

Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Edited by Claire Everett

Skylark

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Skylark
A Tanka Journal

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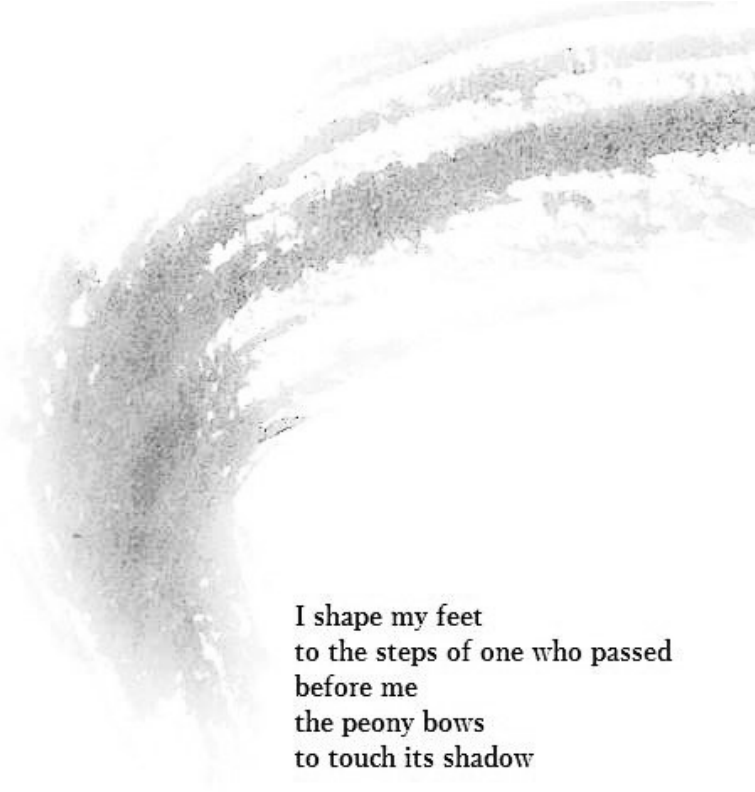
Skylark

A Tanka Journal
Winter 2016: Volume 4, number 2

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In Memory of
Jane Reichhold
(1937-2016)



I shape my feet
to the steps of one who passed
before me
the peony bows
to touch its shadow

Claire Everett

Editor's Message

As I was responding to submissions to this issue, I heard the devastating news that the short-form poetry world had lost one of its finest. Jane Reichhold touched so many of us with her gentle wisdom; she was as fine a scholar as she was a poet; a valued mentor, a trusted friend. A few weeks later I lighted on a review of *Skylark* (on Amazon) that I wished I had seen before Jane died, so that I would have been able to thank her: "Claire Everett's poetic abilities are evident even in her choice of tanka to publish. It is an honor to appear in one of her collections." Jane had yet to submit to *Skylark*, but I believe the honour of which she was speaking was her appearance in *Spent Blossoms*, the TSA Members' Anthology which I edited in 2015. We often say life is too short and as tanka poets we are acutely aware of this dewdrop world in which we exist. I am reminded of the gracious and generous poets who have taken the time and trouble to write to me to tell me how much one of my poems has meant to them; sometimes this has required them to write to a society to ascertain my home address and, lo and behold, a beautiful postcard has arrived out of the blue. Such joy!

In memory of Jane, I ask that each and every one of you considers writing/emailing a poet this season to tell them how their work has resonated with you. As Paresh observes in his judge's report, tanka are as much the reader's art as they are the poet's. Like Jane, be a friend, a mentor . . . hold out your hand to another on this path.

Fittingly, too, in so much as Jane was passionate about art and haiga, I ask you to join me in welcoming the supremely talented Sandi Pray to the *Skylark* team as our new Tankart Editor. Please see the back pages for the submissions guidelines.

~Claire Everett, October 2016

The Wind Five-folded School of Tanka

*"You can do it. With all the help here, you should be
able to do it marvelously . . ."*

—Jane Reichhold

I have never been one for school—knowledge? Yes. Learning? Definitely. But school—what with all its term papers and tests and torturous expectations? Not so much.

But, *A-HA*, this school was different. Inviting and familiar, like an old one room schoolhouse, yet without that 5-miles-uphill-both-ways-in-a-blizzard-with-a-pesky-little-brother-and-lunch-pail-in-tow walk. Without rubrics or rote memorization. Without due dates or grades. Just an open door, twenty-four/seven, and a buoying, confidence-bolstering belief that, "You can do it."

Here, in WFFST, I found a place of thoughtful guidance and kind appreciation. Here, I entered a classroom which welcomed all, freely offering everything—lesson plans, examples, insight and explanation; all the while demanding nothing—not even homework (unless voluntarily undertaken, of course). Here, I met Jane, a mentor generous with her time, her experience, and above all, her encouragement. And here I found a desk where I sat not only willingly, but enthusiastically, studied diligently, and learned abundantly about this amazing tanka life. How lucky I am—how grateful to Jane—to be living it "*marvelously*."

folding five lines
into tanka she gave me
wings
I am ten thousand cranes
on the wind of her teaching

Autumn Noelle Hall

Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

The Skylark's Nest

The Winners

Selections by *Paresh Tiwari, India*

As a kid, I was taught that black and white aren't colours. Even the darkest shadows were supposed to have a hint of violet or green and the brightest of lights had shades of yellow or azure. It made perfect sense to my seven-year-old sensibilities. Oddly enough, almost three decades later, it is a monochrome photograph and some absolutely enthralling tanka that makes me go back to my childhood and realize just how many shades there are to life.

It was an unenviable task, that of selecting the stand-out tanka amongst a stand-out submission. And throughout the month long judging period, I was worried that I may not be able to do justice to the works I was entrusted with; that I may overlook some nuance, some exquisite word-play or fail to unearth the real meaning behind a seemingly simple five-line poem. And today while submitting my report and the poems, that to me are worthy of commendation, I still cannot be completely sure.

For the stand-out works, I have looked for in the poems, words that do not echo or replicate the exquisite photograph by Michele. L. Harvey, aptly named 'Shadowplay', but instead take on a life of their own as a parallel or tangent truth that reveals life in all its glorious colours of hope, pain, love, joy and even dreams.

Every once in a while, you come across a book, a verse, a sentence or even a word that stays with you long after you have moved on. Words that make you wonder and question the status quo. Discrimination based on skin colour is not a new theme for literature by any means, but to capture it with such gut-wrenching beauty in a short poem is no mean feat. Thus, the winner for me is this breath-taking tanka:

Skylark

second grade
the new girl's skin darker
than the others—
her stick-figures drawn
with black Magic Marker

Margaret Chula, USA

Frankly, I had never expected such a take on the photograph and that was one of the many reasons that drew me to this tanka and kept bringing me back. This gem of a verse balances delicately and masterfully the unsaid and the known. The tension is palpable and yet there is a sense of innocence bubbling just beneath the surface. This tanka makes me feel, makes me think and makes me uncomfortable—everything that literature is supposed to. The poet in these five lines manages to pose questions that otherwise may have required a work of novel-length. And yet the imagery, the cadence of words never for once suffers for it.

It doesn't matter if one has experienced discrimination based on skin colour or not, the appeal of this tanka I believe, is almost universal; something imprinted in our collective conscience. And just like most questions of import in life, it does not offer you any easy answers. In fact, it doesn't offer you an answer at all. This tanka, for me, is unequivocally the winner of the Skylark's Nest contest.

Now for the clutch of runners up, in no particular order.

birdsong
filtering through
stillness . . .
she steps aside
for her daughter

Christina Nguyen, USA

Skylark

This verse manages to evoke so many colours and sounds of hope, love and peace that it leaves me almost stunned with its simplicity and beauty. The moment composed by the poet; that instant when we bequeath the world to the next generation, is ephemeral. We can't often pin-point that transition. Maybe it is a continual process; maybe we do it bit by bit. But then maybe there is actually a tipping point, a moment when we step aside and let our children take over. That is the moment equally entrenched in teaching and learning. That is the moment that we truly accept our transience and are at peace with it.

After reading Christina's tanka, I would never be able to look at Michele's photograph again without hearing a bird-song or two of my own, no matter the cacophony that I am surrounded with.

this winter too
the stubborn snow
doesn't thaw . . .
now we sleep in
separate bedrooms

Vandana Parashar, India

The thing that drew me to this tanka was the weight of each image, the force of each word that has been used. The tanka to me paints the world in shades of gloom and loneliness and we all know some of the sweetest songs are that of pain. I, for one, connect to this tanka on a very intimate level. This poem is quite straightforward in what it says and how it says it and that in my opinion is its greatest strength. The non-reliance on cleverness is what makes this tanka soar. More often than not, as poets, we forget the bone-gnawing potency of an honest confession. And this poet reminds us of just that.

Skylark

And finally:

our voices
rising to eagles
we stand tall
scarred and imperfect
among stars, you and i

Sandi Pray, USA

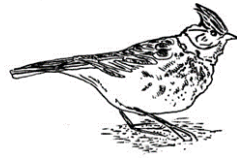
I am writing this report in the middle of turbulent times. Two countries are on the brink of a war. It's in times like these that we often question the need of something as seemingly superfluous as poetry only to be rewarded by an equally emphatic and empirical answer. Probably poetry is the answer. Probably it is the only answer. And that brings me to this last high commendation. I am partial towards this poem for reasons that are entirely personal and may have to do with the times that we find ourselves in. It may even be that the meaning and strength that I derive from this work might be at complete odds with what the poet had in mind. But isn't that the beauty of a truly great poem, it makes all of us feel differently and derive different meanings?

I would like to thank Sandi for writing this verse and reminding me that we may be scarred and imperfect, yet we always have a choice—that of standing tall and reaching out for tranquillity and peace.

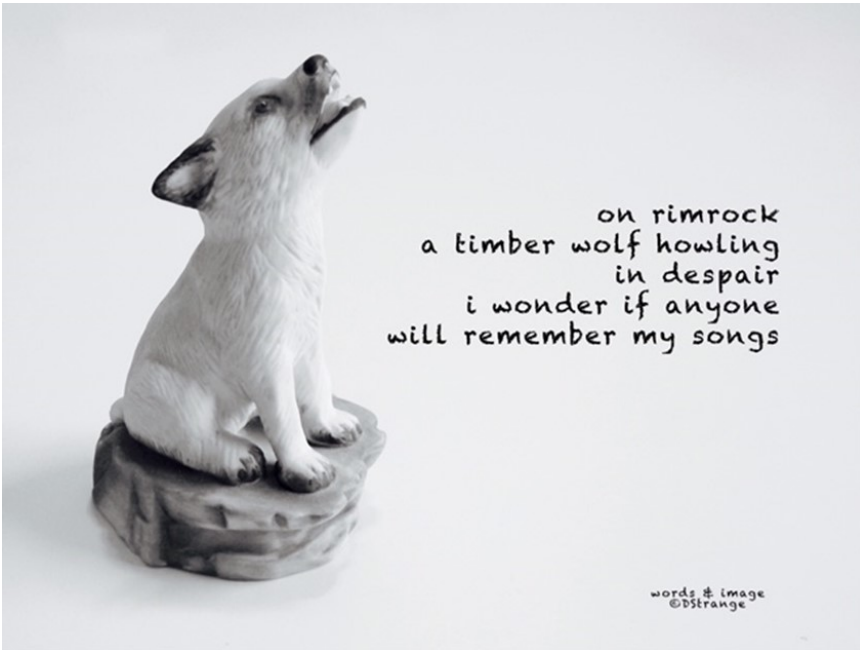
Congratulations to the winner and the three runners-up. Your verses have cadence and rhythm, are well-constructed with elegant imagery and exquisite word usage that do justice to the prompt by Michele. L. Harvey.

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Congratulations to Margaret who will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the competition for *Skylark* 5:1, Summer 2017.



Skylark



Debbie Strange, Canada



**snow moon
whiter on new year's eve
everybody
is guilty of something
everybody has sinned**

Pamela A. Babusci 2016



Skylark

The Skylark's Nest Prompt

5:1, Summer 2017



Sandi Pray, USA

Skylark

Sandi Pray is a retired high school library media specialist living a quiet life in the wilds of North Carolina mountains and river wetlands of North Florida. As a vegan she is a lover of all life and the rhythms of nature.

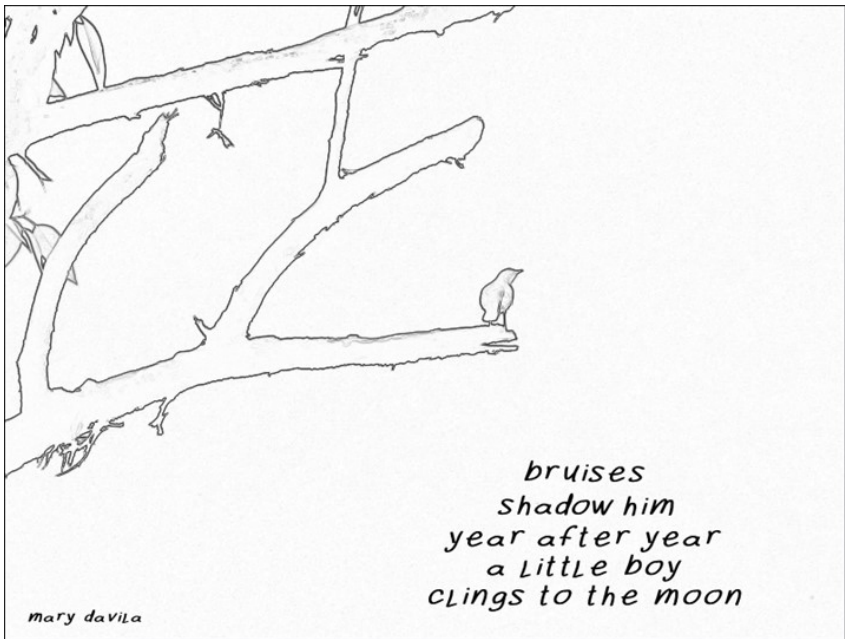
Sandi fell in love with the art of haiku/haiga in 2011 through a 'Band of Poets' on Twitter and then Facebook. With their inspiration and encouragement, she continues to share her encounters and observations of the natural world each day. Through hiking, running, yoga, photography and digital art she finds these moments everywhere.

Sandi's haiku, haiga and tanka have appeared in *WHA Haiga*, *Daily Haiku*, *Daily Haiga*, *Simply Haiku*, *Modern Haiku*, *AHG*, *Frogpond*, *Cattails*, *Acorn*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, *Hedgerow Poems*, *Brass Bell*, *Mann Library Daily Haiku*, *Under the Basho*, *Seize the Poem Anthology*, *DVerse Poetry Anthology*, *Fragments Anthology*, *Skylark*, *Moonbathing*, *Bright Stars* and *Atlas Poetica*.

Sandi's blog is <http://ravencliffs.blogspot.com> and you can also follow her as bigmax722 on Twitter. We are thrilled to welcome Sandi to the *Skylark* team as our new Tankart Editor. (See the submissions guidelines in the back pages).

Poets are invited to respond to the image in any way that moves them. Please label your tanka 'Skylark's Nest entry'.

Skylark



Mary Davilla, USA

Individual Tanka



Note: poets from the UK will have their country of residence stated as such unless they specifically request it to appear as England/Wales, etc.

