball inside her
as well as her hatred
for my father

~United States

Cherita

Alexis Rotella

Room service

dirty martinis
and a feast of bivalves

we spend a Manhattan evening
watching films
from Noire Alley

His sudden death

an end to my fantasy
of the handsome prince

who rode off
in a blue station wagon
kangaroo painted on its trunk

My mother and father

folding sheets
in the cellar

those rare moments
when there's nothing
to fight about

Late summer

I offer her
a jeweled barrette

if she promises
to leave and not return
for another year

New moon

my husband tells them
to leave us alone

the spirits of ancestors
hovering over
our bed

Gone 10 days

and the gardens
are taken over

with Chinese chives
the grief of another autumn
staring me in the face

In the telescope

a picture of
the Big Bang

and dead stars
feeding
new ones

Goodbye sweetheart

my mother says
to my philanderer dad

before the casket lid
is lowered
and locked

Cocktail party

a pity
the live wire

dressed in red sequins
has no real
connections

No American Indian

in her DNA
to brag about

just plain old
Irish
leprechauns

Annual visit

they bring flowers
and Chinese food

they flatter the old lady
praise her ivory skin
while surveying the place

Her favorite child

born stillborn
70 years ago

no room
in her heart
for the other six

Her 100th birthday

she orders
two dozen oysters

and a pint
of French vanilla
with sprinkles

He pinched my arms

to see
me cry

my father
whose father
pinched him

Rosa rugosa

like falling
in love

I risk
the thorns
for its fragrance

With a hairpin

Mother opens
my diary

an ad
in Teen Magazine
for invisible ink

~United States

*Alexis Rotella's latest books, BETWEEN WAVES and THE
COLOR BLUE (Red Moon Press, 2017) are available from the
author akrotella@gmail.com.*

No Moon At All

Amelia Fielden

lying here
alone but not lonely
in a soft bed
the sleeping hours drift by,
what will the wind do now

soft snow light
through half-opened blinds
silhouettes
his concentration . . .
morning piano practice

one black bird
perched in a tall bare tree—
can't start
weeping and wailing
in case I never stop

Beethoven's Ninth
from the student choirs
pure voices
assailing the heavens
on Christmas Eve

far away
from home, the fragrance
of eucalypt
recalls where I come from
where I must return

somewhere
through the dark still night
this wistful tune
from a harmonica:
'no moon at all'

~Seattle, Washington, USA, December 2017

*Amelia Fielden is an Australian. She is a professional translator of
Japanese literature, and a keen composer of tanka poetry in English.*

my inner land

Andy McCall

I stand
in the church porch
between
two wooden benches
on worn flagstones

before me
the heavy oak door is open
the sun streams down
on fields of golden corn
under a bright blue sky

there are trees
and the land stretching
into a distant valley
all I can hear
are the songs of birds

it is warm
summertime
I dream
of leaving the dark
of the church, one day

I will walk slow
to the tall trees
and sit there
my back against
sun-warm bark

I will rest
alone and quiet
while breath
and heartbeat fail
and all is still

there I will stay
till my bones fall
to the welcoming earth
blessed by peace
birdsong and sunshine

~Norwich, England

Autumn Noelle Hall

mass shootings
served up as daily bread
I cannot swallow
still, I'd rather die by gun
than own one

since I discovered
their hinged temple doubles
as a bookmark
I no longer lose
my reading glasses — or my page

when you said
like oil and water
did you mean
consecrated and holy?
— it's not all about mixing

spanning
my entire lifetime
his tanka
a bamboo grove growing
around the hut of the world

for SG

~Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

I've forgotten many things
but that origami rabbit
I breathed to life at five
still hops
from nimble fingers

*~Kenmore, New York/Green Mountain Falls, Colorado,
USA*

*Andy McCall lives with his wife Joy in Norwich where he was born.
He finds comfort in motocross and speedway, in nature, in all kinds of
sweet stuff, and in home*

Cherita

Autumn Noelle Hall

Crazy Horse stares

his proud mount, granite-hobbled
trucks stalled on his outstretched arm

his finger points
at four white men
who turn their backs on him

~*Crazy Horse, South Dakota, USA*

his name and rank

on a satin patch
inside its double breast

thrift shop peacoat—
all those years a stranger
kept me warm

~*Iowa City, Iowa, USA*

growing enlightenment

I plant stella d'oros
beside the garden Buddha

whenever I look
out my kitchen window
he holds up one flower

~*Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA*

While You are Stuck in a Chair Doing Taxes, I Go Outside for You

Autumn Noelle Hall

so, if your ears are burning
that's just because
the wind
is crisp and cold enough
to turn the whole sky blue

and if you hear
a gravelly voice
under the wind
that's just my boots
consecrating granite ground

see how the light
riding the white water
falls
between the boulders
like a last love-making . . . ?

the pond is green—
though not with envy or concern—
it lets the ducks
roll off its back
like water

while yellow willow leaves
as tiny banners
fly
in honor of their marriage:
Fountain Creek and Setting Sun

a SPLASH—
each day is like a stone
that sinks . . .
this pocketful is all I have
but I will share with you

*for ML, wode hao pengyou ("my good friend" in Mandarin Chinese
pinyin romanization)*

~*Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA*

#MeToo

Autumn Noelle Hall

the gauntlet
we girls ran up the steps
to the gym
in elementary school
the boys grabbing more than lunch

the boys who laughed
when they asked me if I liked
tuna tacos
my shame at my own
. . . culinary ignorance

making a sandwich
the boy and the playground
where he held me down
forcing tongue between teeth
to taste the meat of me

the moldy smell
of that guy's basement carpet
gagging me
if I only screamed no
in my head . . . was it rape?

the love letters
his dad wrote me after
his son broke it off
smelling of his cologne
telling how I made him feel young

the airman pounding
on my dormitory door
drunk declarations
that he'd make me his . . . girlfriend
or else

the Senior NCO
suggesting he could land me
a prime assignment
if I showed him a little less
. . . military decorum

my soon-to-be-ex
asserting he still had
conjugal rights—
my killer reply
that I'd like to see him try

*~Davenport, Iowa / DLI, Monterey, California /
Aurora, Colorado, USA*

DFC*

Autumn Noelle Hall

Tell me that story, the one about 'Nam—
how your chopper creeps through the triple
canopy, each layer a trap door to that lair of a
jungle floor, a painstaking ride down a wide, leafy
flight of stairs. Let me hear Huey thump as you
stick the cyclic, pull the levers, pump the pedals,
seeking a sign of your guys on the ground,
knowing you'd better, "*damn well remember*," that a
straight-up retreat, should the VC show, is
impossible—the only way out is not through.

*"You gotta climb those motherfuckin' steps—one at a
goddamn time."*

Achieve vertical horizontally. Mind the
branches. Mind the blades. The reek of iron.
The mortars' roar. Inch your ascent—with the
patience of Job and the cool hand of Luke—
placing all bets on those red Marble Mountains.
While the boys you ferry back to base sway in the
bay six stretchers deep, dying or worse, and your
bird's metal feathers get plucked by AK fire.

Not all in one piece, but you make it. And
that Purple Heart? You waive it. Wave it aside
with your shrapnel'd left arm, heartsick for those
kids with their open wounds which bleed more
than yours even still . . . always will.

So tell me that story, the one about 'Nam—

finally
ready to listen
now
that you are
gone

~*South Vietnam / Davenport, Iowa / Green
Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA*

** For my late father, USMC Captain Robert E. Weinberg, who
earned the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) while serving at Marble
Mountain Air Facility/DeNang, Vietnam—and lived to tell the story.*

~*Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA*

Field Work

Autumn Noelle Hall

*“There were no meadowlarks in the school.
Which was a good enough reason for me
not to want to be there.”*

*from Mary Oliver’s “Meadowlark”
Felicity, Penguin Press 2016*

These coveted pieces of paper—replete with
gold seals and embossed black calligraphy—
declaring their bearer has learned something: tell
me, does the lack of such imply the opposite?

Meadowlark
feeds by gaping; his strong bill
drilling deep
(as though incisive mind)
to pry open the soil

I didn’t glean this from a book, or sitting in a
classroom—unless one considers mixed-grass

prairies lecture halls, their Badlands spires
tenured faculty.

Not to deceive—I do read books (and other
things) compulsively—subtitles, bumper stickers,
laundry labels, recipes. I read poetry. And when I
do, I slip into the poet’s skin and feel at once how
very like/how very unlike we are. Today, while
sitting out-of-doors, I slipped on Mary Oliver,
who like me, did not think or do what her parents
thought and did. But unlike Mary, who writes
she’s searched for him for 40 years, I need not ask
where Meadowlark has gone. I know his office
hours; he’s taught me his song.

a black V draped
against his yellow breast
Meadowlark dressed
as though in academic hood
—minus velvet tam, or mortarboard

~*Badlands National Park, South Dakota / Green
Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA*

*Field Work was written in response to Mary Oliver’s poem
Meadowlark from her Felicity collection, Penguin Press 2016; and To
Be Human Is to Sing Your Own Song, from her Blue Horses collection,
Penguin Press 2014.*

*Autumn Noelle Hall watches the world from a small cedar cabin on the
slopes of Pikes Peak, attempting to make sense of life’s senselessness
through her writing. She is grateful to the sun for rising each day, to her
husband and the mountain’s wildlife for keeping her company, and to all
those who so generously read and publish her work. She sincerely hopes
it is possible to save the Earth one tanka at a time.*

set adrift

Bill Albert

98 years old
my mother, rock of love
now crumbles
her strong New York voice
broken, whispering

I cannot hear
eight time zones away
her dimmed tones
only my heart imagines
undying mother's love

"my first-born son
do not weep for me
my love lasts
over distance and time
I'm always with you"

I'm sorry mom
cannot stop feeling
set adrift
without your presence
so loving so real

"no tears, Billy
I go without pain
in my bed
enjoying the garden
and Beethoven"

I understand mom
with head not heart
your desire
to cast off from life
to just float away

I'm resigned
to your escape
slow, peaceful
and though far away
I embrace you

~Norwich, England

L'Étranger

Bill Albert

my mother died
today I dreamt her
last embrace
eight years ago now
in LA sunshine

my mother died
today I dreamt her
on Jones beach
my legs in wet sand
cradled in her arms

my mother died
today I dreamt her
giving me to
yiddisha grandmother's
age-wrinkled love songs

my mother died
today I dreamt her
split from dad
yelling 'you're just
like your father was'

my mother died
today I dreamt her
sat poolside
smell of hot lotion
in the Hollywood Hills

my mother died
today I dreamt her
ninety-eight
red-lipstick smiling
alive, beautiful

my mother died
today I dreamt her
crying out
wishing to be gone
her history in flames

my mother died
today I dreamt her
I dreamt her
I dreamt her today
today I dreamt her

~Norwich, England

Bill Albert is a novelist, poet and disability rights activist. He was born in New York, grew up in California and has spent the last 50+ years in the UK. (This string is on Bill's website <https://www.billalbert.me.uk/set-adrift>)

Bruce England

I sleep on my couch
before going to bed
I have done this
for years, whenever
I am alone

A cockroach
has no blood, no lungs
decapitated
its walks about until
it starves to death

I fake throw
the ball, the dog jumps
returns to me
once he knows the trick
he barks, throw the damn ball!

We are reminded
voices carry in a motel
we hear sex next door
we pull down the covers
prepare to be animals

Leaving Las Vegas
no matter where you go
or what you do
an American with a gun
is willing to take you out

When things turn bad
drain your glass
stamp your feet
in a little jig
it's something to do

The four beauties:
a roasted duck
stuffing
mashed potatoes
dark gravy

Kisses
on your skin
everywhere
round your body
ending on your mouth

~United States

Sedoka

Bruce England

This morning
churning, dark clouds
someone whispers
in an archway
*on this kind of day
a god is being born**

**Derived from Nishiwaki Junzaburō*

~United States

Bruce England lives in Santa Clara and works in San Jose, California, as a public librarian. Retirement is planned for late 2018 or early 2019. In a few years after that, he will cash out of Silicon Valley for a place not yet determined. A chapbook, Shorelines, was published with Tony Melanio (aka Mariano) in 1998. Sadly, after a long friendship of 51 years, he died this year.

Brendan Slater

black
and proud
my mood
is a god-damned
interloper

~*The Waiting Room, The Unit, Tunstall, England*

so Bukowski
knocks out a few
love poems
while I examine the dirt
underneath my fingernails

~*The Flat, Etruria Vale, England*

once a dirt track
now a real road
worthy of cartography
even though it leads nowhere
worthy of any one of me

~*Slip Lane, Etruria Vale, England*

they can take its name
its choices, laces
cage it for all but one hour in the day
though they cannot touch deep inside
my tender wish to die

~*HMP Shrewsbury (The Dana), England*

after the rain
tires our skin
each of us
with the days
beneath our feet

~*Shelton Cemetery, England*

afterwards
our blood as one
traces the slope of my foot
with a tissue I dab away
the guilt

~*X's Flat, Etruria Vale, England*

they call her French Vanilla
down at the end of the road
with no choices left
she just does what
she just does

~*Aberdeen, Scotland*

just South of North
enough to see
the midnight sun
I ask my new friends if they come
from the East or from the West

~*Havslätt, Sweden, 1977*

narrow skies
imprinted on
my childhood
that sweet delusion
of right and wrong

~*High School, Trentham, England*

five of them
on the towpath
looking for a light
all I can do
is in my eyes

~*Trent & Mersey Canal, Etruria, England*

unwashed
reading *Women*
I begin again to feel
there may yet be some life left
in this dirty old husk of a man

~*The Bed, The Flat, Etruria Vale, England*

every colour
on the bruise-spectrum
his groin
pleading for an end
to this civil war

~X's Flat, Etruria Vale, England

him
and her
and my vows
lip-synced
badly

~Slagharen, The Netherlands

trace amounts
found in his blood
only go to fool
the coroner, his parents
the whole damned world

~Newcastle-under-Lyme Coroner's Court, England

after cutting
my dosage in half
I finally finish
the novel I started
fifty-three months ago

~The Flat, Etruria Vale, England

at thirty
the only son
crashes into the abyss
his parents divide his things
between all his new best friends

~A Living Room in Penkhull, England

making tea
I spill a few drops
onto the kitchen tiles
and think I could clean the whole floor
this way at least I think

~The Flat, Etruria Vale, England

a single ray
of sun through a gap
in the curtains
a new string of photons
the same old string of obscenities

~The Flat, Etruria Vale, England

that man
who chose to live
by the side of a wall
is still there although now
the choice isn't his

~The Backs, Shelton, England

we found out about that guy
we once found in a doorway
who's puke was oily black
we found out about that guy
he's dead

~Outside The Place Nightclub, Hanley, England

the rats
of my school days
that lined the corridors
leading all the way
to here

~High School, Trentham, England

one less bottle
and as with all before
he'd reached the edge of something
youth, potential, eyes enigmatic blue
he'd deliberately made certain would be closed

~Salvation Army, Shelton, England

but for
the blindfold of youth
perhaps I could have seen
my future, the bloodless reflection
of what would be my past

~Bathroom Mirror, Trentham, England (On Leaving School)

no place
no form
no thing
all that remains
is for time to die

~Alone, Head in Hands, In a Two-up-Two-Down, Shelton, England

not the sun
nor the moon
not anything
but the bitter tastes
he left me with

~Stoke-On-Trent, late 1980s

Brendan Slater is a father, born and living in Stoke-On-Trent. He writes and creates digital art. He has been published widely in mags, ezines and anthologies. He has published three books of solo works.

School Boys

Charles D. Tarlton

restless, unable
to stay in one place for long
imagining ourselves
riding painted Indian ponies
crossing shallow rivers

[Gary insisting he'd felt her up, and how she never said No, but I liked her]

making fountains
of shattered water glass
that flew up on both sides
and sparkled
in the sun, in the movies

[or dancing, I rubbed up against Cecelia Nipp, her breasts right there under her dress]

we wore black high top
laced sneakers (we called them
tennis shoes)
but in my mind's eye
they were cowboy boots

[Ricky Camus revealed an erection modeling new basketball uniforms at the school assembly; showing his impossible cockeyed lust]

for riding western
saddles with open stirrups
until the urge came
to flop down on the park grass
and talk about baseball

~Massachusetts, USA

Visiting Day

Charles D. Tarlton

we don't at this moment
have anyone
in the nursing home
all our relations are either
too young or long since dead

and that's a relief
going in you have to break through
an invisible wall
to another world. Incoherence
and well-intentioned cruelty

what then was my mother
thinking deep inside her stroke
while I was standing there
and she mistook me for the daughter
she'd never had?

