

ATLAS
POETICA
A Journal of World Tanka

Number 36

M. Kei, editor
Grunge, editorial assistant
Kira Nash, technical assistant

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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 We do not publish haiku, except as incidental to a tanka collage or other mixed-form work.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.

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A Long Winter

It has been a long winter. My health problems continue, but I was able to avoid a trip to the hospital. New medications, new treatments, new diagnoses . . . We think we discovered the underlying cause for the repeated illnesses. I am slowly recovering. In the meantime, I continue to work on *Atlas Poetica* and other projects, albeit more slowly than before.

Donations have continued to come to Keibooks at PayPal, and I am grateful for the support. That so many people have volunteered their support of the poetic mission of Keibooks and *Atlas Poetica* is moving. It means a lot when the technical challenges combine with the health problems to complicate my literary life.

Your donations enabled me to purchase a much needed new keyboard and office supplies, and are funding the redesign of the website. It is a major undertaking to redo the website because the software running it is so very old, but once completed, it should load much faster, as well as being accessible via cell phone.

I thank Denis Garrison, Carol Raisfeld, Michael H. Lester, Joy McCall, Autumn Noelle Hall, John S. Gilbertson, Charles Harmon, and Peter Fiore for their donations, on top of the donations acknowledged in the last issue.

The challenges continue. Brexit uncertainty is impacting the website. Kira Nash, our technical assistant, who formerly lived in France, is now moving to Italy. We wish her the best in her new location. In good news, our friends in India have finally been able to find a way to purchase ATPO in spite of the reduced international support of the technical changes. When you edit an international journal, events everywhere in the world have an immediate effect.

Contributions representing sixteen countries span the globe and the range of human expression and tanka innovation. Tanka are accompanied by kyoka, cherita, and sedoka, with sequences, tanka prose, and responsive tanka side by side with more experimental works. Also in this issue are articles reflecting the personal experience of poets in writing tanka. Peter Fiore

reflects on miniatures and the delicacy of the tanka moment, while Tanja Trček harnesses the power of tanka's specificity to convey the horrors of war.

In 'Unpoetry,' I reflect upon the value of accepting challenges to find something of value in the most mundane of objects and express it with the luminous power of tanka. Mary Ellen Gambutti offers a *zuihitsu* that combines *sedoka* with multiple kinds of prose, including transcripts, building on Charles Tarlton's previous works of tanka prose written as movie scripts. Autumn Noelle Hall offers us a tanka mandala that rearranges five tanka into a matrix of meaning which combines found tanka from the news with her original expressions to create a gestalt that can be read in many directions. The center tanka serves as the linchpin that holds it all together.

The increasing complexity of the techniques and tools brought to tanka and its literature capitalize on the multivalency that is an innate quality of tanka: the ability of tanka to imply more than they say links with various forms and formats, harnessing their ability to express different kinds of content in different ways in one harmonious whole. Yet the craftsmanship of tanka should not blind us to the role of intuition. Several items, some quite long, read like stream-of-consciousness works of the Beat period, but carry the discipline of a tanka mind.

Matsukaze carries the traditional, intuitive lightness of tanka into an extensive collection of *sedoka*. Some of these read like extremely short tanka prose pieces, while others make use of parallelism that is not easily accomplished in tanka. Previously, *cherita* is the six-line form that has carried tanka's expansion, but perhaps *sedoka* is finally finding its place.

~K~

M. Kei
Editor, Atlas Poetica

Cover image courtesy of Earth Observatory, NASA.
Ardar, Algeria. <<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?>>

spring

A. A. Marcoff

light mist on the air and a brightening sun on the verge of morning, breaking through the silence of trees, touching the running waters of this lucid river that flows on and on towards the sea: this really must be spring now, sprung as it is upon the branches of blackthorn trees, the coming of bud and blossom that is white as the advent of the sun and its collaboration with the day . . .

breaking
the confines
of the mist
sunrise
in a land of light

these grasses have a real spring to their stalks —and we could sing of spring now as though we are ourselves flowing with morning and light: this is pure being, translucent and fulfilling, our song lifted towards the sky, the clouds a passing of moments that dance before the coming sun: yes, the sun is truly rising in our joy, and we are here, a white blaze of blossom over the river, our thoughts like blossoms of the mind: there is a streaming of light and a dance of water and shadow, as ducks fly overhead with sudden urgency . . .

walking to a light mist
we follow the river
into spring

our river is a slow green and goes with these swans of the sun, birdsong intense: it's all infused with the sweet song of a robin, its red breast like sunrise itself, as it breathes and sings of being alive . . .

and I heard
the robin
before I saw him:
this is the sound
of the sun rising

it is a wonder to be here, by this river, as things become a kind of knowledge, burgeoning and green: our song is the song that drives us — it is immediate: a heron is on the pond, a grey deliberation, concentrating on its prey, and daffodils scatter like gold through a dream: the grass is covered with dew as it receives the day, glimmering with time itself — and then comes crow: there is a latent knowledge in the wings of birds — they build their nests: daffodils have come into their own, delicate and gold with the light of petal: no-one has ever seen all this quite as it is now, because this is the present moment in the innovation of the world, and it goes like water right through, and on into the flowing sun: birds flit about singing like oracles: there is a meadow here where we walk — it could be Monet, or the canvas of the sun: and we must sing, and we must sing, as brimstone butterflies move among us, touching us in auras of light and wing . . .

it is
a butterfly silence
within which
a whole world moves
on the wing

and we too are floating with dream, we are celebrants of lilting breezes: and we become what we are before the white countenance of blackthorn, its blossom sprung and fragile in the morning, we ourselves alive in this flourish or dispensation, our eyes tending green, or violet: sparrows peck and drift along the ground, within this weather: a hillside appears, a plantation of elderflower bushes, and time is a moment grown from seed: we are walking to the farm across the Mole Valley, along the river first, and then across the fields, where butterflies flit through longer grasses . . .

fragrance
of the spring breezes
echo
of
butterfly wings

and the whole earth seems fresh now and sudden and radiant with morning: this is our emotion, our daffodil light: Solzhenitsyn spoke about being amongst shadows, how these vanish, so long as we can stand and breathe beneath an apple-tree in blossom, so we may survive a little longer: and we are alive here in the living of the spring, the sky above white and blue, the blossom everywhere a scattered architecture of light and petal and air: there are wagtails by the shallows on the bare riverbed, darting among stones, the sound of geese in a meadow nearby, and horses standing in an open field glistening with silence, and willows flow greener and greener, falling to the green river that is their echo, white violets here now and a long line of poplars halfway across the valley, the valley open and slow with distance: the sun seems its own raw concordance of nature, the land a streaming and a glow and an essence, a light that strikes the hills like thought: at the farm, chickens run for food, and geese, even crows, and sheep bleat upon the hill — the coming of lambs to be born in time, and we sit near a flint-stone wall, near barn and herb-garden and the playground where children play, and all of this encompassed in the sun: and at the farm, I taste an apple, crunchy and rounded with its sharp tang, and a taste of stilton, and onion, and chutney and grapes, and all that solid farmhouse bread, and then sipping tea, black, strong, a sipping of the essence of the sun: we can see a whole monumental landscape of time and breath . . .

a vision of hills
the consecration
of the sun —
letting go
of the butterfly

celandines with a yellow mystery here and there along the way, and Yoshino cherry-trees,

their buds packed with new horizons, of colour and luminosity, a haze over the vast valley beyond, at a distance where sounds are faint, and daffodils seem like little suns in their own light and petal: we pass through slender woodland — thrilling with bird life, and song . . .

lost and forgotten
amongst the grasses
a kettle
turns
slowly wild

and we pass hedgerows in the breeze, we see a church — old and visionary in stone, and faraway — and trees rising up over the land in rugged displays that foreshadow new worlds: this is our land, this is the land in which we joy and hope and walk now, real as dreaming, touched today by a violet dawn, as the river flows on into earth and mind, and inasmuch as we have meaning, we are speaking in the language of the sun . . .

~Leatherhead, in the Mole Valley, England

A A Marcoff — Tony is an Anglo-Russian poet, born in Iran, and has lived in Africa, France, Iran and Japan. He has been a university library assistant, a teacher, and has been in charge of poetry and creative writing in a large psychiatric hospital. A main-stream poet as well as a tanka poet, he has been widely published in journals such as 'Poetry Review'. He now lives near the beautiful River Mole.

Alexis Rotella

A cupboard filled
with jellies and jams
from people
whose names
I don't remember

Mother in her coffin
the mortician's wife
baking on the floor above
the smell
of hot cross buns

He tells her
he took a tramp
in the woods
and his jealous wife
thinks the worst

In a tea-length
black dress
netting over
her swollen eyes
young widow

~Arnold, Maryland, USA

Alexis Rotella is an award-winning poet and mobile artist. In 2018 she edited and curated Unsealing Our Secrets, MeToo experiences from women and men written in Japanese poetry forms in English. In 2007 Rotella was awarded the Kusamakura Haiku Grand Prize as well as winning second place. In 2018 her haiku was awarded second place . . . "Mountain town / old people watch the wind / carve stone."

Star Pupil

Amelia Fielden

*a school field
dotted with wild yellow daisies
and with students
in grey green white uniforms,
eating sandwich lunches*

Helen was bright. Very bright. All her teachers acknowledged it. But for one in particular, she shone. Five years I sat beside Helen in our French classes, witnessing as her delight and prowess in the language bonded a star pupil to a dedicated instructor.

In those days foreign travel from Australia, even for study, was prohibitively expensive. And so dear Mrs. R, school teacher, wife, and mother, had never been to France. She spoke of it to us as a dream, perhaps to be fulfilled on her retirement.

When Helen topped the state in French in the Higher School Certificate examinations, and subsequently won a scholarship to the Sorbonne in Paris, Mrs.R was over the moon, I heard.

During the many years which followed, the star pupil — who became head of modern languages at a prestigious institution in another city — and her old high school teacher, kept in regular and fond contact.

At the funeral for Mrs. R, her daughter snubbed Helen.

*is blood always
more binding than passion —
at New Year
my thoughts spiral back
over half a century*

~Canberra, Australia

Amelia Fielden is a professional translator of Japanese literature and a keen writer of tanka and associated forms, in English. Her latest published collection is 'These Purple Years' (Giminderra Press, 2018).

Deep Water

Anne Benjamin & Jan Foster

sunset
settles over the harbour
in a briny glow
fishermen turn their boats
seeking deeper water

*man-made
electronic light show
paints the town
. . . aurora australis
fills the southern sky*

on the promenade
bare-legged teenage girls
sashay in the dusk —
evening star Venus
flickers in their eyes

*splayed feet skidding
a squadron of pelicans
touches down
ruffled feathers settling
our awkward moment passes*

in the bay
dolphins
leap and frolic
. . . submerging
me in your ocean

*drifting
along with your tide
I wonder
if I will ever find
my way back*

~Australia

Anne Benjamin writes poetry, fiction and non-fiction that has appeared in international publications. In 2016, she edited Gemstones, a collection of tanka sequences written in collaboration with poets from Canada, UK, New Zealand and Australia, and published by Skylark. The same year, her memoir, of living in India, Saffron and Silk, was also published. Anne lives in Sydney, Australia.

Jan Foster, a former English teacher, lives in Geelong, Australia. Her tanka, tanka prose, haiku, haibun and responsive sequences have been published in journals in Japan, USA, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and Australia, as well as online. She is the founder of the Bottlebrush Tanka Group (Sydney) and a member of the Phoenix tanka group (Geelong). Her favourite things, apart from writing tanka, are a good book to read and a cryptic crossword to conquer.

Autumn Noelle Hall

grey and dripping
mid-day hangs in gauzy rags
from the ridge-line
late October airs
her dirty laundry

trojan piñata
peers over the border wall —
comic relief
or a hollow warning
of the serves-us-right to come?

leafing through
my stack-o-tanka-journals
like Picasso
I find many artists turning
the sun into a yellow spot

if joy
is your carrot
perhaps
I am
your stick

~Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

Group Therapy

Autumn Noelle Hall

“A Flash Flood Warning has been issued. All residents in your housing area have been ordered to evacuate. You’ll only have time to gather three items from your home. Please collect them now and proceed to the evacuation boats in an orderly fashion.”

I recognize the professor’s exercise is intended to teach us about our own priorities — an important objective in a psychology class, where we are studying to counsel others. She requires we write down our choices, presumably so that we can’t cheat or change our minds about them post-evac. Once the boats are loaded and safe passage is underway, we are called to share our lists with one another.

“I brought my Bible, the family photo album, and my great grandma’s silver,” one student shares.

Another volunteers, “An electric guitar, my Air Jordans, and a Swiss Army knife.”

One by one, treasured objects, odd necessities and the near-ubiquitous cell phones are called out. Then it is my turn.

“I brought my husband and our two children.”

Silence. A few eyeball rolls. And a superior smirk from the professor, who now informs us, “The boats are overloaded and in danger of sinking . . .” then orders us to, “Throw one of the items overboard.”

Everyone looks at me.

“I get out of the boat.”

The professor protests, as this was not part of her planned curriculum. I assure her I am an excellent swimmer. With a snort, she demands we part with a second possession. Instruments, Holy Books and high tops disappear overboard into the drink. It’s daggers as she dares me to choose between my children.

“My husband gets out of the boat.”

Now the whole class is in an uproar, challenging me to defend what seemed to me right and obvious choices. But I’ve Aced enough psych prereqs by now to be familiar with projection.

The professor interrupts the fracas with the reveal that she faced this situation in her real life. We all fall quiet, eager to learn what this 60-something Doctorate-holding woman chose to save from her memory-filled childhood home.

the wink
of her AA pin
as she admits
she grabbed the handle
of Wild Turkey under the sink

~Aurora, Colorado, USA

Allan Nairn: The U. S. Is Facing Incipient Domestic Fascism, But Rightist Revolution Can Be Stopped

Autumn Noelle Hall

*“You have to . . .
vote in the warmongers
who will preserve democracy
to block the warmongers
who would abolish it . . .” **

unbelievable!
I think to myself again
as I listen
wondering whether Nairn
is listening to himself

when will we learn
there is no “lesser evil”
both devils dance
in Brooks Brothers suits
all the way to Wall Street

the left wing
and the right wing lift the same
predatory bird . . .
Deng Xiaoping’s black and white cats
catching the mice that we are

*you can’t really say
that you were working toward
an anti-fascist goal
if you’re not mobilizing
for the Democrats right now.” **

~Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

** Italicized/quoted material from: https://www.democracynow.org/2018/11/1/allan_nairn_the_us_is_facing*

The historically autobiographical form of tanka is a ready-made vessel for holding what Autumn Noelle Hall views as the sacred truth of her authentic experience. Her writing is a fight against rising political and planetary tides to capture crises of concern and the people and places she loves. She wonders why, when time is of the essence for us all, any poet would choose tanka as a vehicle for the artifice of make-believe.

Points of Views

Barun Saha

hunted
by suicidal thoughts
for some years now
I keep looking at those heights
I never managed to scale

I keep staring
through the fifth floor's wide window
at those speeding lights
that carry me
from a cold bed to a cold desk

~Bangalore, India

November

Barun Saha

The universe weaved a magical mist
shrouding the small sleepy village. Along the
narrow road, a milk-white horse drove a grand
hearse. When it reached the crossroad, a
weathered black horse-cart passed by dragging a
shape that once sheltered love.

our love
never shared space & time
until in earth
we became
the earth itself

** Prose inspired by a scene from the movie, November.*

~Bangalore, India

Cherita

Barun Saha

instability

of a newly installed table
I rock back and forth

to those lives without
space
even for a single one

~Bangalore, India

Barun Saha

minds disconnected
bodies parted ways too
after breakup sex
I envy the moon
returning to the sky again

~Kharagpur, India

fall
has touched a feather
of a pigeon
I still remember the nest
built with my child

~Bangalore, India

Barun Saha is a researcher and poet from Durgapur, India. He primarily writes tanka and haiku. His poems are published in Atlas Poetica, Bliithe Spirit, NeverEnding Story, The Bamboo Hut, and Wales Haiku Journal. Visit <<https://goo.gl/cnTY5y>> for his poems and <<http://barunsaha.me>> for more information about Barun.

Sedoka

Bruce England

Were you good at it?
some signs, you might notice,
a softness in her body
slight open-lip smiles
lingering hugs and embraces
her fingers on your penis

In Mainz, Germany,
two men too drunk to explain
were found hopelessly locked up,
with a mannequin
dressed as a knight, in a large
remote-controlled car

The (world) tree of life,
Buddha (once) sat in its shade
(and) Jesus hung in its limbs,
now (it stands) empty
we need a next, (new) someone
for/(to make) another (best) attempt

~California, USA

Bruce England

The car stopped
in a field of golden grass
through the windshield
I stood on the blue hood
clouds moving beneath my feet

What is so damn
creepy about a rabbit
head on a man,
wearing a suit, and why
does it feel so European?