Skylark

because the hero
always gets the girl
climax
I write you into
my novel

the low rumble
of a distant memory
night train
the time we flew
off the rails

S.M. Abeles, USA

Skylark

"invasive, non-native"
purple loosestrife thrives
along fences and border
the pretty child
translates for us

the gravesites
at the churchyard's edge
near woods and weeds
by trees where birds will sing
here, he says, is where I'll rest

Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA

Skylark

still invisible
the other side
of the moon
the face of my child
i couldn't imagine

she continued
facing obstacles in her life
i wonder
how harshly the flowing river
hit the stones

Muskaan Ahuja, India

Skylark

all the words
I've ever read
compost
in the heart's slow heat . . .
new seeds begin to sing

a script
as yet unwritten
beginning
with the whisper of silks
a poem leaps into being

wolf prints
in mother-of-pearl
on the fretboard
of a steel-string guitar
the sounds of Bach's Chaconne

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

Skylark

the room's overflow
of awkward silences
the reunion
we never wanted
surrounded by lilies

Joanna Ashwell, UK

a late sunset
colours the fallow field—
she glows
at age forty-two
her belly burgeoning

Gavin Austin, Australia

Skylark

after chemo
i grow my hair long like
Ono-no Komachi
a raku sky filling up
with limitless stars

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

you arrive
home in July—
clusters
of red berries
on the curry leaf tree

Anne Benjamin, Australia

Skylark

if only
dogends were seeds
catching
my breath
in the stone garden

on admission
the duty psychiatrist
working the nightshift
with madness
in his eyes

Steve Black, UK

Skylark

digging out a sliver
from my grandson's hand—
a silent hope
he always has someone
to make-it-better

the gossamer
of autumn mist . . .
the day begins
too delicate to hold
the heavy hours ahead

Wendy Bourke, Canada

Skylark

footsteps
across a paddock of dew
at daybreak
Dad's wild mushrooms
on warm-buttered toast

how long
this coil of barbed wire?
unwinding grief
your face in every shadow
your voice in every birdcall

evening sky
please carry him
through twilight
the way you hold
the rising winter moon

Michelle Brock, Australia

Skylark

it is the wrong season
for love and yet and yet
the winter winds
curl around us
as we draw closer

after Issa

a tortured branch
overhangs the cliff face . . .
after all our quarrels
and making up
you finally leave

Dawn Bruce, Australia

Skylark

verdigris
on the garden bench
so worth the wait
this sweet patina
of late-life love

spiritual pamphlets
left on the porch—
while I was out,
lost among the hills
ablaze with forsythia

Donna Buck, USA

Skylark

the wind blows
the petals that I am
down some dark path
until I am scattered
until I am lost

the circle of chairs
around the bonfire
keep secrets
I tell no one alive
how often I dream of you

Marjorie Buettner, USA

Skylark

wordlessly
the prayer plant flinches
in the quiet
of an October evening
if shadows could speak

the arguments
the silent entanglements
born of excuses
the fruit trees need pruning
they have for years

playing with time
I move, you move, the wood
in the fireplace shifts
sparks erupt into the gloom—
your knight forks my king and rook

James Chessing, USA

Skylark

this kettle
squeals and squeaks
as it heats up . . .
for some, it's silence
that precedes a rolling boil

tonight
her voice unsteady
thin
as this onion paper
on which she signed her name

dark trees
white clouds
blue sky—
all this in a hole
in the ice

Susan Constable, Canada

Skylark

tiny purple lobelia
sprouts in pavement chinks . . .
a plucky spirit
working its charm
through my day

Anne Curran, New Zealand

gunshots
blast the racial divide
on the streets
splattered blood
neither black nor white

Mary Davila, USA

Skylark

a sojourn
this late afternoon . . .
monarch butterfly
the perfect antidote
to Brexit

Susan Diridoni, USA



Skylark

researching
my ancestors
in the hush
of a stilled library
their boisterous lives

a fish
down the musk duck's gullet
headfirst
how suddenly a sunny day
can catch us napping

Jan Dobb, Australia

Skylark

lost in the ocean
these pieces of our past . . .
at ebb tide I find
driftwood and sea glass
worn smooth like me

Rebecca Drouilhet, USA

last hummingbird
at the feeder—
chilled by a breeze
I sip morning vodka
knowing it's time to leave

red balloon
dancing on a string
I think of mother
the ribbons of her apron
tethered to a farm boy

Marilyn Fleming, USA

Skylark

international space station
crossing the Milky Way
the boy inside me
still dreams
of escape

stranded halfway
up the shore
Portuguese man o' war
a boy's sand castle
defies the waves

Tim Gardiner, UK

light glints
on the palms of a tree
words
that are said
better with silence

Rajandeep Garg, India

Skylark

his tenure
on this earth turns uncertain . . .
old spirits
who once guided boyhood paths
dangle from scorched trees

drumming rain
and computer hum conspire
I lift my head
from endless editing,
phone a home-town friend

Beverley George, Australia

Skylark

drift
of cherry blossom
or maybe snowflakes
behind the flipchart
the meeting runs over

a sleeping lamb
twitches a hoof,
dreaming . . .
painted on its wool
a blue '62'

Mark Gilbert, UK

Skylark

have I lost
my brief tanka touch,
because of age?
I find so few while
turning my notebook pages

at my tanka cafe,
my one hope is for the soup
to be good—
I know my tanka
will continue to be spilled

down the page
they spill to make
a beginning,
maybe up the page
these tanka will be better

Sanford Goldstein, Japan

Skylark

our Sci-fi future
light years ahead of us . . .
the final frontier
young Sulu going boldly
where no one's gone before

the little money
my parents left me
gone now
to the daughter who tells me
I'll win "no best mom awards"

how he raised me
up on broad shoulders
to see
the wide, wide world before me
red oak leaves for my crown

Autumn Noelle Hall, USA

Skylark

shower and shave
ready to visit
his father
still a man of habit
the day after

Hazel Hall, Australia

a dragon-fly climb
from deep in the valley
his back-pack body
no test
for gossamer wings

Carole Harrison, Australia

Skylark

the blue hour
when your presence is most felt . . .
from somewhere
deep within the woods
a lone thrush musters darkness

not wanting
him to question my tears
I begin
a slow and careful chopping
of onions for our dinner

my gentle father
with his soft white hands
does he notice
as he guts the hare, the light
that goes out in my eyes

Michele L. Harvey, USA

Skylark

harvest time
Mum cooks cakes
by moonlight
the warm savor
of lemony crumbs

a pipe
in his mouth
Grandpa lengthens
his thin shadow
into the twilight

David He, China

Skylark

spring twilight
around the village green
with Argo
my white terrier, faithful
as the hound of Ulysses

we parted
with hateful words
forever—
it's still a thrill to learn
that you're alive somewhere

no choice
but to stay on this trip
until it's over
searching for the youth hostel
that no longer exists

Ruth Holzer, USA

Skylark

under the quilt frame
amidst knees and needles
I learned the nuances of talk
each lady adding color
to the homespun pattern

Elizabeth Howard, USA



Skylark

love,
your bedroom's empty now
but for the lilacs
whose lingering fragrance
I'm in no hurry to remove

carried
by an autumn breeze
our prayers
folded into sky lanterns
flare against the dark

the clang
of trains and iron gates
with the dictate
Arbeit macht frei
breaking into opa's sleep

Louisa Howerow, Canada

Skylark

seared
by summer sun
shoots shrivel—
a child of conflict
without comfort and love

on outback way
a road-train roars by
red dust
blocks the sun—
this silence between us

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

from the train . . .
drab little towns
that voted Leave
drift through fields
of autumn stubble

Gerry Jacobson, Australia

Skylark

I watch you
heaving a mattock
at the rocky soil—
forty years together
and still, surprises

Mary Kendall, USA

another topic
you say is taboo . . .
the glare
of sun on snow
keeps hurting me

Keitha Keyes, Australia

Skylark

on the blackboard
in the café's kiddie section,
a smiley-faced sun
radiates over a fog
of many erasures

receding . . . receding
a white umbrella dissolves
into mist . . .
out of nowhere
a wee warbler of Tuvan song

heads bent
in the faint light
of the wavery window—
the arrowhead's translucent edge,
her teaberry breath

Larry Kimmel, USA

Skylark

child wife mother
I've been many things
poet teacher
one who sits all afternoon
gum leaves filtering the light

growing
in a basketful of basil,
one nasturtium . . .
the red dress she wore
instead of her uniform

Kathy Kituai, Australia

along the shore
in the October sun
monarch . . . monarch . . .
as snowbirds flutter
down the interstate

S.M. Kozubek, USA

Skylark

still bothered
by the lack of structure
in my tanka—
a song thrush breaks
into random notes

plum blossoms
my fleeting brush
with eternity . . .
walking over them
as softly as i can

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK

Skylark

the fog rolling
over the border town . . .
refugees
walk along train tracks
toward a blood moon

steep terrain
and long rows of grape vines . . .
my migrant dream
dries up like a raisin
in the summer sunlight

for Langston Hughes

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Skylark

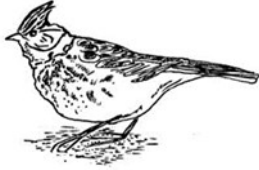
a stained-glass
rooster in the window . . .
sunlight
if I could crow
now might be the time

almost dark
almost home—
easing into the slip
I think of all the knots
I never learned to tie

on the roadside
a grey heron gliding
into a ditch—
the morning commute
a kind of meditation

Bob Lucky, Saudi Arabia

Skylark



an ascension
of uncharted feelings
wrapped in silk
this summer body
freed from superfluous cloth

Giselle Maya, France

Skylark

wild thyme
and oregano
for the spell
I stop praying
enchanted by the scent

the dervish
and the bluesman
filling my cup . . .
too drunk to find
my way home again

the Reaper
maddened by my muse
and her song and dance
turns his dark back
and walks away

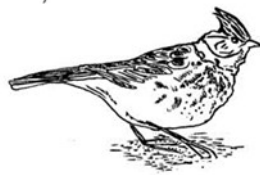
the splash
of the old oars
in the water
the song of the strings
a cello crying

Joy McCall, England

Skylark

a trout
on the bank
a hook
through its jaw . . .
I close my mouth

Jo McInerney, Australia



Skylark

a stench
that buckles the knees—
and so I bow
before the cave of the bear,
on the mountain of tall pines

an autumn sky
the color of peaches
or perhaps souls
departing this world
with fond memories

within
a waterfall
the sound
of a pine forest
a thousand years old

the dark inside
a Welsh folk song
finds my heart
hiding like that bird
there in the treeline

Michael McClintock, USA

Skylark

moving you
from my heart
to the pillow
the night flares
with cricket songs

Malintha Perera, Sri Lanka



Skylark

with whose eyes
do i know heaven
whose ears, the wind . . .
maybe in a past life
mountain was my name

alone
there is no ignoring
a hawk's cry
i become as still
as the wood mouse

take me
as far as you can,
raven
to the world beyond
these words of mine

Sandi Pray, USA

Skylark

“if you love someone
set them free”, you said,
as we sat
at the funeral service
my breath coming and going

I’ve taken responsibility
for many things in life
but they were smaller:
a forbidden water fight,
a stolen bar of chocolate

Patricia Prime, New Zealand

Skylark

this small stream
murmuring and glistening
in sunshine
and across it my shadow
stretching like a bridge

Djurdja Vukelic Rozic, Croatia

after retirement
so many options,
which way to go—
I find a compass
in my Xmas cracker

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

Skylark

it's hard to be
a monk alone
without
the breeze in the pine
the umbrella in the rain

Miriam Sagan, USA

a single snowflake
tingles on my outstretched palm
so far from my heart
yet warmth tunnels through the blood
to crack sheets of ice

Elizabeth Spencer Spragins, USA

a veneer of ice
blankets the creek,
mutes its flow—
I pause to hear
snowflakes fall

Craig W. Steele, USA

Skylark

whispering
paintings
into my brush—
the morning rain
all quiet now

Iliyana Stoyanova, UK

a fish
falls from the sky
what magic
when eagles dance
talon-to-talon

Debbie Strange, Canada

a white cat
lying on the pavement
in the evening sun—
I hope to die as
beautiful a death

Stephen Toft, UK

Skylark

the portal
back into my life
opened by a cat paw
reaching up to curl
over the edge of my desk

a Bewick's swan
becomes a perfect cross
for a moment
I'm also suspended
up high beside the moon

Linda Jeannette Ward, USA

Skylark

the widow next door
plays the Moonlight Sonata
on a spinet
as Beethoven composed it
no self-pity or remorse

I lie face down
not in supplication
the masseuse
invites me to surrender
the arms I carried to war

added to the bliss
of a sandalwood candle
is its care-taking
he knew how to trim a wick
to make the light last longer

Neal Whitman, USA

Skylark

the poem
he wrote for me,
clouds too
have a way
of loving

Dick Whyte, New Zealand

quaking
at her big teeth and big eyes
the children
still beg Grandma to retell
her red-capped childhood tales

the buoyancy
of the about-to-be-born
upside
into a life as bright
as a balloon

J. Zimmerman, USA

Tanka Sequences

Solo & Responsive



Skylark

Going Inland

~for Joy McCall

who lives
on your inner island
she asks—
dipping my silent oars
I glide toward the answer

a sorrel mare
at the water's edge
drinking deeply
dripping moonlight
we find the inland path

in a hut
fragrant with dried thyme
the old crone
at the hearthstone
feeds a flame with her words

at sunup
the reedy sound
of piping
from a fold in the hills
where no path leads

clasping
the hand of a blind harper,
I follow
the song of the brook,
the whisper of trees

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

Skylark

red azalea

~in memory of Sharon Nelson

you chose
your burial plot
in May
an eternity scented
with wild plum and lilac

will this postcard
be the first to arrive
after . . . after
blossoms gone
the weeping cherry

pall bearers
waiting for the hearse
abide
June's mid-day heat
under a willow

this movie
is so surreal . . .
how can I believe
this coffin is
yours

red azalea
scattered on the ground
still beautiful
did they, too,
know they would die

Skylark

you chose the poem
about your uncles' music
for me to read . . .
whatever is afterlife
they've welcomed you

Maxianne Berger, Canada

Beginnings and Endings

spring breeze
smells of rotting logs
wet and fecund
like beginnings and endings
with nothing in between

early summer
buttercups by the roadside
are already dusty
at age twenty, she tells me
she's weary of the world

star gazing—
there's Jupiter trying
to outshine the moon
like me, still wanting to impress
my senile mother

red rover, red rover
she was always the last one
to be called over—
my faint-hearted mother
who outlived all her friends

Mother's death day
look how hopefully
chickadees flit
to the empty feeder
again, again, and again

Margaret Chula, USA

Skylark

A Flicker of Hope

firelight flickers
through the bare bones
of a plum tree . . .
hope for our troubled world
in the spirals of smoke

not a speck of green
beneath their hooves . . .
the ribs
of Ethiopian cattle
across dry river beds

a knothole
catches a drop of rain . . .
what's to see
in the eye of a gull
that will never fly again

the wildfire
leaps across a river
miles away
geraniums in our garden
bright orange, flame red

cold to the bone
I stand in the firelight
of evening . . .
in this world of worry
purple heather blooms

Susan Constable, Canada

Eiderdown

curling up
on this old mattress
bony knee
on top of bony knee
I search for softness

expansive,
this quilted cover
of clouds
 patches of darkness
threaded with light

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

From a Seedling

on one branch
early slaveholders,
on another
an abolitionist . . .
the shades of my forebears

beneath the ground
the remains of a tree—
till I phone her
she doesn't realize
it's Mother's Day

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

Sincere apologies to Janet: this sequence was originally accepted for publication in the previous issue (*Skylark* 4:1, Summer 2016).