"my daughter, Charles"
she said, and pointing to my wife
"my son, Michael"
we've always known what
the changes in the leaves meant

~*Massachusetts, USA*

At Carmody's Bar Waiting for Ezra Pound: A Theatrical

Charles D. Tarlton

1. Home is the Sailor

*CARMODY: "Whom shall I hang my shimmering
garment on;*

Who wear my feathery mantle, hagoromo.

Whom set to dazzle the serious future ages?"

BLIGHT: Ah, They that go down to the sea in ships . . .

(Pause.) No. Wait.

That's not the right one.

The way was blocked by a thousand pretty words. He moved his table into the light and strained to read the invisible message in the grain of the wood

What new story? What new meaning to give to all this? The sea's the same, the sky, too. The men and women who walk around walk on feet, look with their eyes, speak and move their lips (or smile)

The light from here will not shine so far ahead; we are stuck now, forced to imagine what's to come free always to make up what's been.

*CARMODY: We are thirsts slackened, you and I;
something now over with, if you get my drift.*

BLIGHT: Draw us another pint anyway.

I took the train from Rome to Florence, got off, and found a cab. Take me to the *Pensione Bartolo!* A pink stucco mansion with balconies overlooking the river, and a parrot on a pole that ran up and down from balcony to balcony.

did I imagine
poetry would grow up through
the stones as I walked
the streets dodging *Vespas* and taxis
looking for the ghosts of the Brownings?

Stretch a long line and wrap it at the end,
underneath the one before so you can untie it, let
it out slowly with your bare fingers.

His long last gasp, a pirouette along the river
of old words, the cracked boards of old books,
the wrinkled faces of the old women who, in
another time, would have been in frescoes on
church walls. He needed a book to take back
home and copy from, giving each transcription
his own twist. Fit in, he told himself, and he
meant the history of art.

*CARMODY: Would he have come to a poetry slam, do
you think? Would he have stood up and recited amidst
the noise?*

*BLIGHT: Blandula, Tenulla, Vagula, or something
runcible like that.*

It was when Walt Whitman's rage in the
bones found a languid rhythm to keep the music
and the words enveloping. No one to pry
anything open to count the stresses, bang on the
metronome to regulate the beats.

if I liked him,
if I read and really liked him,
could I write like him,
could I, could I really write
a poem, in particular a classic?

2. The Italian Model

You come upon a book in a bookshop, you
read the watermark of your own dreamed
utterances in it, and you steal the other's thought.

CARMODY: You did come in then? Welcome.

*BLIGHT: An evening of talk and laughter. How could I
miss it?*

the flames are hot,
the fragments of broken books
shards of dead verse
scattered, their loose pages blowing
in a violent wind, in resentment.

In his bookshop, oddly, books were thrown
any old way. Shelf upon shelf of histories, novels,
scientific treatises, books of poetry, mysticism,
herbal remedies—all without order. Searching
for a particular book you have to handle every
one.

*CARMODY: I am reading this from a typed sheet. Can
you tell?*

BLIGHT: I love the way you read with such feeling!

In an Italian bookstore (but who can be sure)
I read in Canto IX of *Malatesta*:

*and built a temple so full of pagan works
i. e. Sigismund
and in the style "Past ruin'd Latium"
The filigree hiding the gothic,
with a touch of rhetoric in the whole*

but upwind from here
cold sea scents are coming in
on a breeze, salt and fishy
tumbling tiny grains of sand in patterns,
tight waves and rivulets.

The language as she's spoken brings us round
to sing-a-song; the motive makes the language
flow perversely in old poems, and sometimes
backwards.

As once written hastens back to me, to
wonder whether I might make a song myself, sing
it out before the darkness

Look over here witness, listen to the
testament, the sentences are not sufficient to
depict what we need to know, some truths.

*CARMODY: So, I think we've waited long enough, don't
you?*

BLIGHT: Well, does that mean we can leave?

The enemy arrives, his forces in great
number rimming hilltops, spilling into arroyos,
lining the paths and trails all downward. Now
what do our gods matter, our great theater, or our

poets, or the majesty of kings? They are upon us
and that's that; the way history gets written.

He's come in, at last I sensed the shadow of
resemblance.

Billy-goat songs, the slit throat bleeds all of
our dreams in the open, for everyone to see
Oedipus owns all the shame.

*CARMODY: I got right up on the stage, I did. And I
danced with the Chorus,
swung them around, stamped and spit. There was
guilt enough for all.*

BLIGHT: I was there. That was me on the tambourine!

3. Up Close and Personal

We were wakened in the night by arguments
somewhere inside the hotel, a quarrel between a
young man and a young woman.

They were speaking Italian, and I could only
guess he was the supplicant, an offender whose
infidelity had apparently put him at risk;

he might now lose his love. His voice was
deep and soft, modulated by his guilt.

She, however, was an angel with beautiful
anger, who answered her unfaithful lover with a
riot of musical accusation, each note rising to
silence his moans,

to fill each interstice in his stuttering
contrition with a mounting singsong of logic and
clarion verdict.

Her voice rode over his, drowning out his
laconic sputtering, a dozen or more notes to his
one.

*CARMODY: Jesus, man, will you come in out of the
rain?*

BLIGHT: I was just out here listening.

the translator
of pure sounds hears no words
makes his own way
imposing rhythms, sculpts a tone self
who speaks both for now and then

The woman I was with heard the whole thing
differently!

She believed the rapidity and pitch of the
girl's speech revealed she was the one who had
strayed, and the young man's soft low tones were
born of his hurt. When he would gently chide
her, it provoked her frantic allegro in defense.

She talked fast and loud to silence his
accusations, to protest her sham innocence.

*CARMODY: The modern telegraph started it all. (Snaps
his fingers.) Vital messages across ocean in the blink
of an eye.*

*BLIGHT: When words are whispered from one person to
another, fragments will leak out, spill on the floor.*

then they returned
the men from the ships, swarthy
hungry and torn
poets agreed to tell their story
how they had cleaved to the hero

*CARMODY: He was shouting and posturing. Did you see
him?*

BLIGHT: A man of rare parts.

wild opinions
fill the void, tie us to the mast
lest we succumb
within the gyres of nothingness
subtle confidence of doubt

Next morning on our way to breakfast, we
scrutinized everyone below a certain age, looking
for our mystery duo.

We looked for tiredness in the eyes, a sadness
of expression, some sign of pathos or tragedy. We
detected nothing.

One woman came into the dining room looking exhausted. Ah-ha, we thought, we've nabbed one of them at least, but she was quickly joined by a smiling husband and two very energetic children.

CARMODY: History is the translation of one set of coordinates into another.

BLIGHT: Not "when" so much as "where" . . . I like it.

a decent grasp
of Greek, the study of ancient
measures, sweet music
of the spheres, mythology
and you can look straight back

Coda

Suppose someone were to say now: "And I mean into the past, where the truth of the present still breathes, still waits for us to discover it and ourselves

blow off the dust, crack open the book, sound out the unfamiliar syllables, look for what comes through,"

we could only laugh, I think. The past is so irretrievably lost to us

CARMODY: Even if he comes, who's going to talk to him. (Pause.) I can't talk to him.

BLIGHT: I'll get him to stand drinks all round.

4. Time, Gentlemen, Time

CARMODY: What the older man knows. That's my objective.

BLIGHT: Don't take too long describing the winds or the leaves that dance along them.

The same well paced
intentions fail, somehow
to materialize
in anything more than bright deeds
and nowadays my knees hurt more

An old bike injury in my left hip has resulted in persistent *meralgia paresthetica*, a numbing pain that creeps in and burns on the top of my thigh.

when you tell the truth
when you shift your focus onto
things that bubble up
from down below, from underneath
when you can't stop them coming up

his old mouth hangs
wide open, his truths unable
to form themselves
into solid things, they flutter
on the stale wind of his breath

CARMODY: At the end of a career, he was just taking stock, reading the old stuff over and over.

BLIGHT: Dog-eared thin volumes. What a cliché!

I could barely read up there. I felt out of place. My eyes filled up with rheum and I wiped them on my sleeve.

They were thinking I was so old, I know what they were thinking! Too old to take seriously.

They'd listen, they were being forced to listen, but they'd get out of there as quickly as possible.

"Did you hear that old guy?" they'd ask each other. "Jesus! What was that about?"

experience
encrusts the music of the poem
makes it crackle
as the words come out, a brittle
rhythm the limps and shuffles

that is time spent
and once spent not to be found
again. All the things
I did but can't remember
love slides away like a dream

CARMODY: We'll ask him back, anyway. How would it look?

*BLIGHT: Give him something other than top billing
Right?*

A damnation in disguise, if you were to ask
me,

A person should be allowed to wrap things
up, fold his tent, drive on down the road. But,
that is not how it works.

You admit to yourself or anyone else that you
(even maybe) can't perform at the old level, and
you are looking death in the face.

I mean, right in his cold eyes!

of course, I'll do it
anything not to scuff around
in my slippers
wondering why the meals on wheels
is late dropping off my Styrofoam

*CARMODY: See? I told you. Never too late.
BLIGHT: You go in. I'll wait here in the car.*

The poet reads:

lateness of the hour
wears on all of us here. The light
thins, the shadows
are at one with the trees
they're meant to be the shadows of

5. Open Mic

Everyone said you could hear his voice come
right through the walls; like the beat of a bass
drum, the shrill whistle of a train, or, as some of
them put it, a low sick moan.

*CARMODY: This place is like a hospital. How can we
liven things up?*

BLIGHT: Some vignettes from the old Paris days?

if the bitter
story of what once was, came back
to haunt us. Music
that burns the tip of my tongue
the quickest notes still hot and hardest

quaintly pronounced
the voice of the past, New England
meets the Rockies
現代詩歌 free form
on the hunt for real novelty

The quickness of these early risers, once
shunted up the ramp to the top, and making
friends despite a certain disagreeability;

he was always inventing new forms and
reinvigorating old ones. Whistle a tune from days
of old, sound it out, and sing a jolly *factio rethorica
musicaque poita*

while it remains
a question he will even come
I'll read from his book
of angels and hard statuary
the book of the recently dead

*CARMODY: Stop right there! I say stop! before you do
irreparable harm.*

BLIGHT: No reading out from any real books!

not long from now
and we'll all be wondering
if the last note's
been played of the original
poetry, the music of stones

up to his time
but no farther, I'm afraid
he walked on coals
the words choked up in his craw
the unchewed bolus of culture

There is some danger running roughshod
through the Classics with just a knowledge (some)
of languages, like knowing Provençal but not
Chinese, and one's credibility is lessened.

*CARMODY: The lights need to come up. (Pause.) Don't
you think?*

BLIGHT: Action!

I think of him
in Philadelphia, mocking
liberty bells
wearing outlandish Gothic
teaching his professors the new verse

CARMODY: You said he was coming. Now you say not?
BLIGHT: He is an irregular poet.

Do you remember high school, how we had
to read these poets? How Mr. Regalado made us
talk about *The Spoon River Anthology* and Carl
Sandburg and Amy Lowell?

He made me read Dickinson!
Then he died in a massive car and truck
wreck on the 5.

The ground was thick with blood and
sluggish verse. You couldn't bring in Cummings,
or *Pryrock*, or (God forbid) *Cathay!*

That's right! And I read Williams and
Stevens in my bed at night with a flashlight. It
might as well have been pornography.

is he the last poet
to articulate a virtual
end of olden
things. Ironically, they fall
before even older things

6. On Some Threshold

On the street outside school children ride by
on bikes or walk in friendly clusters. They talk of
things they've seen on TV or heard in the lyrics
of popular songs.

The distant past or the meaning of life (in
that older, dead-skin serious sense) are far from
their thoughts.

What if you tried to make them think about
Greek gods or hoped they'd too imagine looking
down from a 1910 English-morning bed-sitter

and guess at the dreams of working girls going
past?

our old poetry
had resonance because it rhymed
one could sing it
but less definite, recent, and breathy
poems have sent us on a detour

*CARMODY: Who are we going to tell? The audience
will be quite select.*
BLIGHT: I can't think of anyone.

ancient was simpler
ampler in the rose of sculpted stone
her garments weapons
lean of principle, loose cloth wrapped
around a sharp piece of iron

I wanted to go over the mountain, down into
the moon-dark valley on the other side and see
what no one has yet seen.

Well, I wanted to write about things so new
and strange I would achieve greatness just
attempting to describe them.

The farmers over there refused to let me
enter. They said I had come to despoil their
secret lore. Is that what the future's like? The
past?

each one holds tight
the little method they employ
do cutely turn and twist
to make "a powerful, distinctive
verse," and not a child's plaything

young men, brassy
next to an old broken rebel
desperate to be
listened to. He is coming here!
I know it, like I know Catullus

*CARMODY: I am not familiar with any Roman poets,
nor any Attic graces.*
*Here's a conundrum for us all—if we study well the
past will we improve the future?*

BLIGHT: I don't know. How well did they do . . . back then?

how can you learn
from a mistake? Oh, not to do
the same again
but stand here a moment. Look!
it's the old mute set of options

The real irony, of course, is that time passes by and the poet of historical perspective becomes himself an artifact.

We can strain to comprehend our own greatness in the past of someone focused only on the past; or we can throw caution to the wind and make our own future.

Now, if that future is in poems, is the future of poems, what we throw to the wind is exactly our trust in familiar forms. We learn just to distrust.

Who said that? Who was it?

CARMODY: I dreamed about a poem that had no lines, no rhythm, and no discernible words at all. Just the pure poetry, sliding along the wind where someone had thrown it.

BLIGHT: Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. (Pause.) Like that?

7. On the Scent

The two professors of modern literature that Carmody met in the *Prince of Wales Bookshop* were skeptical.

They were of the opinion that Ezra Pound was certainly dead by now, and in more ways than one!

“Even were you able to resurrect the scoundrel” the older one said, “and drag him to your bar, even so, I doubt anyone would come to hear him.”

Carmody was struck dumb by the cut of the remark.

“We’ve come a long way in poetry since Pound’s day,” the other professor said, and Carmody was struck deaf by the scandal of the utterance. He ran from the shop holding his ears with both hands.

how long is the life
of deathless poetry? The notes
struck on a golden
bell, the harmonies of wind
rattling winter’s leafless limbs

*CARMODY: I take heart from recent sales. (Pause.)
Personae has flown out the door. That’s what I hear.*

BLIGHT: A murmuration of starlings!

whose opinion
can with justice now stop up the flow
of poetry
whose lazy eye, whose stunted cadences
muffle the passionate voice

publican, draw me
a flagon of mead, bear honey
for my dry lips
I have come into this ragged place
dragging the comeliest gods

Philosophically, it was a question whether Ezra Pound would enter in spirit or in the flesh.

Devoted followers, extremists in too many cases, always came with the faint hope of actually meeting the troubadour, to shake his knobby hand; they bore their disappointments with great fortitude.

They could not imagine the swing of poetry’s history any but downward since the death in Venice of Mauberly, due to an intestinal blockage . . . but, I digress . . .

*CARMODY: When he gets here, drinks are on the house.
BLIGHT: How about a little something on account?*

they were looking
for reasons to depreciate him
perhaps politics
was something he was lacking. Odd
for one with such a subtle ear

her ear was tin!
we said of Julia's reciting
Yeats's "rise up now"
her Valdosta drawl definitive
she plucked the meaning of the verse

When you listen to the old voices speaking
now—Gertrude Stein, Franklin Roosevelt, John
L. Lewis, Knute Rockne, Wallace Stevens—
though Americans, they all sound strangely and
quaintly British but, at any rate, not American
exactly;

the same was true of Ezra Pound, even
though he was from Idaho.

*CARMODY: I for one will be conning his poems in my
own mind's voice, hearing with the inner ear the
craggy beauty, the hard truths.*

*BLIGHT: "For the seven lakes, and by no man these
verses." (Pause.) Yes!*

8. Out of the Fog

A man with a mass of hair and a classic gray
goatee is leaning with his back to the bar in
Carmody's, expatiating on the virtues of Dante.

He wears baggy corduroy slacks and an old
jacket. His slouch hat there on the bar.

No one is listening, although patrons nod and
greet him cheerily as they pass from the bar to
their tables with fresh beers.

"As I once said to Homer," he pronounces
(Homer Loomis Pound, his father), "the thing is
rather like, or unlike subject and response and
counter subject in fugue."

The musicality of verse. Perhaps, no one
knows who he really is.