Waking up
in the morning
I remember
some taxi driver said
you wanna get home tonight?

She finally
realized how she could
really hurt him
she threw away
his TV remote

You could see now
he's sucking the ugliness
out of her
putting tenderness
into her limbs

We flirt
but we know
we will
not be lovers
in this world

I checked the scabs
on my forehead
some now falling off
frozen death to you
pre-cancerous cells

In the book of life
you may want to peek
at the end, but
it's just darkness and
the shoveling of dirt

~California, USA

Bruce England lives in Santa Clara and works in San Jose, California as a public librarian. Retirement is coming in late 2018. As he once wrote: You worked hard / all your life / on your résumé / now what would someone / say for your eulogy? (Bright Stars: An Organic Tanka Anthology, Volume 5. 2014).

Eternity to Eternity

Carol Raisfeld

much of life passes
without our being in it
so many people
whose lives I've not entered
nor they mine

the questions
about voids in my life
on a form
not single, not divorced,
not married, just widowed

calls
of a raven through
graying sky
my arthritis tells me
of a distant storm

going to bed
I dream once again
wanting
to wake in this world
at least one more day

how can I
make myself irreplaceable
before I die?
the cherry blossoms
return each year

if I left this place
would there be a trace
of my soul
to come back to
in another life?

~Atlantic Beach, New York, USA

Morning Curves Rhyming Kyoka Sequence

Carol Raisfeld

I press myself
against the glass hoping
that he'll see
enticing curves of this and that
arousing him for me

the door
is open just a bit, enough
for me to call
an invitation to this man
who seems to want it all

I feel his hands
caress my neck he draws
me to his side
he rubs my body tenderly
his hands press and glide

the steamy heat
emanates from bodies
so aligned
I find myself oh so wet
and very much entwined

then he takes
that one last kiss before
we say goodbye
I know it's time to let him go
with a smile, then a sigh

I see him
walking out the door checking
on the hour
leaving me to think about
our lovely morning shower

~Los Angeles, California, USA

8-Ball, Corner Pocket

Carol Raisfeld

My friend frequents a place where she has an afternoon snack and relaxes. A place where no one interrupts her thoughts to talk about “needing to write”. Out and about on a warm, humid day, she suggests we stop there for a cool drink. I feel quite comfortable in the cool air of the pool hall as we chat over her gin & tonic, and my ginger ale. I enjoy the ambiance without the usual battery of talkative waiters named Oliver —just chain-smoking waitresses and patrons who don’t care who we are.

daily bread
picked up at the bakery
for dinners
at work early, she calls
to check on the hubby

On the big-screen TV a football game in the third quarter, the sound softer than I would expect. Something exciting must have happened, as an energy spark seems to bounce from face to face in a joyful link of circuitry. Suddenly, some unexplained burps envelop the tattooed, tee-shirted viewers.

Perhaps the pool hall is an arena of Spartan hardness in which one must prove oneself. They exchange their manhood weekend outings between hitting the eight ball and slugs of beer. As we walk out the door, I hear the never-ending call of “rack ‘em up”, “these sticks are straight and have nice tips” and the crack of balls breaking.

on a hot day
so many things to do
cat in the tree
shopping for groceries
and mowing the lawn

~New York, USA

A Rented Room

Carol Raisfeld

“So you write, what do you write?” The afternoon sun poured in through the long windows, washing the beige tones of the couch with a warm pink. I told her I write articles and poetry. “You must show them to me, I’m sure they’re very good, bring them to dinner.” How do I tell her she couldn’t possibly know whether I can write or not. We only met two hours ago.

with my door closed
reading the rejections
I pour
another glass of wine
in the dim room

“I don’t want to talk about my work,” I heard myself say to her, “It’s not something anyone else can be involved in. You have to do it alone, or it’s not yours.” And this I know bone-deep, that sometimes there’s no alternative to the panic and fear. It’s the panic and fear and the isolation that are the writing. At times desperation creates the necessity to write. I wouldn’t swap the final satisfaction of a finished piece for easy comfort.

it never ends
all the nights spent
with a friend
listening to the rewrite
of her greatest novel

As the clock ticked on, I sensed she didn’t want to be alone. Reminiscing about her life, in a voice so vague she could have been talking decades or moments in time. I felt as if one of us wasn’t in the room. She spoke more to herself than to me.

some houses
for all their elegance
I know
are empty and cold
and give off a chill

The next afternoon, I said goodbye and sorry
I couldn't stay. She smiled. "We must meet again
soon. I would very much like to read your work."
But I was already closing the door behind me.

~New York, USA

The Sculptor

Carol Raisfeld

Shadows of hands, so graceful in my tilted
world. I've always wanted to be the chisel, not the
statue, because when you chip away at me my
resistance weakens. Surrendering all I have to
give, as the passion mounts, I wonder if this is
really happening. Is it a complicated fantasy, or
me helplessly succumbing to the madness of
love?

in a dream
so unbelievably intense
the night hot—
blossoms wet with dew
touch one another

~New York, USA

Van Gogh Sky

Carol Raisfeld

we hear
cicadas in the trees
in Provence
wavy lines of lavender
stretch to the horizon

off the beaten path
surrounding sunflower fields
a perfect place
for a tandem-bike-ride
after a hug and a kiss

in the shade
birds singing overhead
you hold me
in the woven hammock
near a flowing stream

a winding road
it's red-roofed villas tucked
beside tall willows
we stroll hand in hand
on cobblestone lanes

enjoying
Monet's garden of flowers
the sweetness
of your smile in the sun
will be in my dreams

kayaking
in the Sorgue river
we floated
past the village walls
as church bells tolled

late afternoon
we find an unmarked café
on a narrow street
the French wine with lunch
fuels our romantic fantasies

wanting
your body against mine
that evening
in the fields of summer
under a Van Gogh sky

the last day in Paris
my senses overwhelmed
by you
that night you show me
the deepest way to love

~France

Carol Raisfeld lives in Atlantic Beach, a barrier island close to New York City. Her hobbies include sailing, chess, sculpting, painting and boxing. She holds US and foreign design patents in interactive soft toy design. Her poetry, art and photography appear worldwide in print.

Kyoka

Charles Harmon

civilization
a thin veneer
dissolvable
in blood, sweat, tears
and alcohol

I'll Depend on you
when I'm a hundred and two
to change my diaper
and Honey, I'll change you —
have wheelchair races, too!

Goddamned Murphy's Law
gotta go — toilet's blocked
gotta eat — diner locked
gotta have it — empty bar
gotta go home — police car . . .

buttering him up
before the kill, Medusa
face still beautiful
smiles with anticipation
unwinding her turban

in my next life
I will return as a
mathematician
musician, or magician —
is there any difference?

homeless guy
in a Superman T-shirt
I give him a buck
so I can tell my friends
I helped save Superman!

he holds up
seven missing fingers
mumbles “Korea”
I give him an elbow bump
with what’s left of my arm

four funerals
and a wedding
hope the happy couple
have lots of
healthy kids

a jolt of coffee
a jolt of earthquake
a jolt of whiskey
a jolt of news
we live in jolting times . . .

proof that God
can make a mistake
mosquitos
flies, the rattlesnake
but cockroaches take the cake!

open-mindedly
in exotic foreign cities
sampling street cuisine . . .
open-boweledly
I pay the price, twice

king for a day
enthroned in a dentist’s chair
I get a new crown
good for the rest of my life
or until I abdicate

~Los Angeles, California, USA

*Charles Harmon, science teacher, lives and works in Los Angeles,
California and enjoys cooking for his wife and three children. Charles
has spent more than five years overseas in over sixty countries traveling,
travailing . . .*

Chen-ou Liu

footsteps fading
down the dimly lit hallway
of a psych ward
my niece’s room of her own
shrinks to black and white

my niece
curls into some dark space
in her mind
the wall of silence
becoming tall and thick

~Taipei, Taiwan

first gay
marriage in his family
the fragrance
of a cedar closet
his parents bought for him

~Toronto, Ontario, Canada

autumn deepens
with a wisp of snow
on the window . . .
these gray-haired years I wake
alone with my dog

my old dog
follows me from room to room
ten years of life
as an immigrant
packed into fifteen boxes

ten years
under the same roof
between us
this invisible wall
of white lies

alone
as the scent of croissants
lingers
sunlight climbing
toward our wedding photos

my dog, me
and the drunken shadow . . .
as the night falls
her absence deepens
the silence between us

a ghost moon
in the midnight sky
one loud creak
after another coming
from the foreclosed house

the hum
of far-off traffic
I lie in bed
thinking how to spend
my first day out of work

watching sunlight
crawl up the whitewashed wall . . .
Time has a logic
of its own
in the waiting room

how many ways
of coming face to face
with loneliness?
a room of books filled
with dead voices

~Ajax, Ontario, Canada

Nothing New under the Sun

Chen-ou Liu

Sunlight slants in through the study window, reaching the front page of today's newspaper on my coffee-stained desk. The headline story details the latest Auditor General's report. His report states that the socio-economic gap on reserves hasn't improved in the last two decades, and the gap in high-school graduation rates has actually widened.

According to the reporter, things got a little nasty Monday afternoon at the Indigenous Affairs meeting as MPs grilled civil servants over the gap. One MP even warned, "heads need to roll if bureaucrats don't shape up on First Nations education." His warning becomes today's eye-catching headline.

sixth graders
in the windowless classroom
on the reserve
a new teacher talks about
thinking outside the box

~Attawapiskat First Nation, Ontario, Canada

*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.*

Dave Read

3 a.m.
unable to sleep
I fumble
through the darkness
of my mind

reading outside
by the light
of my iPad
a hundred
backyard moths

unable
to dump his
loneliness
the man in
the pick-up truck

walking
through the morning
fog
your ghost returns
you to me

sipping lemon tea
this grey September day
the promise
of sunshine
empties with my cup

from under
the shade of
a cowboy hat
he shoots a crow
with his finger

smog filters
the yellow
from the sun
I kick a piece
of someone else's trash

a bike path
skirts the edge
of the city—
wildflowers:
pedal by petal

after
a brief affair
with the actress
I shut
my browser down

last night's rain
pools around the gutter—
I remain
unable to clear
these murky thoughts

more ads than music
I turn off the radio
listen
to the whistle
of the wind outside

all those plans
I'd made for my life—
the light
of a dead star
burning at night

drifting in
the cool September
wind
the clouds of
a jogger's breath

bent
beneath the early
snow
yesterday's
sunflower

the breadth
of starlight crossing
time —
we count our days
on our fingers

ghosting
the boy he used
to be
my friend with thin
grey hair

havin' faith
ain't the same
as believin' —
a truck spins gravel
in the church parking lot

that mythical
moment of
enlightenment —
how soft
my Buddha belly

a tap
on my shoulder
while I pray
my kid requests
a cookie

the hail that
softens into rain —
slowly
I am learning how
to use my gentle voice

playing
outdoor hoops
at night
the long arc
of the moon

a night owl
calling
who, Who, WHO
left this mess
in my kitchen?!

as quickly
as he blows out
the candles
he spends
his birthday cash

each autumn
day grows shorter
than the last . . .
shadows of the dead
marigolds

not quite gold
these dying leaves
of grass —
how poor we grow
as summer passes

spraying
a plastic plant
with Febreze —
the judge's testimony
doesn't smell right

a sparrow
crosses the cold
grey sky —
the arc of a life
spent alone

last night's drunk
sleeps on a bench—
the gathering
shadows
of crows

another round
of Monopoly
I lose
with grace
this autumn

the brightness
I've overlooked
in autumn—
I add red highlights
to my greying beard

filtering my words
for this conservative
audience
all of the f-bombs
explode in my head

brushing dust
off an old favourite
book
the words of
the young man I was

~*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, Presence, Modern Haiku and Acorn), and anthologies (including old song: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku, 2017).

wintertide

Debbie Strange

glissading down
steep mountainsides . . .
we are horses
with our snowy tails
streaming in the wind

every year
winter casts its spell . . .
like children,
we are bewitched anew
by the signature of snow

~*Vancouver, British Columbia*

the length of night

Debbie Strange

yet again,
sleep eludes me . . .
an owl and I
ponder the eternal
question of identity

insomnia . . .
mice at play
inside
the thin walls
of my dreams

~*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

girlhood

Debbie Strange

we brew tea
from the dark leaves
of *cat's whiskers*
but first, you tickle me
with their stamens

we chase
each other across
cloud shadows,
nothing under our feet
but this prairie sky

we once played
in this tangled garden,
enchanted
by the quiet fireworks
of bergamot and butterflies

~Rosetown, Saskatchewan, Canada

*Debbie Strange (Winnipeg, Manitoba) is a Canadian short form poet, photographer and haiga artist. She is the author of *Warp and Weft: Tanka Threads* (Keibooks 2015) and its sequel, *Three-Part Harmony: Tanka Verses* (Keibooks 2018). Please visit her at <http://www.debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca>.*

*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 Moura lives in a converted factory and works with elders. She has had poetry, flash fiction or photographs published in *The Heron's Nest*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Presence*, *Shamrock*, *Flash*, *Paragraph Planet*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Occlum* and *O:JA&L*. She is currently planning or assembling three manuscripts: a collection of haiku and tanka, a book of longer poems, and a collection of very short stories.*

Neon Eclipse

Elizabeth Howard

This is not a fairy tale. Tillman is real. I have seen the tiny star in his cardboard window. — E. H.

You who perch in your snooty mansion,
aglow with blinking lights,
Santa Claus ditties blaring,
do you know Basil, the hoot owl that roosts
on your right turret when the moon is full?

Do you hear him calling — *who, who?*
He's looking for his friend Tillman
who lived in a rickety hovel
where you've anchored the giant hemlock,
its neon defiling the night

Tillman, fearful of mankind,
lived alone
boarded his windows with cardboard,
a tiny star of candlelight
blinking at the outside world

He ventured forth at night,
joined Basil to watch the stars
shoot rainbow sparks
hither and yon,
their heads bobbing in adoration.

You have razed Tillman's home,
his cardboard star blazing
like a roman candle,
his sleeping pad swirling cinders,
nothing left but soot and sulfur

Your neon has shrouded the stars.
While Basil searches the night
calling *who, who*,
Tillman wanders on a divergent path,
lost in outer darkness.

~Arlington, Tennessee, USA

Elizabeth Moura

i'm missing the dawn
once again
knowing my failing
the old pine
taps my window

I spend my sick day
throwing dirty tissues
all over the floor
the cat spends my sick day
rearranging the house

Jesus gives me a cup
filled with black coffee
behind my eyes
are all the prayers
I haven't had time for

today your mother
didn't know you
I give you my pillow
and curl around you
with my tears

line in the sand
a five-year-old girl
tries to scratch
the number
off her arm

~East Taunton, Massachusetts, USA

there are days like this . . .

Genie Nakano

the weather
has changed to misty grey
summer
held in check and global heat
is swept under cover

that is . . .
until the fires sweep again
strange things
happening to our air, waters, soil
stirring doubts at tea parties

why bear children
in a world that won't
be around
much longer
so the prophets claim

I still have hope
I guess — maybe — who cares
let the future
take care of itself
I'm retired

sirens blow
every hour day and night
heart attack
robbery, murder, rape
play it louder — I'm deaf

waiting
for the aliens to come
and teach us
show us humans
how to live another way

~Gardena, California, USA

Genie Nakano lives in Gardena, CA, where she teaches yoga and dance at the Japanese Cultural Center of Gardena. She has a regular column for the Rafu Shimpo where she shares her tanka and short stories. She has written three books of tanka available on Amazon.Com and can be reached at GenieYogini@Yahoo.Com.

The Major General *

Gerry Jacobson

blooded
at Gallipoli
Captain Bennett
rises to command
a battalion, a brigade

second war . . .
with clipped moustache
and prickly . . .
he defends Singapore
but the Japs break through

taken prisoner . . .
fifteen thousand
Aussies
sent to hell
slaves on the Burma railway

they won't catch me
alive says B . . .
commandeers
a fishing boat
sails away to Sumatra

the Major General
is then flown home . . .
promoted . . .
lives out the war
in Western Australia

some men come back
traumatised, emaciated
there's an enquiry . . .
was it a gallant escape
or did he run away?