The News

threaded together
on my couch on girls' night
watching Hitchcock's birds
You were afraid of THAT?
remarks my granddaughter

the missing schoolgirls
kidnapped by Boko Haram
do they know
how many colors and faiths
are praying for them?

HELLO MOM AND DAD
imprinted on the ultrasound
the surviving twin
kicks my daughter-in-law
tonight for the first time

Tish Davis, USA

Skylark

Tumbling Answers

fishermen
catching first sunlight . . .
I float with jellyfish
on a current
of amniotic reverie

your face
in a wash of diamonds
a shell tide
tumbling answers—
where will you be tomorrow

a lone seagull
tracking the shoreline—
what flotsam
between the rocks of doubt
what dreams undreamed

between squalls
a strip of horizon
shines with hope . . .
the decision still waits
for a time that's right

gulls call me back
to a place long buried
a barnacle move
we both know
you need to make

Carole Harrison, Australia

No Way Out

just before the falls
she dropped the towline
our mother
in the other canoe
with her new lover

often, she said
her life would be different
without us . . .
we three children
who bound her to my father

he never came back
after father
chased him
down the street
with a shotgun in his hands

pinning
for a lover long gone
she fills
another glass with gin
and toasts to no one

Michele L. Harvey, USA

Baba Yaga's hut

the witch's hut
balances on chicken legs
boneflowers
twist tentacles
through window cracks

twilight pink
watercolor mist creeps
among the yews
waiting for midnight
where tombstones bloom

secrets
explode like lightning
a spider
scuttles across
the cold oak floor

ivy for the mother
wormwood for the child
laughter for the one
who dwells inside a green hut
calling crows to cry her lies

Carole Johnston, USA

Deep Sea

high winds
tautening the sails—
each time
my fingers draw
a flinch from you

skipping stones
seven times over
the sea surface—
so smoothly you say
we are incompatible

the racket
of unsettled gulls—
you are not
thinking straight i say
to you, to myself

firm ripples
of the receding tide
in the sand—
our hands reconnect
in a stiff handshake

the train zooms
past a blurring green—
a fresh cut
from the ragged edges
of those words

Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK

A Song Stolen from the Place Between Lives

You've just arrived,
the brown wren,
dropped like a pebble
from history, onto my shore,
where I gather fallen shadows

To stir
with wind and rain.
I am the force
of night, and solace
for last days.

Rest. Sleep.
Consign to the sunlight
all regrets,
yield your failures
to the void inside—

The mollusc's
hollow shell—
you have
no other business here
and will need them no more.

Draw new blood
to new bones
from these tide pools—
inhale the quickened atoms
from the ever-burning star.

Skylark

You're to be
re-cast and proven
awake again,
returned whole
to what you are.

Michael McClintock, USA

What Matters in Weather and Mortality

Our valley weather
comes lilting over the ranges
out of the Gulf of Alaska,
scented with whale musk,
cold and salt.

I can stand
on the western slope
of the Sierra
and inhale the remnant breath
of Pacific cyclone and storm.

And I can turn
and walk a hundred miles
into forests
that were saplings in the high days
of Caesar's Rome, the life of Christ.

In time, of course,
as measured by stars
and dark matter,
in atoms of the sun
and the helium tides of gravity,

The earth forgets
these histories . . .
epochs pass
and light fades away
on the apron of the sea.

Skylark

A dying man
will last choose
love's simple beauty—
when lips meet
on a summer night,

When hand holds hand
in the winter bed—
and may believe
the rest is far better left
unfinished or unknown.

Michael McClintock, USA

Unplug

ruined
by Facebook
this peaceful day
of perverts, politicians
and terrorists

as a child
I didn't know
attacks and lockdowns
the world made worse
by social media

racist videos
anti-Semitic trolls
child molester networks
my blood pressure soars
with freedom of speech

my job
is to manage
social media
starting Friday
I unplug

I resist the urge
to capture the moment
for once
family time
just is

Christina Nguyen, USA

Skylark

holding you

Hawaii
transition zone
east to west . . .
I share your tea
using two hands

the warmth
of your tea bowl
in my hands . . .
I am holding
you

the way a potter
breathes life
into a lump of clay . . .
you touched me
and I came alive

the piece
of your soul you threw
in my tea bowl . . .
your fingers
to my lips

I look at
your tea bowl and
my heart is full . . .
how sad
we never met

David F. Noble, USA

Skylark

the white of my years

long evening light
I reach for your waist
before starlight returns
my long hair streaked
with the white of my years

let me move into the dark
den of your body
one more time . . .
while apricots make fruit
and peaches are blooming

tall pines
offer pollen
our fingers
interwined
offer prayers

an ermine trills
in the woodpile
your fingers travel the long
path of my hair
this moonless night

morning, I touch you
like snow touches bare skin
and dissolves . . .
my hair tangled
by dreams of our parting

Barbara Robidoux, USA

Skylark

hummingbirds

making
sugar sweet water for
hummingbirds
I taste it, and taste it
like a little bird

ah, look!
a hummingbird
hovers
near the birdfeeder
making me feel hilarious

happiness
is when I see
a hummingbird
frantically flapping,
flapping at the feeder

summer's end—
counting how many
hummingbirds
came to my flowers
I try to forget his lies

Kozue Uzawa, Canada

Skylark

Your Shadow Presence

in the time
before elusive sleep
your shadow presence
hovers over me
a tender Goya nightmare

a peacock's scream
through the tomb of night
I awaken to find
a sky so starless it must
have wept over emptiness

a rayed halo
round the altar candle flame
can't replace those visions
I tried to sustain
after you were taken

the voice of each nun
dissolves into plainsong
in the Lady Chapel
I envy the moon
drowning in misty clouds

your dear voice
growing fainter in my mind
all day on the still pond
the mallard calls
for his lost mate

Linda Jeannette Ward, USA

Reservoir

well worn covers
of the book of life
her blue
sea and sky
where she touched them

Silver Lake
her solitary gaze
over the reservoir
my father left her
with only the view

born by the Nile
she learned early from the palms
my mother
bent with each storm
till her last dark days

sitting bedside
after she left
I felt the pull
in the cool room
the warm vortex of her love

unlike snow
the weight of memory
does not melt . . .
gemlike moments
on the tree of life

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

Skylark



Sandi Pray, USA

Skylark



Joann Grisetti, USA

Prayers Answered and Denied

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

Geethanjali Rajan, India

& Shobhana Kumar, India

seeing

butterflies chase each other

in the summer field

my heart leaps

I become a child once more

mustard fields

of gold undulate gently

in the breeze

with every mouthful

I feel closer to my home

after endless days

of the summer sun

petrichor

there are still things

that we cannot make

invisible

in the folds of wisteria

and yet

a pale-footed warbler

enchants with its song

I rasp my finger

on the roughness

of a blade of grass

dreaming of a future

filled with satin petals

Skylark

at the temple
our eyes mist
in gratitude
for prayers answered
and those denied

Responsive tanka by email. Started: 7. 4. 16, finished: 10.4.16

Skylark

Glittering Mosaics

Jan Foster & friends

opaline glow
of jewelled colours spread
across pages
so much of value shared
in so few words

Jan

gemstones
polished to perfection . . .
oh, how gently
the heart's words
crystallize into poems

Luminita

short songs
fill the courtyard
I listen
to voices resonate
through the longest day

Marilyn

our feet guided
by glittering mosaics
washed by gentle rain
this ancient pathway
hums with coral and jade

Julie

jewellery shop
from a display case
I choose
a turquoise birthstone
to be made into a ring

Patricia

Skylark

born between
bloodstone and aquamarine
always the tug
of the sea, finding strength
from iron, clenched in jasper *Carmel*

a spun-silk casket
of miniature treasures
gleaned from the stream
. . . in this life a caddisfly
. . . in the next, a poet *Claire*

a birthday cake
studded with gemstones
from the sparkle
of our difference
a poem of harmony *Anne*

Jan Foster, *Australia*, Luminita Suse, *Canada*, Marilyn
Humbert, *Australia*, Julie Thorndyke, *Australia*, Patricia
Prime, *New Zealand*, Carmel Summers, *Australia*, Claire Ev-
erett, *England*, Anne Benjamin, *Australia*.

A sequence written via email in celebration of the launch of *Gemstones*:
Collaborative Tanka by Anne Benjamin & Friends. See the website for
details & ordering information:
<http://skylarkpublishing.weebly.com/about.html>

Skylark

Deserted Farmhouse

tan renga

Beverley George, Australia
& *Simon Hanson, Australia*

deserted farmhouse
at home on the veranda
a black-faced sheep
flights of starlings
flee the chimney

mud bricks
an empty wasp nest
under the eaves
a model helicopter
cocooned in web

hay bales
the endurance
of hessian
fallen fence posts
held by a strand of barbed wire

a rusty plough
slowly making its way
back into the ground
tendrils of a pumpkin vine
straddle dry furrows

in the shed
clay flakes from the spindle
of her potting wheel
old jam jars
splintered sunlight in charred glass

Skylark

*behind the outhouse
an ancient quince tree
still bears fruit
jelly-splashed recipes
in the kitchen drawer*

a drawstring bag
of boiled knucklebones
five for playing Jacks
*the slow drip of a brass tap
staining the sink*

*Huon pine
that familiar creak
in the hallway floor
under an unlocked door
the hollowed step lets in draughts*

a large key
dangles from a wooden peg
above the shoe rack
*pantry shelves
lined with old newspapers*

*hearthstones
blackened by the fires
of earlier days
a diary no one will read
beneath a bedroom floorboard*

Reflections

Marilyn Humbert, *Australia*
& David Terelinck, *Australia*

on the wall
in gilded frames
shadow faces
I check
my reflection again

*a stippling
of winter light across
the floorboards—
could this be memory
or imagination . . .*

the house creaks
in strengthening wind
crooning a lullaby . . .
I try to net
my fluttering thoughts

*watching the boats
bring home the morning catch
in the seagull's cry
every piece of grief
we have ever known*

shards of glass
missing bits of jigsaws
odd-scrap
in the dusty corners
of our minds

Skylark

*inkblots
on faded parchment
you tell me
what you think
I want to hear*

overflowing
my discontent surfs
churning seas—
hunting storm thermals
a lone osprey

*weathermen
speak of isobars
and troughs—
no words to describe
this cold space between us*

on the edge
slipping into the void
these dreams
where reality
bends into wishes

*the gap
that hovers between
life and death . . .
those paths we choose
and others we're forced to walk*

Light Touches

Carol Judkins, USA
Hazel Hall, Australia

fluttering
beneath the wind bell
my tanzaku
will these words and music
touch a distant star?

*carmine light
on a garden seat
I see you
transfigured in shimmer
before the sunset dips*

a soft breeze
at twilight dusk . . .
this caress
of the scent of your roses
that cradle the stone

*song of a thrush
as dawn mutes its trumpet
light touches
rosemary and thyme
in my herb garden*

heat now
through a sun-warmed window—
shedding
this shawl and slippers
with yesterday's worries

Skylark

*evening wrapped
in purple and platinum
listen . . .
cheeping on the breeze
a cricket's canticle*

Carol and Hazel both had a tanka published in the *Tanka Journal* (Japan) #47. 2015. When they looked at them side by side, they thought the two could be the start of a sequence since they seemed so much like a call and response . . .

Skylark

Tipping Point

tan renga

Marcus Liljedahl, Sweden
& *Anna Maris, Sweden*

shades of autumn
that old song on repeat
until I become it
*a scratch in the record
keeps taking me back*

low winter sun
dark horses disappear
in frosty mist
*the heel of her boot
trapped in the stirrup*

*winter solstice
only the morning after
a little lighter*
first deep breath
the slow turn of venetian blinds

cusp of winter
in a crow's wings
the changing wind
*the waterfall still
reduced to a trickle*

*new year
i let my lanterns rise
into thin air*
two planets slowly moving
towards a conjunction

Skylark

snow storm
the sculpture park
takes on new shapes
at a crossroads
signs with no names

deep winter
in and out of the dishwasher
empty cups
a lingering taste
on the tip of my tongue

tipping point
only me and the sky
and the skis
everything that I am
in one single thought

winter fever
volumes of snow
turn to sleet
a wilted sunflower shares
its last seed with a fresh wind

alone in a crowd
the firm grip
of a winter rain
across a sea of smart phones
our eyes, locked

Diversions

March 2016

Giselle Maya, France
& Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK

all my life
following my own
meandering path
below the waterfall
a pool of petals *gm*

a sharp gasp
as I plunge into
the Kaaveri . . .
how easy to think
of anything but God *sk*

a smile is born
as i watch you dance
the pranks of Krishna . . .
your face and mudra reveal
your innermost being *gm*

the display
in a shop window—
your laughter
at all my jokes
perfectly timed *sk*

we prune
tangled quince branches
and our feelings
under the vaulted tree—
can we remain friends *gm*

Skylark

the clamour
of memories clawing
their way back . . .
i rearrange what i can
into a tanka or two *sk*

by the sea
skimming flat stones
why can't we stop
and talk about
what we feel *gm*

a gull's cry
fainter and fainter—
everything
said by our fingertips
brushing but a moment *sk*

hand to hand

Joy McCall, England
& Tom Clausen, USA

*moon-shadows
of bare branches
on the brickweave
how I love those
with simple souls*

a gentle breeze
in this day
between us
a warm penny too
hand to hand

*it is the touch
of the friend's hand
not the coin
that brings the comfort
I was seeking*

where is it
that we can exist
in the tangles of this world
and still see
some solace

*a scrap of cloth
caught on the brambles
a wild violet
a small bird singing
—your poems*

Skylark

pair

Joy McCall, England
& Lynda Monahan, Canada

dark ravens
cawing in the treetops
waning moonrise
the doe shivers
huddling down into dead leaves

let the ravens wait
and dead leaves give way
to growing things
let her know the warmth of sun
the river's springtime song