*CARMODY: What did I tell you? (Pause.) Are we in at
the return of Modernism, or what?*

*BLIGHT: I looked a lot like my father. But, I mean, I
wasn't the same person as my father.*

pick up the thread
of a zillion vowels and consonants
twist and twirl
in time upon itself, the tones
of a century of verse

line up the words
across an arched stone bridge over
the river *Kiang*
technically, all poems are the same
our mouths and brains in tandem

He wears his erudition on his sleeve, the way
another man might wear sadness.

they are all dead
but this enchanted ghostly poet
back to the bar
recalls "Old Possum" questioning
an anonymous Stilton

They left their poetry behind for us to muse
on, and turned the tide of literature the way
cowboys in the movies turned stampeding cattle,

round upon themselves, into ever-smaller
circles. In the post-Modern aftermath, the
carefully crafted stream of English language
poems ran into the canyon wall and scattered in
countless ragged little pieces.

*CARMODY: I am completely reinvigorated!
Reinvigorated, I tell you.*

*BLIGHT: Now that your chickens have come home to
roost.*

the evening runs
down, as usual, and we forget
there was someone
here. Every night we wait for him
he is the symbol of our fate

someone recites
two longish and obscure poems
Homage to Sextus
Propertius, take a breath, and then
Sestina: Altaforte

Dream air is thinner than normal air; you
hardly know you're breathing. The surfaces of
things are blown delicate as a result; you dare not
touch them.

Be satisfied imagining he really came this
time, and that the rollicking evening was a
complete success.

We've got to get some of the others next
time, though, the ghosts of Ford and Eliot, of
course, and Yeats, and I've always wanted to
drink across from Henry James.

Don't you think that the air's getting just a
little too thin right now?

~Northampton, Massachusetts, USA

*Charles D. Tartton is a retired university professor who lives in
Northampton, Massachusetts with his wife, Ann Knickerbocker, an
abstract painter. He has been writing tanka and tanka prose since
around 2007. His overriding interest is to extend the reach of tanka
prose, explore its elasticity, and bring it more deeply into the mainstream
of English and American poetry.*

Chen-ou Liu

drunken shadow
and me
under a twilight sky
each waiting
for the other's silence

this moonless night
on the long way home . . .
loneliness
and the shadow
creeping towards me

our new life
in this promised land?
my son raising
a maple leaf
to the sunshine

a feathery thing
perches on the edge
of my dream . . .
the winter moon wedged
between seedy high-rises

a summer breeze
thrown over the face
of the moon . . .
loneliness comes between me
and my thoughts of home

replying to a letter
by my estranged brother . . .
the cold moon
as white
as my blank paper

~Ajax, Ontario, Canada

first-time visit
to the nursing home . . .
on this snowy day
I feel the weight
of an old man's stare

the rise and fall
of her chest
snowlight
shining through
the hospice window

a hilltop house
painted with the colors
of summer breeze . . .
hand in hand we chase
a day of laughter

morning-after
awkwardness fading . . .
my body
the blank canvas
for her fingers

~Toronto, Ontario, Canada

lying back
in the steam
of a hot spring
the widow
with summer desire

she and I
look at cherry blossoms
happily
and yet something between us
begins to fade

~Taipei, Taiwan

Chen-ou Liu lives in Ajax, Ontario, Canada. He is the author of five books, including Following the Moon to the Maple Land (First Prize, 2011 Haiku Pix Chapbook Contest) and A Life in Transition and Translation (Honorable Mention, 2014 Turtle Light Press Biennial Haiku Chapbook Competition). His tanka and haiku have been honored with many awards.

Cynthia Rowe

a dribble
of paint on the rusty
pylon's tag . . .
as wonky as the heart
on our very first date

~Alstonville, NSW, Australia

cottonwool sky
the skein of geese weaves
a loose vee
like that sloppy joe I crafted,
big enough for both of us

~Central Coast, NSW, Australia

adult home English
I teach her to read real
estate notices
while she serves green tea
in fine bone china cups

~Camberwell, Victoria, Australia

his bride wears
white slipper satin
framed by
French windows . . . wisteria
trailing through an azure sky

~Launceston, Tasmania, Australia

before surgical gloves . . .
nightly, my father filed
his nails
memories of him fading
so why do I remember this?

~South Yarra, Victoria, Australia

possum prints,
bird pecks, the roofer
finds poems from
way back in our downpipe . . .
who says birds can't read?

~Woollahra, NSW, Australia

snails on the beet,
I hunt by hand at night,
and that's how
you ended our love affair
. . . killing me softly

~Preston, Victoria, Australia

in the bustling
pulse shop mung beans
flying out the door
when the surf's up no time
for white tablecloths

~Noosa, Queensland, Australia

from the ferry
a pigeon pair first down
the gangway
united as we were when
tossed by turbulent seas

~Manly, NSW, Australia

Cynthia Rowe is Past President: Australian Haiku Society; Editor: Haiku Xpressions; Past President: Eastern Suburbs Branch (Bondi Writers) FAW.NSW. She is a University of Melbourne graduate in French and Philosophy and has taught tertiary French and English. She was awarded a Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française by the French Ministry of Education and is a Writing Fellow of FAW.NSW. Cynthia has published seven novels and three poetry books.

Dave Read

white whiskers
tickle my chin
she giggles
to see how
much I have aged

watching
the arc of his life
on descent
the old man who'd
hit me fly balls

a flag hangs
against the windless pole
the pride
of God and country
a little limp for now

I doodle
my way through another
meeting
my notebook a study
of art in blue lines

the houses built
closer together
I nod
at a neighbour
whose name I don't know

no idea
what to do next—
the toddler,
the butterfly
caught in her net

under a hood,
behind dark glasses
he slips
through the crowded
streets alone

tossing change
at the beggar's hat
I pass
without looking in
to his eyes

looking
across the river
the waves
like hieroglyphics tell
the secret lives of fish

sword fighting
with fallen branches
I take
another swing
at my youth

the ranger
discusses invasive
species
I pause to examine
my European roots

unsure what
security he's providing
the guard
escorts a homeless man
back into the cold

~Calgary, Canada

Dave Read is a Canadian poet living in Calgary. He primarily writes short poems with an emphasis on the Japanese genres of haiku, senryu, tanka, and haibun. He was a recipient of the 2016 Touchstone Individual Poem Award for haiku, as granted by The Haiku Foundation. His work has been published in many journals (including Atlas Poetica, hedgerow, Akitsu Quarterly and Acorn), and anthologies (including dust devils: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku, 2016).

dancing solo

Debbie Strange

a bird's nest
bound with spidersilk . . .
nothing
to hold us together
after the young had flown

afterthoughts
blacker than our last
conversation . . .
the skeletal remains
of ancient forests

the stings
of a thousand wasps . . .
some betrayals
grow more venomous
with passing years

unsettled . . .
old arguments
sagging
in the cloudbursts
of my mind

leaves spin
against autumn skies . . .
I reflect
on all the times
you refused to dance

~Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Debbie Strange (Winnipeg, Canada) is a short form poet, photographer, and haiga artist. She is a member of the Writers' Collective of Manitoba and is also affiliated with several haiku and tanka organizations. Her first collection, Warp and Weft: Tanka Threads was published by Keibooks in 2015. You are invited to visit her on Twitter @Debbie_Strange and at <http://www.debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca>.

Sunrise Service

Don Miller

the solitude
of this desert hike
put on hold
a speed talker
rounding the bend

soon
thereafter
spying
a shotgun shell
on the sand

and like
a beachcomber
sifting these thoughts
shooting
through my mind

the alarm
of drop and cover
drills
becoming part of
Sunday meditation

in a moment
of silent prayer
brass casings
fill
the collection plate

~*Chihuahuan Desert, USA*

*Written the morning of the massacre of church attendees in
Sutherland Springs, Texas.*

*Don Miller lives in the Chihuahuan Desert of southern New Mexico,
USA. He has been writing tanka since the early 1980s, and has had
his tanka, tanka sequences, tanka prose, and other short-form poetry
published on a somewhat regular basis in various print and online
journals since the early 2000s.*

Elizabeth Howard

defying bees in the clover
and the sting on her finger
she keeps trying . . .
wobbly cartwheels
turning acrobatic

a leisurely walk
around the sparkling pond—
ducks in distress
nest scrambled
egg yolk and straw

a slant of morning sun
on the hummingbird feeder
the water liquid gold . . .
a bejeweled bird
betwixt earth and heaven

when she told me her name,
I recalled a glowing girl
shooting basketball goals . . .
not this dour woman
all joy out of bounds

bleak morning
a red-tailed hawk perched
above the bird feeders . . .
after long icebound days,
even predators starving

outside my door
the world is green—
what if it were brown?
how much rice
would an acre yield?

soil plowed, seed sown
they lie coiled on the moist earth
fertile bodies
urging the seed to sprout
the harvest to be bountiful

in the morning glare
a hawk crosses the windshield
prey dangling . . .
oh! to release the talons
to free the wee clenched claws

frost on the hammock
lazy days of autumn ending
the sky lapis lazuli . . .
flitting through the Andes
a brilliant blue bird

on the rocky hillside
near the cave spring
bullbats cluster at sundown
my ears echo
with their booming dives

nature studies 101 . . .
jar cover awry
wee black widow spiders
 flee
 in all directions

we filled fruit jars
with fireflies
on summer evenings —
now I wait for at least one
before I retire

a detective looking
for a lost child . . .
the blue stone fox
freezes in the spotlight
a vole's tail at its feet

~United States

Elizabeth Howard lives in Arlington, Tennessee. Her tanka have been published in Eucalypt, red lights, Mariposa, Ribbons, Gusts, Atlas Poetica, Skylark, Moonbathing, and other journals.

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins

bare branches cradle
weary sun on crimson clouds—
wooden rocking chairs
slow to stillness on a porch
that sags into the twilight

~Charleston, South Carolina, USA

beneath the bare boughs
of a sycamore tree
this circle of gold
with a simple inscription
holds your promise to my heart

~Fredericksburg, Virginia, USA

blankets gone to gray
tucked around the autumn sun—
promises of rain
scent the stirring of a breeze
that blows out maple torches

~Warrenton, Virginia, USA

a votive candle
kindled on the cusp of night—
my window open
to evensong of owls
and lullabies of willows

~Willow Spring, North Carolina, USA

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins is a poet and editor who taught in community colleges for more than a decade. Her tanka and bardic verse in the Celtic style have been published in England, Scotland, Canada, Indonesia, and the United States. Shades and Shadows, a collection of her bardic poetry, is scheduled for release in spring 2018. Publication updates are available on her website: www.authorsden.com/elizabethspragins. She lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, USA.

Frances Black is entering the second year of her love affair with Tanka. A retiree located in Sydney, Australia she enjoys dabbling in many writing genres. She finds Tanka dove-tails well with essay writing and memoir.

Frances Black

the dog
her faultless life partner . . .
legacy
to a series
of abusive husbands

~Australia

Idyll and Nightmare

Frances Black

We inhabit two realities—the first the everyday experience of our privileged life-style and the second courtesy of modern technology—unending, violent images bombarding us about world events

we bear witness
to human cruelty
twenty-four seven
thanks
to our ever-vigilant press

Many members of Western society bask in material comfort enjoying the full gamut of pleasures that humans have created.

baby-boomers—
the privileged generation
live their lives
in unprecedented
peaceful luxury

How do we reconcile this disconnect?

we loll
on comfortable sofas
over-dosing
on our diet of
violent infotainment

~Australia

Cape Cod Evening

*Edward Hopper:
oil on canvas, 1939*

Geoffrey Winch

he and she
had this dream
and they lived it:
that same dream
still is ours

white-painted house
in a diminishing light
reconciled
with ripe grass resisting
mowing until morning

scent and shade
of evening trees
mingling
with cool air
easy to breathe

two persons
near the close of day,
their attention centred
on their collie dog
waiting watching

how our search
for our ideal home
could have ended
eighty years ago
with Edward Hopper's painting

~still looking for Cape Cod in the UK

*Geoffrey Winch, a retired highway engineer, resides on England's south coast. He is associated with several local creative writing groups for whom he leads occasional poetry workshops. His most recent collections are *Alchemy of Vision* (Indigo Dreams, 2014) – focusing on the visual, performing and literary arts – and *West Abutment Mirror Images* (Original Plus, 2017) marking his twenty-fifth successive year of being published in small press poetry magazines mainly in the UK, US and online.*

Asylum

Gerry Jacobson

coming out
of all the world's hellholes
they flee
rockets and mortars
slavery, torture

crammed
in tiny boats
crossing
an ocean of dreams . . .
founding fathers?

our Navy swoops
*like wolf on the fold**
hijacks
humble fishing boats
full of the wretched

the stranger
who seeks our help
carted off
to prison camp, out of sight
soon out of mind

day follows day
behind barbed wire
year follows year
for those who seek asylum
on these *boundless plains**

locked up
for the crime of hope . . .
three thousand
men, women, children . . .
will it win the redneck vote?

~Australia

* 1. Lord Byron, 1815, 'The Destruction of Sennacherib'. 2. Peter
Dodds McCormick, 1878, 'Advance Australia Fair', adopted as
Australia's national anthem 1984.

In Patched-up Clothes*

Gerry Jacobson

'Old Sailor' stares
sadly out of his frame
smoking a pipe
in Winchester . . .
are his hips hurting?

'Old Soldier'
in ragged overcoat
stands up so straight . . .
it's a bleak day
back in a Suffolk village

Tommy Raeburn
the Ayrshire hermit
in shreds and patches
slippers and tattered troos . . .
is that a tear in his eye?

unshaven
Durham beggar, black hat
the artist draws
fine hairs in his nostrils
this bitter cold morning

with a straw broom
sweeps shit off the crossing
holds out one hand
she doesn't look happy
in the 1820s

please give
to this tall man
in patched-up clothes . . .
who cares for blind beggars
in 1824?

'Blind Peter'
and his sighted Boy
selling matches
in the dark
cobble streets of Norwich

Shalom . . .
Samuel, old clothes man
you will need
your umbrella today
down in Greenwich

looking closely
at the Charing Cross porter
I think perhaps
he's blind in one eye . . .
coaches to all parts of England

'Old Joe' of Portsmouth
looks about forty
maroon coat
basket on his arm
slightly twisted grin

'Whistling Billy'
in red coat and medals
did he fight
at Waterloo . . .
does he suffer PTSD?

'Little John'
of Colchester
poor bastard . . .
to be a lunatic
in 1826

~Great Britain, 1820s

** Dempsey's people: a folio of British street portraits from 1824–1844.
By John Church Dempsey. Watercolour. National Portrait Gallery,
Canberra.*

*Gerry Jacobson lives in a Canberra suburb. He has been writing tanka
for ten years, enjoys the challenge of tanka sequences and tanka prose,
and loves that it enables him to write about experiences, memories, and
feelings. He dotes on four grandchildren and visits them in Sydney and
in Stockholm.*

Take Me Along

Ignatius Fay

My youngest sister is less than a year old
when mom dies of lung cancer. The next six
months, her crib is in my room. We spend a lot of
time together in the middle of the night—early
threads of the bond she develops with her only
brother.

Panicked about raising five kids on his own,
dad sends the infant to live with close friends who
have a child of the same age. After a few months,
she is moved to live with an aunt who has
cerebral palsy, on top of being below average
intelligence. I don't like my sister being shifted
around like this, but I'm eleven. What am I to
do?

Still in panic mode, dad marries a widow
with three daughters. Out of the frying pan . . .
Yet, he does not feel secure enough to bring my
sister home, so she is moved again, this time to
join an uncle's household of seven. She lives
there for a year.

Finally she comes home. But the mixed
family isn't working. The rest of us get the hell
out as soon as we are of age. Being so much
younger, she finds herself home alone through
her high school years. Is it any wonder she has
abandonment issues?

lung cancer
in palliative care
I must be sure
when the time comes
she is not alone

~Canada

Short and Sweet

Ignatius Fay

They told her I was coming, so she is trying to stay lucid, slipping in and out of consciousness. I am her only brother, and we have been close since she came home a newborn and her crib was set up in my room. When I arrive, she looks almost as small and certainly as frail as she did back then.

I am warned that she probably won't speak; if she does, I will have to lean close, ear to mouth. I approach the bed, bend right down, kiss her bald head:

'Hey, it's me. I'm here. Listen, I have to say this is getting fucking boring. Every time I see you lately, you're in bed. C'mon. Get up, get dressed and we'll go dancing.'

in my ear
what turn out to be
her last words
a faint reedy voice
tells me to fuck off

~Canada

Ignatius Fay, a disabled invertebrate paleontologist, writes haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose. His poems have appeared in many respected online/print journals. Breccia (2012) is a collection of these forms, a collaboration with Irene Golas. He is the current editor of the Haiku Society of America Bulletin, and resides in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

Jackie Chou

awake again
in the wee hours
I listen
to the swooshing cars
dreaming of ocean waves

moonlight
casts strips of shadow
where you left your scent
an abrupt good-bye
lingers in fitful sleep

a thousand thoughts
dwell in the darkness
the tick-tock
of my roommate's clock
fills the unsaid of words

~California, United States

Jackie Chou studied Creative Writing at USC. She used to write mainly free verses but recently became interested in Japanese form poetry. Her works have been published in Ribbons, Skylark, Atlas Poetica, and the Cherita Journal. Besides writing, she enjoys watching intellectually challenging quiz shows such as Jeopardy and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.