~Australia, 1940s

** Later, Lieutenant General Henry Gordon Bennett (1887–1962)*

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

Second Amendment

Grunge

So, I've worked for a gun and pawn shop here in Broward County, and have family and friends in the business. I don't have any 'special insider knowledge' into the Parkland massacre or anything like that, but I wanted to write about some of my more notable experiences down here, concerning the 2nd Amendment and school shootings.

to protest the violence
in parkland
the man who sold cruz
the gun legally is
sent death threats

would-be thief
at the gun store door
thinking no one noticed
the AK-47 he stuffed
down his pants

customer requesting
to examine a pistol
before he buys it—
puts it to his temple
pulls the trigger

the felon could
have bought a gun
privately and legally
if only he hadn't
mentioned his record

15 minutes of fame
for the brave students
falsely accusing "freaks"
of planning a shooting
a month after Columbine

~Florida, USA

Desk Lord

Grunge

fan knocked over
onto the water dish
drenching the tv
the cat is
playing at dominoes

eating kibble
without a care
in the world
he's dry while
i try to mop

reminding myself
i still rule
this house
because my desk is
weiufhwekjdn

~Hollywood, Florida, USA

Tanka Pair

Grunge

once happy
to cry
the catharsis
of not bottling
everything up

now worried
that the bottle
has a hole
through which every
emotion is spilling

~Hollywood, Florida, USA

Grunge

time bomb:
my cat's
culinary palette
far exceeds
his digestive skill

“your dog eats hay!
that's so ridiculous,”
says the owner
of the cat
that loves bean sprouts

we were angry young and poor
but now we're realizing
the anger's turning to depression
and we're not young anymore
but poverty remains the same

running
from the crime scene —
released a baby rat
into the bushes that
i couldn't bear to kill

in mourning
that i
cannot
have a
sky burial

it doesn't matter
if what i write
is good
as long as i get
words on the page

like a
mad dog
i chase down
a moment of
happiness

but when my
jaws snap shut
it's only air
and the fleeting
memory escapes

ibis
with a broken leg
i just wanted to
remember him
and wish him well

cleaning off
old patio chairs
to make the perfect
sunning spot for
someone who is no longer here

searching the sky
for black dots—
the high-flying
vultures that
make me happy

~Hollywood, Florida, USA

Grunge is an Indo-American member of the LGBT community, who specializes in urban tanka. He is currently the editorial assistant for Keibooks, and lives in South Florida with a collection of pet arthropods, an ancient cat, and a pudgy leopard gecko.

Rhyming kyoka

Jackie Chou

my sister's Shih Tzu
won't fit into an igloo
meek like a sheep
boy does he love to sleep
and eat rice with tofu

~California, USA

Cherita

Jackie Chou

after the party

foil balloons dangle
from the ceiling

our friendship
slowly deflates
as we find ourselves

day after day

waiting for him
to drop by

a vagrant dog
barks lugubriously
in the quiet dark

~California, USA

Jackie Chou

ripples
on my red velvet sheet
last night's dream
of riding naked
in a roadster across time

falling notes
of a street musician
I gather each
to write a poem
prompted by jazz

brief blooming
of the night cactus flower
my mother's beauty
restores once again
in a recurring dream

cat licks morning mist
on the windshield
at the group home
neither do I eat
with proper dinnerware

awake in the night
by the sound of rain
your imprint on me
washed away
with every soothing drop

~California, USA

Jackie Chou is a poet residing in sunny Southern California. She sometimes gets her inspirations from common city birds and flowers. Her works have been published in Atlas Poetica, Skylark, Ribbons, the cherita journal, moonbathing, ephemerae, and others.

Under the White Ceiling

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

first time

*in my life
a message of hope*

*to accept
who i am
in your metal mirror*

what a worthy reason
to get nearest to myself
may this transmits
messages from shifting
to meshing in a galaxy
and its suns

the doublings here
are a chance in the mess
to hear myself again
in the crowd smouldering
the remnants
far out of sight

adrenalin is

*adopted for
the aftertaste*

*i find you
to be a guessing game
and you must in the outcome*

~Cartagena, Spain

Honking

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

*watching
your back,
the dew is finished
& worn down
to a full dull red*

promoted by
heaped metal scraps,
you've promised
your second
coming
in a cart-horse,
which roars
the capital,
built with floods,
you push the sky
to a place
beyond the norms
to reclaim the soil
from able miners
to complete
all things
frantic light,
I glance over at him
with no license plate.

~Bilbao, Spain

Midnight, Salt-upon-Street

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

*Late,
walking toward home from the river mouth,
I shorten the distance*

*by allowing something
to happen.*

No ambient light, no running amok.

The street is empty
and the sea roiling,

I keep my amigo closer,
that plan, laid and the deed done,

I catch wide eyes in the flare
and the fear is everything I touch for the fit,
the faithful fever shifts

around into the sea beach
among the gentle murmurs.

~Palma de Mallorca, Spain

A Frame

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

I am mixed up,
My father is a Native American-German,
my mother is a Spanish-Basque-Catalan-
Chinese-Fanti,
I am a few craft hugged to n-dimensions,
available from a corner in the translated world,
on a shoestring.

*In the ditch like in the history,
the skin reflecting the glare
of the looted sun,
I cross from right to left
to start for the other shores.*

Behind the studio where a couple is sacrificing
the future,
the glorious memories are carved and pedestrians
look
thrice at the dummy whose hands are a little
afraid of its
ears, eyes and mouth,
I keep its manhood,
I keep my seven-blood babbling
alarmingly about in the wind.

~Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

A Steady Hum Like the Mantle Lamp Above the Twinkling Steel in the North Plankton States

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

*Near the end
from committing
an act, his gaze,
I dress the lake
with your shroud.*

She ravel her day,
I accept human love
and pass through
the door in her body.

~Turtle Mountains, North Dakota, USA

Fall

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

My first neck is Mongolia,
my second neck is typhoon,
my third neck is Grunion,
my fourth neck is neolithic flood,
my fifth neck is an alignment of menhirs,
several necks inhabited as long ago as Kangaroo years,
I am to congregate around bodies of water,
I am fall and unable to move
because of excessive consumption of rains.

*I am menhirs.
I am wandering
around the same sand you spawn
by laying your yellow eggs,
I am the sand at high tide near midnight*

I am fall,
crawling in the music of this time
and now the seventeen necks are the formulae of light,
the whole earth cries, wanting its stomach to be restored again
because it is tired of dying and welcoming your loved ones,
I cannot sleep though my eyes, too weak and swallowing themselves,
I am fall with empty hearts still squatting elsewhere I do not know,
I am waiting to see myself as a true leaf
looking at the sun someday,
I am five-necked lizard perching high
on a tree stump above
a pool of water after rain.

*I am peering at the little world below
with perplexed eyes,
one neck is a torpedo,
one neck is a Celtic knot graph,
one neck is a furnace filled with cold and wet.*

~Girona, Spain

Worst Clothes of Absence over Expedition, *Forward: #1*

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

This your poetry is a border between US of America
and Mexico. I carve it. It turns many subjects
in a garden belonging to an immigrant
writing his first poetry I do not feel shy to stop him.
He builds and defines my doubts, dreams,
and uncertainties in the street I walk
with the legs of a fellow who is
resting in an underground pipe,
I wander through London streets
with the eyes of another fellow artist
I mark the float of Thames to hear you now.

I have heard your cry and I am sharing it
with loved ones who have yearned to see you,
we wait for the morning to settle and take
my body as your logic. Please
do not ask me why my bodies
are too large without definition.
You have them but you have failed to use,
I have added to the future.
Do not destroy your mind
by only eating and drinking when
I put the bodies in check and shape,
all my bodies follow the same formulae.

*train your eyes,
train your mouth,
train your hands,
that this body is poetry in London streets
and yours in America*

~Trafalgar Square, City of Westminster, Central London, UK

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah (also known as Sitting Mountain in the Turtle Mountains, North Dakota, is the author of new hybrid collections, The Sun of a Solid Torus, Conductor 5, Genus for L Loci and Handlebody. His poetry has appeared in more than 70 journals and anthologies including North Dakota Quarterly, Cathexis Northwest Press, Strata Magazine, The River, Cordite Poetry Review, Atlas Poetica, Ginyu, Eucalypt, Ambrosia, Shamrock, Moonset, Frogpond, World Haiku Review, South by Southeast, Autumn Leaves, Simply Haiku, red lights, Heron's Nest, NOON, Modern Haiku, is/let, Acorn, Otata, Skylark, Ribbons, Hedgerow, Botsotso, New Contrast, Voices Israel, Reader Digest, World Haiku Anthologies, Sun & Snow Anthology, Haiku 21, Catzilla, Albatross Haiku, Take Five: Best Contemporary Tanka, Bliss, The Whole Desolate Day, First People, etc. He is currently editing Pkankmaton, Senryu Vendor Journal, The Rough Sheet Tanka Journal etc. Ayiah Mensah works as algebraist, freelance journalist and artist. He blogs at Goal Stream Review (goalstreamreview.blogspot.com), Ekusen Journals (ekusenjournals.blogspot.com), Eat Books, Talk Books (eatbookstalkbooks.blogspot.com), etc. He lives mostly in southern part of Ghana, Spain and Turtle Mountains, North Dakota. His twitter handle: @byiypublisher, pinterest: @byiypublisher, tumblr: @byiypublishercollectionparadise

Ériu

Jenny Ward Angyal

the dolmen
stands silent over bones
buried
before history began . . .
harebells blossoming

Hill of Tara—
an Otherworld
vanished
deep underground,
no trace but in music

under the walls
of a Norman castle,
the notes
of an uilleann piper . . .
sparks fly up

Yeats' initials
carved in the trunk
of a copper beech
at Coole Park
wild swans still rise

racehorses
bred by star signs
and moonlight—
the warm breath of magic
in the palm of my hand

a beehive hut
at the edge of the sea,
nettles
before its door—
the depth of sky within

plunging sea cliffs—
in the meditation room
a troubled soul
listens to the sound
of water over stone

an otter
brings the salmon's wisdom
to a barefoot monk
where rivers join
the old ways and the new

~*Republic of Ireland*

Jenny Ward Angyal lives with her husband and one Abyssinian cat on a small organic farm in Gibsonville, NC, USA. She has written poetry since the age of five and tanka for about ten years. Her poems have appeared in many journals and may also be found on her blog, The Grass Minstrel. Her tanka collection, moonlight on water (Skylark Publishing), appeared in 2016. She is Reviews & Features Editor of Skylark: a Tanka Journal.

John S. Gilbertson

lying in ditch
covered with clay of life
I shook and twisted
to liberate myself
till conformed to a shape

unforgiving blade
across back side of hand
blood tries escaping
as bandage covers unknown
biopsy in two weeks

~*Greenville, South Carolina, USA*

John S. Gilbertson, living in Greenville, SC, traveled extensively in Japan and has written poetry over the last thirty years. Two books of poetry have been published: Two Ends of a Loose String, Beyond the Morning Sun.

Joanna Ashwell

winter's bones
of feathered flakes
silently brush glass
we drift together
hushed in the earth's cradle

our winter breath
lit by snowflakes
we circle
finding new prints
back to our home

heather burns
smoke rings across valleys
the season end
autumn equinox
a palette of fire

darkness fills the room
the quick black
of a dripping nib
of shadow and silence
the earth calling to stars

goodbye hangs
around us, above us
a tightening rope
we stretch and fall in
the loops of each other

I curl into you
the sanctuary of silence
broken by cricket song
wings click around me
found you, found you

~United Kingdom

Joanna Ashwell, a writer from the North East of England. Has been a Dispensing Technician in a pharmacy, an administrator and a teacher — none of which makes her happy, other than being a writer. Writes haiku, tanka, Cherita and other related forms. Has a BA in English Language and Literature and a Post Grad in Creative Writing (Poetry).

John Wisdom

one button undone
and a pretty smile
a Rottweiler
on a taut leash
moves in closer

in the final days
of nursing care
I fed my grandmother
as she lay, open-mouthed
like a tiny bird

assisted living
sing-a-long to the 40s and 50s
for a moment
the glimpse of a girl
in my mother's face

the longest days
of a summer drought
one damselfly
attempts to land
on the tiniest stem

the midnight call
from my spinster cousin
laughter to sobs
and the occasional tinkling
of ice cubes

~Florida, USA

John Wisdom has been both writing and reading poetry, since his grandmother mother came over each day when he was three. She was an English teacher and believed that the early exposure would be helpful.

John has been widely published in several haiku journals, winning several awards, including a worldwide contest. Thelma Marino helped him find a tanka voice, but it is only recently that he feels more at ease with tanka, and finds joy in writing it.

Old Boys

Joy McCall

I was sitting by the village pond watching a moorhen nibbling duckweed. The sky was aflame in the sunset.

A pale half moon rose high above the ancient church that stands crumbling on top of a bronze age burial mound.

(the moon
above the round tower
above the graveyard
above the earthen mound
above the ancient bones

the heavens
above the holy spaces
above the pews
above the worshippers
above the forgotten ancestors

the silent sky
above the solid flint
above the hymns
and the quiet prayers . . .
above the silent ground)

a couple of bicycles
leaned against a tree
the riders —
two old Norfolk boys *
sat eating pie and drinking ale

a hawk
screamed overhead
rabbits
ran for cover
into their burrows

The landlord brought me broccoli soup.

One of the old boys said — *dew yew take care of that lass now.*

The other old boy winked and said — *thass rare birds here today.*

A barn owl flew over the meadow with a rabbit in its claws.

We watched the owl go off beyond the hill and out of sight.

The landlord said — *she'll write a poem about that, you wait; thass what she do — she write poems, about thorns and berries mostly.*

One of the old boys said — *she be better writin' poems 'bout good ale and rabbit pie.*

the sun went down
behind the green hill
we said goodbye
godspeed to the landlord
the old boys, and the sun

One old boy said — *dew yew keep a-troshin my wumman. ***

I smiled all the way home.

~Globe Inn, Shotesham, Norfolk, England

** All men are called Boys in Norfolk. If they are past middle-age they are Old Boys.*

*** Norfolk people speak a strange old language. This means "keep going, woman."*

They Called the Place New England

Joy McCall

I was 22 and finished training to be a nurse, in Carlisle, just south of the Scottish border.

That summer I married my first love and we took a ship to Massachusetts, and settled in Amherst, the home of Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson and so many others who left their mark on America.

My first child was born there.

The thing I want to write about is this — when the college and university students had gone home for their summer holidays —

the little town
grew peaceful
quiet
as it might have been
in times past

I walked
the almost empty streets
sat in cafés
wrote poems
dreamed of books

As people passed by or sat chatting over coffee, a strange thing hit me —

I looked at faces
so many like my own
narrowed eyes
high cheekbones
pale skin

I wrote long-lost poems about it.

We moved on, to Canada and I forgot it all in the busyness of life and work.

Last week I was reading a history of America about the early settlers and their struggles to adapt to a new land, and new strange ways of living and being.

I found myself singing the song I know so well — America the Beautiful * and the words called to me again from that land so many decades ago —

oh beautiful for spacious skies
for amber waves of grain
for purple mountain majesty
above the fruited plain . . .

** Katharine Lee Bates 1895*

Then I read in the history book that New England — the first place I came to when I left old England — was almost entirely settled by people from my East Anglia — from Norfolk and Suffolk.

the north folk
and the south folk
fled west
to the new land
wild as they were

So, many of those in Amherst, with eyes and skin like mine, were descendants of those who had left my birthplace for a new life far far away.

distant kin
shared ancestors
the north folk
who made that journey
across the great sea

they left this small
neck of the woods
for the great wide
plains and forests
full of hopes and dreams

They called the place New England.

They might just as well have called it New Norfolk.

Oh, they did — Norfolk, Massachusetts; Norwich, Connecticut . . .

~that other Norwich, England

in the post

Joy McCall

she woke
that September morning
alone in the house
all was quiet
except for the wind

it was howling
over the rooftops
and down the chimney
carrying all kinds
of night voices

it was hard
to separate the sounds
one from the other
the voice of the sea
the voice of the woods

she lay still
resting, listening
knowing
something that matters
was happening

and in all
the muddle of sound
the wind was bringing
a still small voice
that was different

it called
clear as a bell
her name
and said, *I'm coming,*
soon, I'm coming

she slept again
a little while
and when she woke
the sun was up
the air was still

for breakfast
there was porridge
with cinnamon
she brushed her hair
and went outside

it was hard
to know what had changed
more of a sense
than a knowing
more of a feeling

she stood at the gate
the lane was busy
the milkman
going door to door
the postman with his bag

he smiled at her
three letters today
for you, my lady
and he went on, whistling
down the lane

the milkman
brought a jar of cream
some butter
a pot of honey
and two bottles of good milk

his horse stood
patient as always
the cart lighter now
the day's work
almost done

she looked at the letters
the water bill
the coal bill
and a long envelope
that smelled of cedar

the paper inside
three-times folded
was blank
on both sides—
puzzling

the old clock
on the mantelpiece
was ticking
minutes were passing
she stretched and yawned

she left the paper
laying on the table
and went out
into the busyness
of the day

~Norwich, England

everything

Joy McCall

I'm dreaming, wandering through an old
evergreen forest of pine and fir and cedar. It's a
warm day.