Skylark

pine-winds singing

Matsukaze, USA
& *Murasame, England*

crunching pieces of celery
while typing
a reply email
to the woman
of the rain

*listening
to the quiet pine-winds
singing
with the owls
long before dawn*

in silence
hearing
caged birds stir
in a soul
full of stalactites

*Sunday morning
quiet enough
to notice
my own strange
erratic heartbeat*

Matsukaze & Murasame (Joy McCall) have been writing these magical sequences for some time. You will find more to enjoy in *pine winds, autumn rain*. See the website for details:
<http://skylarkpublishing.weebly.com/about.html>

two for joy

Paul Smith, England
& *Joy McCall*, England

a pair
of magpies strutting
across the lawn—
how can I not
think of you

*my neighbour
playing a kettle drum
in the garage
my mind adding one note
while the beat goes on*

gusty rain
like some funky
jazz band
hammering
at the window

*the madman
singing out of tune
down the lane
stomping time
on the gravel*

flicking moss
from the gutter
the jackdaw's
grey cap
is a mirror for me

Skylark

*my heart
keeping time
with the woodpecker
both of us
tapping slow*

two triptychs

Paul Smith, England
& *Joy McCall, England*

mamasan—
I say it
out loud
just to feel
its warmth

*bluesman—
I whisper it
and music
fills
my quiet room*

awake before dawn
I listen
to the blues
of you
inside my heart

~~~



## Skylark

running wild  
through this forest mind  
thoughts of you  
and what still  
might be

*the track  
opening up  
into a clearing  
with room for  
wide, high dreams*

the sparkle  
of sunlight on water  
I dip in a toe  
to make sure  
that it's real

**When the Light Departs**

David Terelinck, *Australia*

Mary Kendall, *USA*

this alloy  
of clouds and winter light—  
it's not what you said  
but how you looked  
as you said it . . .

*still unable  
to explain why the world  
seems darker now . . .  
all the frozen buds  
on the camellia bush*

days and days  
of endless rain that swells  
the window sills—  
only two weeks left  
in her first trimester

*a sudden  
knowing of what  
may never be . . .  
the silence of snowdrops  
pooling on the lawn*

not the way  
she expected to wear  
all white . . .  
the greying of her thoughts  
following sedation

## Skylark

*winter storm,  
a young dove lost  
in a sea of mist  
. . . my empty arms  
grow heavy*

she spends the morning  
filling freshly turned beds  
with crocus bulbs—  
what else can a woman  
of a certain age do?

*when the light  
departs, I put down  
my paintbrush . . .  
this world of colour  
between earth and sky*

## Skylark

### **spring**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& *Joy McCall, England*

there's a minimalist  
within me somewhere  
I just need to move  
everything out of the way  
to find him

*there's  
a woman of excess  
inside me  
hiding in the stark  
tidiness of the room*

another spring  
in the rattlebag world  
we clean  
our little corners  
of chaos

**lines and tides**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
*Joy McCall, England*

she sits at the sea's edge  
watching the pages  
turning, turning  
brief lines of Ryokan  
scattering like gulls

*he stands on the clifftop  
talking to himself  
the wind-rush  
tossing bits of poems  
seaspray on the sands*

the moon blows  
lines and tides  
across the page  
we each of us speak  
in spillages of night

## Slow Pilgrimage

Beatrice Yell, Australia  
& Jan Foster, Australia

Autumn  
all its colours  
in a single leaf  
these shortening days  
still full of joy and wonder

*through the lattice  
of winter-bare branches  
shards of sky  
the only colour  
. . . your blue, blue eyes*

skyward  
a slow pilgrimage  
to Shinto shrine  
suppliant prayers flutter  
in the winds of fortune

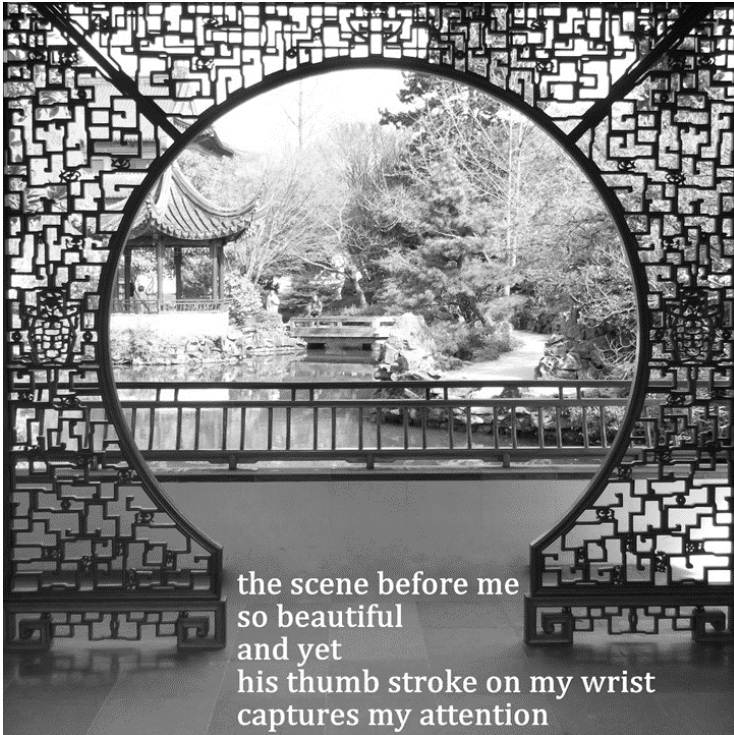
*cool breeze  
after a hot day  
pure rush of relief  
. . . the sound of your voice  
saying you've arrived safe*

jacaranda  
through surgery blinds  
shadows  
the doctor's report  
and his best prognosis

Skylark

*this morning  
your phone call saying  
it's twins—  
new buds opening  
on the passionfruit vine*

Skylark



Chinese Garden, Vancouver

*Wendy Bourke, Canada*



## Rengay





**Straits**

Hazel Hall, Australia

*Carol Judkins, USA*

**& David Terelinck, Australia**

moonlit park  
a K-mart trolley's  
coat of frost

*slumped on the bench  
a man in a camo jacket*

**CEO sleepout—  
those days when he chose  
to doss under the stars**

the fickle twist  
of a horoscope's whim

*factory closure  
the long walk to school  
from the shelter*

**tossing her sandwich  
to the stray that just whelped . . .**

**Creatures of the Air**

Giselle Maya, France  
*Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*

it too  
has markings of a tiger cat  
the chirping sparrow

*no stranger to cell phones  
a minivet mimics ringtones*

interlaced dragons  
blown together by this  
never-ending wind

*as if divulging  
some secret, a white tortoise  
drifts out of the clouds*

early morning birdsong  
cherries slowly turning red

*catching the sunlight  
blue pine to blue pine  
a Bhutan Glory*

**The Joy of Finding**

**Geethanjali Rajan, India**  
*Shobhana Kumar, India*  
Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

**button roses—  
diverse shades flourish  
in one window box**

*soap bubbles—  
where do rainbows go*

searching  
in a tangle of orchids  
a young crow

**a vine curls over  
the forgotten garden swing**

*beneath the bramble  
the joy of finding  
a silver ring*

surprised by the plum scent  
a barbet pauses its song

**garden's edge—  
silence punctuated  
with sunbeams**

*stirring from a siesta . . .  
coconut fronds nod*

## Skylark

in the reed bed  
a cat softly breathes  
watching the fish pond

**leaves ride on ripples  
in the gentle breeze**

*bits of clouds  
slide away  
from a lotus leaf*

noiselessly, a black kite  
takes to the sky

Rengay by email. Started 10. 3. 2016 and finished: 23. 3. 2016.

## Split Timing Rengay

Daniel A. Rosas, USA\*  
& Neal Whitman, USA

mom's lullaby  
matches the lilting rain  
late winter

*daytime tree limbs welcome me  
night-time ones give me fright*

after years of war  
the two presidents shake hands—  
olive branch

*lightning then BOOM  
the tree trunk splits in half  
two minutes to midnight*

at midnight we count down  
New Year's Eve with friends

*first dream  
the Earth is trembling  
a record-setting year?*

\*aged 14

**Between Stars**

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff, USA  
*Connie R Meester, USA*

flocking birds  
louder than the words  
between us

*stones surround our burgeoning fire  
more wine more sparks*

fall bike ride  
leaning  
into your every turn

*creeping along at dusk  
fog covers our trail  
and the startled deer*

breathing in the closeness  
between stars

*searching the predawn sky  
Venus and Mars, naked eye  
naked*



**deep autumn  
crushing fallen leaves  
on the trail  
soon snow will blanket  
this dead-end life**

**Pamela A. Babusci 2016**





# Tanka Prose





**safely delivered**  
*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

Printed in 1725 and thicker than my hand is broad, the leather-bound Bible that once belonged to my grandmother contains several cracked and yellowed pages closely written on both sides in faded brown ink, the entries dating back to 1699. The ink has bled through the thin paper, which is torn and mended in several places with cloudy tape. I photograph the pages with my iPhone and enlarge the images, laboriously transcribing as much as I can.

Here is my ancestor Elizabeth, married on August 20, 1717 ‘old stile.’ In the next twenty years she bore thirteen children—seven of them born dead. Her granddaughter, also called Elizabeth, married a lieutenant in the 55th Regiment of the British Army and sailed with him from New York to Ireland and back again. Widowed with at least three children, she later remarried. An oil portrait of her second husband, in powdered hair and flowing cravat, hangs on the wall behind me. One forefinger marks his place between the pages of a half-closed book.

a brittle history  
of baptism and burial—  
the refrain  
*thanks be to god*  
in a spidery hand

**Cycle of Memory**  
*Marjorie Buettner, USA*

Rocking my grandchild to sleep, I am caught in a cycle of  
memory which takes me from the past to the future then to  
the present once again, rocking, rocking . . .

full moon rising—  
our breathing sighs  
in unison  
can it be my mother  
I am holding in my arms

## Dry Lightning

*Barbara Curnow, Australia*

Roselle lives on the edge of the outskirts of Darwin. She used to think that she followed her heart up north, but now she knows differently. She followed a man. “Just a man” she whispers when her thoughts wander his way.

The humidity is rising and the dry season’s days are numbered. For weeks, clouds have been piling up, flashing, grumbling and trying to rain. Sweaty and in need of relief, Roselle begins to fill her garden bath beneath the paw-paw trees. She lets the tap run for a while without putting the plug in; best to get through the sun-hot water in the pipes and into the cold from the depths of the tank.

Already naked, but for sunglasses, Roselle sinks into the full bath. Every cell tingles and releases its pent up heat. Idly she reaches for the Rubik’s Cube that she always fiddles with in the bath. She lets her mind slip into a place somewhere between gentle focus and random rambling; wants to let the back of her brain intuit what to do.

Roselle has always loved to be wrapped in water. She feels cocooned and wonders if it harks back to her happy time in the womb. She’s seen photos of her pregnant mum; always so relaxed with a glass of wine and an easy smile. This morning Roselle heard on the grapevine that someone from her home town drowned in the weir, but to ponder even this seems strangely comforting. “When I die” she thinks “I’d like to drown. To be born from water and die in water”. The idea has poignant appeal; a circle finally closing.

some will live  
some will die today—  
nine years old  
playing God, catching  
yabbies in the weir

## Skylark

With a jolt Roselle is shaken from her reverie by the screech of the garbage truck. She listens for the clatters and thuds of her discarded possessions, and watches in her mind's eye as sandals, pots and pans, books, photo albums, bags of clothes and bathroom bits and pieces fall between the great metal jaws.

She feels just a small grain of guilt, like sand in an oyster. Some of this stuff could have gone to the Salvos. Tomorrow she leaves. Cleaner, lighter, free.

too many  
of his empty words—  
dry lightning  
a brolga trumpets  
her beak toward the sky



**anchored**

*Susan Diridoni, USA*

breath coaxes the song, where he hauls the dream tools,  
where we two float to the ceiling and then open the roof,  
the house anchored by music and books.  
there is poetry in one room, his guitars in the other room,  
flat surfaces covered by printed matter,  
space occupied by melodies and rhythms,  
the house anchored by books and music.

a yellow room  
glowing in the key of  
Andalucía  
the morning stars  
dissolve in birdsong

**Still the Music**

*Amelia Fielden, Australia*

The nursing home program for Saturdays and Sundays shows only 'family visits'. No other form of entertainment. Not far to drive, but it's like moving into a different world.

dawning bright  
the day turns to dismal rain—  
a faint light  
that flickered, now gone  
from his old blue eyes

Too wet to walk in the courtyard today. I think he still knows who I am, but he neither speaks my name, nor gives any sign of affection.

He's losing his words. I put one of his old favourite CDs on the player. And then another. We sit in the music until an aide collects my husband for 5 o'clock dinner.

whether to keep  
battering these fragile wings  
against  
his fading warmth, or  
to fold myself away

**Hunting Season**  
*Seánan Forbes, USA/UK*

She has always tried to be invisible. It started in childhood. Don't make Daddy angry. Be careful; Mumsie's in a mood. You know your brother's temper—Why do you bother him? Hush, now; Gran's not feeling well. Be mindful; your granddad's had too much to drink. And she truly didn't want to attract Uncle Eddie's attention. That was disgusting.

hunting season  
an abused child  
erasing herself  
from family photos—  
a gift to the past

Older now, she finds herself drawn to the familiar. Chooses lovers who neglect her, friends who demean, mentors who diminish. Sometimes, she feels as if the world were conspiring to bring her down. Other times, she believes that she sows mines in her own fields. Always, she knows that she deserves the ill.

thick clouds  
of fleeing birds  
Cassandra's warnings  
always unheeded  
she tips her cheek to his fist

She studies maps, charts, stars, tides, navigation. Develops an obsession with finding the quickest routes. Another with the least likely. Unfolds old books and age-stiffened plats in shops and libraries, drifts waking dreams down roads, into alleys, through neighborhoods long buried, longer changed. Presses the pages of atlases against her skin, imagines es-

## Skylark

capas and passages translating themselves onto her skin, migrating within her, showing her different destinations, spinning the compass of her days.

as if her life  
could be traced  
in song lines—  
the blue-veined map  
within her skin

five years  
she's been lost  
in her husband's life—  
the tilt of an old compass  
in her still-young hand

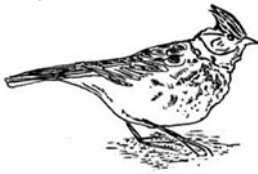
She doesn't blame him. If she is to change directions, then she must escape herself. At rest stops, she dips into local maps: tourist spots, historical sites, parklands, lakes, routes that are old, new, open, barred, vanished into time or under asphalt . . . Her notes, her thoughts, her interests, her wayward inward ways, she shelters deep within her, in caverns she has yet to own, much less explore. She steals time from errands. Spends it trailing her fingers along lanes and avenues. Freeways. Free. She seeks a sign with that word. Wonders whether she could read it, if it were there.

a morning wasted  
searching for its key:  
open door  
the caged bird  
clings to its perch

---

## Skylark

**\* Editor's Note:** This beautiful piece was inadvertently omitted from the previous issue (4:1, Summer 2016). With Seánan 's permission, it was published in *Haibun Today* (10:2, June 2016) and is reprinted here for the enjoyment of our readers. Errors and omissions inevitably do occur, but with the understanding of the poets concerned, these can always be rectified and full apology given. Thank you all for your patience and understanding.



**Ben Lettery**  
*Tim Gardiner, UK*

The ascent of Ben Lettery begins; my first taste of hill walking in Connemara on the west coast of Ireland. Gaining altitude rapidly, the youth hostel a shrinking view beneath, my gaze is drawn to verdant hillsides all around. The blanket bog stifles my companion's resolve and they don't keep their displeasure a secret from the group. "My feet are wet, it's so wet up here" their near constant refrain. It's a relief when they finally give up and head back to the hostel.

Proceeding upwards, the *Sphagnum* sucks at fetid boots; by now more hung-over students have turned back from the treacherous mire. A few continue though, hopeful of success. Will takes the direct route, scrambling over loose rocks and boulders. He's soon lost from sight; like Mallory vanishing into the clouds for the last time.

the weight  
of my over-full pack  
on fragile shoulders . . .  
bootprints in mire moss  
of those who came before

**To Gnome is to Loveme**

*Autumn Noelle Hall, USA*

My sister-in-law is dying of stage four breast cancer. So my brother-in-law fashions a mobile sick bed in the back seat of her SUV and chauffeurs her on a coast-to-gulf-to-coast farewell tour. We are one of the last stops on their way back home to Northern California. For a few bright June days, we share BBQ and stories, tears and loads of laughter on the deck above our blooming garden.

“... they creep me out!”  
he says of garden gnomes  
so we tease him  
our razzing as pointed  
as red conical hats

Goodbye hugs are extra-long, as is her last gaze. “I know . . .” she says. We both do. Miles away and another treatment along, she checks in via text. We are silly, in the way only the saddest of sisters can be.

“I’m going to start a gnome-of-the-month club for him after you’re gone.” She lol’s back, “That’s AWESOME!” I text her a picture of a Coast Guard gnome. After 32 years as the mate to his Boatswain, she texts back:

“OMG  
I almost peed my pants  
I laughed so hard!”  
the emoji, too, has tears  
in its X crinkled eyes

“We want to plant a tree for you,” I tell her, “What’s your favorite?” She says, “Willow.” But I know they grow too big.

Skylark

“But I love blooming trees, too!” she adds, and the Japanese short form poet in me hits on the perfect compromise.

Ever the impish one, she picks Groundhog Day to leave us. No doubt she knew full well her “White Light” mantra would counter any future shadows. Mid-May, we find her tree, just days before my brother-in-law retraces their road trip to visit. He is here to help us dig the hole, and to suggest we stand our green garden gnome beside the trunk, as guardian.

planting  
the weeping cherry tree  
in memoriam  
the echo of her laughter  
blossoms in our garden

—*for Karen*



Skylark

**Erquan Yingyue (二泉映月)**

*The moon shining in Erquan pond*

*Hazel Hall, Australia*

not a soul  
in my hearing's sight  
drifting  
light and darkness  
through sockets of my mind

Streets of Wuxi are chilly tonight. In my old place beside the temple, I'm sitting in the kind dust holding an empty rice bowl. Even my friend the fiddle is bereft of tunes.

platinum light  
across an empty path . . .  
harbinger  
of an ID file  
and unfamiliar guards