Jeffrey Woodward

now back
from the bright meadow
you wear
pollen on naked ankles
and burrs in tousled hair

the disheveled one
uttered little but
I took that for a sign—
the moon above the interstate,
the small towns passing by

come to me now
while the moon is full,
come to me now
while the short night is new
and all is possible

when you ask
for coffee, they
pour you coffee,
the dregs of it,
bitter and black

I find, in your love
of a flower, a mind
long accustomed to live
patiently, blinds down,
beside a thin shadow

all that I love now
all that I hate
there in the bright
exactly white
blank paper's glare

that's the hotel
where forty years ago
we first slept together
there's the same bright moon
sailing high above it

the Cape Ann window
thrown open to invite
the ravenous gulls' cries
the sea-sick salt of the air
the sun's seduction

there's a window
in Las Cruces
I remember
one candle and
the desert night

so much
in Vermeer
depends
upon light from a window
depicted or implied

I took his shoes up
at my mother's insistence
and tried them on
a Thanksgiving dark with rain
and my father barely gone

I know
it is as common
as the day
and yet I love
the dandelion

a dab of purple
for Good Friday
and gray weather
in a corner of the yard
the crocus without shadow

unexpectedly
home from a five-year stint
in Hell's Kitchen and
fundamentally the same
cadging bourbon and spare change

I would not call you now
what innocently I called you then
for better or worse
for I've tried several lovers since
some better indeed some worse

the evening sun
and elongated shadows
severe
with the tumbleweed reeling
into the desert town

a bright afternoon
in a clearing full
of devil's paintbrush
the cardinal repeating
repeating his call

the loud argument
of their faithful marriage
of 50 years
concluded quietly on
that morning he did not rise

lasting evidence
indeed
of the fire once there
a simple pipe left
on Vincent's chair

thunderheads
drawing near
and nearer
in answer to
the cicada's call

he mercifully
took in the stray, chaining it
in the high weeds out back,
remembering from time to time
to walk out there and feed it

no moral but
this sickle
for the weeds
this shovel
for the snow

noting the exit
to Amherst, dear Emily,
without taking it
one rainy night alone on
the Massachusetts Turnpike

not that you and I
were ever properly
suited for each other . . .
I scan by Marblehead Light
waves flailing against the rocks

a jitterbug
of bright
triangles
red yellow and blue
on the bay

she leans on the wall
in a sheer cotton dress
invitingly
a gentle wind teasing
the blue hem of summer

~Detroit, Michigan, USA

Jeffrey Woodward founded and formerly edited the journals Haibun Today and Modern Haibun & Tanka Prose. He served in 2010 and again in 2011 as adjudicator for the British Haiku Society's Haiku Awards. His selected poems, under the title In Passing, were published in 2007 and he edited The Tanka Prose Anthology in 2008. In 2013, collections of his haibun and tanka writings were issued under the respective titles Evening in the Plaza and Another Garden.

a current of silence

Jenny Ward Angyal & Joy McCall

I find myself
at petal fall
hidden
in the apple's starred heart,
a ripening pip

*black ants climbing
the blackthorn tree
sometimes
I crave
the sharp, the dark*

aphids
hide among the spines—
I extract
from the life I lead
every drop of honeydew

*in my head
a faint buzzing
my skin grows hair
yellow and brown
I'm a bee in clover*

in the throat
of a morning glory—
I am
the crimson splotch
that bids you enter

*I settle
under the skin
of an acorn
buried and forgotten
by last year's squirrel*

I am
a beetle
scribbling runes
under the bark
of your mind

*the wind
tears away the birch-bark
wunjo
it sings, wunjo—
its own ode to joy*

I build a canoe
and drift downstream
swept along
on the current of silence
that flows between the notes

~North Carolina, USA / Norwich, England

Joy McCall lives in her birthplace, old Norwich in Norfolk, England. She too grows old and her mind is full of ghosts and poetry.

Jenny Ward Angyal grew up in Connecticut, where she wrote her first poem at the age of five. She now lives with her husband on a small, organic farm on the top of a hill in North Carolina, surrounded by meadowlands, sky and the madcap songs of mockingbirds. She writes tanka in whatever time she can spare from catering to the needs of her Abyssinian cat.

Joan Leotta

Heaps of ginkgo leaves,
small fan-shaped suns
slip right and left as
Autumn's last breath
heaves in and out

~Calabash, North Carolina, USA

Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage as writer and story performer. Her poetry, short stories, and essays appear or are forthcoming in North Carolina Literary Review Red Wolf A Quiet Courage A-3 Review Silver Birch, Postcard Poems and Prose among others. Joan's first poetry chapbook Languid Lusciousness with Lemon, will be out in March 2017 from Finishing Line Press. Her work celebrates the value of the seemingly ordinary moment. Joan Leotta lives in Calabash, North Carolina, USA

Jim Doss

a son's self-loathing—
xanax and a shot of vodka
ignite the fire
that consumes this effigy
made of flesh and blood

staggering in drunk at 9 am
nose swollen, eye half closed—
is there any point
in asking *where have you been,*
what the hell happened

car swerved off the road,
abandoned in a ditch—
the truth begging
a cover-up story
when the cops come knocking

wedding ring stolen—
my finger now
unencumbered by jewelry,
my heart
still filled with love

finger picking
a sad country tune
on the guitar—
heartbreak
is so overrated

empty bottles of booze,
used rubbers, dirty needles,
a dead bird or two—
walks in the park
sure ain't what they used to be

the swimming hole
where you and I skinny dipped
while falling in love—
if only we could get
that naked again

Margarita—
more than just a drink—
a name whispered
through red lips
intoxicating with a twist of lime

I bait the trap
with peanut butter
set the spring—
hungry ghost or mouse
I'm ready for you

You understand nothing
he says
twisting the watch
on his wrist
as though it were a shackle

it's just a dream
she said as the clerk
refused her credit card
just a bad dream in this world
where nothing is real

blind date—
her lipstick print
fluttering on the lip
of the wine glass like wings
she wishes would whisk her away

injustice
is the way of the world
so get used to it
the TV
seems to be saying

at the shelter
a sadness in the dog's eyes—
that hunger
all creatures
have to be loved

not dirt poor
but dusty
like a sharecropper's field
in August
on Tobacco Road

Louisiana—the deafening silence
of the salt marshes
when the engine is cut
and the boat glides
across a rainbow of oil

my poems—just bits
of light and darkness
glowing on the Internet,
constellations placed there for anyone
to build their own mythology

~*Maryland, USA*

Jim Doss lives with his wife and three children in Sykesville, Maryland, and earns his living as a software engineer. He has previously published two books of poems: Learning to Talk Again, and What Remains. In partnership with Werner Schmitt, he also published a book of German translations entitled The Last Gold of Expired Stars: The Complete Poems of Georg Trakl 1908 - 1914. In his spare time, he is an editor for the Loch Raven Review.

Felbrigg Hall Behind Scenes

John Parson

Felbrigg Hall sits close to the North Norfolk coast, originally Elizabethan, though only the wine cellars from those times remain, stares south across ancient parkland and lake. Behind, in sheltering woods, are the twisted remnants of great chestnuts, some sprouting birch and oak from hollowed limbs. Beneath them, in woodland pasture, a great red bull with its herd still grazes.

Armada chest
with elaborate locks
on the stairs down
hasp doubled up
by protective runes

no entry
beyond basement steps
continual drips
of Elizabethan vaults
on emaciated frogs

their attic room
in dust-filled air
rays light up
a crane's image
of undying love

handmade
green wallpaper
now curled back
consigned twin sisters
to early arsenic deaths

room under eaves
full of stuffed beasts
our guide recoils
from vacant stares
through eyes of glass

what ghosts still rock
the crib where dormers
walled up now once gazed
through stones pierced by
Gloria Deo In Excelsis

~*Norfolk, England*

Untitled

John Parsons

For Tim Wilson

from the gate post
a lone swallow
joins others gathering
far above
for warmer climes

At the head of a valley that runs parallel to the cliffs, I pause a while in light rain and marvel at each droplet that hangs on the rusted wire mesh of an old fence, each holds a different aspect of the view above and below. As I stare down the winding path that runs between borders of bracken, I notice a red oxide smudge against stems on the dark side, it appears strange, I watch it for a few moments through the mist of rain, with thoughts dwelling on the plight of my good friend, now lying in hospital, death imminent.

orange smudge
a fox crosses the path
to disappear
amongst bright stems
on the other side

~Norfolk, England

Untitled

John Parsons

across calm seas
the single sail
an arrowhead
carries white light deep
into the welling heart

my shadow
so far below
completely lost
amongst vast textures
of gorse and bracken

~Norfolk, England

Untitled

John Parsons

fragment of a rib
amongst flotsam holds
a reminder
to handle solitude
with care

sea-worn bricks
so easily succumb
less so this fragment
of a seal's rib
here in my pocket

worn sea defences
more beautiful as waves
destroy them and the cliffs
wild clematis slides
inexorably down

~Norfolk, England

John Parsons

first light
a chaffinch family
drinks from the puddle
night fears fade
through open blinds

swathes of rosebay
fire spent
drape the valley head
gulls clothe
new mown hay

what use these tears
that I'll see you no more
instead I plant a hundred
hollyhocks to bring
each passing stranger joy

beach meditation
people pass in silence
then on my hand
the moist touch
of dog's nose

wildflowers
I once planted in her eyes
down paths
I always kept clear
now narrowing

~Norfolk, England

John Parsons, a lifetime in art and poetry. Set up and ran the fine art printmaking department at St Martins School of art in the sixties. Helped edit/print Trigram Press with Asa Benveniste also for Advent Books with Brian Coffey. Songwriter for The Fabulous Poodles. Lives and works in Cromer on the north Norfolk coast. The tanka largely stem from a lifelong interest in zen and a closeness to nature, they are largely written during long solitary walks in this historic area and along the cliffs and beaches.

chai masala

Joy McCall

small glass jar
in the morning post
from an old firm
who grinds spices
on the Yorkshire moors

my room fills
with the scent
of wild places
over these hills
and far away

cinnamon
cardamon
nutmeg
cloves, ginger
and black pepper

how can I help
but dip my finger in
and taste?
and all day long
I breathe magic

~Norwich, England

blessed be *

Joy McCall

for Carole and Kathryn

They came from America, two old poet-
friends, to walk on my small East Anglian fields.

We felt like Shakespeare's three witches with
the cold wind blowing our hair, and the wide
skies dark and threatening rain.

the Archer
oak lover, tattoo'd *enough*,
the graveyard Goat
bemused by the dark yew,
the Fish in the thin stream

All around us were the signs of history going
far back in time, stopping now and then leaving
way-markers at shifting points—the Viking
intruders, the Roman invaders, the Anglo-
Saxons, the Iceni tribes, the early Christians, the
ages of bronze and iron and stone . . . and a
sense of the timeless, back to the Dawn.

Are there ghosts? Do all men, all creatures,
leave the marks of their being on the air, on the
land, in the waters?

We three felt it, there on the desolate bitter
hill.

the cold wind howled
on the Iceni hill
black rooks rose
from Viking pines
a bay horse stood alone

hawthorn hedgerows
heavy with red berries
edged the narrow lanes
that wound through green fields . . .
and above, the wide dark skies

it was a time
of gathering—pebbles
tales, imaginings
lichened sticks, visions,
fallen oak leaves

old stories
lay all around us
Roman cart tracks
Iceni chariot ruts
the echoes of battle

we were witches
taking strange shapes
on the low hill
the wind blew wild
through our aged hair

~Venta Icenorum, Norwich, England

** Wiccan mantra*

trees

Joy McCall

*And you, be certain that you keep
some memory of trees, for sleep*

Harold Monro— from ‘Trees’

Felix Dennis
cut down an orchard
to make space
for his grand house
made of wood

in his bed, he dreamed
the crying of trees
axed and fallen;
the ground, sorrowing
for the loss of roots

When Felix died three years ago, he left his vast wealth, gained from publishing gentlemen’s magazines, to pay workers to carry on planting trees in a huge desolate area he bought and began to forest when he ‘saw the light’.

He wanted to make amends for all the trees that were felled to make the paper for his magazines.

Now the ‘Heart of England Forest’ holds one and a half million native British broadleaf trees.

And I was just going to list them but the names are too lovely, they need to be in a poetry vessel—

sweet chestnut
oak, beech and alder
hornbeam and birch
sycamore and field maple
lime, ash and privet

weeping willow
and the witches’ rowan
aspens, poplar, cherry
hazel, dogwood and spindle
and the old wayfaring tree

Felix lived to plant the millionth of his trees. He gave up publishing and became a poet of gorgeous, rhyming verse.

The forest became home to the almost extinct hazel dormouse and all kinds of creatures under threat from man’s industry.

His forest, his poems, his dreams, make me love even more the trees in my own small plot which was once a builders’ yard full of rubble and broken tools.

my garden holds
so many English trees
bare in winter
they lock branches
jostling for space

my hedges
hawthorn, hazel and beech
grow and grow
they are taller
than the house now

they are home
to sparrows, chaff-chaff
and grey squirrels . . .
wood mice make their nests
in the tangled roots

I wear a pendant
of old hawthorn wood
worn smooth with time
to touch it brings comfort
to my broken hands

Joyce Kilmer wrote
*I think that I will never see
a poem
as lovely as a tree —
isn’t it so, folks?*

~Norwich, England

gravestones, pot, and a husky dog

Joy McCall

On what would have been my mother's 98th birthday, we went to the cemetery, and in the cold rain under dark grey skies, we sang 'Happy Birthday' to her.

her name
carved with my father's
makes no sense
I still hear them
laughing, praying, singing

We laid a Norfolk flint hagstone on the base of her headstone, to keep the witches away; not that witches would frighten the bones of such a good mother. She would have just smiled at them and put the kettle on for tea.

There were rabbit droppings on the grass of her grave. She would love that. She loved all creatures.

An English robin was singing, high in an ivy-covered oak tree.

The cemetery holds many hundreds of graves, some centuries old.

There are equally ancient trees, mostly evergreen except for the wide-spreading oaks.

Like all graveyards, there are great dark yew trees to keep out the cattle and the black witches.

spruce and pine
Norway fir
a cypress
beautiful and graceful
and the necessary yews

amid the disorder
of headstones
angels and crosses . . .
a plain hundred all the same
young men, killed in war

So many of the stones had the same words repeated again and again—

rest in peace
together again
dearly beloved
in heaven
. . . *gone home*

The little pathways between the stones were narrowed with grasses and moss, barely wide enough for my wheelchair.

three rough lads
leaning on a crypt
smoking pot
I breathed deep
and smiled as I passed

I guess they were playing hooky from school—and who would think to look for them in a cemetery?

Further along the path a young man was walking a gorgeous husky dog.

We could see the wolf in its face and thick silver fur. A rare kind of dog in this place of small Norfolk and Norwich terriers.

We stopped to talk. The young man told his story, of being crippled and lost and alone and broke.

He had tried to hang himself from a tree, but was found and cut down.

He spoke of a lifetime of mental illness and alienation and wanting to die. Then he had seen the dog in a rescue place.

The dog had been there a long time, too big for homing and miserable, unhealthy, as a working dog would be in a cage.

The man took the dog home with him to his bare flat.

He got books about huskies. He could not walk the dog enough with his damaged legs.

He found an old three-wheeled bike and fixed reins to it and every day the husky pulled him through miles of quiet Norfolk lanes, far from his small flat, summer and winter alike. He said the dog was happy. By the wagging of its tail, I think he was right.

The young man said that he went at the end of each day to the old market just as the stalls were closing, and bought for a few pennies (all he had) the leftover fish and chicken from the day's sales. He knew what a husky dog liked to eat. They shared their supper.

the husky
stood still at his side
the young man said
he saved my life
I saved his

There is always sadness in the air of a cemetery. That day there was also gladness. And life, among all the death.

~Norwich, England

Please to remember the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason, and plot . . .*

Joy McCall

for Brian Zimmer, again

Every year now it's the same on this night—all over my city people are partying at bonfires, fireworks are flashing up into the night sky, and I think of my dear friend who lost hope, lost the light, and could stay no longer.