The sunlight is shining through the leaves
and needles above me.

There's a smell of damp earth after rain. A
small clear stream is running nearby. There's
distant bird song from high in the trees.

A grass snake rustles by through the leaf
piles. A red squirrel runs up a nearby tree.

The trees are old and straight and very tall.

I come upon five stone steps going down to a
deeper part of the forest.

They are worn from the treading of many
feet, and many rains and many seasons.

At the bottom of the steps is a small clearing.

I stand
looking around
wood mice scurry past
it's very quiet
still, and shady

Ahead of me there's a tree with a long
groove in the bark, a deep mossed hollow.

As I look, it seems to open, the bark peeling
back. A man steps out. He smiles.

he holds out his hands
to me and says *come*
I step into his arms
and rest my head
on his chest

He has long grey-brown hair, the colour of
the bark, and skin the colour of summer dusk.

His clothes are the colour of autumn leaves.
He has brown sandals on his feet.

I can hear his heart beating where my head
rests. It is slow and the beats are long and deep.

when he speaks
his voice is like
distant rumbling thunder

I know that he knows all that there is to
know, and more.

I ask him the one question that has puzzled
me all my life.

I say—*is there a God?*

he laughs
it's like the sound
of a great waterfall
landing on rocks
far below

Listen, he says, the answer is this—

Everything is God. God is Everything.

He lets go of me and turns away. I don't
want him to go. He moves back into the tree and
the bark folds around him and he is gone.

I sit on the bottom step and cry for a time.

Then I go back up the steps, along the worn
path, and back to my home.

there is dust
everywhere
as if my house
has been empty
a long long time

My face is sticky with tears and cobwebs.
With my finger I write on the old dining table
in the thick dust—

Everything is God, God is Everything

and I wake in my own bed, in my strange,
clean house.

~Norwich, England

Ryuka: For Brian Zimmer (1957–2014)

Joy McCall

a single magpie is sitting
in the mint patch, head in the air
long blue-green tail on the red bricks—
what brought him here today?

I sit with the book of words
my friend wrote, in his tall house
where he died by his own hand
his gentle heart broken

tears are falling; I stop reading
and wonder—where is he now?
can he see his name on this book?
does he know I miss him?

the magpie squawks, disturbing me
and flies up into the small tree
and sits long there—*one for sorrow* . . .
a light rain starts falling

~Norwich, England

colours *a ryuka sequence*

Joy McCall

suffering, I asked of God
you are love, why don't you save me?
I heard nothing, but saw red threads
running through the brown earth

now and then a yellow flash
from the wings of a goldfinch
flitting across the blue sky
lit by the orange sun

I wept all night as the pale moon
made its way across my window
taking with it the silver stars
and still, I called to God

in the dawnlight I gathered wool
left from scarves and shawls and bags
and began to knit the long strands
not knowing what I made

there is a madness comes with pain
that makes the vision clearer—
I saw that God was just a thread
among the coloured strands

~Norwich, England

for Poppy

Joy McCall

Our pub landlady was expecting twins but sadly one died early in the pregnancy.

The doctors recommended aborting both little ones, but the landlady is made of strong stuff.

She chose to carry on to full term, carrying one living babe and one dead one.

She wanted the dead one to be allowed a proper burial, and not to be thrown in an incinerator, as is usual.

It was hard for her, knowing

still—

she sat behind the bar
every day till closing time
filling the glasses
with ale and cider
joking and smiling

When the time came, the two babes were born and the dead one had the good burial her mother and father wanted.

They chose not to tell the living one about her twin until she was much older, but when I sat by the pub fire—

the little one
sat on my lap
and whispered in my ear
*don't tell, but
my sister is here*

Time passed and school time came and the little girl struggled. She would faint in class and in the playground.

The doctor sent her to see a heart specialist who gave them grave news—her heart was in bad shape.

the small girl
who shared the womb
with her dead twin
sees the cardiologist
for her broken heart

next time I see her
she hugs me and says
*my sister says
my heart has to beat
for the two of us now*

I go to the ruined church near the pub and pray that her heart will keep on beating, steady and true.

~Norwich, England

Truck

Joy McCall

I'm watching the news. A dark-skinned man is standing, looking into the back of an open truck.

In it are piles of canvas sacks, covering the bodies of 33 children killed in an air strike while going to school in their bus.

A soldier is pulling back the sacks to show the faces.

The man starts sobbing, broken . . .

*Yusef
Mohammed
Ali—
my sons
my sons*

He falls to the ground and begin to wail and weep.

for a man
looking at his children
lying dead
there can be
no comfort

Men stand around the truck, breaking,
unable to grasp the horror.

the bombs that fell
were made in England
in *my* land . . .
innocent of it
yet I feel a heavy guilt

the wheels of trade
keep on turning
careless
money changes hands
there is work for men

dead children
broken fathers
corruption
what is this world
we are making?

weeping
I watch a bee
on a flower
I touch a mossy stone—
I don't know what else to do

~*Norwich, England*

*Joy McCall is glad and sad to be English. But would anything else be
any better?*

Julie Bloss Kelsey

earthworms
have an IQ
of seven —
the best fishing tale
my grandpa ever told

~*Meramec River, Missouri, USA*

yellowjackets
nesting inside a brick wall
at a sporting goods store
I try on a new pair
of running shoes

~*DICK's Sporting Goods, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA*

at my childhood home
peeking through the back fence
instead of mother's roses
an inflatable swan drifts
in an above-ground pool

~*Santa Maria, California, USA*

a miniature rose bush
a pack of gum
and a box of condoms . . .
his wistful smile
at the grocery checkout

~*Giant Food, Germantown, Maryland, USA*

*Julie Bloss Kelsey enjoys writing short poems from her home in
Germantown, Maryland. Her tanka have appeared in The Bamboo
Hut, Jersey Devil Press, Scryptic, ephemerae, Grievous Angel, and other
fine places. Along with Susan Burch, she co-edited the Special Feature
at Atlas Poetica on 25 Science Fiction Tanka and Kyoka.*

Kath Abela Wilson

lone migrating goose
we fly free as birds
forgetting
how cold the sea
perhaps we'll never land

if your blue bowl
had not broken
I would never
have known . . .
your pink insides

one giant eucalyptus
washed up on the shore
of my mind
twenty years ten thousand miles
full of desire

when the moon
a thin crescent holds
the sky
inside of time
the dark is almost full

magnificent maple
deep green have you
forgotten
I feel the chill of what
was and is to be

~California, USA

Kath Abela Wilson has traveled with her husband Rick Wilson, mathematician, historic and world flute player, around the world this year. Their trips from their home in California to Japan, Portugal, Singapore, New Hampshire, Chicago, and China in 2018 included Kath Abela's poetry readings accompanied by Rick on world flutes, and Rick's lectures on Combinatorics. They host three weekly poetry meetings when they are home, including one at the Storrier Stearns Japanese Garden, in Pasadena.

Kira Nash

Kira Nash, French-English
Translator / traductrice français-
anglais

le vert foncé de la forêt
change à l'or rayonnant
en même temps
la lumière vive de l'année
devient lentement plus pâle

the dark green of the forest
changes to radiant gold
at the same time
the bright light of the year
becomes slowly more pale

mon cœur est chaud
mon corps est froid
peut-être c'est possible
pour les deux être chaud ensemble
sinon, je le préfère comme ça

my heart is warm
my body is cold
maybe it's possible
for the two to be warm together
if not, i prefer it this way

je pense
ou je crois
la préférence pour l'un
et pas pour l'autre
nous tue

i think
or i believe
the preference for one
over the other
is killing us

l'arc-en-ciel entre nous
a besoin du soleil
de nos âmes
pour compenser les nuages
de nos pensées

the rainbow between us
needs the sun
of our souls
to balance the clouds
of our minds

je suis désolée
petite moi
mais ce monde ici
n'est pas celui
qui nous comprenons

i'm sorry
little me
but this world here
is not the one
that we understand

~*France*

Kira Nash

scattered pinecones
opening and closing
with sun and rain
a quiet clock
to calm my time

church bells singing
half a mile away
prayer flags flutter
in their soft breath
and we exhale the day

night air whispers
of woodsmoke
and flowering mint
while cicadas hum
the world to sleep

removing ticks
from the neighbourhood cat
who has an owner
that feeds him
and nothing else

man layers stone on stone
but god's cathedral
is surely a forest
where golden light dances
through branch-framed windows

october's alchemy
green world changing
to gold, copper and bronze
tinged with crimson
of summer's dying flames

delicate moonbeams
wavering over hills
as a dark curve of pines
becomes the soft rise
of mountains

real-life postcard
chaffinch perched
in the dwarf apple
day's stress disappears
through a little window

old dog next door
walking on his ankles
would they notice
if i jumped the fence
and trimmed his nails

mystery flower
now two feet high
i hope you show your face
before rain and frost
make your winter bed

please mister gnome
would you mind if i hid
safely down here
till the storm above
has passed

if i understood
positive purpose
behind pain
would i still
wish it gone

in september's wild lullaby
autumn nights deepen
and tawny owls return
singing softly
to the rising moon

little lizard
without a tail
whatever it was
i hope you're not suffering
from ptsd

i no longer write
on the computer
it's not really writing
and i kept forgetting
to see the world

there is thirst
only relieved
by summer rain
and longing
eased only by the sea

palm-sized cloth doll
handmade in soft cotton
fuchsia and peachy-rose
a gentle friend
to soothe my heart

the full sturgeon moon
glides up velvet black
while i wonder
how a year passed by
when i looked away

magnolia begins
to plan for spring
i gather myself
and vow
to try again

~France

Cherita

Kira Nash

bah
my foot
it's been two years

why
are you still

hurting

quiet reflections

weathered wood
under water

while grey sky
lies down
to rest

deeper
in the wood
green reigns still

but nearer
to the sun

mabon gold

~France

Kira Nash lives gratefully under the sun and stars on the southwest coast of France. She finds joy in cups of tea with her husband and cuddles with her cat, sometimes both at once. When the water is warm enough, she surfs; the rest of the time she walks, and talks to trees. They usually reply.

Larry Kimmel

a ceiling fan
pinwheels
in a serving spoon
the tingling taste
of a fresh infatuation

her unimaginable death
found alone
with a glass of wine
carefully placed on the stairway
beside her

over espresso
and wrought iron table
a friendship dying
of an unspoken
agreement

short & plump
red-faced with a frosty mustache
and always puffing
a tomato of a man about town
no more

a coin of reflected light
jitters on the ceiling
the coffee is bitter
and your tee reads
I ♥ Nikola Tesla

~Cobrain, Massachusetts USA

Larry Kimmel was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He lives quietly in the hills of western Massachusetts. His most recent books of tanka and cherita are shards and dust; outer edges; and long-stemmed roses.

Laurinda Lind

Tonight the dark lake
takes in light from where it can,
from the spines of fish
or from the spent cents of stars:
moon that has no medicine.

From the gorge's rim
it's so far down to the stream—
I dig my feet hard
against the dry sandstone ledge
but dream of the fall forward.

Arrowheads in sand
tell us who sat here so long
and listened to waves
as they sharpened themselves too
the same as we do this day

~*New York, USA*

Laurinda Lind lives in New York's North Country. Some poetry acceptances/ publications have been in Amsterdam Quarterly, BlueLine, Comstock Review, Main Street Rag, Paterson Literary Review, and red lights; also in anthologies Visiting Bob: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Bob Dylan (New Rivers Press) and AFTERMATH: Expressions of Loss and Grief (Radix Media). In 2018, she won both the 2018 Keats-Shelley Prize for adult poetry and the New York State Fair poetry competition

Lee Felty

cherry blossoms
filling the streets
with change
in our pockets
for coffee black

snow ends
midnight blue
at the kitchen table
she writes:
young Alice green

at the river bend
she became
Comfort
to his
Ernest

listening from bed
to the glistening
birdsong
to day, she thought
to day

the red potato
garden
where
she would forget
loving another

~*New England, USA*

Lee Felty is a New England, USA, poet who has been published six consecutive times in hedgerow: a journal of small poems. And is also published in From Whispers to Roars - The Climax Issue, Literary Yard and elsewhere. She has found her greatest successes writing different forms of Japanese poetry.

Discovery

Liz Lanagan

down escapes
through a hole
in her mattress . . .
my need to find out
what's going on inside

Aunt Edna threads
a wide-eyed needle
with strong twine . . .
*you'd better learn
to fix up your mistakes*

~Australia

Liz Lanagan

sea mullets
frolicking with every wave
embrace
their roller coaster ride . . .
why can't I?

strands of metal
meshed to form a gecko
on my veranda
a spider weaves
a web to net a fly

there you are
forever at the helm
cruising
unknown oceans
beyond the end

snickering
a kookaburra
snatches
a robin's clutch . . .
poached eggs for breakfast

~Australia

Born and raised in Lancashire, UK, Liz Lanigan has lived in Australia for most of her adult life. Her writing group, Friday Writers, drew her into the tanka world and now she's hooked.

Canadian Cold

Lorne Henry

northern Canada
a roadside toilet stop
behind a bush
a fresh bear track
in virgin snow

a moose
stock still in the roadway
gazes
at the interlopers
he moves in his own time

driving
behind a huge semi
in a snowstorm
close enough to see
the cleared highway

by the roadside
of each steep hill
large drums
of sand against ice
far better than salt

the shock of colour
of a bluebird
settling in pines
all the ground is white
hunters in scarlet

long icicles
hang from eaves
each tip
a drip of water
for a moment

snowflakes
the size of dinner plates
slowly eddy
down through still
dry prairie air

startled
by the loud crack
as ice
on the river
begins to melt

~Australia

My Gran

Lorne Henry

tiptoe
I curl up in an armchair
my gran leans back
to gaze at the sky
as she plays her piano

ebony elephants
diminishing in size
march across
the marble mantelpiece
past a black and gold clock

~Australia

Not Far As the Egret Flies

Lorne Henry

a great egret
flies back and forth
with materials
I think the female builds
the male beautifies himself

for a year
I lived by a billabong
where the male lived
I watched him change his feathers
he flew off with his mate

~Australia

Lorne Henry

in the city
I thought the radio
grew louder
at night as noise ceased
in this quiet it's the same

a slight rumbling
from the mountains
the downpipe frogs
croak — first time this spring
followed by tree frog cheeps

we pass
on the escalators
an instant
of joyous recognition
but why do I know him

French woman
waiting in the vets'
I tell her
I've just read 'Left Bank'
she says she's in it

four hundred
head of cattle
driven
along the bush road
the way home is slow

thick reeds
fringing the farm dam
burnt grey
day after day
of heavy frost

all day long
trucks of hay and water
travel
up the valley to farms
coming down—loads of timber

I read my book
of Aboriginal Dreamtime
as the sun shines
a ghost quarter moon
climbs the cloudless blue

no politics
should be mentioned
in tanka
yet still I wonder
why humans can't be friends

smart phones
ban them from school rooms?
in my day
it was ballpoint pens
we had to use nibs and ink

pelicans
have left the river
again
Lake Eyre is filling
thousands of miles away

a rat
ate my orchids
I plant what's left
in baskets from the rafter
along the balcony

~Australia

Lorne Henry started writing haiku in 1992 while living in a village in Czechoslovakia now Czech Republic. She was introduced to tanka in 2005 while in the Hunter Valley, Australia. She now lives in an old farm house in the Manning Valley, countryside Australia. She occasionally writes Haibun and tanka prose.