A miserable wind is hanging in the air. As a twig snaps, I'm reminded of lost comrades. Tired bones tell me the moon has risen. A stranger is touching me on the shoulder. *Abing*, says my companion, *Open your eyes. See, the moon is shining in Erquan pond.*

a light becomes  
many if you let it  
I'd gift my violin  
to ignite one flame  
between two seconds

fragrance  
that lingers after spring . . .

## Skylark

tuning  
to jasmine flowers  
brewed in porcelain

This melody pouring through the sky is mine, but not mine. It slips in and out of inky caverns, tracing the shapes of grief. I throw it back to the spheres where it shatters into fragments. Broken moonlight shimmers and flickers on my lids. Our tormentors will not strip us of the will to live.

a vision  
rises with the phoenix  
bowls full  
of rice shoots grown  
in exquisite qi

As all fades away, dust informs me that I'm back at the gate. Fumbling, I reach out to make sure. There's the erhu safe beside me. The vessel, overflowing with coins.

dare to speak  
through silk and bamboo . . .  
a future  
shaped by yin and yang  
before the mist sets in

---

**Author's Note:** *Erquan Yingyue* is a piece of music composed by Huà Yànjūn ('Abing') for the two stringed Chinese fiddle, *erhu*.

Skylark

## The Well

*Gerry Jacobson, Australia*

The shiny new shopping centre at Chapelfield dominates the old town. We don't go there, preferring a quiet cafe in a cobbled laneway. And then a rainy afternoon browsing the cathedral. Nine hundred years of town and county christendom is memorialised here. Including the crusades of the famous Royal Norfolk Regiment.

An archaeological find in the foundations of the shopping mall. Who tells me about this? The excavation uncovers skeletons crammed in a well. Bodies of seventeen people including several children. Dropped in head first. Ethnic cleansing in the Chapel Field?

*auto da fe*  
people condemned  
tortured and burnt . . .  
a terrible crime  
to be born Jewish

DNA testing shows that some of these people are indeed Jews. There's no mention of these killings in historical records. But there were several pogroms in English towns during the 1100s and 1200s. After 1290 England was *judenrein*, emptied of Jews, for 360 years. The evidence is sufficient for a sombre burial in the Jewish cemetery at Earlam.

Next morning it's still raining. We visit the cell of Mother Julian, anchoress of Norwich, 1342-1430. On the wall her words: "All shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well." At her shrine I light a candle for the softening of ethnic hatreds in the world to come.

lighting candles  
and spreading the light

Skylark

welcome  
the *Shabbat* bride . . .  
pray for our peace

for the rain  
it raineth every day  
and this  
is the season  
for miracles

Where the mist rolls

Shobhana Kumar, India

*Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*

Geethanjali Rajan, India

In Lovedale in the Nilgiri Mountains, the monsoon lasts for the best part of the year. So when the sun comes out, the house readies itself for a celebration. The large French windows are kept open until late evening. The fragrance of cedar, eucalyptus and cypress settle themselves in every nook. Quilts are brought out to soak up the delicious warmth. Picnic baskets are set up, and we spend long afternoons sprawled on the grass, reading an old favourite. And then, there are grandmother's cookies. Sometimes, cakes and soups to wind up the day.

Grandmother remembers nothing.

*who might it be  
the cuckoo calls repeatedly  
atop this hill  
where the mist rolls through  
cascades of rhododendron*

As we move uphill, sometimes at a trot and sometimes at a canter, the smell of pine needles and eucalyptus leaves crushed underfoot soaks into everything. We chase each other and startle the birds. A monkey and its mother sit on the culvert at the bend of the road, watching us. They probably know what comes next.

Suddenly, one of the boys, who has gone ahead, cries out that the train is making its turn uphill. We get ready to race the "toy train"—the moniker given to the almost 100-

year-old, steam engine. As always, amidst chugs, puffs of smoke and giggles and much excitement, we the adolescents beat the old lady.

I wonder where the others are now? Do they ever think back on these days?

**puffs of smoke  
before each bend  
what stories  
would the mountains  
share of us**

*One by one, the early sun touches the peaks as if lighting butter lamps. After days of rain and leeches, this seems like a good omen, a blessing of the deities. I climb the narrow path to the monastery on a ridge in the shadow of Kan-chen-jun-ga. My parents made annual pilgrimages here. To the north, a glimmer in the distance of the sacred range of Tibet, to the east, the mountain stretches into Sikkim in a haze of mist.*

*As the incline becomes steep the banks of nettle and buttercup give way to slopes of verdant spongy moss. All along the way hundreds of prayer flags catch the growing light. I murmur the mantra fluttering in the cold breeze. At the entrance to the monastery, I turn a row of wooden prayer wheels. Young monks gather in the temple hall for their dawn prayers. In the rise and fall of their chant to the Lotus-born Guru I prostrate and make offerings for my parents.*

clouds billow  
from a stone censer  
amidst the intone  
two butterflies feast  
on the same ambrosia

Responsive tanka prose by email. Started: 17.5.2016, finished: 24.5.2016.

*Gary LeBel, USA*  
**a dim light**

burns from a shop's backdoor in an alleyway scabbed with  
the pockmarks of bricks in the light's hounding scrutiny  
south of Market lair of leather bars and B&D clubs

and out of the not-quite entirely dark comes a tall young  
woman lean and nimble as she turns and faces the wall to  
strike up a dance with her shadow the music between them  
full of strangeness and joy without longing of being here **just**  
**now** in this night this alley this alone this cone of light

*did you see it  
when she turned  
to look over a shoulder,  
that beryl glow in the eyes  
behind her eyes?*

Skylark

Ἀντικύθηρα  
*Antikythera*

*Gary LeBel, USA*

‘There come now no kings or Caesars  
Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.’  
Ezra Pound, *The Seafarer* (1926)

Near the Greek island of Antikythera in the early 1960s an ancient device was retrieved from the sea-floor. Though badly deteriorated, it was thought to be a kind of astrolabe, a complex instrument used in predicting the movements of celestial bodies. Its technical sophistication, consisting of a series of inscribed, geared and pinioned disks, is a wonder. Many have tried to build their own to test its accuracy, but like the lost plays of Attica, we can only speculate about what is now but a heap of galled bronze . . .

Rodrigo, *la época*  
*de señores y de señoras elegantes*  
of Aranjuez and Andalus:  
hair-line cracks along  
a brilliant, bluish egg

where rippling waves  
of wisteria shade a silk-robed emperor’s eyes  
as he drowns himself in pleasure  
on that fabled afternoon  
his warriors failed to rise:

spin the dial, old Greek,  
and set the gears to meshing—  
nobody wins but someone loses:  
where is our rightful place here, what plinth  
will hold the construct true?



## Skylark

Those timeless days  
when drifts of graygreen sea  
would groan  
in the ears  
of napping seals,

before the knife-edged keels  
of cypress sliced waters  
churned to froth  
by heaving arms  
of living bronze,

days that flinched  
in the wombs of stones,  
the dry cicada rounds  
whose swellings clenched  
the voiceless air,

when sail-less oceans rose and fell  
without astrolabes or laws  
though the star-bright eye  
had long been watching  
its hungers fed by claws,

in lives of violence, day as night,  
while the young rock whirled  
through cosmic seas  
before a slave or sinner had as yet  
sunk down on bended knees,

a true Eden, found and lost  
before a king's decree had set  
his rival's house to flame,  
before stone turrets stole horizons  
for a landed family's name,

Skylark

a shivering pre-inscribed  
on the waves of Tethys eons before  
the Theban's daughter  
washed her brother clean  
with seditious water—

O Tireisias, come, come:  
find us a nobler path  
to Ilium,  
where nature un-blinded to itself  
bats new eyelids smoothed of scales,

a provenance long ascendant  
in the gentler minds of whales  
whose steadier eye from its higher stage  
looks on with passive wonder  
at an upstart's loosened rage,

but the tale  
outruns itself before the claw  
had learned the fit  
of jackboots enforcing  
a despot's law,

of a time before the pious,  
kneeling low by candlelight,  
took up arms against a stranger's god  
and sunk its prophets as with plows  
beneath the lumbering hooves of cows,

before the versing diplomat  
with full-length mirror showed us as we are  
in singing rhymes he made replete  
with claws that danced a two-step learned  
on fiefdom's bleeding feet—

Skylark

will no one clear  
the blossoms from his eyes  
to wake the drunken lord?  
for we can ill afford to wait  
till intelligence win the bored—

by burning gates  
the specie's spoken: in the cinders  
Hegel's ash betokens  
all that's green will wither  
to the umber of common hate—

and so we force the gears  
tooth on tooth  
in relentless forward mesh,  
madly oiling the squeaks that grate  
against our better sense,

and it seems to matter little  
that the teeth be shattered, worn or missing,  
for like a wheel with broken spokes  
the world still rotates nonetheless, imbalanced,  
off its axis, hobbling with the rest;

we hear the clack  
of mangled gears in sirens, wars  
and future's trades,  
and still we honor larceny dressed  
as Pride in fine parades

and swill the desert's gold  
to our thirsty heart's content,  
believing that lights  
switched on eternally  
must surely be Heaven-sent

## Skylark

and live by fences  
through our yards  
in nations half asleep,  
crawling as if through lightless depths  
a Marianas deep

to prowl an ocean's speckled floor  
as Eliot once had said,  
with mindless eyes on slender stalks  
that planned no exit  
for this dread

and so we war with larger arms  
to force the strife more wide awake,  
or call due the notes  
of thrice-sold debt  
a single keystroke takes,

or fill the rôle  
a rag-doll plays in lieu of the wisest king  
whom dreamy Plato hoped  
would set aside their wealth  
in quest of nobler things,

but the purple emperor  
cannot hear or see  
when power's snakeskin masks  
the eyes and ears that merely hold  
the weakness of the man within,

or even señor Rodrigo,  
whose blind fingers so nobly caressed  
the black and white  
in an art that lulls and deflects it  
mercifully from our sight:

## Skylark

spin them, fingers!  
spin the gears till dying stars collide  
in one last unholy mesh  
to free us from this impulse  
their nebulae sealed in flesh . . .

but the ranks of ants  
will win the day and cart us forth  
in abler jaws, the planet lick  
the wounds we made, and leave unsown  
the quiet glade,

for *'Here the nightingale  
spills its lucent cry  
through lofty pines',*  
a fleeting, unheard whistling  
through the tines of a toppled crown.

*'Here the nightingale . . .'* from *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles



**Entryway**

*Cindy L. Schrader, USA*

I am awakened by a faceless man in my dream striking a large gong. The fading tones meld into thunder rolling between the hills. I hear the *whoomp* of the screen door unlatched again by the wind.

After years of comfortable habit now the bed has only one side. I slide feet into slippers and shuffle down the hall while belting my robe.

The house is hollow and indistinct in this darkest hour of the night. Your ghost hovers just past the edge of my vision. If I could become more transparent perhaps I could see you clearly.

As I reach for the screen door the wind slams it violently in warning, "Do not cross this threshold."

Tamed and latched, I press my face to the screen. A curtain of rain stretches along the edge of the porch. A few wayward drops dart under the roof to splash my cheek. I taste riotous spring growth. Roots creak and murmur as if straining to walk.

morning light reveals  
an old tree has fallen—  
it will take work  
to make a new path  
in this altered landscape

**First Encounter, and Just After**

Charles Tarlton, USA

*I thought I was benefiting the Indians as well as the government, by taking them all over the United States, and giving them a correct idea of the customs, life, etc., of the pale faces, so that when they returned to their people they could make known all they had seen.*

—Buffalo Bill

1

One story begins when an English galleon sails into what will someday be called Drake's Bay, and drops anchor. The crew gathers at the rail to scrutinize the wild inshore headlands and their new telescopes sweep the arc of this perfect Pacific bay. The world is about to change forever. Onshore, through breaks in the trees, tattooed Miwok hunters watch uneasily the strange giant seabird bobbing on the tide. It is still not too late for these English to sail away.

the way a petrel  
hovers as if walking  
on the water  
so our judgment hesitates  
between future and the past

when the cormorant  
rises black out of the sea  
no fish in its beak  
then Miwok, shaking their heads  
read only bad omens

2

Word spread more slowly in those days; a letter might take months to go from the New World to Spain. As reports trickled in, it must have seemed to some that an enormous race

## Skylark

of beings lived there, spread from New England to Florida, from Kentucky to North Dakota, from the Great Plains across Mexico to the isthmus and then out again into the Andes and the Amazon and down to Patagonia. But spread too thin, and they had never discovered the wheel.

minute radio  
bursts from space, *dah-di-dah-dit*  
and we imagine  
civilizations of blue glass  
beings with a single eye

so they sent artists  
who filled books with their drawings  
of tall feathered men  
reported stories of cannibals  
dancers on the backs of whales

### 3

In 1579 London, would tales of a sea voyage lasting years have struck the same chord that reports now of missions to Mars do? Earlier, Magellan's planned circumnavigation of the globe took three years and one month, only eighteen of the original two hundred crew members survived, and Magellan himself was killed. The unmanned missions to Mars and Venus took less time, but, of course, they were only one-way trips. The *Magellan* spacecraft flew to Venus in 1989, performed its tasks efficiently, and was deliberately crashed into the planet's surface in 1994. Only one of Magellan's original five ships, the *Victoria*, made the complete trip.

when you come on deck  
everyone's glued to the rail  
you ask, "Anything there?"



Skylark

but no one answers your question  
they're all wondering the same thing

suppose we found  
anthropoid beings while we were  
poking around some  
other planet, and they looked  
like us, but were more trusting?

4

The history of the world was always known to us. The cities of Europe sit on top of historical dust heaps; the Enlightenment atop the Renaissance, the High Middle Ages on the Low, and all of it resting on the pillars of Rome and under that in places, Ancient Egypt and Greece. You can look down through holes in the street in Rome or Florence and see the past, or go behind a fence on a side street in Catania and peer into a Roman amphitheater. So, and here's the point, in 1589 Europeans had a settled sense of where the real world had been, how it had evolved, and that it led straight up to them. All of a sudden, there was Plymouth Colony and the Wampanoags in their thousands, and there was Mexico and Tenochtitlán!

the urge to destroy  
what cannot be understood  
ignorance and fear  
make the ground underfoot shake  
we hear voices in thunder

those ships in the bay  
their white wings folded up  
like a sitting bird's  
these are the ancient gods come  
visiting across Time

## 5

The descendants of native American are waiting tables in the restaurants, mowing the lawns, washing cars, harvesting the crops, and building the houses of California. And to many they are still a mystery. Descendants of Europeans in California heal the sick, defend the accused, design the buildings, teach the young, and make the laws. The fog has not yet dissipated, of course, and time may be running out, but there is hope still in the slow permeability of cultures. Go to California, see for yourself.

early masses said  
in Spanish, "*Cordero de Dios*  
who taketh away  
the sins *del mundo*,  
*ten piedad de nosotros*

Mexican rappers  
*cholos* as they call themselves  
*chingazos, tu sabes*  
understand "they ain't no line  
cannot be easily crossed"

## 6

In 1960, I went to the bullfights in Tijuana with some members of my brother's fraternity at San Diego State. We took an old bus from the border out to the *Plaza Monumental*, *La Virgen de la Macarena* was playing, and the *botas* came out and were passed around. If you've never seen a bullfight, let me tell you it is cruel, bloody, and primitive. You're in an American place watching a European thing, and they really confuse and then kill the bulls, stab them in the heart and they drop to their knees coughing blood. It feels foreign, and you wonder why the Mexicans go in for it.

## Skylark

on Aztec altars  
the stone knives dug for the heart  
put the head on a stick  
and everyone gnashed and cut  
themselves, singing the whole time

English justice  
dragged the guilty with horses  
to a site and hanged  
them nearly dead, then defiled  
the corpses, chopped them in fours

## 7

If the medieval peasant hovel made of wood, wickerwork and clay plaster could evolve into tidy council housing or, if the burgher's stone and timber houses in the towns led to today's McMansions, or if pinnacled castles of stone pointed the way to grand hotels and skyscrapers, how would Americans be housed today had Europeans remained in Europe? What would have been the natural future of housing that began with the wigwam, longhouse, teepee, and adobe hut, the Anasazi cave dwelling or the Mayan palace, the igloo? Would there have even been a future?