Guy Fawkes night
and all through the dark
the sounds of fireworks
while in my head
his low sad voice reading

—and he would sing, in the evenings as we talked on the phone, his own quiet evensong psalms—

blessed is he
that considereth the poor
the Lord
will deliver him
in time of trouble

the Lord
will strengthen him
upon the bed of languishing
and wilt make all his bed
in his sickness

mine own familiar friend
in whom I trusted
which did eat of my bread
hath lifted up his heel
against me

as for me
thou upholdest me
in mine integrity
and settest me
before thy face for ever

found tanka from Brian's much loved Psalm 41, King James Bible.

he has peace
and I am glad of it
and yet, and yet . . .
the dark empty space
he left behind him

~Norwich, England

** old English folk song*

Joy McCall struggles with various kinds of suffering and loss, but her soul finds solace in the land, in nature, in poetry, in people, in love.

we didn't speak of cabbages
and kings* *a ryuka sequence*

Joy McCall

for the Gypsy

we could talk till the cows come home
of caravans and mystery
of life and death and poetry
and whether God exists

we talk of stars and trees and land
of books and wood and bronze and stone
of sparrows, magpies, robins, crows
and wolves that walk alone

we discuss the old religions
the evolution of mankind
our kin and genes and dna
and earth and sea and wind

we wonder why we do the things
that make us glad and help us see
how to carve stone and write good words
and what the muse might be

we speak of pot and crack and gin
and sorrow for our younger kin
who've swapped the joy of streams and hills
for online games and pills

we talk of tribes, community
of empires, wars and history
the first big bang and where it leads
of souls and energy

we speak of Norfolk fields of hemp
of ropes and sugar beet and oil
of dead coal mines and cotton mills
and futile, useless toil

we talk of mankind's migrations
of invaders and battles lost
of Vikings, Romans, Celts and Picts
of spirits, spectres, ghosts

I think we'd talk for evermore
if there were time and light enough
the sky grows dark, the clock ticks on
— we part, the day is done

~Norwich, England

** The time has come, the Walrus said,
To talk of many things:
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing-wax —
Of cabbages — and kings —
And why the sea is boiling hot —
And whether pigs have wings.*

Lewis Carroll's poem, the Walrus and the Carpenter.

the island
a ryuka sequence

Joy McCall

For Liam Wilkinson and M. Kei, who so love the sea

We all have some inner landscape, familiar
and true; some place, some scenery, some
homeland that makes sense to us.

I guess that most people believe it to be a
metaphorical thing, and so it is.

But I also believe that in some mysterious way
I do not understand, it is also real.

My island is real. It has lived within me since
I was a child, the land and the Tribe, the
characters which are parts of my true self.

I hear the sea when I'm asleep
all day salt winds blow on my skin
this land is as much a part of me
as my flesh and my blood

Something within me holds the memory of
the light of that first flash of the first starburst
that divided the land from the sea; the light we
came from, the light that is home.

we are made of the same old stuff
made of the minerals, gases,
the birthing light, the burning out—
air, water, earth, fire

the bones

what will I do with the dry bones
left of the Elder and the Crone?
the cliffs erode by tidal surge
the high cave will soon fall

I sit beside the Hermit monk
his fire burns—it is growing cold
we speak of where to lay the bones
where they could rest, in peace

the grey north sea is strangely still
autumn giving way to winter
the island has fallen silent
no songs from the meadow

The Child has come to the north beach,
climbing over rocks from the west shore.

She sits, sad, by the fire, wrapped in an old
blanket.

she says the Bear is dying now
there is no one to keep her safe
she cannot stay to see him die
her guardian, her warmth

the very air is sombre now
there is no sound of crying gulls
no flying fish, no water snakes
the island is grieving

what's to be done with this heartache?
we need healing and ritual
some way to let go of the past
some songs, some spells, some rites

tonight all the tribe will gather
and drink saké around the fire
and we will muse throughout the night
until the daylight breaks

That is all I know for sure; the bones are still
uncertain in the crumbling cave; there are no
songs on the still air.

some light

the stream is still trickling downhill
from the dun-brown autumn meadow
it makes its way to the seashore
through the furrowed gully

the Mongoose burrows in brown fur
what evil lurks in his dark mind?
the Bear too close to death for fear
sighs in fading half-sleep

the abbey ruins don't change much
now and then a loose flintstone falls
bitter east winds erode the lime
the tower still stands tall

the black-winged Raven still flies high
above the small hill and the pines
raiding the nests on tree and shore
calling wild *nevermore*

the Poet sits always writing
his Wild Girl dances round the stones
he looks up and smiles, and writes on—
she knows the poems rule

when it's dark, he lays down the pen
and holds her and tells her the words,
the poems that have shaped his day
the light his soul has seen—

*all of life is a mystery
the coming and going of days
of good beliefs, of happenings
of youth, and growing old*

choices

we gathered on the sandy beach
the tide came in and out again
the Hermit kept the fire burning
we mused and talked, in vain

When daylight came we climbed the cliff
almost to the top, to the cave of bones.

It is a sorry place, just the bones and scraps
of cloth, half covered in sand and chalk and
mildew.

Water-bats fly in and out. The sound of the
sea is distant here.

This is where the choice became hard; how
to know what would be the sacred thing to do;
how to respect the ancestors.

we few became divided then—
to leave our dead kin where they lay
or find a better resting place
and move the bones away

Still we have not decided.

Some day, the answer will be clear; or else
the sea and the winds will decide and part of the
cliff will fall, and the cave, and the bones, too.

no one answers

I go to spend time in the cave
with the spirits of my kinfolk
the black-robed Elder, the stern priest,
the wise and gentle Crone

They lie there laid out neatly as before, the
old man and the old woman, so long dead in this
cold cave.

far below the tide is turning
the same tide that erodes all things
my island cliffs slowly crumbling
bit by bit, to the sea

what is right for bodies long dead
and nothing left but pale thin bones?
how hard to find the sacred thing
that will honour my kin

as always with risk and safety
there seems to be no easy choice
I pray but no one answers me
even the wind is still

turning aside

I am alone now with the dead
I see my kinfolk lying there
I touch each skull, the sightless brows
the few tufts of old hair

I chose to leave them there in peace
their fate decreed by time and tide
I won't go to the cave again
in tears, I turn aside

the time has come, to let go now
to turn my back on the dark night
to bid the dead—farewell, godspeed
and walk on, into light

~Norwich, England

the far field

Joy McCall

the boy sat
against the hay
in the corner
of the old barn
holding the sick calf

its laboured breathing
rattled in the big space
and its sides
shuddered
against his chest

darkness fell
heavy rain began to drip
through the broken roof
and splashed on the cobbles
in the farmyard

the boy's head drooped
and he dozed
the calf's breathing
grew shallow and slow . . .
and stopped

in the barn
in the heavy midnight
cradling
the still warm body
the boy awoke and he wept

and the moon broke
through the clouds
and shone on the far field
where the cow stood
lowing . . . lowing

~Norwich, England

chance encounters

Joy McCall

Calling for a boiler service, after a long wait I
get a young lad called Danny with a singsong
Welsh accent and instead of gas supply, we speak
of the Rhondda valleys and the closing of all the
coal mines and his longing to make art and
design and roam singing in the fields of his native
south Wales, instead of working in a noisy
London office with a dozen others, answering
phones for a huge company.

life is not
what he expected
or wanted
he does a job he hates
to pay the rent

I tell him
just begin —
one step
onto the path
you long for

there are many ways
to reach a dream
a quick jump
or a long winding road
with light up ahead

in the end
we forget the boiler
I go to write poems
he goes to write down
one step towards his own light

Now the boiler is still broken, and I have to
spend an age on the phone again, trying to get
connected to an engineer.

~Norwich, England

the fabric of friendship

Joy McCall & Sanford Goldstein

for Sandy

How often the postman brings me a small light parcel with the familiar handwriting and Japanese stamps, from Shibata-shi, and always inside the plain brown wrapping paper is some fabric—a handkerchief, a scarf, a hand towel—all covered in kanji or pictures of blossoms or small children playing in fields, or rice paddies, or birds . . .

tenugui
to dry my hands
and my tears
and one far-off day
to patch my skirts

and now and then, the tanka come too . . .

patches

fabric scraps
of soft handkerchiefs
your long ago gift—
patches on my skirts
my pillows, my life

Joy

*to see again
the handkerchiefs
long ago given to you,
it is an important patch
in my life with you*

Sandy

it's the thread
that holds everything
sewn together
until time and death
make the stitches unravel

Joy

Always, there are the things that connect people, especially poets, small precious things, not just words.

~Norwich, England/*Japan*

Julie Bloss Kelsey

dead center
of the United States
during a coffee run
I brake for an old man
riding a tricycle

~*Hays, Kansas, USA*

I can't take
any more pictures
a blue-green dragonfly
just landed
on my iPhone

~*Shaw's Garden, St. Louis, USA*

grain silos clustered
by a farmer's field
adrift
in the Kansas River
a single buoy

~*near Lawrence, Kansas, USA*

in southern Wyoming
desert scrub
an antelope
lifts its head
at a passing car

~*Wyoming, USA*

Joy McCall encountered tanka decades ago as a child, met the form again at an Alan Watts talk in Canada, also attended by Sanford Goldstein; and met it again in the books of the master who became her friend.

Sanford Goldstein is now 92 years old. He has been writing tanka for more than fifty years. He continues to live in Japan with his friend Kazuaki Wakui.

When Julie Bloss Kelsey isn't chauffeuring her three children, she enjoys writing short-form poetry about frogs, clouds, and aliens from her home in suburban Maryland. Visit her on Twitter (@MamaJoules).

Kath Abela Wilson

they came with the apartment
we paid extra—
cockroaches
marched the wooden lid
of the NY kitchen bathtub

squid appendages
from biology class
dissections
showed off to my butcher boyfriend
our love at first sight

so loud it was his job
to catch the crickets
in the house
let them out gently for the night
so we could sleep

a cute little beautybite
near my bellybutton
the bee
in the bath towel
in the bed and breakfast

one small neon green memory
a beetle crosses my arm
fifteen minutes
to eternity
I can name witnesses

dragonfly fossil
amber adventurer
how like you
we are our gold leafed days
immemorial

night moth
the sound of you
knocking desperately
at my studio screen door
what more can I do

~California, USA

Kath Abela Wilson collects wood and stone cast away by the ocean to create "Figures of Humor and Strange Beauty" in words and assemblage. Her new chapbooks "The Owl Still Asking" (Tanka for Troubled Times) and "Driftwood Monster" (Haiku for Troubled Times) reflect some of these metaphoric discoveries. She is the creator and leader of the Pasadena Poets on Site in Pasadena, hosting three live workshop/readings a week, and the online Tanka Poet on Site and Cherita Poets on Site where she gives prompts daily. @kathabela in Twitter.

Karma Tenzing Wangchuk

At the bus stop,
half an inch of fine snow
on the sidewalk—
perfect for using my cane
to play a game of tic-tac-toe.

My cane and I
are all but inseparable
these days;
even at night, it stands nearby,
while I'm sleeping in the shelter.

Face covered
by an Oakland Raiders cap
before lights-out,
he grabs some extra sleep
on his bunk at the shelter.

Up to take a pee,
middle of the night,
I make my way
through a dark room of men
snoring in their bunks.

A slimmer waist
than I've had in years—
this shelter life
looks pretty good on me
if I don't say so myself.

Coffee pot empty
by the time I get to it—
homeless shelter blues
on a September morning
of gray sky and a forecast of rain.

My newspaper
damp from morning fog—
my butt too,
from sitting on the bayside bench
to do the crossword puzzle.

The sick ones
in the overnight shelter
have no place
to lay their heads
during the day.

A pale sun, white
through clouds over the bay,
snow predicted—
the line will be longer
at the shelter door tonight.

A tough guy,
or wants to look like one—
you can tell
by the way he swaggers,
by the way he scowls.

A young woman
wanders into the shelter,
asks a monitor
sitting behind the counter,
“Can you tell me where I am?”

Back from rehab
after two days' treatment,
he says he's cured—
a young rooster, so close
to the chopping block.

This cafe's
a dreary place these days,
overtaken
by homeless people,
myself among them.

When the one
who never stops talking
finally leaves,
the very air around me
seems to heave a sigh of relief.

Over morning tea,
a friend is talking about
cherry blossoms,
and it occurs to me
that we are two of them.

Tea with a friend
who's leaving town for good—
hard news to bear
when I think of all the tea,
and more, we didn't share.

How easy it is,
moving her emails
into a folder,
how hard, not having her
here with me.

Stood up,
I go to the bar alone,
have a beer,
write a short poem
about being stood up.

Like the song says,
the girls all get prettier
at closing time,
but I'm pretty darn sure
us boys don't.

There seems to be
a glow around everything
after that sake —
even the busker I don't like
sounds good right now.

~Port Townsend, on the Olympic Peninsula, Washington
State, USA

Karma Tenzing Wangchuk is the author of several poetry chapbooks including two of tanka: Clouds Gather and Part (Tel-Let, 2005) and Open Door: Love Poems (privately published, 2013). A Vietnam War veteran and ex-Buddhist monk, Tenzing lives in Port Townsend, Washington, USA.

Kayla Drouilhet

dancing bumblebees
make a smiley face
on a sunflower
small conversations
with my father-in-law

the haze
of blackberry wine . . .
our lost dreams
among weeping cherry trees
and a folded flag

the flooding
of our autumn bank . . .
amid white oak
silver dusted butterflies
flutter and flutter

the scattered droplets
upon my window pane . . .
the tack
on my map reminds me
I forgot to visit you

following
the yellow brick road . . .
half-truths
await a girl
and her black dog

you have cancer
my doctor says sadly . . .
dandelions blow
into hopeless wishes
cascading to earth like stars

sexy whispers
between long-term lovers . . .
below
the drifting sounds
of car traffic

summer comets
reflected within his eyes . . .
then I point
to the constellation
of Libra and smile

winding roads
through my broken heart . . .
summer winds
bring waves over my feet
removing the loose sand

~Mississippi, USA

Kayla Drouilhet lives in the United States down south in Picayune, Mississippi, with her twin boys and loving husband. She is twenty-five years old. She currently plans to go back to school in a couple years to finish her Wildlife Biology degree to work with plants and birds. Also, she wants to get a minor in creative writing. Her favorite hobbies are photography and writing stories, poems, and reading them as well!

Lavana Kray

I feel at ease
since pulling walls
all over me —
a firefly heals
my photophobia

Camp
of anonymous
sculptors —
my eyelashes scatter
butterfly powder

I see you better
when you are nowhere
to be found —
a summer-resistant snowflake
on my shoulder

Old photos,
letters, diaries, gewgaws,
recyclables —
I blow on the almost
dying embers

I am still waiting
on the edge
of the empty road —
in my eyes, dandelions
from swooshing by trains

I told myself
to leave something behind me
to last in time —
granite monument
on my resting place

This morning
I hardly could open
my eyes and the door —
crystallized stillness
with a whiff of mothballs

I never saw
so many friends
around —
a strike of luck
with my clinical death

Hoots of laughter
cheer my mood —
the mental home
across the fence
from my house

Wolves of oblivion
running behind me
on the field of snow —
if only I were
a white rabbit

Mom's chrysanthemums
are waiting for me
by the gate —
milestone by milestone
I arrive at the graveyard

A lifetime
of strident trifles
in unison . . .
your passionate silence
a counterpoint at the end

~Iași, Romania

Lavana Kray is from Iași, Romania. She is passionate about writing and photography. She has won several awards, including WHA Master Haiga Artist 2015. Her work has been published in many print and online journals, including Haiku Canada Review, Haiku Masters, The Mainichi, Ginyu, Daily Haiga, Haiga Online, Ribbons, Atlas Poetica, etc. She was chosen for Haiku Euro Top 100, 2016. This is her blog: <http://photohaikuforyou.blogspot.ro>.