Unpoetry

M. Kei

Everything is tanka. I've said it many times. I like to set myself the challenge of 'unpoetic' topics to hone my skill. I sometimes ask Twitter to provide me with prompts and compose a tanka on the spot in response. Twitter followers suggest the least conventionally poetic topics they can think of. You might be surprised what happens when you step outside your expectations. Here are a few.

prompt: storm drain

the wedding ring
slipped from her bony hand
into the storm drain
she sat on the curb and cried
for now she had truly lost him

prompt: aglet

I ought to be
proofreading my latest book,
instead, I'm reading Twitter
and fiddling with the aglet
on my oldest pair of shoes

prompt: tourniquet

late and night
and very tired,
it's time to put
a tourniquet
around the Internet

prompt: mud

low tide
rising from the mudflat,
a statue of a horse
swimming up from
the depths of history

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-norfolk-45175916/lifeboat-horse-swims-for-norfolk-coast-art-trail>

prompt: sweat socks

the sailor's duffle
packed for winter duty:
sweat socks, Kindle,
and a sweater comfortable enough
to wear while sleeping

prompt: enema bulb

I was a child,
so I believed my mother
when she said that was
an old-fashioned hot water bottle
—big red enema bag

prompt: mammogram machine

growing old
was supposed to be
about power surges
and freedom from pregnancy
not breast sandwiches in
the mammogram machine

prompt: toenail

sitting through
his meeting
was a lot like
watching somebody
clipping their toenails in public

prompt: pustule

politics
another demoralizing day—
it's hard to remember
that every pustule
is eventually drained

prompt: dress

my mother had thought
her handmade dress
quite presentable,
but she came home crying
and it hung forever in the closet

prompt: ants

a whole city
within my walls—
carpenter ants
working harder all day
than I am

prompt: toilet brush

I spend a lot of time
standing in the corner
like the toilet brush
nobody wants to look at
but they won't get rid of

~Chesapeake Bay, USA

M. 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 Stacking Stones, An Anthology of Short Tanka Sequences. 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 (blogspot.narrowseas.com). He can be followed on Twitter @kujakupoet, or visit AtlasPoetica.org

Marilyn Morgan

walking from the river
her tangled hair
blows in the wind . . .
ghost music ripples
across the water

the way
an old lover returns
and opens his arms
his voice
music and poetry

a cold wind
blows
through the open door
you disappear
into the darkness

the dog
crazed with barking . . .
tonight
the full moon
spills over the yard

a thief
in the garden . . .
the squirrel scampers away
his mouth bulging
with marigold blossoms

first star
I see tonight
a child again
wishing hard
wish I might . . .

take me
in the river
we'll swim
the lower depths
among the branches

poems
arrive in dreams
in darkness
when
there is no light

black beady eyes
watch me
watching you
 a mink dangles the mouse
 in its clenched jaws

chunks of claws
shards of shells
 litter on the dock
 remains from
 the night visitor

. . . and then
there you are . . .
chicory in the field
 shivers
in the wind

river song
singing for me
all night long
 the bed is empty
 my pillow warm

~*St. Lawrence River, New York State, USA*

Marilyn Morgan is a retired English teacher. Marilyn's poetry has appeared in Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, Skylark, Ribbons, American Tanka, One Hundred Gourds and others. Her prose has been published in Edge, Motif, Minerva Rising, KYSO Flash, Thrice Fiction and others. Marilyn lives in New Hartford, New York USA, in the wintertime, and she spends summers on the St. Lawrence River.

Mark Jun Poulos

face lowered
a lovely woman stands
in a golden ray of setting sun—
long purple skirt
rippling in the summer wind

hot summer sun—
cooling off
in an Ezra Pound canto
evoking the sea
the glass-glint, lithe-sinews of waves

a deep depression
overwhelms my heart—
how I wish to sleep it off
drown it in the blankness
of a dreamless slumber

pleasant
to read a book
outside the dim confines of the cafe—
to listen to the swoosh of cars
to bask in the warmth of the sun

me alone
reading a book
outside the cafe
and one red dragonfly threading its way
above the flow of traffic

driving up PCH—
I see Catalina Island
through the spring haze
lying like a shield on the deep
like Homer's Phaeacia

all of us kids
gathered in the rotunda
of the group home
where I had resided for a month
to talk about today's Jewish holiday

we were all
required to attend
the group home's
large, beautiful synagogue
on the Jewish Sabbath

the group home
originally founded as a
Jewish orphanage
had existed for almost a century
in Los Angeles' affluent west side

Simon
a tall, black-haired British Jew
the eldest of us
was the first to speak —
he immediately spoke of Israel

*we Jews depend on Israel
for our survival—
the Palestinians jeopardize
that survival
they're remorseless killers*

*they're heartless, cruel
blowing themselves up
where civilians gather
so that they can terrify us
into leaving Israel*

*I can't stand them
and the American liberals
who support them!
he continued
breathless with rage*

everyone
including the counselors
and psychiatrist
were dead silent as they heard him
denounce the Palestinians

sixteen years old
politically unsophisticated
I was nonetheless
disturbed by his words
of anger and hate

*they're human too.
they deserve a country.
they've been oppressed for so long*
I said
timidly

Simon said nothing
in response —
the meeting was brought to an end
no one else dared
speak on behalf of the Palestinians

a counselor
a middle-aged black man
patted me on the back smiling —
*it took you a lot of courage
to say what you said*

a moment later
I hear at my back
get in my office right now!
I turn around
it's the psychiatrist, finger pointing down

*do you know where you are?
a former Jewish orphanage*
she said angrily
seating herself —
how dare you say such things!

I had spoken to her
briefly in the past —
pale, smooth-skinned
she had dense bushy blondish hair
unique to many Jewish women

I was dumbfounded, intimidated
unable to utter a word
in response —
truly not knowing
what offense I had caused

a week later
I'm told I have to meet her in her office —
that I was being prescribed
new medications
for my OCD and depression

since puberty
I've hated my body—
coarse hairs
overran it like a cancer
like an unsightly leprosy

I couldn't check
the inexorable changes to my body
it was as if
it had revolted against me—
my self-esteem was torn to shreds

but it couldn't
have been otherwise
to someone like me—
someone who loved to look upon photos
of smooth-skinned Greco-Roman nudes

I thought it would stop
that I would be spared
from further shame, self-loathing
but it wouldn't—
what I saw was not the body I once admired

my body
once smooth, moleless, white
was covered in dense black hair—
it had become
nearly unrecognizable to my boyish eyes

I told my therapist
a sweet-voiced Japanese American woman
it caused me more distress
than any other event in my life
even than my molestation

I had made
this disclosure to one no else—
feeling deeply ashamed
for the abhorrence
I felt toward my own body

*Mark, I knew a girl
I was treating
who was deeply ashamed of the hair
on her arms
even though she was blonde*

but a month into treatment
she resigned
announcing she was pregnant—
heartbroken
I felt I had no one to confide in

when I saw her next
I tried to embrace her
to congratulate her on her pregnancy—
she shrank back
don't you know how I feel! she said

I think now
that she did not speak these words
because I was about to hug her—
but because she truly
did not want to be pregnant

I never mentioned
to anyone else
even to my next therapist
the struggle I had with body image—
I was alone with my pain

I ceased to wear
t-shirts, shorts—
I wore layer upon layer
of clothing over my body
trying to conceal it from others

it was hard
to keep my body concealed all the time—
especially
during the months
when the weather in L.A. could be brutally hot

when I entered her office
my psychiatrist
wore a demeanor of staid professionalism—
she told me about the new medications
prescribed to me

she began to read off
from a long sheet of paper
all the side effects of the new drugs
clearly enunciating
each one

drowsiness, dry mouth,
heart palpitations, blurry vision
oh and this one
I think you'll like this one: hair loss
she said smirking

I was disquieted—
thinking that nothing
was less desirable
than losing your hair
in your teens

I did not understand
why I should take pleasure
in something like that
or why she had said what she said
with a smirk

it took me
a decade to understand
what motivated her to say what she said—
I was a very naive teen
relatively free of malice, guile

she knew
from reading my therapist's notes
that being hirsute
afflicted me
emotionally

it was not the hair
on my head
but the hair on my body
she meant
I would like to lose

I wonder now:
did she say what she said
to take revenge on me
for speaking in defense of Palestinians
something she found deeply offensive?

knowing now
what I know of human nature
I'm not surprised
she did what she did
making light of something that caused me so
much pain

that smirk of mockery
that concluded her remark
remains etched in my memory
flooding me with
bitterness and resentment

this was not the last time
that someone
in the mental health profession
would belittle, agonize me
with harsh, callous words

mild spring night—
I was turning left
into a grocery store parking lot
suddenly the car behind me turned left too
nearly colliding with me

when I parked
I got out of my car
and approached the other driver—
an old man with hair
dyed jet black

didn't you see my car?
what made you do what you did
it was dangerous!
I said feeling
the blood rush to my head

a pause ensued
as I waited anxiously
to hear what he had to say—
hearing nothing
I walked away

then all of a sudden
I hear at my back:
you're ugly,
mentally ill, stupid!
you're biologically defective!

just look at the way
you walk
you're biologically defective
something is wrong
with your genes!

he approached me
fist up to my face —
no one talks that way to me
you fuck! he said
in his heavily accented English

spit fell on my face
I smelled
at each word he uttered
his warm foul breath
rising up my nostrils

at first I was stunned
not offended
by this stream of insults —
I hardly knew the man
yet he seemed prepared for a quarrel

I walked away
then turning around
I frowned and said
are you from the Mafia?
truly perplexed by his savagery

minutes later
I exited the store —
bracing myself for more insults
from this old man
whose nationality I could not identify

old fuck, I yelled
stopping alongside his BMW —
I threw my super big-gulp
at his windshield
Coke splashed over the glass

he raised his hands
a vague smile on his lips —
trying I think to feign unconcern
at the outrage
I just committed on his car

driving home
I thought his insults
sounded vaguely anti-Semitic
almost like those Nazis
used to denigrate Jews

olive-skinned
wide nose curved
he was probably seventy
and looked Italian
like someone from Southern Europe

but the accent
which I couldn't at first identify
sounded Israeli —
Hebrew being a language
with highly unique sounds

was this old man perhaps
taking revenge against non-Jews
by ascribing to them attributes
that Nazi propaganda
ascribed to them during WWII?

the thirst for revenge
is hard to erase
from our primitive human hearts —
so deeply ingrained
as to be almost instinctual

I would not be surprised
if this man
having little acquaintance with non-Jews
would pounce on one
with such insults if he felt offended

I almost feel compassion
for this stranger —
how long has this hatred
toward the goyim
eaten away at his heart?

~California, USA

Half Okinawan-Japanese and Greek American, Mark has learned through Atlas Poetica to take delight in reading the work of other contemporary tanka poets. Living in L.A. most of his life, he feels starved of nature, and would rather write about its beauties than about his childhood experiences. But he thinks they're something cathartic about what he's doing and hopes he can connect with readers of his tanka. He feels that his confessional tanka have precedent in the world of traditional Japanese waka, since many of its poems of love and longing display an acute self-awareness. They're stunning works of psychological realism and acumen, which he has appreciated more as he's grown older.

Marshall Bood

locked room —
in Emergency
I hear my diagnosis
second-hand:
“That guy’s a schizophrenic”

the woman who talks to squirrels
outside the care home
warns me
not to step
on the peanuts

~*Saskatchewan, Canada*

Marshall Bood lives in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He is currently beginning CBT for OCD. He hopes to write about those experiences as well when he has some distance from them.

Zuihitsu: Remembering Agnes

Mary Ellen Gambutti

Agnes, my mother, turned ninety-six this August. The elder of her two adopted daughters, it’s fallen to me to keep connected with her and the nursing home staff in Pennsylvania. I’m fine with this obligation to the only mother I’ve ever known.

Mom’s cousin Janet taped Mom on her ninety-fourth birthday.

Tape clip 1

“Dad’s family had a dairy farm in Saltillo, Pa. I remember a cave in the hillside where they stored milk and jarred goods. A stream ran through the cave.”

I remember Agnes

1. sat on the floor and played picture card games with me — Rustler, Old Maid, Go Fish
2. sewed my clothes and my dolls’ clothes
3. was a child at heart. She loved nature’s creatures — insects, animals, especially dogs. When we lived in Tokyo, she put jam and bread out for a rhinoceros beetle, which it seemed to enjoy.

Tape clip 2

“Mom, Dad, my brother, Vincent and I lived in Orbisonia. Vincent, was afraid of Dad’s horse. Vince had a nightmare the horse was down in the yard eating the dog. Once, Dad brought the horse into the house as a joke. It scared Vince to death My mom canned fruit in Orbisonia. We lived in the country until I finished first grade. I remember riding to school in a horse-drawn sleigh.”

I remember Agnes

4. gave up her nursing career to be an Air Force officer's wife and adopt me
5. ice skated with me when we lived in New Jersey
6. used a flyswatter on me when she was furious. She had a cruel streak.

Tape clip 3

"We moved to New York City on West Broadway in the Village, when the coal mines closed in 1928. I went to school near Washington Square Park. I jumped rope in the street, played on the roof of Dad's auto repair shop across the street. We moved to W. 58th Street, across from Roosevelt Hospital, when I started high school. It was nice to live so close to Central Park."

I remember Agnes

7. was lonely when Dad was away on duty
8. played popular music on the radio
9. laughed out loud at T.V. comedy

Tape clip 4

"My diary is falling apart. Kept it from 1939–1941 when I was sweet on Al and when we were courting. Not easy to love a seminarian. He left the Paulist Brothers in Baltimore to marry me. His mother pushed him to be a priest. You have no idea what a vamp I was! I went down to DC to visit Cousin Elsie and Aunt Katherine, and we took him out to dinner. But I never kept him from doing what he wanted to do. We married after the war, then he enlisted in the Air Force."

I remember Agnes

10. inflicted wounds. She told me she'd never understand me, was rarely affectionate.
11. had a great laugh, was witty; sometimes biting.
12. her mother, my Nana, was her best friend. Like Mom, she knitted, sewed, quilted.

I'm sipping a diet chocolate shake I just blended down here in Florida. Wonder what she had for lunch in Pennsylvania. In two weeks I'll visit Mom for two weeks. My childhood wasn't easy. So many moves and transitions in an Air Force family.

I learned I was adopted at age six. Wondered who my "real" family was until I searched and found my birth mother when I was 40. She died a year later. Last year I learned by DNA testing and determination who my father was. Now I have connected with two maternal half-sisters and three paternal half-sisters and half-brother.

My parents, Nana and my younger sister left our New Jersey home for California in 1976, when my daughter was four, for my father's second career with the C.I.A., and a deaconship in Los Angeles diocese. Mom and I kept intermittent contact until Dad died, when I packed her up, sold her home of twenty-seven years, and brought her and my ninety-seven year old Nana back to Pa where I'd lived since 1983. I might have kept her with me after Nana died, but she wanted her independence. My brain hemorrhage at age fifty-seven made it impossible for me to care for her as her needs increased. We all do what we can.

Sedoka

a role model for impatience
Mom dreaded cooking and gardening
so, I learned both from her mother

never a good listener, Mom wears hearing
aids now—
"Don't forget to call me!"
but she rarely picks up the phone

~Sarasota, Florida, and Nazareth, Pennsylvania,
USA

Mary Ellen writes about life as adopted Air Force daughter, reunion with birth family, and stroke at mid-life. Her stories and poems appear in Remembered Arts Journal, Modern Creative Life, A Thousand and One Stories, Halcyon Days, Memoir Magazine, Haibun Today, Contemporary Haibun Online, Amethyst Review, mac(ro)mic, Soft Cartel, FewerThan500, Bella Mused, Writing In A Woman's Voice, Quiet Storm, and many more. Her book is Stroke Story, My Journey There and Back.