on the cold prairie  
where bending winds blew ice and snow  
they dug in leeward  
low hills and built of thick sod  
dwellings defined by the land

the way small towns grow  
they tear up classic buildings  
build what's now in style  
until new styles come pushing  
forward, knock it down again

The ends of threads unraveled on the floor point nowhere; that's the way with threads once they've been loosed. Up close an incident can seem unique, but on reflection, seems to indicate a trend. That being so, in California there are more beautiful Anglo-Latino children than anywhere else in the world; the eyes that were ashore gazing out through the trees met the eyes on board under their shading hands. And we are not to the future yet.

in the stucco house  
where I grew up a Mexican  
family now lives  
and the railroad tracks don't mean  
anything at all these days

here everyone speaks  
a little Spanish. Street names  
words like *plaza*  
or *patio* go unnoticed  
not foreign to anyone

Skylark

## Ensigns

*David Terelinck, Australia*

At first, you thought you imagined it. Even after the fifth time, you continued to doubt yourself. For weeks you found yourself looking, but always the same disappointment. Now you can't trust whether you've seen it or not? Is this another betrayal of your eye? Or even worse, your mind?

moments of truth  
or wishful thinking  
the flicker  
of a flame that catches  
. . . or dies

Three endless months of nothing but the constant coldness of white. The white of the same page over and over. A whiteness that obliterated phone lines and Wi-Fi. Each morning the whiteout of your foggy breath on the window pane. Sometimes snowdrifts higher than the cabin roof. And storms so fierce that your nerves buzzed like faulty electrical wires charged with high-tension static.

Maybe you start to believe them a little now? They told you that you would be a fool to come here in winter. You laughed and said the solitude was just what you needed to finish your manuscript. They told you solitude might very well be the death of you. And perhaps they were right. You can barely remember your own name. You are down to your last cord of wood. The salted meat has run out, and there are just three dozen cans of beans remaining.

who decides  
what's fact or fiction?  
each page turned  
remains a challenge  
for writer and reader

## Skylark

You can't believe, won't believe, that the story ends here. Found frozen to death after the thaw. A spot on the six o'clock news for no more than a week. Posthumous publication and some piddling royalties for your agent. You wonder if this is the grand sum of it all?

You glance out the window once more. There it is again? That small flutter of yellow against the white. A yellow so pale that you tell yourself again it might just be sunlight glinting off ice crystals. You look to the tree-line in the distance. The lower branches of the spruce are gently swaying. Your eyes draw back to the foreground and the barely-visible yellow pennant continues to wave in the breeze.

Suddenly, your neurons light up like tungsten. You know what this is. Short on digits to count the passage of these many days, you look to the calendar upon the wall. Unturned, and abandoned to the whiteness, it now lies mutely about month and season.

a lifetime spent  
looking for guidance—  
first crocus,  
this tiny ensign  
of hope . . .

the way sunlight  
erases each shadow  
it touches—  
why then this sudden  
postscript of tears?

swept away  
with the rush of meltwater  
a single bird call  
cascades through  
each bone and sinew

# Articles, Essays, Reviews & Interviews

*Jenny Ward Angyal*  
*Editor*



All reviews by Jenny Ward Angyal unless otherwise stated.





Skylark

## Hunger for Less

### A Review of *The World Disguised as This One: a year in tanka* by Mimi White

Deerbrook Editions, Cumberland, ME, 2015, 87 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5.6 x 8.6, ISBN 978-0-9904287-6-3. US \$16.95, available at [deerbrookeditions.com](http://deerbrookeditions.com) and at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

When I resist  
December's fierce clarity  
a sparrow pecks in dirt  
reminding me to feed  
this hunger I have for less

What does it mean to hunger for less? New Hampshire poet Mimi White has published three collections of 'mainstream' poetry; her books have received a Philbrick Poetry Award and a Jane Kenyon Award for Outstanding Poetry. Her work has appeared in prominent journals including *Harvard Review* and *Poetry*. And yet she writes in her acknowledgements to the present volume that when a friend invited her to collaborate in exploring the word *contain*, "I realized that the tanka was the perfect form for investigating that seemingly simple word." *Tanka is the art of containment—the art of enfolding layers of meaning in a few deceptively brief lines:*

Since news  
of your illness  
the ground  
has been too hard  
to plant tulips

The poem is a simple, literal statement, almost casual in tone—and yet it can be read and reread as a metaphor for a world turned stony and sterile in the face of devastating news.

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The poem has the ‘fierce clarity’ of winter light; to resist that clarity by adding more words would only detract from its impact.

White’s hunger for less took her on a yearlong exploration of tanka. The present book is comprised of 63 tanka arranged in four seasonal sections; like the solar year, it begins in winter and circles back to autumn, containing all the seasons of the human heart.

Nothing seems to hold  
*where are you—where am I—*  
another world opens  
disguised as this one  
white branches in the orchard

This tanka expresses a profound sense of dislocation—of realizing that the world is not what it had seemed. Is it more, or less, or simply different, transformed in some profound way by life-changing experience or by intuition? The interpretation is up to the reader—for answer, the poem itself offers only ‘white branches in the orchard.’

Such a tangible image may seem ‘less,’ perhaps, than our fleeting, intuitive glimpses of ‘another world,’ yet it feeds our hunger more fully than abstractions ever could.

I did not see  
the white-tailed deer until  
they ran high-stepping  
through the new grasses—  
*why just a glimpse, I cried*

We may echo the poet’s cry—‘*why just a glimpse*’—but catching those glimpses is the poet’s work, and tanka is indeed an ideal container in which to capture them. If the basket seems at times to hold little more than broken branches, it is up to the reader to look more deeply:

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Hours with friends  
although my heart holds little  
like a basket of broken branches—  
we sit inside while others  
move chairs into the sun

The poem powerfully expresses the emptiness of sorrow, the self-isolation of depression, the inability to move into the sun's available light. At such times the outer world seems too large, too overwhelming:

The vastness  
of Montana cannot hide  
our friend's death—  
we cast repeatedly  
into deep, disappearing holes

Casting again and again into the deep, disappearing hole that is death, we come up with nothing but sorrow. But White suggests that in time we can be emptied even of grief:

To empty of sorrow  
look how snow  
recedes into trees  
back into darkness  
where the barred owl flies

Slowly our grief melts back into the darkness; at last we can move our chairs into the sun and fill our empty baskets with morning light. In her hunger for less, White has disguised whole worlds of metaphor and meaning in the lines of a few short poems.

The snowy owl turned  
and looked at us  
in the morning light—

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if only we had stayed  
what else might she have shown us

*If only she had stayed, what else might she have shown us?*  
We can be grateful that White *did* stay in the tanka realm for a full year. Lovers of the form may hope she remains, or returns—for if we stay with her words, they can show us joy as well as sorrow:

So many words  
written after midnight—  
with the moon  
at my shoulder I listen  
as if the sky were ringing bells

The sky *is* ringing bells for those who can hear it. Stopping to look and listen deeply gives us the raw material for poems—and the practice also feeds our deepest hunger for the *more* hidden inside what may seem like *less*:

Not a hoot  
from the woods  
when I pause to listen  
yet stopping brings me  
closer to where the owl lives

‘Where the owl lives’ can be read as a metaphor for the deep, hidden heart of things, ‘the world disguised as this one’ that we glimpse repeatedly inside the small, highly polished, overflowing vessels that are White’s tanka.

Again that hunger  
I carry like an empty bowl  
shining—  
when I hold it in my hands  
my hands are full

## Not Waiting for Epiphany

### **A Review of *Tanka Left Behind* and *Tanka Left Behind 1968*: Tanka from the Notebooks of Sanford Goldstein**

*Tanka Left Behind*: Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2014, 208 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, afterword by M. Kei. ISBN 9 780692 258897. US \$15 from Keibooks or Amazon.com .

*Tanka Left Behind 1968*: Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2015, 103 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, afterword by M. Kei. ISBN 9 781514 848111. US \$12 from Keibooks or Amazon.com .

Who says my poems are poems?  
My poems are not poems.  
When you know that my poems are not poems,  
Then we can speak of poetry!

—Ryokan, *Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf*, tr. John Stevens

These are the words of Ryokan, Japanese Zen Buddhist monk, hermit, and poet, born in 1758. And here are the words of Sanford Goldstein, teacher, translator, editor, and poet, born in 1925:

I did not try  
for beauty, Ryokan,  
I remember what my colleague told me:  
the image of a man pissing  
is a morning-glory

~TLB, 1996

Perhaps Ryokan's paradoxical words are meant to contrast the self-consciously 'poetical,' the merely pretty, with the simple, spontaneous expression of the whole breadth of human experience. Goldstein has always been a follower of Ishikawa Takuboku (1886-1912), who believed that poetry should be the honest record of a poet's emotional life—piss-

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pots as well as blossoms. Goldstein himself 'speaks of poetry' quite often, but he is clear about what it is and is not:

ten a day!  
she cried  
as if a poem  
were some  
miraculous thing

~*TLB*, 1977

Poetry for Goldstein is not 'some miraculous thing' but the record of his days, which he has been spilling onto the page for nearly half a century. Goldstein, now ninety years old and widely considered the 'father' of English-language tanka, has previously published eight tanka collections comprising roughly a thousand poems; in the two present volumes, drawn from his extensive notebooks, he offers readers that many more again. He has been so prolific because he does not sit about waiting for inspiration to strike but gets on with the daily business of recording his life:

not  
waiting  
for epiphany,  
I write  
my five lines down

~ *TLB*, 1978

In these two collections of 'tanka left behind,' the reader can see, almost more clearly than anywhere else, how for Goldstein the business of living and the business of writing tanka have been intertwined into a single inseparable enterprise. As much as he could not write without living a multi-faceted life, it seems he literally could not live without writing tanka.

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my own lines?  
spilled out  
on a sheet  
and carrying  
the burden of five

~TLB, 1976

This poem was written four years after the death of Goldstein's wife; he was raising three young children on his own, spilling onto white sheets of paper 'the burden of five'—five lines, five people forever linked. By giving him a place to deposit the plain, unseasoned record of his existence, tanka nourishes him:

I want  
today  
a poem to eat,  
Takuboku,  
without salt

~TLB, 1983

. . . and it becomes an indispensable source of sustenance:

tanka,  
never abandon me,  
never leave me,  
so many the hours  
of hopeless need

~TLB, 1978

. . . until the continuous, daily practice of tanka becomes an integral part of his identity:

I could burn  
every book,  
every line,  
and still, still,  
this tanka me!

~TLB, 1976

Goldstein has kept a notebook for each year that he has written tanka. In his latter years he has dug deeper and deeper into the past recorded in those pages. His most recent previous book, *This Short Life: Minimalist Tanka*, published in 2014, contains poems drawn from his 2008 notebook. *Tanka Left Behind* offers poems from eight years' worth of notebooks: 1976-9, 1980, '83 & '89, and 1996. *Tanka Left Behind 1968* delves still further back, well before his first book, *This Tanka World*, was published in 1977.

*Tanka Left Behind 1968* contains over 350 poems written during a single harrowing year during which the poet's wife endured a lengthy hospitalization and surgery for an arterio-venous malformation in her brain; his daughter was hospitalized in the same hospital after a bicycling accident; and his father died. In his introduction to the book, Goldstein calls it a 'tanka novel,' and so it is—except, of course, that it is more autobiography than fiction. It stands as a tribute to the power of art, of poetry, and of tanka in particular to help the human being navigate the most turbulent of waters and to emerge—not unscathed but in some deeper sense still *whole*.

each moment  
some new pain  
grabs hold,  
and still I do not break,  
do not collapse



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Tanka sees the poet through crises of faith and dilemmas of decision:

no god  
to pray to  
I know,  
still I pray for  
her recovery

always  
the question of whether  
it was right to cut,  
unable to escape  
the dilemma I chose

. . . the tedium and loneliness that reign in hospitals everywhere:

like Cinderella  
I sit in lonely corners  
waiting,  
no magic in this  
hospital room

. . . and the dislocating ordinariness that rolls right along in the midst of crisis:

one minute  
the doctor speaks  
of lumbar puncture,  
the next  
of baseball

Although “the road ahead/lies scattered with/fears . . .”, the book ends on a note of hope:

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this morning  
from the brown vase  
on the kitchen table,  
I remove the withered flowers  
and buy fresh ones at a shop

The story resumes eight years later with the 1976 notebook poems in *Tanka Left Behind*. This volume, which covers a span of twenty years, naturally lacks the intensity of theme and focus found in *1968*, but Goldstein's distinctive voice and unflinching honesty continue to offer the reader universal human experience in the guise of one man's particular life:

this tanka  
diary  
and still  
an everyman  
synecdoche

~1976

*Synecdoche*—a term undoubtedly well known to Goldstein, the professor of poetry and literature—is a figure of speech in which the part represents the whole. But a poet can become 'everyman' only if he is willing to be entirely truthful and therefore vulnerable:

nude  
with all these clothes on  
so much  
exposed  
in poured syllables

~1976

Goldstein's lifelong loneliness, due to his wife's untimely death, is a recurrent theme throughout the volume:

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the back door  
key,  
and the nothingness  
of entering  
this wifeless house

*~1976*

how chill  
the walk  
toward coffee,  
toward poems  
on her memorial day

*~1983*

But far from being absorbed in self-pity, the poet is moved by his own personal grief toward compassion for the world outside himself:

outside  
a crash,  
and once more  
the universe turns  
on a broken point

*~1976*

The poem beautifully expresses that momentary, heart-stopping chill we experience when we realize that someone's life has irrevocably altered in the flash of an instant.

Goldstein writes of the trials and joys of raising his three children:

sweet and sour  
meatballs—

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my son  
coming home  
for the weekend

*~1977*

The first line can be read both literally and as a tongue-in-cheek metaphor. In other poems he makes more explicit the layered meanings of word and action:

we reached  
for soap bubbles  
in last night's kitchen  
as if the reach  
was symbolic

*~1983*

Soap bubbles—beautiful, fragile, ephemeral, impossible to catch and hold—the texture of life itself. Goldstein captures the happy chaos of daily life, familiar to any family:

all night  
food fell off plates  
children screamed  
and crawled  
and God was praised

*~1977*

. . . and the inevitable challenges of human relationships:

I can cut  
the tension  
or peel it  
like potato skin—  
tonight's home visit

*~1983*

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The contrast he draws between cutting through the tension versus peeling it away is a thought-provoking metaphor. Which action leaves the ‘potato’ more intact? And is that the aim?

He writes also about the challenges and rewards of his long teaching career; the depth of his commitment is evident:

students,  
whose world  
I pry open  
with my own world of words,  
have you ears to see with?

*~1996*

‘ears to see with’—Goldstein’s approach to both life and poetry is rooted in the concrete world of the five senses:

this sea of sense  
of lip, eyes, and ears,  
more real  
than another sea  
of wave toward shore

*~1977*