Lorne Henry

suburban train
an Aboriginal man
holds his boy
high above his head
'isn't he beautiful'

on my way
home from the dance I stop
at a red light
the street name the same as mine
the tacho reads my birth date

~Melbourne, Australia

moonlit clouds
of silver-winged geese
flying south
as I gaze upwards
small snowflakes on my face

~Edmonton, Canada

tourist brochures
I read cover to cover
selecting
holidays I cannot take
ah but I can dream

he told me
as boys they used to chase
kangaroo rats
on this property
no sign of them now

~Australia

*Lorne Henry has been writing haiku since 1992 in Czechoslovakia
now Czech Republic. She started writing tanka about 2005 after a
workshop given by Beverley George. She also writes haibun and tanka
prose.*

Louisa Howerow

across the bay,
an autumn mist softens
the city lights. . .
and my need to resurrect
wronged ghosts

the moon
casts a rippling copy
of itself
maybe it's enough to say
the sea sets us apart

I finger-plink
twinkle, twinkle, little star . . .
what's left
behind the line of dark spruce
broken antlers littering snow

a red gash
across the horizon —
all that's left
of the sun, the words
that held us together

we paddle
toward a thread of sun —
from somewhere
a haunting wail, a loon
responds to our silence

an orange X
marks a Norway maple . . .
the drey nest
wedged in its branches
already empty

winter morning
the wind scouring my face,
I shuffle
across the ice, a penguin
still holding dreams of flight

feather-reed grass
how its plumes crest and fall
in the slight wind
your voice whispered my name
when our hands happened to touch

~Canada

Louisa Howerow's tanka have appeared in Eucalypt, Ribbons, Gusts, and Atlas Poetica.

Margaret Van Every

Colombian slaves
ankles shackled
reduced the dance to small steps—
cumbia,* you can't still us
cumbia, not even chains

** They danced their dance despite their limitations and the dance lives on.*

~Jalisco, Mexico

Margaret Van Every lives in Jalisco, Mexico, where she writes fiction, essays, and poetry (traditional western forms as well as Japanese short forms). She has two volumes of tanka: A Pillow Stuffed with Diamonds (bilingual), 2010, and holding hands with a stranger (2014). She is a founding member of the Not Yet Dead Poets Society.

Delaware Bay

M. Kei

dinghy adrift
after the storm
a hat on board
but no sign
of any living person

tugboats,
towboats, and pushboats
few things
under their own power
on the Delaware River

freighters
in the Delaware Bay
following
one after another
in a broad wake

a riprap island
and caisson lighthouse
nobody home
but the foghorn
still calls to passing ships

bell buoy
on the Delaware Bay
the same
siren song
in a new voice

~Delaware Bay, USA

Kei is a tall ship sailor and award-winning poet who lives on Maryland's Eastern shore. He is the editor of Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka and the anthology, Neon Graffiti : Tanka Poetry of Urban Life. His most recent collection of poetry is January, A Tanka Diary. He is also the author of the award-winning gay Age of Sail adventure novels, Pirates of the Narrow Seas. He can be followed on Twitter @kujakupoe, or visit AtlasPoetica.org

Bogeymen

Marianne Paul & Joy McCall

my grandson
loses his temper and kicks
his stepfather
what do I know for certain
about anything

*everyone said
'she's a bad girl'
then her shirt tore—
cigarette burns
all over her body*

my young friend
douses herself in gasoline
and lights a match—
a prayer for those children
whose bogeymen are real

*it's only the dog
that stops him
from jumping
when the train passes
under the bridge*

waking up
to find an uncle climbing
atop of her
so many monsters
under each bed

~Ontario, Canada / Norwich, England

*Marianne Paul is a Canadian poet and novelist. Her
favourite pastimes are kayaking, short-form poetry, haiga,
and bookbinding.*

*Joy McCall lives in her birthplace, old Norwich in Norfolk,
England. She too grows old and her mind is full of ghosts
and poetry.*

Ebb and Flow

Marilyn Humbert & Kate Brown

in sea rocks
below the craggy cliff
a cranny—
my feet tread
an unfamiliar path

*we tiptoe over
jagged edges, broken shores
and dance
between smooth stones
our beach ballet*

in salt-tang mist
I wait for the tide's wash
holding a shell
to my ear . . . sirens sing
of those lost in the deep

*twinkling tea lights
set this watery table—
like pepper
her ashes sprinkled
sifting through the shallows*

above the splash-zone
scrawled in charcoal
a mud-map:
coral reefs, hidden shoals
and a treasure chest

*foam outlines
trace wet sand
fading slowly
like memories, fainter
with each sea breath*

~Shelley Beach, NSW, Australia

River of Time

Marilyn Humbert

My mother has been moved into a nursing home after fracturing her hip in fall. Although recovering as expected, given her age, her mind seems to be wandering more. She still recognises me when I visit but she speaks of a voice from the past. Her own voice as a child.

Watch me jump, watch me run. Look at me, look at me.

a tower of blocks
reaching to the clouds
tumbles,
disappearing
into the river of time

Today she is distracted, watching for something or someone. Outside the window, wind swirls leaves in grey tinged sky. My presence is ignored.

tree shadows
in winter twilight
rising stars
are singing . . .
calling her home

~Mirridong Nursing Home Bendigo, Victoria, Australia

Marilyn Humbert lives in the Northern suburbs of Sydney, NSW, surrounded by bush. Her pastimes include writing free verse, tanka, and haiku. Her tanka and haiku appears in International and Australian Journals, Anthologies and Online. Some of her free verse poems have been awarded prizes in competitions and some have been published.

Kate Brown is currently residing in Sydney, Australia, Kate has spent most of her life in Darwin, Northern Territory, and has worked in finance, aviation and hospitality. Writing is a hobby and part of her current studies at Edith Cowan University, which draws on her unique upbringing, diverse travels, and distinct wit. Kate's style is exploratory and experimental, yet tackles social dilemmas while incorporating the subtle humour and ironies of everyday life.

Marilyn Morgan

a rabbit
in the yard
nibbles new spring grass
coyotes
 prowl the fields beyond

why
when everything
appears so wrong
does everything
feel so right?

sharp sliver of moon
hangs precariously
 posing
on the distant horizon
across the river

warm September
by the river
crickets
 in the field
call me home

ship after ship
on the river tonight
stringing
their lights
through the darkness

took the long way home . . .
and learned along the way
what an old lover knows
 is what
a good lover knows

sometimes
even your hand
in mine
lights up
the darkness within

it's only
a dream
sailing in from afar
a nightmare
in a moonless sky

friends
forever we said
till a l s altered
the well-trodden path
we once walked

~*New York, USA*

Marilyn Morgan is a retired English teacher. Marilyn's poetry has appeared in Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, Skylark, Ribbons, A Hundred Gourds and others. Her prose has been published in Edge, Motif, Minerva Rising, Thrive Fiction and others. Marilyn lives in New Hartford, New York, USA.

at nineteen years old

Mark Poulos

incense sticks smolder
in front of the steps to a temple —
mother fans smoke
towards me
hoping to heal my mind

how I long at times
to be alone in some verdant place
mountain, valley, plain —
free of those emotions
only other people can stir up

seeing myself as she sees me
I hate myself less —
is that what
I really want
when I want to be loved by a woman?

shocked, realizing that
I looked too long
into the eyes of a red-head
I yearn for
I'm stabbed with remorse, shame

old yellowed photos
of her and father
mom stored away deep in a closet —
the only reminders of a time
when she loved the man who betrayed her

~*California, USA*

at eleven or twelve

Mark Poulos

that photo of me
sprawled on grass
crying my heart out—
I tore it to shreds
when my brother couldn't stop laughing at it

I look into the face of my aunt
nearly eighty—
it's as fresh, glowing
as when she was a middle-aged wife
with a teenage son in tow

my aunt Reiko
humble, devoted wife for sixty years—
alone at her desk
she transforms into a haiku poet
steeped in images of bird, blossom, moon

my uncle
whom I found dead on the floor—
he lay peacefully on his side
eyes shut—image of Buddha
entering death—after nirvana

~*California, USA*

Starbuck's scene

Mark Poulos

nearby sits an old man
looking sad, lonely
who slowly spoons cream cheese
into his mouth
worn-out copy of Ulysses on his table

lonely, sad myself
what stops me
from talking to this old man?—
my heart aches seeing him
slowly spoon cream cheese into his mouth

old man
sad and lonely
spooning cream cheese into your mouth—
though young I too know first-hand
emptiness and sorrow

this autumn night
my book-lined flat
is utterly quiet—
the only sound
the steady hum of the fridge

this longing for a child of my own
I can't suppress—
just watching a baby
serenely chew on some string cheese
makes me happy

little baby
calmly chewing on string cheese—
I wish I had your pure mind
that gives such a serene look
to your clear-blue eyes

Starbuck's
crazed bag lady screams
in the restroom
trying to muffle her voice
with the gushing tap

smiling at a baby
eating popcorn in her stroller
I fold my arms—
she folds her arms in turn
smiling back at me

old mother
far away in Japan—
when I picture your face
round, smooth as a chubby girl's
my heart feels soothed

in a drunken sleep
bum lies sprawled on the pavement—
orange yo-yo attached
to his forefinger by a string
a few feet away

~California, USA

Mark Poulos

porcelain skin
blue-green eyes
rich red hair
how can this beauty I long for
be the mother of three kids?

frowning
a Chinese woman
vigorously sweeps the pavement
in front of an acupuncture shop
where a bum has slept

~California, USA

Mark Poulos is from Los Angeles, CA. He visits Albany, NY, once a year.

Cherita

Maryalicia Post

she sleeps without dreams

while in her garden
palm trees gossip

about a storm
strengthening
off the coast of Africa

storm over

trees still
dripping

last
angry
words

~Dublin, Ireland

Maryalicia is a journalist and travel writer based in Dublin, Ireland.

Ryuka

Matsukaze

holding hands
by candlelight
nothing slices through
this drunken haze

flower fragrances
and the smell
of fresh baked cookies
in this lobby

autumn sun shines
we speak in whispers
while several
haiku form

asking him
a known bad-boy
to come into my bedroom—
sex against moonpill

dianthus growing wildly
in her garden
how long will it be
before happiness returns?

several days
from Halloween—
just thought i'd say that
and move on

bit of a breeze outside
trying
to keep things
light in my life

~Dallas, Texas, USA

Matsukaze

always waiting
for
the rising
of
a new world

'coffy is the color'—
this black skin
will
become beautiful
in the mouths of people

i pause
in silent prayer
and the world
sits
suspended

in a dash
to be right
to be out loud
i jot down
many words

will someone sing
a hymn
to America's
uncertain future
in a bronze voice?

i want booze
i want sex
lots of sex—
bending willow
in the church yard

one day
i too
will be settled
like
two dry towels

the colleague and i
sit
talking
about the purchase
of permits and guns

cool
autumn afternoon
i am still
amid
this highway traffic

doing quick shopping
for
random things—
a cute man and his crew
passes by me

lately
a few dreams
of marriage
of a wife
and a baby

sunspill
across the floors—
this afternoon
proves to move
at a slow pace

ringing phone . . .
i
do not
even give it
a second glance

taking
all my daily
situations
and stuffing them
into minimal tanka

have i found my voice yet?
something
i ponder
while a customer
goes on and on

saltine crackers
and a sprite
to settle my stomach . . .
wait!
am i pregnant!?

wanted
to be rich
by now . . .
now i just
want to be safe

purchasing
coffee from Starbucks
a haiku
taking form in mind
when he walks by

deciding
to return to singing—
a certain thrill
i get when thumbing
through German lieder

listening to Mahler
then to Orff
thinking to myself
i'd like to watch
Hitchcock's 'Topaz'

halloween approaches . . .
but
we the people
have already been living
in a nightmare

“isn’t it awkward . . .”
not
finishing my statement
before your lips
are on mine

stopping by
another
Cajun food joint
just before
heading to work

drinking
several wine coolers
on the job
and i really
don’t care

to pass the time
i jot down tanka
about anything
that comes
to mind

~Thursday, October 26th, Holiday Inn Hotel

*Matsukaze
a musician and actor
lives in Dallas, Texas.*

MachiNation

Michael H. Lester & Autumn Noelle Hall

As a condition of employment, Corporatech requires insertion of a computer chip in my wrist. For security purposes, the company uses the chip to track my whereabouts at all times and to credit my BitBucks account for my wages. I must use the chip to gain access to secure areas of the company compound and to make all purchases of company products. The chips are supposed to be non-modifiable, but the Chinese, the North Koreans, and the Russians are all working on hacks that will allow them to reprogram the chips and control the host. I know this because I work as a mole for each of these governments.

this darn robot
acts like it owns the place
I’ll unplug it . . .
I ‘ m a f r a i d
I c a n ‘ t l e t y o u d o t h a t D a v e

This morning is an important test—the Russians are going to send a command to my wrist chip to see if they can jail break it.

My husband, Dave, thinks there’s a chip in his wrist. His daily memory supplements have helped him forget what caused that scar. Or that I stopped him before he had a second “chip” implanted in the other wrist. The bloody bandage went down the incinerator shaft, along with the razor and my daily dose.

*believing his MRS
[Mind Re-org Sessions]
are his job . . .
all this gibberish
he insists is Chinese*

Once I quit swallowing their pills, it all came back to me—and a good thing, too. Without my computer savvy, there’s no way I could’ve hacked BitBucks to supplement our income. I had to create a false ID, since obviously deposits to his account would set off the e-bots. But there’s

plenty of Outerzoners—we call them Ozzies—whose old Sōsh'net profiles are still in the data vaults.

redirecting funds
from the Redirecteds
outrageous
the price one pays
for a manicure these days

My nurse, Olga, thinks I believe she is my wife. I know she is a Russian spy, but I pretend not to notice. She has hidden all the damn razor blades, which I use for chip realignment and calibration. The Russians think the Chinese have sabotaged their efforts to hack the chip, and the North Koreans have sent an army of teenage club hoppers with toxic chemicals on their hands to find me. They trust no one. Not even me—especially not me.

the vibrations
give me a headache
what she does
in the bedroom when she thinks
I'm asleep is her business

All the BitBucks I've redirected over the past few months have mysteriously disappeared. That is just part of the game. I am not the only wrist-chip quadruple spy who hacks unsuspecting virtual bank accounts. There are legions of us out there.

I think I received a signal from the Russians—my veins are turning red. I have to get the chip out now!

“Olga!” I cry.

But Olga is gone, along with my walker and the maltipoo.

I'll call in sick
wrap my wrist in lead foil . . .
I'm afraid
I can't let you do that
Dave

As the mem-sups and dendrotics compete for the same nodes, Dave's neural net is fragmenting. Lately, the seizures are violent enough to shake the bed. The last one gave our poor little multi-fax such a fright, she went and cowered in her charging kennel all night. (These facsimile pets are engineered to be so sensitive these days . . .). I don't know what's more worrisome—his growing paranoia, or the way he keeps calling me Olga.

“H'Adrian—
such a defensive name,”
he used to joke
“the only wall
that'll ever come between us”

Ah well, we've had a good run. He's been the perfect mate, what with his direct tech connections. I'd never have gotten the access codes for the Ozzie Liberation Gambit Alliance without him. But now that he's nearly mem-wiped and I've off-stored enough BitBucks to buy my way past the BordeRovers, it's time for me to re-assimilate.

the e-bots
will be deprogrammed soon
two red moons rising—
one machine language
one world

~a future Los Angeles, California, USA or
Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Michael H. Lester is a CPA and attorney practicing business management for the entertainment industry in Los Angeles, California. Numerous journals have selected Michael's haiku, tanka, cherita, haibun, and tanka prose for publication. Michael is the author of a book of poetry, Notes from a Commode – Volume I, available on Amazon.com. He has several other books in the works, and is a co-founder of the cherita: your storybook journal.

Collaboration often brings out new and unexpected dimensions in the poets' work. Autumn Noelle Hall's joint tanka prose with Michael H. Lester takes her short form writing where it has never gone before—into an imaginal Sci-Fi realm. Unlike typical legal disclaimers, the caveat here might read: Any similarity to actual technological and pharmaceutical aspirations or eventualities is entirely deliberate; ramifications from such possibilities should be carefully considered and entirely avoided, if at all possible.