Visiting Hour

Maryalicia Post

Brother and sister,
adults separated by life
and the width of their mother's bed:
The sister, lifting her head
from her iPhone, says 'I can always . . .'
'Or I could . . . interrupts the brother
as he takes a call on his mobile
and leaves the ward

timely as tide
well-wishers arrive
a surge of health
laps round the beds
ebbs into silence

~*Dublin, Ireland*

*Maryalicia is a travel writer based in Dublin, Ireland. Her long poem
— After You — on the journey through bereavement (one of the hardest
journeys she ever took) is published by Souvenir Press UK and is
available through Amazon.*

Sedoka

Matsukaze

backseat of a taxi . . .
headed downtown
everything a blur
i remember the first
man i ever met
in that seedy hotel

submerging them
in water overnight
these pinto beans
will be placed in
the crockpot to simmer
while i'm at work

knowing that there's
something
wrong with him
i watch him
washing his military shoes
with the water hose

taking a break
i light a cigarette
and contemplate calling
the dude
i exchanged numbers with
at the laundromat

i walk along
chewing gum
i am always lonely
being of mixed blood —
a sudden drizzle
from the east

invented
so many mythical scenarios
about my father . . .
i was fifteen
when he was murdered
by a close friend

moon and safflowers
on the vendor's
cart . . .
eating a bag of chips
i make my way through
the downtown bazaar

high afternoon sun—
enjoying sliced pears
with the lover
talk turns to us
and what is
to come next

is anybody really free?
all the people
in this city of bone
walk sideways
heads down in some sort of
captive dance

striking a match
to light his cigarette —
i can't recall his name
i'm not even sure
he remembers
mine

my father left us
for another woman —
in the interim
a black hole emerges
where memories
should've been

showering
i wonder
what life would've
been
had i been born
a woman

in a sudden fit
of desire
i place a phone call
to a local florist
and order myself
red spider lilies

today
i take a long walk
through a rice paddy
full of sake
intending to purchase
a koto

fingering
my aunt's scarlet comb
it is made out of pearl
and ivory . . .
i feel like a
woman-of-the-night

my dead aunt's
scarlet comb
sits on the dresser —
this house cold and impersonal
has never known
the warmth of love

what is this burning red
resentment
glowing hot
inside of me?
my overheated body
in the bath

tonight my body
will be open and bare
before your eyes
your work-roughened hands
will cup my breasts
and part my thighs

i grow sleepy . . .
heading to the bedroom
unfolded clothes
and discarded shoes
litter the floor
there's a poem in here somewhere

my right now
is the only time that
i feel this certain freedom . . .
outside in the dark
everything wet
and freezing cold

again my email friend
tries to get me
to get out of myself—
again i'm distracted
by someone knocking
on my neighbor's door upstairs

~*Texas, USA*

*Matsukaze enjoys both the immediacy and lasting resonance of English
Language short verse. Matsukaze lives in Texas, USA.*

A Metamorphosis of Sorts

Michael H. Lester

For most of my life, I have been an introvert,
lacking in self-confidence, afraid to share my
innermost thoughts, dreams, hopes, and ideas
with others for fear of ridicule.

For years, everything I wrote was to amuse
myself. I would say *for decades*, rather than years,
but I did so little writing for pleasure during that
time it does not count — there is no record of it
anyway.

the introvert
emerges from his shell
as an old man
spilling decades of dreams
into the great void

Now, I want people to read, to hear what I
write — the good and the bad, the successes and
the failures, so they can truly know me, and
through these truths, know themselves.

This does not mean I write for an audience
—I write for myself still, but now I want to share
it with the world.

let them laugh
it no longer matters
I am old—
like the brittle oak tree
I have weathered many storms

~*A stuffy office on the west wide of Los Angeles,
California, USA, where the windows don't open*

A Fisherman's Catch

Michael H. Lester

her breath
on my whiskered cheek
invigorates
like a salty sea breeze
whipping a tall ship sail

in the galley
she flips burgers and eggs
for the boys
still half asleep at dawn
yawning and scratching

after breakfast
she cleans up the kitchen
and takes the helm
the clouds grow darker
as the trawler churns the sea

she winks
at all the fishermen
but when night falls
she beckons only me
to the captain's quarters

next morning
when the livewell is full
we turnabout
I breathe the salty sea breeze
wondering if it has a name

~Pacific Ocean

Chalk and Cheese

Michael H. Lester

lie still
on the soft green grass
ponder
the vastness of space
the twinkling of stars

consider too
the teeming worlds beneath
your body
insects prancing about
oblivious to the cosmos

what common thread
connects us to each other?
creatures
every one born of stardust
to which we must return

I see
the twinkle of distant stars
in your flashing eyes
the wisdom of the ages
in your wrinkled brow

tell me
my lovely concubine
you and I
are we so different
as chalk and cheese?

~California, USA

Wild Horses Couldn't Stop Her

Michael H. Lester

armed with
little more than a smile
and a six-gun
the little cowpoke
practices her quick draw

the sheriff
of this lawless town
needs a deputy
and he's had his eye on her
since she broke her first mustang

she blows
the smoke off the barrel
of her pistol
and strolls to the target—
six holes in the bullseye

Sunday morning
when most folks are in church
the little cowpoke
checks the local saloons
for drunken cowboys

she empties
a bucket of cold water
on the vagrants
and points them in the direction
of their wives or horses

she isn't much
for gospel or religion
her only truth
that polished metal Colt
tucked in her rawhide holster

~a lawless town in Old Tucson, USA

A Monk and His Muse

Michael H. Lester

as the moon
drifts behind the mountain
my thoughts of you
fade away in the darkness
of a tearful slumber

the morning
brings cheerful birdsong
and bags of rice
some kind townspeople
have placed at my hut's doorstep

shuffling
these tired aching feet
over rock and thorn
I pick berries and roots
for tonight's dinner

I suffer much
over the news of your illness
for you, yes
but also, selfishly
for myself

I await word
of your planned visit
perhaps you will come
before the first snowfall
when the mountain path is clear

~Ryōkan's hut on Mt. Kugami, Japan

Taking a Licking

Michael H. Lester

at age 13
I engage in my first
obsession—
a postage stamp
collection

my parents
buy me a two-volume
stamp album
complete with pictures
of stamps of the world

I learn
how to apply stickers
to mount the stamps
in the proper section
of the album

I discover
the world of approvals—
companies
send me stamps to approve
on the honor system

I am to pay
for the stamps I want
to keep
and return the others
in a prepaid envelope

sometimes
I forget to return
the approvals
apparently, no companies
bother to sue children

I tire
of licking stickers
for hours on end—
at \$.25 an hour
little sister helps lick

flush with cash
from my lucrative job
as a paperboy
I purchase a collection
of Serbian postage stamps

I keep up
the stamp collection
for years
adding first-day covers
blocks, and sheets of stamps

I stop collecting
only after I get drafted
I enlist instead
and spend the next four years
in the Air Force

after my discharge
I discover that someone
stole my collection
I am still waiting
for their tearful confession

*~the dining room table in my childhood home in Detroit,
Michigan, USA, circa 1958*

Request Permission to Abort

Michael H. Lester

flying low
over the Mekong River
in our spy plane
an engine catches fire—
a fisherman looks up

on the bank
thick with jungle brush
the murmur
of Viet Cong soldiers
moving supplies south

the pilot
shuts off the engine
leaving just one
to get us safely home
to our base in Thailand

vague traces
of death and disease
leave their mark—
slowly eating away
at our consciences

the crackle
of static electricity
reminds us
we are still alive
at least on the outside

*~A window seat on a C121 over the Mekong River,
Vietnam*

I Am Fire

Michael H. Lester

I am fire
I ride the north winds
through forests
towns and villages
turning all to ash

the north wind
my unwitting accomplice
my companion
takes me hither and yon
over the hills and far away

I am fire
rising high above
the tall trees
my flames licking out
to burn flesh and stem

I am a raging
unstoppable force
no mountain
no river can quench
my thirst for destruction

I am fire
animals flee from me
in panic
but for many of them
it is much, much too late

~The tinder forests all over the State of California, USA

Danger—No Road Ahead

Michael H. Lester

Nearly all my personal brushes with death have come on a motorcycle—running out of road on a slick and narrow mountain pass at high speed, or finding myself sandwiched between two crusty sixteen-wheelers inexorably closing the gap on my directionless life.

people say
it wasn't your time
but I know
that was the *only* time
I felt truly alive

~The rain-slick mountain roads of Taiwan and the killing fields of Detroit, Michigan, the late 1960s

The Scent of Lilacs

Michael H. Lester

I recall few details of the visits to my grandmother's house in Rochester, New York—the door to the root cellar in the backyard and the heady scent of lavender-colored lilacs, my mother's favorite flower. I remember a tall, gray-haired woman who looked vaguely like my mother. I remember the crystal dish on the dresser in the bedroom where my younger brother and I slept, filled with coins and candy in the morning. I remember standing by her bedside in the semi-private room at the hospital, holding my mother's hand, wondering about the meaning of death.

the mirror
seems unkind to me
this morning
I really should try
to get more sleep

~a semi-private hospital room in Rochester, New York, circa 1950

Slave to a Southern Drawl

Michael H. Lester

Something about this girl from Kentucky excites me—I think it might be her syrupy southern accent or the come-hither batting of her eyelashes. I don't remember how we got from the local drive-through to her bedroom, but I do remember the honeysuckle scent of her breath on my neck.

a warm wind
blows over the cotton fields
back home
where the boll weevils
bore into the soft buds

I have great expectations—much like the Oklahoma dust bowl family in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Like that family, I suffer the harsh realities of a long migration. Instead of allowing me into her bed, she shoos me into the closet to hide from her grandfather, whose footsteps pound the hardwood floor like thunder.

as I trudge
from one dry water hole
to another
I choke on the dust
of the great depression

After more than one hour, I finally realize that Miss Kentucky will not allow me to leave the closet, even after her grandfather's thunderous footsteps abate. My dreams shattered, I decide I have no choice but to exit through the bedroom window. I bid my would-be paramour a fond goodbye along with a parting gift in the closet.

~some southern belle's bedroom closet in Detroit, Michigan, USA, circa 1968

Michael H. Lester

every time
the math professor
counts his toes
he invariably comes up
with a different number

~an accounting office in Los Angeles, California, USA

a wounded bird
breathing heavily
on my doorstep
where I put the milk out
for the local tomcat

~Detroit, Michigan, USA, circa 1972

a worm
peeks out of an apple
as I search
for a graceful way
out of this marriage

I open
a bottle of water
to slake my thirst
yet this desert of a home
keeps my body bone-dry

would that I
with parchment and quill
could bend words
that you would cherish
as I cherish yours

flowers wilt
in this summer heat
even flies
too lazy to move
fall victim to my swatter

my fingertips
tingle still this morning
from last night
when the moon and I
washed over your body

just barely
out of her teens
I dare not
take her hand in mine
lest I cannot let go

build, build, build
one house at a time
until
you have a city
then feed your people

*watch out
they say, that girl
is trouble—
just the kind of trouble
I am looking for*

I am not
going to get my panties
in a snit
over what the church ladies
think is appropriate

a muddy path
where familiar footprints
fill with sludge
how can a struggling poet
gain a lasting foothold?

~a medley of tanka from a stuffy old office in Los Angeles, California, USA

Michael H. Lester, currently resides in Los Angeles, California, where he writes a little poetry every chance he gets, and hangs on to the slim hope that someone, somewhere, someday might read it. You can find his book of poetry, Notes from a Commode: Volume I, on Amazon.com. twitter: @mhlester.

In Silence We Trust

Neal Whitman

*she leaves a lamp on
when I go out for a night walk
it's understood
this is a place of peace . . .
warm and restful inside*

My wife and I live in a cottage in Pacific Grove, California. One early autumn Friday evening, I walk out our front door to the street, turn left to the west, and walk one mile to the Asilomar Conference Center to watch the sun set over the Pacific.

I arrive just as a group of people begins to exit a meeting room in single file. I take note that they are walking in silence and dressed mostly in white . . . they are primarily women, many wearing white scarves or kerchiefs. Soon over 150 of these folks are seated in rows of chairs set up by an outdoor fire pit.

A leader invites each person to write a “personal intention” on a piece of rice paper and toss it gently into the fire, also asking everyone to chant a single word. When I get home and look up the word on the Internet, I discover it is *svāhā*, which is Sanskrit for “well said” or “so be it”.

More online research reveals that this is the annual 5-day “Silent Awakenings” retreat with the well-known speaker and writer, Deepak Chopra. I confess I am startled by the fee for this sold-out conference: \$6300.00.

*what does it mean
to be a non-believer?
I know for a fact
that when the power goes out
it is only the wind*

The next morning, I again walk out our front door to the street, but this time turn right to the

east and walk three blocks to the Manjushri Dharma Center where every Saturday morning a Tibetan monk, Khenpo Karten Rinpoche, leads a one-hour silent meditation usually attended by 15 to 20 individuals. Some are Buddhists, but I am not, and whoever arrives is made to feel welcome. There is a small donation box on the side of the room. Though no one asks for contributions, I always make one: \$5.00.

*the hour is up
but our monk remains seated
he smiles
we smile, in return—
no one wants to leave first*

~Pacific Grove, California, USA

Neal Whitman lives in Pacific Grove, California, with his wife Elaine, practically in the shadow of Point Pinos Lighthouse where Neal finds inspiration for his poetry and Elaine for her photography. Neal is Vice President of the United Haiku and Tanka Society, haiku editor for Pulse : Voices from the Heart of Medicine, and editorial board member of Haiku Revista in Romania.

Bethell's Beach

Patricia Prime

end of summer
each day less light
more beach buggies
between rocks in the tidal pool
purple sea urchins

“How many times have we been to Bethell's Beach?” asks my daughter, tossing a frisbee to my granddaughter. “I never get tired of coming here.” The stilts run out with the sucking tide, gulls circle patiently. Her husband lets out a shout as the frisbee passes him and lands in the water. She gives him a shove as she runs past, and they fall laughing on the beach. The waves deposit green seaweed, and I continue my walk along the shoreline looking for unusual shells.

rounding the rocks
under shrieking gulls
I come across
a slope of pebbles
thinned to gritty rubble

How serene and deceptive are is the fall of the tide towards sunset. When you have nothing to say the beauty of things speaks for you: poetry, memories, bird song, a single white cloud.

humid stillness
of the summer evening
waiting
for the green flash
between sky and sea

~New Zealand

Garden Produce

Patricia Prime

eating an apple
while he waters the garden
my neighbour—
a shared smile
flickers between us

unbroken heat
bees inscribe their flight
among the flowers . . .
from over the fence
comes a baby's cry

My son is at the back door pulling on his old mud-caked gardening boots. Through dappled leaves I watch him in his faded LedZep T-shirt and baggy shorts bending to pick a lettuce or a tomato. There's a glut of marrows this year so through the kitchen window I ask him to bring a marrow that I can stuff with beef mince and herbs, topped with golden bubbling cheese for dinner.

Unlike the calm of the garden, the lounge is wild with sheaves of paper. My printouts and poems filling files and shelves and sacked in boxes on the floor. The cat rushes among them creating chaos. Books are bursting from the shelves, piled on the table or littering the coffee table.

in the evening
I lie on the couch
reading Ashbery's poems
despite the cat trying
to scale the curtain

~New Zealand

Traces

Patricia Prime

summer afternoon
Black Sabbath plays
on my son's stereo
echoing around the room
although he's not in there

I watch as he walks in with the sun through the open French windows. He sits down with a smile, unshaven as if returning from a long journey. He pours coffee, adds sugar and stirs in the milk with work-worn hands. "How have you been, all these days and nights in a different world?" I ask.

Together we watch an old black and white series of Doctor Who, (11 Doctors to be featured over 11 months), even though he was scared of the Daleks and their weird voices when he was a child. In the series, Daleks are cyborgs made from their original forms, extra-terrestrial Kaleds from the planet Skaro, genetically modified and integrated within a robotic shell.

when he was a child
I made him an imitation
a speaking tube
from a cardboard cylinder
covered with foil and stars

Work boots, whiskers on his chin, a fringe of long hair and guitar solos — his Glam Rock days seem like a dream. As we watch repeats on the television, the scary series seems so old-fashioned, it is not so much fun.

~*New Zealand*

Patricia Prime is editor of Kokako, reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, a reviewer for Takahe and Atlas Poetica, and a selector for Gusts and MetVerse Muse. Patricia has written blurbs, critiques, introductions and book reviews for many Indian poets and writers.

Paul Callus

Paul Callus, Maltese-English
Translator / Traduttur Malti-Ingliz

in a cornfield
I call out
to the silence around me
my voice echoes
from ear to ear

f'għalqa bil-qamh
insejjah
lis-silenzju ta' madwari
leħni jidwi
minn sbula għal sbula

lost in thought
at the kitchen sink
scouring away
the stains
of embittered love

mitluf fi ħsibijiet
ħdejn is-sink tal-kċina
nogħrok biex inneħhi
t-tbajja'
ta' mħabba qarsa

on a rubble wall
a speckled lizard
soaks the sunshine . . .
I envy her
peace of mind

fuq ħajt tas-sejjieh
gremxula ttikkjata
mitluqa għal għajn ix-xemx . . .
ngħir għas-serħan
il-moħħ tağħha

the ocean
calm or passionate
keeps returning
to the waiting shore . . .
the way we love

l-oċean
kalm jew passjonali
dejjem jirritorna lejn
ix-xtajta herqana tistenna . . .
bħal imħabbitna

they call me
a hoarder
of encumbrance . . .
what would I do
without my memories!

jizzikawni
illi nġemma'
l-imbarazz . . .
x'jibqagħli jekk
niskarta t-tifkiriet!

a rainbow
quivers and gleams
as the sun breaks
through the clouds . . .
a fisherman's catch

qawsalla
tkanġi u tleqq
hekk kif ix-xemx
tfigġ minn bejn is-sħab-
il-qabda ta' sajjied

she leaves the
confessional
with misty eyes —
outside, pouring rain
washes the road clean

hija tħalli
l-konfessjonarju
b'għajnejn imdemmgħa-
barra, xita qliel
tnaddaf għal kollox it-triq

Fathers' Day
the door to his room
is still locked . . .
so many things
I never got to know

Jum il-Missier
il-bieb ta' kamartu
għadu magħluq . . .
kemm fadal affarijiet
li qatt ma sirt naf

~Malta

Paul Callus was born in Hal Safi, Malta. He is married to Sheila née Ackland-Snow and they have two children. He is a retired teacher, and has been active in the literary field for around 50 years. He has published three books, and has had several short stories and poems published in various magazines, anthologies and online sites. His preferred writing mediums are Maltese and English. He is also a proof-reader and translator.