What is the ‘other sea of wave toward shore’? Does he mean the world of speculative thought about things we cannot know? Goldstein has long been a student of Zen—his 1996 notebook contains ten poems about the funeral of his beloved teacher—and Zen is not a practice given to metaphysical speculation. Instead he observes

how life sets up  
its own sermons

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in winter's chill  
or cardinal's red  
or late evening's coffee smell

~1980

To fully grasp the import of those nearly wordless sermons that Goldstein captures in his outpouring of daily poems, one needs to read them *all*; their impact is cumulative, like the droplets of water that join together to make waves toward the shore. The handful included here cannot do them justice. By opening his old notebooks and sharing their content with readers, Goldstein has humbly offered us a great gift.

these tanka  
continue  
like a light  
going on  
in the dark

~1977

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## Ripe Apples

### A Review of *Dark Maroon Jacket* by Joann Grisetti

Dandelion, an imprint of Wildflower Poetry Press, 2016, 76 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9. ISBN 978 1519543288. US \$8.50 from Amazon.com

*"I . . . require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life . . ."*

—H.D. Thoreau

In *Dark Maroon Jacket*, Joann Grisetti offers the reader a simple and sincere account of her own life. Just over 100 poems are arranged chronologically in six sections. The section titles are all musical terms: "Solo" is about childhood and adolescence; "Duet" is about courtship; and "Coda" includes poems about children grown and parents passing. The reason for some section titles is less clear. "Mordent," for instance, presents poems about the first months of marriage; the term refers to an ornament in which a musical note alternates quickly with the tone below, perhaps reflecting the ups and downs of newlywed life. While the musical themes are interesting and thought-provoking, the poet might have achieved greater thematic unity if those themes were echoed in the poems themselves (only one tanka refers directly to music) and in the volume's title. Instead, the title refers to the jacket she wore when she met her future husband; appropriate since this book is to a large extent the story of a marriage. The story begins, however, with the earliest childhood memories:

before me  
he and she sit dreaming  
between daily chores  
and a burnt pot of peas  
a smile whispers "I am"

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The first poem in the book, this tanka sets out the premise that we all want to whisper “I am;” to declare our presence in the world and tell our stories. The poem succeeds through its juxtaposition of concrete images and the unusual and pleasing turn of language in the last line. All of the poems share highly relatable memories, but some tell more than show:

will they accept me?  
these many friends of his,  
we are still strangers  
I am feeling insecure  
and frightened of losing him

A situation and feelings familiar to most, of course, but as tanka the poem would have been stronger if the poet had found concrete images to suggest the feelings rather than telling them directly.

The best poems in the volume juxtapose concrete images to create layers of meaning:

moving boxes  
in piles throughout  
our place  
waiting to be filled  
with trinkets of memory

Here we can read ‘moving boxes,’ ‘our place,’ and ‘trinkets of memory’ as metaphor, giving the poem a deeper psychological meaning beneath the literal one.

playful fingers  
grasp for my nose  
my chin  
oh how perfect  
the crescent moon



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The unexpected last line lets us understand—without being told—how the writer feels about the child, who embodies all the beauty and perfection of the natural world.

tears held back  
for five timeless days  
in private  
while friends come and go  
the apples have ripened

The book closes with this tanka, whose last line—‘the apples have ripened’—is about so much more than apples. The poet, too, has ripened into maturity, bearing fruit in the autumn of her life.

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## The Sound of Flowing Water

### A Review of *An Anthology of Modern Japanese Tanka* edited by Michio Ohno & Ikuo Ishida

*Éditions du Tanka Francophone*, Québec, Canada, 2015, 316 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5.2 x 8.5, preface by Yukitsuna Sasaki, introduction by Michio Ohno. ISBN 978-2-923829-20-3. CAD \$26 or EUR 20, available from <http://www.revue-tanka-francophone.com>

if you are  
going to give birth,  
deliver the world  
in the young green of  
the woods teeming with buds

~*Ei Akitsu*

In the pages of this anthology, 99 poets ‘deliver the world’ of contemporary Japanese tanka, presenting the reader with 99 poems originally published in Japanese between 1901 and 2014. A selection committee—described by editor Michio Ohno as six ‘somewhat younger’ Japanese tanka poets—chose the poems; they also wrote a brief commentary on each tanka. A team of six translators rendered the poems and supporting materials into both French and English. The result is a handsome volume with a single tanka in three languages and a commentary in French and English occupying each two-page spread.

Michio Ohno’s introduction, “Past, Present, and Future of Tanka,” offers an extensive discussion of the characteristics, history, and present state of tanka in Japan, as well as issues surrounding the translation and internationalization of tanka. With regard to tanka composed or translated into languages other than Japanese, he writes “I do not think it is necessary to be bound by the 5-7-5-7-7 count for Japanese syllables, or to try to write the poem in five lines. Instead, poets

should keep searching for the optimum number of syllables and lines for short poems in their own languages.” The translators have followed this sensible suggestion regarding syllable counts; nevertheless, some of the poems in English translation display prepositions dangling awkwardly at the ends of lines. It is unclear why, since moving those little words down would have done no violence to the lineation.

The anthology includes three broadly thematic sections entitled “Life,” “Nature,” and “Society,” each comprised of 33 poems arranged chronologically by date of first publication. The tanka in the “Life” section treat the full panoply of human experience and emotion, and range across the human life span from birth to death

receiving  
 holy water, the child  
 trembles  
 and looks at me  
 I can't go that far

~*Toru Maeda*

A child is being baptized and looks to the narrator for reassurance, but the narrator ‘can’t go that far;’ cannot provide reassurance of the power and truth of the symbolic rite. The poem is a thought-provoking commentary on faith, trust, and doubt.

We can only wonder what obstacles stand between the narrator and faith, or between the narrator and the child. Did the narrator once enjoy a firm and childlike faith, now lost through years of living?

Those years may take their toll in other ways, as well:

dropped  
 something, I bend down  
 deeply to pick it up—

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old age covers me all over  
like a fishing net

~*Sakurako Makita*

A very relatable observation for anyone over a certain age; but the striking image in the last lines gives it new life. It is as if the narrator has not changed into an old woman; instead she is the same person as always, but now snared inside the ‘net’ of old age.

a person will die  
thinking about death—  
eggplant  
flowers blooming  
in quiet sunshine

~*Hiroshi Yoshikawa*

The unexpected juxtaposition of the upper and lower verses gives this tanka an intriguing ambiguity. Perhaps it is saying that a dying person thinks only of death, even as the world goes on blooming; or perhaps it is saying that constant thoughts of death *cause* us to ‘die’ to the beauty of the present moment, represented by ‘eggplant flowers in quiet sunshine,’ which offer both present beauty and future nourishment.

In the “Nature” section, images of the natural world express the continuity and deep connections between human beings and nature.

cherry trees  
will get old taking  
many springs—  
through our bodies  
the sounds of flowing water

~*Akiko Baba*

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cherry blossoms bloom  
with all their might  
and so  
I gaze at them  
with all my life

~*Kanoko Okamoto*

The trees get old just as we do; the waters of life flow through their bodies and through our own; and their immense vitality deserves our whole-hearted attention. Typical of the Japanese aesthetic, the beauty of nature is enhanced by its transience and by the ever-present shadow of death:

falling blossoms,  
a myriad of them,  
each petal  
trailing light  
down into the ravine

~*Miyoji Ueda*

sadness came  
because  
of the brightness  
one tree  
was darkened

~*Toshio Mae*

In the first poem above, the beautiful image is created by spent blossoms falling; each carries a trail of light—of life—down into the ravine, an image that suggests darkness and death. The exquisitely symmetrical second poem provides a further gloss: ‘sadness came/because/of the brightness’; ‘because/of the brightness/one tree/was darkened.’ Light and

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dark, sadness and joy, are as inseparable as the two sides of a coin.

Many of the poems in the “Society” section are informed by history, and many examine the cruel paradoxes of war.

in the enemy’s camp  
where they resisted  
vehemently  
I found an English reader  
covered with mud

*~Naoki Watanabe*

during time off  
from his work at  
the gas chamber  
he might have taken his kids  
to the park to show swans

*~Hikaru Koike*

By humanizing the enemy—the ‘other’—both poems explore the unresolved ambiguities of the human heart. The enemy soldier studies a foreign language; even the Nazi officer is imagined as a father enjoying time with his children. The overwhelming horror that results from our darker impulses is shown all too matter-of-factly in this 1947 poem about Hiroshima:

the big bones  
must be  
the teacher’s  
the little skulls  
are amassed nearby

*~Shinoe Shoda*

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Similarly, a survivor of Nagasaki remembers forever:

black water  
full of dead people  
bumping  
each other in the water—  
my eternal river

~*Hiroshi Takeyama*

The 'eternal river' flows through the poet's memory and through all of us—horrors never to be forgotten and never to be repeated—but it also evokes the eternal river of life, the sound of whose water flows through our bodies and through these 99 poems.

becoming  
a woodpecker  
hitting  
the larch trunk, I look up  
at this life with awe

~*Yukitsuna Sasaki*

Thumbing through the pages of this anthology, looking at life with awe and wonder, feeling the flux of joy and sorrow, readers may well be inspired to take up editor Michio Ohno's invitation to compose the one-hundredth poem.

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## Squeezing the Clay

### **A Review of *outer edges*: a collection of *tanka* by Larry Kimmel**

Stark Mountain Press, Colrain, MA, 2015, 34 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5 X 8, introduction by Linda Jeanette Ward. ISBN 9 780986 432804. US \$5.49; available from Amazon.com .

on the literary map,  
look for me  
at the outer edges  
where it reads  
*Here be Unicorns*

Tanka itself, of course, already lies near the outer edges of the literary map, but Larry Kimmel's tanka push the boundaries of both form and content in creative ways.

coffee to brew. this dailiness—  
keep  
moving keep-keep moving keep  
—rosebuds o p e n i n g  
in dew time

The use of punctuation and typography are more reminiscent of e. e. cummings than of traditional tanka, yet the wonderful shift in awareness that happens between the first three lines and the last two keeps this poem in the tanka camp. The final image awakens both narrator and reader. Lovely in its own right, the image is enhanced both by the concrete technique of *o p e n i n g* space between the letters, and by the gentle pun in the last line.

The poem above is from a sequence called 'waking to the fact of morning,' one of two sequences that round out the sixty poems in this volume. 'morning' is a brilliant sequence of six tanka that capture the awakening narrator's shifting moods



and perceptions from the inside out. Both the sequence's title and its poems exemplify Kimmel's distinctive way of mixing wry humor at the daily grind, awareness of a larger, troubled world ('—*and now the news*'), glimpses of beauty, and intimations of a different reality:

we've come through  
again  
sunlight crosscuts the kitchen  
motes circling— light shade light  
cosmos in small

'We've come through again' may be read simply as meaning that the groggy narrator, wishing he were still in bed, has managed to stumble into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. But as the dust motes and sunlight catch his eye, those first two lines take on a much larger significance, which is offered with a typically deft touch. The alternation of light and shade is a miniature not only of the Earth's rotation but also of the endless play of light and dark that permeates our metaphorical cosmos—where 'we've come through again' to tackle another day.

The book's second sequence, called "monologues with tome-tombed men," includes nine poems addressed to literary figures of the past:

Issa,  
where have I gone wrong?—  
indifferent to housework  
kindly to insects,  
but revered—? not at all

Tongue in cheek, Kimmel compares himself to one of the four great Japanese haiku masters; but his own mix of humor and wonder at small things really *is* reminiscent of Issa's equally distinctive voice.

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Gentle irony directed at himself and at the foibles of the modern world runs through many of the poems of this highly literate poet:

at the checkout  
reading all  
the tabloid headlines—  
the curse  
of literacy

. . . a poem that speaks to anyone whose eye is helplessly drawn to print, no matter what the content. But while we *may* be able to choose what we read, our thoughts are another matter:

in my mind's eye  
I can see her in a thong &—& nothing . . .  
my god!  
so this is the life of the mind  
who'd have thought

The poem captures the narrator's stream of consciousness in a manner nearly Joycean, taking us inside his mind and making us laugh along with him in half-rueful irony. So the 'life of the mind' may not be quite what we'd like to think—but what about the larger course of our lives? Are we in control of that?

to sculpt a destiny  
or simply squeeze  
the clay  
and take what comes  
?

A choice worth pondering; the last line may offer the only honest answer to the dilemma. Paradoxically, if we let go of

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pretentious efforts to ‘sculpt a destiny’ and instead ‘take what comes’—even let ourselves be guided by it—we may find ourselves led toward both beauty and meaning:

lying  
under stars  
becoming  
a wide slow  
river

Here for a moment striving yields to simply *becoming*—becoming one with something wider, slower, and deeper than our small selves. Such experiences are fleeting; we must inevitably return to the humdrum reality of ‘simply squeezing the clay.’ But that humble activity may be enough, Kimmel suggests, to let us participate in creation and somehow, sometimes, transcend the dailiness and distractions of our lives:

horsehair, catgut  
& rosin—  
how we use  
this world  
to transcend it

Working with the ordinary stuff—the unpromising clay—of daily life, with all its contradictions and imperfections, Larry Kimmel’s poems gently probe the outer edges of the baffling world we inhabit, showing us just how—now and then—transcendence happens.

Skylark

**upstream and down**

**A Review of *on the cusp:*  
*a year of tanka* by Joy McCall**

Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2016, 124 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, introduction by M. Kei, afterword by Larry Kimmel. ISBN 9 781519 371928. US \$13 available from Keibooks and Amazon.com

*"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o'er-wrought heart and bids it break."* —*Shakespeare, Macbeth*

my heart  
sad at missing him  
glad with love  
the fish, as always  
swims upstream and down

This is Joy McCall's tanka for July 31, 2015, a little over halfway through the year-long tanka diary she began in November, 2014, shortly after the tragic death of her dear friend and fellow poet, Brian Zimmer. The book is meant to be read and savored slowly, one poem per day through a year of grieving—of swimming upstream and down—but it is nearly impossible for the reader to stop at one, so strong is the pull of McCall's voice:

the poems  
are falling fast  
fish scales  
and skin shedding  
the pull of the new moon

*~Feb. 21, 2015*

Beginning on the cusp of Scorpio and Sagittarius, the poems carry the reader on a year-long journey hand-in-hand

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with McCall, threading the narrow passageways between dying and living, between grieving and loving, between sinking into sorrow and moving on. The path will be familiar to anyone who has experienced the recursive stages of grief; yet each mourner's voice is unique and gives unique expression to universal experience.

Anyone who has ever grieved will have noticed the disturbing way in which the world goes on about its business just as if nothing had happened:

the first pink  
blossom in the winter  
cherry tree  
nature does not care  
about my constant grief

*~Nov. 30, 2014*

Yet impersonal nature, carrying on with its endless cycles of life and death, also offers a quiet source of consolation:

weary  
I rest my hand  
on the chestnut branch  
the slow winter sap answers:  