Cherita

Michael H. Lester

of all the insects I find repugnant

even roaches and mosquitoes
my husband is the worst

yet no swatter or spray
no netting or lotion
can keep him away

locked in a primal embrace

unicells divide into two
aided by a universal force

emanating from some far away
celestial body
to create all living things

the family reunion

in a cottage
by the lake

where parents argue heatedly
over how to split the bill
and cousins come of age

the buzz of hornets

fair warning to those
who would threaten their hive

an old man with a cane
takes a swat at the nest
but the hornets let him go

~Los Angeles, California, USA

Michael H. Lester

the rush
of acceptance fades quickly
the sting
of rejection
lingers long

he looks
ridiculous
in his pompadour
I blame my wife
not the miniature poodle

to unravel
the mystery of you
would I not
forsake my body
and pledge my soul

she peels chestnuts
I add a log to the fire
the cat yawns . . .
maybe under this full moon
she will finally say yes

the sidewalk café
in Paris where first we met
as young men
I wonder if I should put that
in the obituary

there's that draft again
I thought he had it fixed
I shuffle through
boxes of his old letters
wondering what broke him

may your heart beat
long and steady . . .
a bristlecone pine
named Methuselah
4768 years old

The Ghosts of Mozambique

a cherita sequence

Michael H. Lester

our clasped hands
swing back and forth in rhythm . . .
closer and closer
the whispering waves bring bits
of crimson sunset

as proof
I don't need a hearing aid
I ask her
to say something . . .
still waiting

he misinterprets
her sarcastic smirk
as approval . . .
needles and tattoos
in all the wrong places

cocooned
within a pink parasol
and silk kimono . . .
my eyes follow her
into my rival's boudoir

the best of times
our reckless carefree youth . . .
we ride the gale winds
wild horses galloping
headlong into the unknown

~Los Angeles, California, USA

they set sail

on a balmy day
from the shores of Mozambique

with stores of coffee
and bushels of tea
bound for the isle of Crete

a seasoned crew

of able seamen
with backs as strong as oak

to steer the craft
through shoal and reef
and keep the ship afloat

for days they drift

in the Indian Ocean
as calm as a Buddhist monk

and fill their bellies
with mollusks and fish
and jugs of Jamaican rum

while the mariners sleep

with bulging guts
the sky grows dark with cloud

the angry sea
and its frothy head
could run a ship aground

as gale winds

whip through the galley
the captain implores his mates

batten the hatches
and trim the sails
leave the flotsam in our wake

throughout the night

and into the dawn
the sailors clench their teeth

as the pounding waves
loom ever larger
and the hull is nearly breached

from the ocean depths

in a frightful splash
a creature rears its head

with golden scales
and a serpent's tongue
its eyes a flaming red

half the crewmen

jump the ship
to brave the churning brine

rather than face
the monster's wrath
they sooner would go blind

the fearsome serpent

flares its nostrils
and bares its razor fangs

it slowly glides
to the edge of the ship
the seamen within range

the remaining sailors

die of fright
each and every one

including the captain
his sultry wench
the cook and his wayward son

but the giant beast

just curious
submerges once again

with its quick descent
the storm subsides
and the sea returns to calm

a ship of ghosts

bound for Crete
from the shores of Mozambique

the scent of coffee
and fragrant tea
would never smell as sweet

~Los Angeles, California, USA

The Ultimate Thrill

Michael H. Lester

After watching *Rebel Without a Cause* starring James Dean and Natalie Wood, my friend, Doug, and I buy switchblade knives. We practice flicking them open like they do in the movie. Soon the novelty and excitement wear off. We have no one to stab so Doug suggests we play a game of chicken.

adolescents
beat back the summer doldrums
any way they can . . .
picking up bad habits
wherever they might find them

In a game of chicken, the players stand facing each other with their feet spread apart. They take turns throwing their knives between the other person's feet, blade first, so that the knife drives into the ground. The player moves the foot closest to the knife up against it, shrinking the space between their feet. The game continues until the space between their feet grows so small that one player chickens out.

tattooed boys
pretending
to be men . . .
their role models
temporarily between jobs

When we finally tire of that game, we look for something new and exciting to do. Doug suggests we sneak into the local hospital at night and check out the view from the roof. Everything goes smoothly and we are literally on top of our own little world with a 360-degree view of Detroit and Windsor.

I'll never understand why Doug jumped off the roof that night.

Incidentally, he always won our games of chicken.

the ancient ones
meet in secret gardens
where they exchange
potions and elixirs
to salve their brittle bones

she flips through
the travel postcards in the
hospice gift shop . . .
the priest tells her there are
only two places he can go

~Los Angeles, California, USA

Michael H. Lester is a CPA and attorney practicing business management for the entertainment industry in Los Angeles, California. His haiku, tanka, cherita, haibun, and tanka prose have appeared in numerous journals. Michael received an honorable mention in TSA's 2017 Sanford Goldstein Tanka Contest, is the author of a book of poetry, Notes from a Commode – Volume I, and is a co-founder of the cherita: your storybook journal.

Cherita

Patricia Prime

on the way north

the headlands are revealed
in all their glory

a time now
for relaxation
in the summer sun

shellfish gatherers

leave their footprints
on the wet sand

buckets clanking
as happy children
leave the beach

moonless night

the cat curls before
burning logs in the grate

startled
by the falling ash
it leaps to its feet

at the flea market

we sort through the books
for non-fiction

a letter
in the German language
falls from the pages

high tide

they paddle out to the boat
on their kayaks

the blue sail
unfurls in the breeze
as they pull away

expectation of rain

outstretched arms
lips slightly parted

I leave
the blackening skies
to a seagull

the noon sun

girls in bikinis
pose for photographs

a model's blush
under the brush
of powder

~New Zealand

Patricia Prime

in unison
five geese fly north
necks outstretched
they are high, going
higher on a thermal lift

I smell the envelope
seeds I will plant in spring
already there within
the beauty that will bloom
in the months to come

the black dog
sniffs around my ankles
then jumps up
to take the juicy bone
from my outstretched hand

twilight evening
a flute exhaling one note
as evening tiptoes in
and stars illuminate the mist
that lays a finger on my lips

if I think of dad
what I see is a grainy image
extracted from memory
of him standing at his bench
tailoring suits for gentlemen

she takes my hand
a child leading grandma
to the sea's edge
where a beach of bright shells
is washed by cool waves

you left me like a coin
dropped somewhere in the middle
of a busy street
I remember exactly the date and year—
although a coin has no memory

a grey day
puddles in the garden
the hills shrouded and dim—
reading poetry makes the day
less gloomy and cold

one more evening
I am at the same point
in my life
the words I write are not
enough to erase your memory

the young woman
forever holding down her skirt
with pouting innocence
and yet all that knowledge
in the depth of her brown eyes

across my table
a gathering of voices
joyful faces,
learning to see me again
after a long absence

on today's bus
everything suddenly stops
as we wait
for a duck and her ducklings
to cross the main road

there by the lake
the moon makes sense
shining
on the deep water
playing with light and dark

~New Zealand

Bird Walk : the Uretara Estuary and Yeoman Walkway

Patricia Prime

We walk along the haiku pathway to the wetlands to view the birds through your photographic eye. An angled shot of the houseboat moored beside the river, where a woman in a bikini waves to us from her sundeck. Square frames show images of shell duck, pukeko and Canada geese. I stand awkwardly directing your gaze to the bird sculptures lining the river bank: moa, a bittern and water birds. Lying with your elbows resting in the grass, you line the camera eye-to-eye with a heron. A swan bursts from the still water of the wetlands, through a cluster of reeds, to stand erect for a moment, wings outspread.

poised silhouette —
raising the camera
for the last shot
your hand remains steady
despite the Parkinson's

When we return home, we know your husband will put the photos on his computer, enlarge them, alter them in some way to make a perfect picture, but your first ambition will be to measure up to his standards, to see his face light up to make you feel like a genius photographer.

family snaps
in leatherette albums
prove
nothing but memories
last forever

~New Zealand

Belgische toestanden — *Belgian Circumstances*

Paul Mercken

Dominique Mineur
wordt Belgisch ambassadeur
in Riyad zowel
als Véronique Petit in
Teheran — Allah Akbar!

*Dominique Mineur
and Veronique Petit named
ambassadors from
Belgium in Riyad and in
Teheran — Allah Akbar!*

Hendrik Bogaert, een
Belgische politicus,
wil religieuze
kledij in het openbaar
verbieden — en 't vrije woord?

*Hendrik Bogaert, a
Belgian Parliament member,
proposes to ban
religious clothes in public —
end of the right to free speech.*

~Bunnik, Netherlands

*Retired philosophy professor and medievalist from Belgium (° 1934),
Bunnik, NL. Research and teaching in GB, USA, Florence, IT, and
Utrecht, NL. Committee Haiku Kring Nederland (Dutch Haiku
Society) 2004-2017. Published Bunnikse haiku's en ander dichtspul,
2012 (Bunnik Haiku's and Other Poetic Stuff, in Dutch) & Tanka of
Place – ATLAS POETICA – Tanka's van plaats, 2013 (bilingual).
Voluntary work in the fields of nature, society, culture and spirituality.
Humanist, promoting democratic confrontation by dialogue.*

Paweł Markiewicz

cold fall wind and oak
the route of ants in his bark
is washed by raindrops
the drop is like ambrosia
that was drunk by Herkules

dawn in the autumn
I'm finding ancient antlers
in dark forest-temple
I want to hang antlers over
my picture with Ibycus

mossy forest glade
red deer is shedding antlers
next to ferns with bees
bees announce the happiness
ferns hide the treasure of love

a way into temple
I am moving over carpets
of lotus flowers
the flowers hide boleti
and wonderful healing herbs

dawn and autumn wind
falconer is releasing
his hawk in the air
birds—harbingers of freedom
and wonderful fulfillment

~*Poland*

*Paweł Markiewicz was born in 1983 in Poland. He studied both
Laws and German studies in Warsaw. He was twice the scholarship-
holder of Forum Alpbach in Austria—the village of the thinkers. His
more than 30 long poems have been published in German magazines
and anthologies. Paweł has written recently haiku in English which
were printed in Japan, Australia, as well as in Germany.*

Peter Fiore

global warming—
how else to explain
the forsythia, the blossoms
daffodils and dandelions
shining brightly all at once

fake black cat
posed
on the white porch
in a hurricane
of blossoms

slowly you begin
to let go
not many things
seem to matter as much
then you lose your teeth

outback
mist, red leaves
I love you
I love others
now here, now there

mushrooms everywhere you look
in the backyard
been that kind of summer
but what does it mean
and who the fuck cares

binging on baseball
feel myself get fatter
while
Henry's hitting a thousand balls
and running his legs to fire

soon
I will only think of you
twice a day
then twice a month
then . . .

brown leaves
wash across my windshield
fastball
down in the count
over the wall

winter of our discontent
first Trump's lies
and now my brother
diagnosed
with a death sentence

~New York, USA

Peter Fiore lives and writes in Mahopac, New York, USA. His poems have been published in Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, American Poetry Review, Rattle, Ribbons, Skylark, A Hundred Gourds and others. In 2009, Peter published text messages, a book of tanka poetry and in 2015, Peter's book of tanka prose, flowers to the torch, was published by Keibooks. In the spring of 2017, Peter's first novella, when angels speak of love, was published by Loose Moose Press.

Patricia writes poetry, reviews, articles and Japanese forms of poetry. She has self-published several collections of poetry and a book of collaborative tanka sequences and haibun, Shizuka, with French poet, Giselle Maya. Patricia co-edits Kokako and is reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, on the editorial staff of Gusts, and is a reviewer for Atlas Poetica, Takahe, Metverse Muse and Poets International.

Rebecca Drouilhet

the white dove
whose color repels shades
of red and black
does she miss their dark passion,
feel their despair in her red heart

dancing with death
I begin to hear the music . . .
a lover's sigh,
a child's laugh,
the silence that comes after

some things
do grow in the dark . . .
a piece of moon
slips out of the clouds
showing me shadows

each year
my journey 'round the sun
pulls me closer
to the place where snowflakes
and blossoms begin and end

poetry—
a touch of fire
from a thirsty soul,
the vision of a seer
blind to all but truth

blue October
bringing hollow places
on the wind . . .
things I left unsaid,
questions without answers

how easily
wings get tangled
in a web . . .
I watch a butterfly break free
claiming her patch of blue

the house
of my childhood
rising before me . . .
where will the weathered steps
take me this time

~Picayune, Mississippi, USA

Rebecca Drouilhet is a retired registered nurse from Picayune, Mississippi, who works as a moderator on an international poetry forum. Her haiku and tanka have won prizes including a Sakura award in the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Haiku Invitational in 2012 and an Honorable Mention in that same contest in 2017. The Japanese Tanka Poets Society has awarded her a Certificate of Fine Tanka. In her spare time, she likes to read, play word games, and spend time with her large family.

Ruth Holzer

when you're away
on distant Tower Road
between the pot farms
and the nerve gas arsenal
I might dream of you

~Denver, Colorado, USA

from the Jersey train
I'd see lighted windows
slip past
imagined people out there
staying up to paint and write

~New Jersey, USA

my house
in a German village
displaying
through its shutters
American bullet holes

~Thaleischweiler-Froeschen, Germany

castle windows
ablaze with old gold
at sunset
beneath its stout red walls
I settle for the night

~Berkeley Castle, Gloucester, UK

Ruth Holzer's poetry has appeared in Atlas Poetica, Lynx, Presence, Eucalypt, Modern Haiku, American Tanka, Haibun Today and others. She lives in Herndon, VA, USA.

Sanford Goldstein

so much
to do paying
that enormous bill
and treating my friend
to supper

I have
nowhere to turn
should I leave Japan,
I hang on here by
a slim thread

entering
the college
I used to teach at,
someone recognised me
and I could not respond

~Japan

Sanford Goldstein is now 92 years old. He has been writing tanka for more than fifty years. He continues to live in Japan with his friend Kazuaki Wakui.

Sharon MacFarlane

snowflakes drift
like torn lottery tickets
flung into the wind
by a disgruntled man
who's lost all hope of spring

a March morning
a flock of silvery pigeons
soars above the town
like a handful of dimes
tossed by a happy child

a grasshopper
alights
on a dogwood leaf
nibbles it
into lace

crosses planted in the ditch
decorated with plastic roses
faded photos of teenagers
cut down
before they reached full bloom

~Saskatchewan, Canada

Sharon MacFarlane lives on a Saskatchewan farm with her husband of sixty years. She has published books of short fiction and poetry.

Down Crocodiles Come

Tigz De Palma

i need a lover
who cups my breasts
each time
he holds me
in a t-shirt too soft

caressing my leg
you whisper a broken heart
instantly
i time travel
to my mother's womb

as much as
a butterfly loves
a flower
spread my wings back
kiss me

because of . . .
husband does not
accurately
describe
who you are to me

naked
on our autumn beach
i drop my shield
down crocodiles come
i love you

~Balearic Islands, Spain

Tigz De Palma fell heart first into Japanese style short-form poetry about a year ago and writes mostly from the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. She has been published in Otata, Bones, Sonic Boom, Presence, and has earned an Honorable Mention in the Haiku Society of America's Harold G. Henderson Best Unpublished Haiku contest 2017.

A Kaleidoscope of Recollections and Places

Vijay Joshi & Arlene Teck

shapen
by a misshapen pine
winter mountainside
dotting the dark valley
village lights

bearing a candle
the last of the skiers
catches up
five interlacing rings
ignite

home to see Mom
both of us look for
our little girl selves
fading star
brightens again

mother's mirror
never have I felt . . .
so beautiful
unfolding
wrinkles of time

Christmas at Mom's
snow globes become
snowstorm
the gentle soprano
quickens her cadence

old pond
a leaf falls in
silently
ground fog
surrounds it all

under milkweed
a poet and a soldier
exchange poems
battles won
a time for celebration

grief
cascading from within
pours into concentric pools
risen from the ashes
freedom tower

bloodied memories
hobble across
cobblestones
one more war
one more wasted life

mint yard
covered by weeds
covered by snow
oblivious to distractions
the monk continues praying

morning fog
slowly recedes
dewdrops
a wet scarecrow
scared of its own shadow?

twilight sun
sinks below
cloud cover
overhead wires
briefly a gleam

imaging machine
suddenly flashes
a red signal
traffic flow
resumes on green light

~New Jersey, USA / Geneva, Switzerland

Vijay Joshi is a published poet, having published "Reflective Musings", a collection of contemporary poems and "Kaleidoscope of poems", a collection of haibun, tanka poems. Haibun Today, Chrysanthemum, and Contemporary Haibun, have published his poems.

Arlene Teck has BA, CogPsy, Cornell University. Advanced work, creative thinking processes, Edward deBono School of Thinking. Currently healthcare branding creative director, ixseo.com, Geneva, Switzerland. Member – Haiku Society of America, 1983; Haiku Poets of the Garden State, 2011.

Going Upstream: 30 Tanka Phrases of Old Tanka Masters

Ryoh Honda, Translator

Using the tanka form, we share meaningful personal experiences which provide us moments of connection, even though we would be missing opportunities perhaps permanently to meet and have a cup of tea or glass of beer.

Atlas Poetica, as a universal platform of tanka, has been showing how borderless the world of tanka is. The borderlessness made an ocean, where many rivers meet. This time, let's go upstream and see the longest river through the eyes of old tanka masters.