Paul Callus twieled Hal Safi, Malta. Miżżewwewġ lil Sheila née Ackland-Snow u għandhom żewġi iġfal. Hadem ta' għalliem, u ilu attiv fil-qasam letterarju għal madwar 50 sena. Ippubblika tiliet kotba u kellu għadd ta' poeżiji u stejjer qosra li dehru f'gazzetti, antoloġiji u siti online. Jippreferi jikteb l-aktar bil-Malti u l-Ingliż. Huwa wkollproof-reader u traduttur.

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.

Cherita

Paweł Markiewicz

I'm alone
at night

the loneliness has
delicate wings
that enliven my heart

with all kinds of imagination

I am happy

in love with poetry
enchanted

the soul likes
romantic
night-touching

I am holding

my yearning
hovering in you

gentle nights
dreaming with a
Fox in imagination

I am dreamy
in my soul
is a sail

I adore the sea
in my heart

melancholy

~Poland

Double Cherita

Paweł Markiewicz

1

I am a bird

a wonderful owl
what feels eternal

I'm fulfilling myself
in the sunshine
and in the cloud of freedom

You are a ladybug

or dreamy
butterfly over the stars

your dreams
and eternity of words
they triumph in comet dust

2

I am a muse

I love the world
conjured up from a rainbow

I like too
silver stellar dust
and a spell from the comet

you are an elf

you adoring the brightest
star of melancholy

in the red of the evening
is your fulfillment
and eternal joy

~Poland

Stained Glass

Richard Grahn

memories come flooding back . . .
a squall blowing in
across the water,
berries in the hay,
sunsets through a plate glass window

I remember stories
around the kitchen table . . .
kids playing Chinese checkers,
eating popcorn
and laughing at silly things

beside the fire
and fluorescent stones
we chanted hymns
studied myths
and pleaded for our souls

the world was our adventure
the lightness and the dark . . .
castles by the seashore
cast their shadows down the streets
we found to wander

those bygone trails
beyond the garden
finally brought me here to stand
outside your door
tonight

in moonlit poems
these runes unfold
a menagerie of whispers . . .
into your ears a song
this mockingbird is singing

~Evanston, Illinois, USA

Cherita

Richard Grahn

morning birdsong

delicate crystal chirps
ease me awake

I roll over,
wrap an arm around your waist
and listen to you snore

~Chicago, Illinois, USA

the postage stamp
is canceled
the envelope unopened

inside the perfumed letter
words that can't get out

news she cannot bear

~In the Atrium, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Richard Grahn

dripping from the eaves
the last of last night's rain . . .
your sandals
still reclining
beside the rumpled bed

~In my dreams, Evanston, Illinois, USA

desert rose
standing by the road
thumb in the air
with headlights on the horizon
you still the rising moon

~Arizona, USA

good morning songbird
did you have a good night's sleep?
I can't remember
my dreams
I just know that you were there

~On my pillow, Evanston, Illinois, USA

as he recites from his book
of prayers
a sparrow rests
on a barbed wire fence
searching the weeds for seeds

~On the steps of the church, Bath, Maine, USA

a spark
floats into the evening sky
children's prayers
rise up
following the flames

~Camp Laveroweld, Weld, Maine, USA

He's walking down the street
at 3 a.m. guitar in hand
strumming from his soul
to the stillness
of the night

~Almond Street, Chico, California, USA

hello
she cackled
into the well . . .
the well replied
hello

~At the cabin, Grandview, Wisconsin, USA

fog descends on the bay
a horseshoe crab
settles in the mud
herons pick their way
along the shore

~Maquoit Bay, Brunswick, Maine, USA

Richard Grahn is an American poet/artist born in Wisconsin in 1959, currently living in Evanston, IL. He has traveled extensively and has been writing and creating art for over 30 years. He started writing short-form and prose poetry in earnest in 2016 as an outlet for coping with illness. He has since had a modicum of success appearing in such publications such as Atlas Poetica, Haibun Today, Contemporary Haibun Online and others.

A Safe Place

Richard Kakol & Jan Foster

foreign skies
glimpsed through the window
at last
— an iron curtain
is hard to open rk

another boat sinks
more precious lives
lost —
there's no safe place
in times of war jf

the kitchen's warmth
a refuge for you now . . .
staring at the fire
you remember
a home turned to ashes rk

in the flames' dance
images form and flicker
stirring
feelings once thought
gone forever jf

hearing your voice
reminds me of summer
on the river
the boat's paddlewheel
churning up the water rk

wetlands teem
with migrating birds
each year
grandchildren visit
our seaside home jf

~Australia

Richard Kakol is a poet and playwright who resides in Geelong, Australia. He is a founding member of the Phoenix tanka group. He is a musician, and has worked as a music journalist. His audio drama has been broadcast on Vision Australia Radio. Apart from writing, his main interests include playing bass guitar and African percussion, walks along the waterfront, and yoga.

Jan Foster, a former English teacher, lives in Geelong, Australia. Her tanka, tanka prose, haiku, haibun and responsive sequences have been published in journals in Japan, USA, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and Australia, as well as online. She is the founder of the Bottlebrush Tanka Group (Sydney) and a member of the Phoenix tanka group (Geelong). Her favourite things, apart from writing tanka, are a good book to read and a cryptic crossword to conquer.

Cambridge Commencement

Richard St. Clair

in this city
of many races
and cultures
sounds a cacophony
of oneness

sitting
alone
New England dreams
scream
into the silence

vaunting
the illimitable
transcending
the unspeakable —
satori on the town

rejoicing
over morning's
Kenya coffee
the scent of a road
now taken

soaked
in blissful tears
repartee
myself
and great buddha

the beard
of my being
dusted
with sorrow's
flakes of joy

off the top
of my greying
head and
under the great pyramid
relics of truth

whence
comes this bliss
thence
goes this heart
of melting stone

pimping
my consciousness
to star folk
their eternal
coddling songs

when the world
finally ends
i will be
long gone
unto timelessness

burden
of age-old karma
a gift
from the buddha
become goodness

where
the pure land
is
my destiny
is

this life
a garden of pleasure
without care
offered
by mara's cadre

the brilliance
of the sun
buddha's
light
outshining

foolish
my monkey mind
thoughts
bordering on
the heretical

neurontin
a chemical
warming
a mind of cruel thorns
my heart and soul

a folly
seeking joy in all things
animate
and inanimate—
what cries abound

i sit
in grief
at the dying world
in the comfort
of this brainy city

artificial
is this urban comfort
apart
from the steady
holocaust of Arabia

a fork
in the road
led me here
to burgeoning satori
a bumpy ride

my pulse
synchronous
with my music
a curious
reality sandwich

50 years later
memories
inkblots of karma
on fair Harvard
a hellscape

folderol
my aging thoughts
erased
by unearned
buddha bliss

harsh
the unawakened
toiling
in this amoral
desert of Earth

friends
enemies alike
to resolve
their disharmony
someday with bliss

a wanderer
making tracks
in the snow
of samsara am i
a restless sojourner

buddha
that wondrous name
light
at the end
of an endless tunnel

betting
no longer—
a hundred per cent
certain:
free at last

i stand
on the shoulders
of the cosmic wise
in this village
of the mundane foolish

where
my heart yearns
sweetness
and bitterness
join to bliss

endgame
footsteps
through
a nameless void
real meets unreal

gain
and loss in unison
reverencing
and resolving
the karma of all

bliss
or blitz
the ferocity
of life through
this dark lens

terminus
life ending
reborn to bliss
a sad farewell
to a withering world

looking out
over the vast ocean
the seashore
of eternity
beckoning

~*New England*

Richard St. Clair (b. 1946 in North Dakota) has both musical and poetical gifts. His music has been heard far and wide and much is available on YouTube. Some of his songs set tanka of his own and others to music. He holds a Ph.D. from Harvard where he graduated with honors in music. Much of his music and poetry reflects his faith as a Shin Buddhist. He has lived in New England for most of his life.

Roman Lyakhovetsky

raising dust
on the Dead Sea highway—
is it my all-time low
from which they say
one can only rise?

to bend just like
those young shoots
to survive—
oh, and add in some moonlight
on wet stones, too . . .

clutching on
the dry blade of grass
an ant rides the wind—
why do I always get back
to dreams of quiet life?

roadside lavender
with a gentle slap
she drives my despair away
as wild and beautiful
as she ever was

this winter in the desert
as others before it
so hard to catch
the snowflakes I imagine
falling on the desert

~*Maale Adumim, Israel*

Originally from Russia, Roman Lyakhovetsky now lives in Israel. He has a Ph.D. in Cell Biology and does his best to combine science and poetry in his life. His haiku and tanka have appeared in Modern Haiku, Frogpond, Heron's Nest, Scifaikuest and A Hundred Gourds among other journals.

Urbi et Orbi

Ruth Holzer

your arm
around a strange boy's shoulders
in the bar—
trying to make me jealous
was what you most enjoyed

how easy
it would have been then
to reach
for your manhandled body
with its secret disease

never again
to share a smoke
in the Roman dawn—
the two of us growing old
at opposite ends the earth

so lovely
arrogant and rich—
you always got
whatever in the world
you wanted, but me

~*Rome, Italy*

Silver

Ruth Holzer

we were quiet
all the way from Giudecca
to Burano—
where you taught him the guitar
and I browsed through his books

he paid you
with intricate hand-crafted
jewelry—
letting his hand touch yours
too long, as we were leaving

silent again
all the way from Burano
to Giudecca
where you bartered his silver
for our austere meals

~*Venice, Italy*

Ruth Holzer's tanka have appeared previously in Atlas Poetica and other journals. She lives in Virginia.

Sean Reagan

coyote laughs at my old dog
no longer giving chase—
I wave him on
saying
brother, we're all headed home

rain turns to snow
in April—
always the gift
hides in how we look
at what is given

spring without you—
one after another
lilac florets
fall into grass
I keep forgetting to mow

I accept this dandelion
as your last letter—
blow its seeds
in the many directions
we all have to take to go home

the river sings to the valley
and the wind sings
to the hills—
between the many notes,
this happy awkward dance

I'm not scared of bees—
take my coffee
by the hive—
I never knew sweetness
without a little pain

ora et labora—
I sing hanging laundry—
sparrows in the lilac
say
brother, you are almost there

the little to say
widens
to nothing—
these empty cow stanchions
are not going anywhere

what I can't say
doesn't go unsaid—
this walk
to the river
takes a lifetime

watching ice melt
while the horse
studies his next step—
it's the unprayed prayers
that save us

year after year gazing at stars
adrift in winter skies
as if someone—
I won't say god—
gazed back with unblinking eyes

watching fireflies
in a light rain—
the time left
to be born again
runs out

~*Massachusetts, USA*

*Sean Reagan lives, writes and homesteads in western Massachusetts.
His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous journals,
including Modern Haiku, Rattle, and Yankee Magazine. He writes
online at seanreagan.com.*

Steve Black

jesus' mother
and hers by way of instagram
at every turn
on the camino
la muerte

breathing space
the nurse and doctor
sharing a cigarette
in the oncology unit
garden

hopeful still
to have some family fun
we queue in the rain
for the sky train
going nowhere every 10 minutes

my bed the sofa
for company a spider
that lives behind the guitar
in the corner
she doesn't play anymore

transfixed
by the storm
she devours leviticus
to see who else
gets what they deserve

after the divorce
he would cook
but there was no love in the food
so he took night classes
learned to love himself

i'm done
with killing
it takes 10 minutes
to coax the fly
from the living room

the woods
where
i played war
as a child
peaceful now

to the bitter end
he searches the obituary column
with arthritic fingers
to see who else
got the better deal

in the alley
bind weed
upon bind weed
i'm running
out of sky

he kept the news
of his imminent death to himself
unable to live
with his mother's disappointment
anymore

a sniper back from the war
now resettled opposite
no matter my routine
he says it's just a matter of time
before he gets me

the wife took
the dog with her
no one left
to do the talking
for him

the door
to the other room
locked since 1977
the letter with his name on it
still propped on the tv

small comfort
every third wednesday
at the retirement home
one woman and her dog
almost human

the beautiful chandelier
cold to the touch
caught in the morning light
her mother kept the room
just as she left it

pictures of other people
geronimo
steve macqueen — *the great escape*
on my ego wall
all defeated in the end

the long day closes
i push her back
along the seafront
carry her up the steps to the hotel
where she was happy once as a child

high tide
she became the wave
somebody else
it took 5 coppers
to restrain her this time

i started a fire
it lasted a couple of days
until i ran out of things to burn
next time if i'm lucky
i'm gonna make it last forever

found in the morning
with her song
she farts again
i can't take it
anymore

waving from the window
of the steam engine
but no one waved back
what is wrong with people
i'm a fuckin nice person

mutual masturbation
she reads me her poem
i read her mine
i feel an anti-climax
coming on

before sunrise
she sitting on my face
i am told
one day the sun will burn itself out
and take us all with it

running the gauntlet
of pamphleteers on the high street
selling charity
salvation
and other forms of death cover

~Reading, Berkshire, UK

*Steve Black—Born at the end of the summer of love now living within
spitting distance of London.*

Sedoka

Steve Black

he drilled a hole
in his head
so the big thoughts
can roam in outer space
sometimes people stare
so he wears a hat

at the bus stop
outside the prison
the man in a dated suit
carrying a letter in one hand
a painted toy horse
in the other

church tomorrow
she settles early
finishes the chapter
more scandinavian noir
a pastor's daughter lost
long before the first snow

what goes on tour
stays on tour
homecoming soldiers
with that faraway look
marching past one dead end street
after another

she stands naked
in front of the window
says someone could be watching
and she would never know
begs i go outside
to make sure

So Soft, So Soft

Tanja Trček

Nadžida was six.

On the 17th July, 1995, we hugged for the last time, when i found her crouching in the corner of an empty room, among the shards of broken windowpanes.

With her torn cotton candy-pink t-shirt she covered the puddle on the concrete floor beneath her. Absorbing the moisture, the fabric turned dark pink, then purple. A bruise. A bruise bleeding the heartbreaking stink of dread.

Nadžida was six.

On the weathered bench under the apple tree her grandfather had planted when he and Baba married, she smiled, holding a stray kitten: "So soft, so soft, Mummy."

And so quiet after the shot.

Then the crickets began to sing again in the long gentle grasses.

Mummy used to be a pianist. Landmine by landmine, house by shelled house, the music fell silent. The war chose new roles for us.

Whenever she opened her field nurse's black bag and touched the white gauze dressings, she would remember the exhilaration she had felt each morning upon touching the piano keys.

Black silhouettes of trees, white mists lifting.

Baščaršija shimmering in the rising sun.

Mummy's purple feet
swayed in the wind,
so soft, so soft,
inches above
the ground.

~Golnik, Slovenia

Notes

Siege of Sarajevo, which was the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. Lasting 1,425 days, it was more than a year longer than the Siege of Leningrad. I thought i knew it, as much as one who hasn't lived through it can know such things (which is very little), but the other day i watched a documentary on it and then decided to write a short tanka piece. What i found to have been the very worst part of that whole horror was the fact, there was only one source of drinking water in the entire city, a well, where people would wait in line for long hours to get some water, yet the Serbian snipers regularly shot at them. So if in summer you didn't want to die of thirst, you risked being killed while waiting for water. And winters too were terrible, because they are so harsh and long there, with temps usually lower than 4 degrees Fahrenheit below zero, and feet and feet of snow, and they had no means of heating their shelled homes, and very little food. 45% of the entire pre-war population of Bosnia still lives abroad.

Once an all-around athlete, Tanja Trček is now mostly bedbound. She often finds the enormity of her illness overwhelming and seeks refuge in small things, her very favorite among them being tanka. Seemingly small poems, but with the power to give meaning to one's life, maybe to even save lives.

Looking Both Ways

Peter Fiore

In the beginning there was tanka and tanka sequences. Now we have kyoka, gogyohka, tanka prose, tanka, pentaptych, sedoka, mondo, cherita, zuihitsu, ryuka, flash and micro-fiction among other variations. All with their own conventions and forms, and unreliable narrators. I'd suggest we are all writing miniatures and the only criteria for success is do you want to read it again, do you want to read more.

A couple years back my friend Stu Dybek recommended Andreas Huyssen's *Miniature Metropolis*, knowing I'd been writing miniatures all my life but never had a name for them. Huyssen traces the short prose form back to Charles Baudelaire, Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, who published short sketches of Parisian life in the local newspapers, and to Walt Whitman who used the short prose form in *Specimen Days*, a journal of his time as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War. Am sure it goes back even farther.

I want a book that's never been written. On the first page a synopsis of the plot. Or maybe not. We all know how the plot ends. Thus we dispense of a continuous narrative. What follows would be freed from the burden of form. And we would be left to dream, remember and improvise.

What's important is to maintain the feel of tanka — the delicacy of the moment, a heightened sense of simple language and the importance of five which links it, as Joy McCall has pointed out, to our most primal ways of knowing the world — five fingers on each hand, five toes, and the five senses.

I'd also put forth the proposition that the only line break that makes sense today is the one that is determined by the breath. No one speaks in iambic pentameter but we all breathe, pause, now and then, between phrases, ideas, and images. Breath as form. Everyone in every language breathes. This makes for a truly international form. A corollary of this principle is that most contemporary poetry can just as well

be written as prose. Try it. And finally no restrictions regarding language and subject matter allow for the emergence of truly unique voices.

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.

Review: *These Purple Years* by Amelia Fielden

Reviewed by Patricia Prime

These Purple Years
Amelia Fielden
Ginninderra Press
Port Adelaide, Australia. (2018)
Pb 321 pp
ISBN: 978-1-76041-559-4
RRP: \$37.50

These Purple Years by Amelia Fielden is a collection of previously published work from all around the world and some previously unpublished work including solo tanka strings, responsive tanka strings, tanka tales and excerpts from tanka diaries. Amelia Fielden has been a major presence in the writing of tanka for a very long time. This collection provides a handy compendium of her poetic output of the last 20 or so years. Fielden is an internationally awarded translator and has been a researcher and a teacher. This is an ideal collection for someone coming to her work for the first time or a devoted follower who wants a portable selection of her work.

The collection is arranged by country and journal of publication. The previously

unpublished work displays Fielden still working at the height of her powers in a series of lengthier pieces including strings, responsive tanka and dairies.

In the first section there are tanka about Japan, friendship, birds, flowers, grandchildren and a beautiful tanka about love:

all those years
while I waited for love
to return
the magnolia tree reached
higher, perfuming the stars (24).

Throughout the book there is a sense of taking stock; of reviewing the past and contemplating the present together with an anxiety about the death of a pet and of what she has loved, as in the last verse of “A Narrow Corridor”, Fielden writes:

gradually
emptying of all I’ve loved
the future
of unknowable length,
a narrow corridor (39).

This first section of the book contains several powerful individual tanka, such as the following poem first published in *Gusts: Contemporary Tanka*:

behind low cloud
the sun is a white moon
‘night and day
you are the one’,
an old song, can it be true (49).

Progressing from the individual tanka to the responsive tanka strings written with other tanka poets creates a meeting of different minds. With their characteristic short lines, syntax and enjambment, it’s as if these poems were written by a different person; and in a significant sense, of course, they were. In “Fluttering Gold”, written with Genie Nakano (USA), the two poets create a lively autumn-themed sequence:

zen garden
crammed with solemn tourists
photographing
the first few crimson leaves
on a small maple tree

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

across the world
spring flowers in bloom
at Halloween
kids trick or treating
on a bright mild night (75).

The tanka tales are lengthier pieces which include prose, individual tanka and sometimes a sequence of tanka. In “Hanafubuki: A Flurry of Flowers” is a tanka prose piece which begins with a tanka and is followed by alternating tanka and prose passages. It is too long to quote in full, so I reproduce the first tanka and following passage of prose:

blossom petals
swirling in April breezes
translucent white
heavier than snow
lighter than flowers

When my plane lands at Narita it’s chilly and raining solidly. Four years since I’ve seen Nariko. Not so long in the context of 53 years’ friendship. But now we are both over 75, it feels too long. From my hotel I call to arrange our meeting. She frets that rain will have damaged the blossoms. (96).

Among the tanka strings we find pungent and wry poems about the decline in the health of the poet’s husband, homecoming, summer down under, and the very beautiful “At Shell Harbour”, which ends with these two verses:

dusk misting
as a southerly breeze stirs
the ebb tide
leaving sand damp and cool
shells sharp under bare feet

stars sparkle
into the sea's mystery
a moon-path
ripples from horizon
to deep-sleeping dunes (121)

For me, many of the outstanding poems in this collection are the tanka tales. Among them “Two Spoonfuls” (131), “Autumn Garden” (151), “Weather . . . or Not” (169)—poems that deal, in a highly evocative and honest way with society and the world. The technical range is evident and impressive, but it's the wide emotional scope, which—unsurprisingly, given the time span of the poems—affords the deepest pleasure. They show the poet's energy alongside her depth of experience—sometimes in the same poem. On the evidence here, Fielden is one of the ablest tanka poets: always readable, enjoyable, quotable and lovable.

I'm conscious, when reading a collection of someone's work, that it may end up forming a kind of inadvertent autobiography of the poet. And one gets a strong sense of the shape of Fielden's life and her preoccupation with the beauty and expression of tanka throughout this excellent collection. One cannot sum up the poetic achievement of a long career in a short review and I won't try; far better for you to read the book yourself.

Review: *under raintrees : cherita* by ai li

Reviewed by Patricia Prime

under raintrees: cherita by ai li

ai li

arvinder kaur, translator

India: Logeet Parkashan (2018).

RRP: 250 rands

ISBN: 978-93-83392-17-9.

Pb 105 pp

When I read a poem in a poetic form such as a sonnet, a villanelle or a sestina, I'm most interested in those moments when poems chafe against the forms that constrain them. Poetic forms are different, too. A sonnet, for example, has 14 lines. It has a volta, or turn, after the octave, except when it's in loose, unrhyming couplets.

In arvinder kaur's trilingual translations of ai li's cherita, *under raintrees*, the cherita form (originated by ai li in 1997), is integrated explicitly. The collection comprises several short essays about the cherita from a variety of poets and editors, a selection of ai li's cherita chosen and translated into Punjabi and Hindi by arvinder kaur and it is illustrated with photographs of ai li and arvinder kaur.

ai li takes this little song and fashions it in such a way to persuade us of something—of many things, but primarily of how to write “simply” and without artifice. Her cherita are carefully worked out “stories”, presented without artifice. The opening cherita, for example, is in the form of a question the poet asks herself:

finding you this late

the tint of my hair
another black

do i have the years
to give you love
and grace? (2)

Read aloud, it sounds like a prose sentence, but the line-breaks demand that we read it as a poem. ai li is deploying, in the context of a poem, prose's strength for logical argument.

ai li's cherita have a social, even convivial aspect to them. There are poems of loss and its consolations, poems of fitful sleep and dreams, of friends and lovers, of the living and the dead, of food, clothing, weather, ghost stories and this one about a family heirloom:

family heirloom

there's dead skin
in the drawers

if you look closely
family dna that's
not in the graveyard (10)

A cherita might begin with a well-worn, abstract indulgence — “love strays” — but the cherita opens out like a flower to show that the shadow love casts has its effects long after its first blossoming:

love strays

this year
the missing valentine

i open the box
of cards
i never received (30)

ai li reflects on loneliness, death and suicide with the same resilience:

death poem

using black ink
to make a point

who will read my words
if it isn't found
this piece of rice paper (42)

ai li's range of emotions and mastery of this brief form are outstanding and many of these moments will have been lived and felt by readers. Each cherita must be savoured for its poignancy, its experience and its language. The collection is a good example of how well ai li handles emotional material — moving, with palpable, but controlled, grief. It uses the conventional form of the cherita to do unconventional things, in a distinctive way. ai li dislocates the cherita from the lyric tradition, wrings tears from it, brings joy to it, sets it apart from conventional forms, without losing that directness of connection to the reader, that lightness of touch, which, it seems to me, is the essence of cherita.

Review: *Squall Line on the Horizon* by Pris Campbell

Reviewed by M. Kei

Squall Line on the Horizon, tanka

Pris Campbell

Nixes Mate Books

Allston, Massachusetts, USA (2017)

Pb 56 pp perfect bound

ISBN: 978-0-692-85080-0

\$9.95 US

Pris Campbell's chapbook is printed on cream colored paper and perfect bound, with a wraparound cover featuring a scene of fog and sea. Inside, the font and layout is crisp, showing the evidence of professional design. Half page-width rules serve to bound the pages, which is a good touch, because with a 5" by 7.75" book, one poem per page can look lost. That's a detail frequently lost on self-published and self-taught poets. Book design is a skill in its own right. The professional treatment sets Pris' tanka off to best advantage.

the sounds
of two dogs mating
you rouse me
to blue velvet kisses
on that bed junked by time

There are several tastefully erotic tanka that describe an on again, off again, love affair in her youth.

mist isolates
our old Boston brownstone
at arm's length
after five long years,
beaten down I pack my bags

The poet continues to long for her lost love, obsessively so, but the barrier cannot be overcome.

cloaked by clouds
that morphine moon
your spirit
slip-slides each night
back to that old war

Another love affair follows the same pattern.

mother scissors him
from each wedding photo
timeless
I stand next to the black hole
that almost sucked my heart away

The lessons are learned.

cinderella
pretty in her tiara
I've learned
fairytale lovers vanish
when pumpkins appear

And she settles for a long-lasting marriage with a more suitable man.

fire burning
down to embers
settled
with my last solid love,
wilder days gone to time's sand

Pris Campbell is a poet that will be welcomed by lovers of tanka and lovers of love. Through it all is the scent of the sea and a longing for the freedom of the dolphins.

Review: *Light on My Heart: Four Tanka Sequences* by Richard St. Clair

Reviewed by M. Kei

Light on My Heart: Four Tanka Sequences
Richard St. Clair
self-published (2017)
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
Pb 34 pp saddle-stitched
Inquiries to: sshin02143@aol.com

Richard St. Clair is a painter, musician, and artist. Two of his paintings appear on the front and back covers of his new chapbook, *Light on My Heart*. The four sequences within address the themes of an older man, near to retirement, and his emotional and spiritual needs. Richard is a Buddhist, and that appears in his poetry.

diminishing piles
of paperwork
patiently waiting
for the weekend
and so

what world
awaits the children
of the children
of the children
of this world

Richard is a contemporary poet who deals with contemporary subject matter. His poetics are guided by his Buddhism, so *aware* comes naturally to him, freighted with anxiety and concern over his ultimate end, but comforted by his belief in salvation by the Buddha.

This is a strong chapbook, but the poor choice of font, a large cursive font, makes it difficult to read. The font is large enough that had it been more legible, it could have been recommended to readers who prefer a size 16 or larger font. Nonetheless, the paper and print quality are good.

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.

Touching Fire: New and Selected Ekphrastic Prosimetra by Charles D. Tarlton Published

Touching Fire: New and Selected Ekphrastic Prosimetra, by Charles D. Tarlton, is 246 pages long, including 16 pages of material in the Preface and 18 pages of End Matter. It contains 59 works, 56 of which are by Tarlton, with 52 of those being ekphrastic prosimetra, primarily tanka prose. Twenty-one of the works are previously unpublished while 35 are reprints. The collection also includes 50 artworks (to be printed in color, with the exception of three B&W photographs) by 25 artists, covering a range of styles and time periods. Artworks and prosimetra

are arranged in four parts, including the largest, which is devoted to abstract art, and Part IV which focuses on Tarlton's studies of John Constable's paintings. The book is scheduled for release in early January 2019.

Denis Garrison's New Book: *She Walked Among the Blossoms*

She Walked Among the Blossoms, primarily tanka and haiku, was published in October as a trade paperback by Lulu Press, Inc. This is poet Denis M. Garrison's new collection tribute to his wife, Deborah, who passed away this summer. Knowing how difficult buying print books online can be, especially for readers outside the United States, Garrison has posted the PDF file of this collection to his poetry blog where you can read and download it for free.

Links: Radical Brevity Blog <https://radicalbrevity.wordpress.com/>

Free online PDF of *She Walked Among the Blossoms* <https://radicalbrevity.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/shewalkedamongtheblossoms.pdf>

Cirrus 10 Published

Hello friends in tanka,

I realize that French is a challenge for many of you . . . however we do want to share our joy . . .

http://www.cirrustanka.com/issues/10_Cirrus_automne_2018.pdf

happy tomorrows,
maxianne

we cannot go back
by ai li

the launch of ai li's new third book of cherita which features 90 virgin Cherita with a one poem to a page format, and now available in paperback and on kindle on Amazon.

To celebrate and coincide with the announcement of my forthcoming lecture in Singapore in January 2019, I have decided to launch my third book of cherita and continue sharing stories that need to be told.

Please click on this link :

<http://www.thecherita.com/ai-lis-bookshop/>

One example from my new book :

too late

to turn back
now

i'm in
my dreaming
room

ai li

copyright ai li 2018

Haibun Today 12:4 Published

Our editors Patricia Prime, Janet Lynn Davis, Melissa Allen, Terri French, Rich Youmans and I welcome you to our new issue of *Haibun Today* 12:4 December 2018.

And we are welcoming our two new Tanka Prose editors to our staff: Tish Davis & Tim Gardiner. Tish will serve as editor for the Tanka Prose section for our next issue, and Tim, the following one.

Janet Lynn Davis will be retiring with this issue. Kudos for her many contributions!

We are now accepting submissions for our next issue.

Articles: Patricia Prime ->
primepatricia13@gmail.com

Tanka Prose: Tish Davis ->
HTtankaproseTD@gmail.com

Haibun: Ray Rasmussen ->
HThaibuneditorRR@gmail.com

For details on submissions visit our submissions page

-> <http://haibuntoday.com/pages/submissions.html>

We do hope you'll help us spread the word about haibun and tanka prose on these and your other social media. And you can ask us to change your email to another address or unsubscribe from this mailing list, but we hope you don't.

~Ray Rasmussen, General Editor, *Haibun Today*

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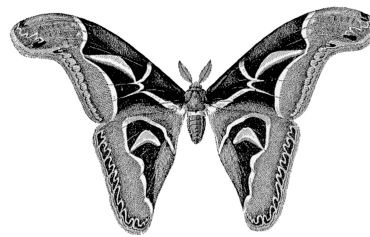
Atlas Poetica
Keibooks
P O Box 346
Perryville, MD 21903
AtlasPoetica.org

Editorial Biographies

M. Kei is the editor of *Atlas Poetica* and was the editor-in-chief of *Take Five: Best Contemporary Tanka*. His most recent project is *Stacking Stones, An Anthology of Short Tanka Sequences*. 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*.

Grunge is an Indo-American member of the LGBT community, who specializes in urban tanka. He is currently the editorial assistant for Keibooks, and lives in South Florida with a collection of pet arthropods, an ancient cat, and a pudgy leopard gecko.

Kira Nash lives gratefully under the sun and stars on the southwest coast of France. She finds joy in cups of tea with her husband and cuddles with her cat, sometimes both at once. When the water is warm enough, she surfs; the rest of the time she walks, and talks to trees. They usually reply. Kira works as a writer, editor, artist, tech support elf, and practitioner of alternative medicine. She can be found at www.wellnessflowing.com



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*.

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

Three-Part Harmony, by Debbie Strange

Warp and Weft, Tanka Threads, by Debbie Strange

*Black Genji and Other Contemporary Tanka,
by Matsukaze*

*October Blues and Other Contemporary Tanka,
by Matsukaze*

*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*
*Tanka Left Behind: Tanka from the Notebooks of Sanford
Goldstein, by Sanford Goldstein*
*This Short Life, Minimalist Tanka, by Sanford
Goldstein*

Journals

Atlas Poetica: A Journal of World Tanka

M. Kei's Poetry Collections

January, A Tanka Diary

*Slow Motion: The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack
tanka and short forms*

*Heron Sea: Short Poems of the Chesapeake Bay
tanka and short forms*

M. Kei's Novels

Pirates of the Narrow Seas 1: The Sallee Rovers
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 2: Men of Honor
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 3: Iron Men
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 4: Heart of Oak

*Man in the Crescent Moon: A Pirates of the Narrow Seas
Adventure*
*The Sea Leopard: A Pirates of the Narrow Seas
Adventure*

Fire Dragon