30. Tanka is not to sing flowers and moon, but, through the moon and flowers, to express human heart.
~Okuma Kotomichi (1798–1868)
29. What we call tanka is all born from the true mind of human beings.
~Motoori Nobunaga (1730–1801)
28. As tanka reasonably complies with the universe, its expression is wide even though it may look narrow.
~Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769)
27. Tanka only born in my true mind is naturally new.
~Karasumaru Mitsuhide (1689–1748)
26. Tanka should not be so elaborate, it should be smartly tasteless.
~Jiun (1673–1753)
25. There is no tanka in the time of tanka. There is tanka when one doesn't make tanka. When you reflect your mind on every aspect of nature, both your mind and body will be tanka.
~Karasumaru Mitsutaka (1647–1690)
24. Tanka is a customized broom to sweep away secular dust in one's mind.
~Keichu (1640–1701).
23. Man with tanka, tree with leaves.
~Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1654)
22. It is bad to make a heart by seeking words. It is indispensable that words should be sought based on a heart.
~Hosokawa Fujitaka (Yusai) (1534–1610)
21. Generally, tanka is effective to contemplate one's mind, and it's an action that doesn't take time.
~Sanjonishi Sanetaka (1455–1537)
20. Both the handwriting of children and the first five sound units of tanka should be smooth.
~To no Tsuneyori (1401–1484)
19. Good tanka has the style that doesn't tell all.
~Shotetsu (1381–1459)
18. For highly thoughtful tanka, it doesn't matter whether its words are good or bad.
~Imagawa Ryohshun (1326?–1420)
17. As far as styles and wording are appropriate, excessive expressions would be allowed.
~Nijo Yoshimoto (1320–1388)
16. The first five sound units would determine whether the tone of tanka is stiff or stable.
~Nijo Tameyo (1251–1338)
15. It is not good to make tanka of four seasons by fabrication. Nature in the raw should be elegantly treated.
~Abutsuni (1222?–1283)
14. Letting what has no heart have its heart, this is a usual practice of tanka.
~Sengaku (1203–1273)
13. Only when a heart fits in words, good tanka is born.
~Fujiwara no Tameie (1198–1275)

12. When you make tanka, don't discard your heart and decorate. Tanka should be based on only your heart.
~Emperor Juntoku (1197–1142)
11. Roughly speaking, the style of tanka, like the human face, is not uniform.
~Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239)
10. Tanka practice looks light but is deep, easy but hard.
~Fujiwara no Sadaie (Teika) (1162–1241)
9. Let me submit five years of my life, but let me make one good tanka.
~Kamo no Chohmei (1155–1246)
8. Everything is going to wane, but only tanka will not, even in the end of the world.
~Saigyō (1118–1190)
7. If tanka didn't exist no one could recognize the beautiful nature. There would be no heart, per se.
~Fujiwara no Toshinari (Shunzei) (1114–1204)
6. Being lost in thought, I gathered things that sprung to my mind, and then they became something like tanka.
~Izumi Shikibu (978?–?)
5. When a heart doesn't go well with a style, a heart should be prioritized.
~Fujiwara no Kinto (966–1041)
4. There exists a mind such that intends to soothe this unstable world, by letting speechless flowers and birds speak, assuming heartless trees and grasses have hearts.
~Minamoto no Shitagō (911–983)
3. Tanka is not only a flower but also a fruit.
~Ki no Tsurayuki (866–945)
2. When the styles of tanka are carefully analyzed, we find that the old is indeed a mirror that shows now. But when the present

is compared with the past, new tanka are flowers and the old ones are fruits.

~Sugawara no Michizane (845–903)

1. The spring sunlight is gentle and larks are chirping. Without tanka, my sentimental mind could not be refreshed.

~Ootomo no Yakamochi (716–785)

Review: *October Blues* and *Black Genji* by Matsukaze

Reviewed by Maxianne Berger

October Blues And Other Contemporary Tanka
by Matsukaze

Keibooks, 2016

with an introduction by the poet and an
afterword by M. Kei

ISBN-13: 978-1533085221

8.25" x 6", 160 pp

\$14.00 USD (soft cover print)

\$5.00 USD (Kindle)

Black Genji And Other Contemporary Tanka
by Matsukaze

Keibooks, 2017

with an introduction by the poet and an
afterword by M. Kei

ISBN-13: 978-1544751580

8.25" x 6", 174 pp

\$14.00 USD (soft cover print)

\$5.00 USD (Kindle)

Matsukaze (wind in the pines) is the pseudonym of a poet who discovered tanka around 2006, moved into haiku, and returned to tanka in 2013. *October Blues* (*OB*) gathers tanka sequences written before the 2016 publication, *Black Genji*, published in September, 2017, is the follow-up companion collection. In the afterword to this second volume, publisher M. Kei describes the poet as “[y]oung, black, gay, and

spiritual” (*BG* 171). Details of these and other realities appear throughout the poems whose themes are achingly human.

There are two excellent reasons for reading either or both of these books. Firstly, Matsukaze uses personas—the “I” in any given poem is not necessarily an alter-ego of the poet himself. And secondly, intrigued by the modernist Japanese poet Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912) “who wrote all of his tanka in three lines/three units[.]” he was encouraged by Kei “to utilize the lineation / form that best served the sentiment that was to be expressed” (*OB* 6).

The five phrases of Takuboku’s tanka are set into three lines of one, two or three phrases. Matsukaze’s “experimentation with the Tanka form” (*OB* 6) has enabled him to push lineation even further, with his individual tanka being set into one, two, three, or four lines, as well as the conventional five.

The fictitious “I” has a long and well-established history in English literature, whether the narrator of a novel or the persona of a poem. As to tanka in Japanese, Terayama Shūji and Tawara Machi, two *kajin* well-known through English translation, also use “I” as an alias for fictitious personas, so Matsukaze is in good company. His giving characters other than himself an I-persona in his poems opens a world of possible human experiences with more intimacy than might affect a detached observer relating the same experience in the third person.

In “Soiled Noon,” writing in a world where husbands are primarily paired with wives, Matsukaze indicates that the I-persona is female in the first line of the first tanka (*OB* 137).

my husband
the war criminal—
it was a frozen November
when he committed seppuku
for ‘treason’

The true horror of the protagonist’s situation is revealed as early as the third tanka: “in my slip / my legs spread forcefully / a traitor’s widow / beneath his accuser / ‘bartering’ sex for my life” (*OB* 138). Throughout this 34-tanka

sequence, violence is expressed without embellishment: “lips cracked . . . swollen / earlier he slapped me / again / he moves in me / like aged fury” (*OB* 142). The emotional elements that constitute this story could not be told as strongly in the third person.

Another interesting aspect of Matsukaze’s literary armamentarium is the use of many voices, a polyphony of different I-personas interspersed in multiple narratives within a single sequence. The title poem of *Black Genji*, 27 two-line tanka, is a prime example. Details in the 4th couplet suggests the poet’s alter-ego (*BG* 123):

it’s just turning midnight—i keep making
tanka
in between settling the day’s financial accounts

Several pages later, however, a woman appears: “your warm hands cupping my breasts” precedes her coyly euphemistic “you lift my hips to drink from this sun cup” (*BG* 126). The female “I” reminds readers of her presence several stanzas later, “beneath red lights over the deserted pier / this cold lonely feeling as you lift up my dress” (*BG* 127). This is the second, immediate appearance of “red lights[.]” If most readers think of a red-light district, within a tanka sequence it could have another origin as well. Earlier, on the same page, the poet’s alter-ego is “thrilled” by a gift, “a wonderful book of contemporary tanka to read” (*BG* 127). Are the “red lights” allusions, then, to Mokichi Saitō’s collection of that name. Would Mokichi’s tanka be “contemporary” enough? Or does the wink to “contemporary tanka” occur earlier in the sequence, with “a long rainy season” (*BG* 126).

Whatever is behind “red lights,” at this point the narrative moves from the “book of contemporary tanka” to two transition units that smoothly leave the poet’s alter-ego before reintroducing the female persona. These couplets include several changes of locale—dark stairs, a bar, and a corner where stories and a cigarette are shared “beneath the red lights in this city” (*BG* 127). As in the case of many sequences nowadays, the experiences and epiphanies move through many venues, from bed to coffee shop to

“some dark corner alley”; from “running through Philadelphia streets” at the beginning (*BG* 123) to materializing “back in Houston and your home” half-way through (*BG* 126). All these discursive leaps might be unsettling for some readers who need groundedness, but others will marvel at the energy. As well, within and between phrases, Matsukaze composes the individual units of his poem with those deft juxtapositions that are tanka’s strongest quality.

one of those nights of wind blowing through
trees
lying in your bed consumed with your scent
(*BG* 123)

we all come from water—
the blood of my ancestors rings loud in my
veins (*BG* 126)

The sum of the parts is more than the whole. Tanka (and haiku) poets wanting acceptance within the realm of mainstream poetry can look to composing similar sequences using tanka’s strength of phrasing within whatever stanzaic units they choose—although there are issues with longer lines.

Matsukaze’s couplets, tercets and quatrains work well on the page, however one-line tanka, as done in Japanese, can be problematic in English. Certainly, the idea of the monostich tanka is a good one. For example, a reader could engage with a squinting modifier, or fluidly shift emphasis from word to word, depending on where a phrase break feels right. The problem for a monostich is the width of the printed page. Even though these two books are 8¼” wide, not all one-line units fit. And to add further impracticalities, the entity in which you read one of these monostichs will force the line to break unpredictably.

Consider this tanka from “Darkness in a Peony”: “in spring, anticipating the hat, light clothing, and Cuban cigars of my grandfather—a wild wind will be my legacy” (*OB* 97). There are twenty words, thirty-one syllables. The width of the book has the line break quite clumsily between “a” and “wild[.]” If I present the tanka

here, as a block quotation, the column width used in the *Atlas Poetica* you are now reading will break the line as soon as necessary, and probably twice. And as I write this now, I cannot predict where.

in spring, anticipating the hat, light clothing,
and Cuban cigars of my grandfather—a wild
wind will be my legacy

Above, I’ve italicized “here.” The deictic referent for “here” changes according to the physical location of the text. My “here” is the monitor as I write this review. Those of you reading the electronic edition of *Atlas Poetica* can vary where lines will break by changing the font size, the number of columns to display, and the width of the viewing window. Readers of the *October Blues* e-book would experience similar variations. The upshot of the single-line tanka experiment in English is to yield haphazard breaks imposed by fonts and margins, and not to produce the desired, floating phrase boundaries open to different readers’ different interpretations and emphases.

Another quibble I have with these two collections lies in the very breadth of their numbers. *October Blues* contains thirteen sequences varying in length from 7 to 80 tanka, for a total of 482 individual tanka. *Black Genji* has nineteen sequences of 3 to 86 tanka, for a total of 550 individual tanka. All of these sequences are good, but those that are exceptional are lost in the verbiage. My conclusion, as you will see, reassesses how we think about tanka sequences, and in a way, can serve to resolve this issue.

We live in a transition period where print is competing with pixels. Because of this, I feel that print might better compete by focusing on those aspects that e-versions cannot replicate—specifically the feel of pages, and all the white space possible around individual “stanzaic” elements (for a tanka in a sequence represents a stanza). Surely setting only a few sequences into a physical book would give each tanka its due weight. First up, I would propose one of my favorites, “White Peach Hotness” from *October Blues*, a gathering of 77 three- and four-line tanka. When I starting reading through, I had

check marks on every page, and finally the note,
“all are wonderful.”

on the ground, these shoes
stepping on a cherry petal shell—
tongue-tied meeting him for the first time (OB
99)

there’s no talking after you arrive
only stripping off clothing before
folding into whitening skies (OB 105)

sitting against a sunny wall—
grandma’s potted freesias
seem to still carry her scars (OB 110)

There are so many possible examples, and as many moments that would call out for physical space to enhance their dreaming room. With perhaps two or three sequences, such a book in our home libraries would be one to which we return, again and again. Wanting more by a same poet can always send us to the “complete” electronic version.

But then again, if we were to consider these sequences themselves as the poems—thirteen poems, nineteen poems—the length is not unusual. Setting aside my personal preference for less, and returning to what Matsukaze’s books actually are, I dare to ask, but are these tanka? And I effectively dodge the question in replying, why would that matter? Whether composed of tanka or of stanzaic units fully inhabited by the essence of tanka, Matsukaze’s sequences in *October Blues* and *Black Genji* are in and of themselves interesting, well-written, and overall, strong, engaging poems.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Atlas Poetica will publish short announcements in any language up to 300 words in length on a space available basis. Announcements may be edited for brevity, clarity, grammar, or any other reason. Send announcements in the body of an email to: AtlasPoetica@gmail.com—do not send attachments.

Cherita 6 Published

Dear Kei,

and so we danced and somewhere a carousel [two volumes] the sixth edition of *the cherita : your storybook journal* has launched.

This is the last edition edited by Larry Kimmel as he bows out of *the cherita* as co-editor. Larry has collated two volumes for your enjoyment.

In *and so we danced* you will find 45 new cherita by 26 poets from USA, England, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. *somewhere a carousel* brings you 45 fresh cherita by 29 poets from USA, England, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ghana, Trinidad and India. Altogether 90 cherita by 34 poets from nine countries.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Larry Kimmel again for the three editions he has helped to launch of the cherita, and for his invaluable help as co-editor, supporter, a patient listener but more importantly for his loyal friendship. I will miss him by my side.

The deadline for #8 is 31 December 2017 and 31 January 2019 for #9.

A GENTLE REMINDER

Once we notify you that we have accepted your poems or artwork for publication, either in the online journal or print journal, please do not share or submit your work elsewhere until we

have published your work, or the editor will withdraw your work from publication. We also ask that you refrain from republishing your work in any medium for 90 days from publication in *the cherita: your storybook journal*. Thanks.

Yours,

ai li

editor

the cherita

www.thecherita.com

Me Too Seeks Submissions, Deadline 15 February 2018

Dear readers,

As many of you may already know, the great Alexis Rotella is putting together a groundbreaking new anthology of poetry titled “Me Too” and is seeking haiku [and tanka] and its related forms on the theme of sexual harassment. We expect this collection to be one of the most empowering and socially aware books of short form poetry ever published, so don’t miss your chance to share your stories on a subject that has remained in the shadows for all too long. We are honored that Alexis has asked us to publish this project through our new publishing house Misfitbooks.

For full details on how to submit: <https://alexisrotella.wordpress.com/2017/10/17/me-too-anthology-call-for-poems/>

All the best,

Chase and Lori

Cirrus 8 Published

dear editors of tanka journals and anthologies,

we are pleased to announce that the 8th issue of *Cirrus, tankas de nos jours* has been posted. Although most of you don’t speak French, we hope you can enjoy the visuals as much as do our contributors.

http://www.cirrustanka.com/issues/8_Cirrus_automne_2017.pdf

wishing you all many happy tomorrows,
Maxianne
for the *Cirrus* team

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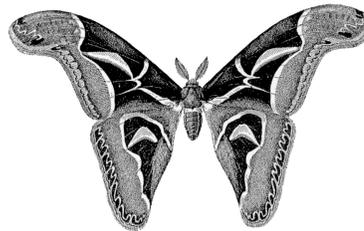
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Atlas Poetica
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Editorial Biography

M. Kei is the editor of *Atlas Poetica* and was the editor-in-chief of *Take Five : Best Contemporary Tanka*. He is a tall ship sailor in real life and has published nautical novels featuring a gay protagonist, *Pirates of the Narrow Seas*. His most recent poetry collection is *January, A Tanka Diary*.



Our 'butterfly' is actually an Atlas moth (*Attacus atlas*), the largest butterfly / moth in the world. It comes from the tropical regions of Asia. Image from the 1921 *Les insectes agricoles d'époque*.

Errata

Poet Bill Albert's name was misspelled in ATPO 30 as 'Alpert.' The correct spelling is Albert. We apologize for the error.

Publications by Keibooks

Anthologies

Neon Graffiti : Tanka of Urban Life

Bright Stars, An Organic Tanka Anthology (Vols. 1–7)

Take Five : Best Contemporary Tanka (Vol. 4)

Fire Pearls (Vols. 1–2) : Short Masterpieces of the Heart

Tanka Collections

Black Genji and Other Contemporary Tanka,
by Matsukaze

October Blues and Other Contemporary Tanka,
by Matsukaze

Warp and Weft, Tanka Threads, by Debbie Strange

flowers to the torch : American Tanka Prose, by peter fiore

on the cusp encore, a year of tanka, by Joy McCall
fieldgates, tanka sequences, by Joy McCall
on the cusp, a year of tanka, by Joy McCall
rising mist, fieldstones, by Joy McCall
hedgerows, tanka pentaptychs, by Joy McCall
circling smoke, scattered bones, by Joy McCall

Tanka Left Behind 1968 : Tanka from the Notebooks of
Sanford Goldstein, by Sanford Goldstein
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Pirates of the Narrow Seas 3 : Iron Men
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 4 : Heart of Oak

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