*soon, we will be rising*

*~Feb. 10, 2015*

The unexpected '*we*' in the last line suggests the coming resurgence of the poet as well as the sap, even though in other poems she expresses her awareness that she—like all of us—is also approaching death:

how many loves  
can we lose to death  
before we too

Skylark

crawl, sorrowing  
through the dark gate?

*~Dec. 15, 2014*

It is as if each death of a loved one hews a small chip from the self; a small part of us dies with each death. But the fish of our grieving swims upstream and down; and McCall's poems take flight as well as creeping in sorrow:

dreams, such dreams  
long fingers running  
up and down my spine  
and all the little bones  
opening their thin glad wings

*~Dec. 7, 2014*

This little poem sends chills of delight up and down the reader's spine; but it becomes achingly poignant when one knows that McCall's own spine was damaged in a nearly fatal motorcycle accident that ended her nursing career and left her paraplegic. But while her legs may be paralyzed, her spirit has wings:

he carries  
my spirit, featherlight  
up the hill  
the wind at our backs  
the moon at the summit

*~Aug. 16, 2015*

... and although in the following poem she is writing about someone else, it could easily describe McCall herself:

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the poet flits  
from branch to branch  
not roosting  
then mindless of the wind  
he takes to the sky

*~Oct. 20, 2015*

She, too, flits from branch to branch, spilling tanka freely on the wind like fistfuls of petals. She is amazingly prolific, rivaling Sanford Goldstein in the art of spilling out small poems that capture the fleeting moments of the poet's inner and outer lives. McCall says that she never edits her poems; entirely free of artifice, her tanka possess an enviable raw vitality, and their cumulative impact is both moving and magical.

However free her spirit, McCall is rooted in the earth, in physical reality and in ever-present pain, physical as well as emotional:

the low voice said  
imagine the pain  
*covered*  
*in the colour you like most—*  
sunset, bathing the wounds

*~Aug. 14, 2015*

She writes many poems about pain and yet never seems to be crushed by it, as a weaker spirit might be. Suffering draws forth compassion from the strong:

when I suffer  
am I not nearer  
to understanding  
the battery hens  
the culled badgers?

*~Oct. 25, 2015*

Skylark

is my own pain  
any different  
than that borne  
by the hunted hare,  
the cornered fox?

~Oct. 26, 2015

The first poem above gives an unexpected and refreshingly earthbound twist to the conventional religious sentiment that suffering draws one closer to God. Although at times McCall rejects conventional religiosity with some bitterness:

where are the gods?  
luxuriating  
on their thrones  
being waited on  
by groveling fools

~June 22, 2015

. . . she nevertheless has a profound and abiding sense that the world is, in some mysterious way, sacred:

at the altar  
the priest intones  
the old latin  
how beautiful it is:  
*dei plena sunt omnia\**

*\*all things are full of God*

~Oct. 23, 2015

*All things are full of God:* what is holy is to be found here and now in the ordinary, the inconspicuous, the humble:



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down the path  
to the holy place  
a grey mouse  
a pile of dry leaves  
two frogs, and me

*~Nov. 12, 2015*

McCall travels the path to the holy place daily, it would seem, and the reader will be grateful for the invitation to accompany her on the journey. It is a journey full of pain and sorrow, yes, but it is also replete with the world's fragile and astounding beauty, and with the beauty of a strong and clear-eyed spirit who watches with deep love this flawed and lovely world.

a jet black feather  
lying where it fell  
on a pale pink rose . . .  
there are two sides  
to everything

*~June 23, 2015*

I woke  
as the church clock  
rang midnight  
and I lay, counting  
the twelve shining things

*~Sept. 12, 2015*

McCall knows how to count what counts, and the twelve months of her book are twelve shining things—one turns them over in the hand, wondering at the glints of light and dark. And her year cycles back to end where it began, on November 21, once more at the cusp of change:

## Skylark

these times  
are like stars  
in the sky  
the dark night of the soul  
lit by laughter and love

**Sculpting a Face**  
**An Interview with Janet Lynn Davis**

silhouettes  
we made of ourselves  
in grade school . . .  
how many know me  
only by my profile

Janet Lynn Davis's tanka is a thoughtful meditation on how others see us—and on how we often feel that our depth and dimensions remain unseen. Very effective as written, this tanka would also work beautifully if the last word were “poems”—but that would profoundly shift the meaning. Our poems, unlike a flat profile, often *do* reveal what lies deepest within us. In the international village known as “tanka town,” poets who may never meet face-to-face grow to know each other well through their poems alone. Nevertheless, we often hunger for “profiles” that give us more factual knowledge of the person behind the pen. Toward that end, I asked Janet to tell me more about herself and her relationship with tanka.

**JWA:** What early experiences drew you to the practice of writing?

**JLD:** Hi, Jenny. I'm not sure what triggered things—possibly the overall experience of Kindergarten and the even-earlier experience of my mother and others reading to me. I loved picture books as well as fairy tales and fables, not only the stories themselves but also the sound of the words. Soon after we learned how to string a few words together in Kindergarten, I remember making a child's workbook, or so I thought, roughly patterned after ones we used as students. Off and on during the next few years, I created tiny newspapers, magazines, menus, cards, and books with my own binding. One year I wrote children's Christmas stories with a friend; I also

wrote a bad play, which that same friend and I performed for some neighbor kids. I received my “Writer” badge as a first-year Junior Girl Scout. I enjoyed my poetry books as a child, including a popup version of *A Child's Garden of Verses* (which, incidentally, I unearthed not long ago from my parents' old house). But for some reason, I had no interest in trying my own hand at poetry until later. I do remember slick, mimeographed sheets from grade school, however, that featured the poems of a small handful of students.

homemade books—  
*You can be a writer*  
my dad once said  
though hoping, I suspect,  
I'd do something sensible

**JWA:** How did your writing life evolve as you moved out of childhood? And how did you finally come to writing poetry?

**JLD:** As a teenager, I produced a handful of “therapy” poems. Then, for a couple of college classes, I wrote several short stories, something I immensely enjoyed doing. I also was a journalism/PR major, which led to a career in communications (press releases, newsletter stories, etc.), publications, and technical writing/editing. I dabbled in a few personal writing projects along the way, but for the most part, with my long hours (12- to 16-hour work days weren't unusual) and life in general, my creative efforts greatly slowed down. It wasn't until I later became sick and stopped my career (after marrying) that I began to take a closer look at poetry. I thought I'd been neglecting my spiritual self and wondered if poetry might help; I also wondered if such an activity might help stimulate the healing process. I had no intention of publishing my work at first.

**JWA:** How did you become involved with tanka?

**JLD:** I'd been churning out free verse for a while. A poetry friend asked me a couple of times if I'd tried my hand at tanka yet, to which I answered "no" and left it at that. But soon enough I grew curious, so I did a little bit of research and then produced ten tanka (that is, my beginner's version of tanka) over the course of two days. A day or two later, I foolishly submitted them to an editor, who quickly and kindly accepted nine of them. I have to believe he was being lenient with me since I was brand-new at the form (and I'm grateful!). I became hooked immediately.

**JWA:** Have you written other kinds of short-form poetry?

**JLD:** I've written tanka sequences and tanka prose pieces also. But I've only ever written a handful of "publishable" haiku; that's it. While my love has been tanka, I sometimes tell myself I'd like to finally become better at haiku. So you never know. I'm impressed by proficient writers in a form as short as haiku. How do they do it, I wonder?

**JWA:** Why do you think you have a particular affinity for tanka?

**JLD:** Your questions make me think! Tanka: so many bits of stories, so many interesting poets. I love the feeling of intimacy when I read journals and other collections of published tanka, as if people are whispering their secrets to me or as if I'm a guest seated at the dinner table, intently listening to all the conversation.

I seem to be drawn to writing tanka for several reasons. For example, I like how so much emotive power can potentially be packed into such a small space. And I like how the tanka we write can become souvenirs of life. Also, writing tanka helps me to focus more on the present that's surrounding me rather than worrying quite so very much about this crazy world of ours—to notice small gems I otherwise might

not notice. Finally, the sometimes-immense challenge of writing these little lyrical poems appeals to me. For one thing, how to say just enough, no more than that? How to make the brief wording flow, even sing? How to capture the interest of readers while remaining true to myself and certain “traditions” of the form?

ornate  
as an old lady's brooch  
edged with gold  
this little beetle  
affixed to a leafy branch

**JWA:** What do you think *tanka* is, anyway?

**JLD:** This makes me smile. I remember spirited discussions in the English-language *tanka* (ELT) community, during my early days of *tanka*, as to what ELT are and what they aren't. The meaning of the word *tanka* works well for me: *short song*. Beyond that, I think ELT are harder to pin down. The simplest thing I can say in this short space is that they are brief five-line lyrical poems, typically with certain recognizable characteristics. Sometimes I've wondered if “we” shouldn't have adapted the term *tanka* to the five-line poems we write in non-Japanese languages. But it's far too late to turn back now! Often, my favorite *tanka* are those that may be thought of as “traditional” (that is, inasmuch as they can be in English) with respect to form and aesthetics. Yet in terms of topic, place, and language, I prefer *tanka* to be all over the map—contemporary, fresh, bright, reflective of our actual lives. Onward we go . . .

**JWA:** Do you have a method for discovering, capturing, and polishing *tanka*?

**JLD:** In terms of *discovering* tanka, which may be the hardest step, if I have a method at all it's to be quiet, still, and open. To be both close to potential tanka moments and removed, detached. Reading poetry journals or books late at night sometimes stimulates my "muse."

each time I wake  
during this long night  
of painkillers  
a half-composed tanka  
fading in and out

In terms of *capturing* tanka, I think my method should be called *chaos*. I tend to allow my gut to guide me. But if only I could be a better "spiller," like Sanford Goldstein.

*spill your tanka*  
*at a café*, he says . . .  
I'll consider  
inhaling coffee beans  
if that's what it takes

*Polishing* is probably the easiest step for me, not that I really can call it easy. That's the time to let my ever-eager left brain do its thing. The trick for most of us may be to polish (for basic grammar, clarity, and conciseness) but not to the point of rubbing away the nuances or bits of character essential to one's voice. Then, unlike when I was a newer tanka poet, I tend to hold onto my work for a while before I submit it to editors.

Being part of a distinct community has helped me; I'm usually more prolific when I'm around other tanka poets, even if only "virtually." And sharing one's works privately with a few fellow poets, via email or closed forums, can be informative in terms of the reactions received.

**JWA:** Do you have a personal set of “rules” you try to follow?

**JLD:** A few personal rules of mine: Try, but don't try too hard. Breathe, be open. Above all, write for myself (not expressly for publication or other people). Be bold; don't be afraid if the narrator comes across as a less-than-perfect person. Edit as necessary but not to the point of editing the life out. Write from the gut/heart, yet edit with the head/mind. Less is often more, though sometimes it *is* less. Listen to others but not completely. Learn.

on bare ground  
I sprinkle small seeds  
with abandon  
as if growing wildflowers  
requires a lack of care

When it comes to tanka style, I often set out to write in a short-long-short-long-long line pattern (out of respect for the form and because I like the pattern)—which is not a rule for myself but instead a flexible guideline. I also prefer a substantial last line (as opposed to one that peters out). I most enjoy reading tanka that are concise and lithe, as well as slightly musical, and I at least *aim* for those qualities in my own writing. I try to eliminate poetically unnecessary words and to be careful with modifiers. I prefer “simple” and down-to-earth but worry that I can be *too* simple.

never thought  
a life could grow to be  
this unadorned,  
my daily pot of oatmeal  
steaming on the stove



**JWA:** What do you see as the purpose of poetry, for readers and yourself?

**JLD:** For readers and poets alike, I believe poetry can be beauty itself; refuge/rescuer; companion; teacher of love, deeper truths, and even harsh realities. It has the potential of lighting new fires within us, of linking us with forces larger than our selves and the physical world around us. For myself, in the role of poet, verse is obviously a means of emotional and other expression. I feel writing poetry is an artistic endeavor that is no less and no more significant than any other. As we know, many people scoff at and/or are bewildered by all things poetic. In fact, in the “real world,” few friends and family members of mine show the slightest bit of interest in my efforts as poet. But I tell myself that surely all humans are creative beings and need such outlets, so how lucky I am. Poetry is what I do, and I'm glad.

a stranger's card  
adrift on our winter lawn . . .  
handwritten inside  
*Noel's wife has cancer,*  
*just thought you should know*

**JWA:** What keeps you going?

**JLD:** Food and water. Quiet time, rest. A little bit of sun, sometimes some drizzle too.

into steaming tea  
I release curls  
of fresh ginger . . .  
once in a while, my life  
borders on exotic

**JWA:** Do you see recurrent themes or topics in your work? What are they? Why?

**JLD:** I suspect my themes and topics aren't so different from those of other tanka writers. I think certain recurrent themes are, in time, replaced by others. When I lived in the city, I sometimes wrote about things urban; since moving away to a rural setting, my subject matter has become a little more nature-oriented. When I went through a long stretch of illness, I occasionally wrote of doctors and uncertainty and such. When I travel, I tend to write about places I visit. My themes in more-recent times have been related to family matters, such as my mother's decline and passing as well as many trips down memory lane while clearing out the old family house. I suppose there is a thread of self-reflection/identity, passage of time, irony, or social or philosophical commentary running through a number of my poems. I'm often influenced by the ordinary, and there's no telling from day to day what may trigger a new poem for me.

three of them  
huddled round the X-rays,  
mulling over  
my various pieces—  
me, a perpetual puzzle

a gleam  
when she notices  
the "Grandma" mug  
now too heavy  
for her to hold

the crackle and pop  
of my breakfast cereal—  
more news

Skylark

about car bomb blasts  
somewhere else in the world

**JWA:** What do you think is distinctive about your voice?

**JLD:** Ha, I wish you'd tell me! I don't know for sure—similarly to how a person's recorded voice may sound different to him or her than to everyone else. But I get the impression this voice of mine may be relatively quiet, and, again, simple; at times, quirky, candid, or generally surprising; and sometimes with undertones of humor. I imagine my poetry voice is similar to my personality, which also can baffle me (and probably others too) a little.

a gift  
of lion earrings  
from the suitor  
who kept insisting  
I was a mouse

postage stamps  
with *LOVE* swirled in red—  
the mail clerk  
asks if it's okay  
to use them on my letters

how light  
can resculpt a face  
. . . if for one day  
I could be everyone  
I've been loath to like

**JWA:** Do you have any plans to collect your poems into a book?

## Skylark

**JLD:** No, not really. Though I've had a penchant for assembling publications for much of my life, I also have a strong practical side that says to me, "Janet, now *who* would read your book(s)? The audience is nowhere large enough to justify the time and expense."

my next home,  
built among lean pines . . .  
thinner and thinner  
the desire  
to make a name for myself

Never say never, though. Maybe someday, who knows, I'll put together a couple of saddle-stitched chapbooks, booklets, or something else. It might be fun, and doing so would force me to finally organize my out-of-control collection of tanka.

a jumbled heap  
of lantana clippings  
left to dry—  
line by crooked line  
I untangle my words

Thank you, Jenny, for your time and interest in having this chat with me! And thank you, Claire Everett, for your wonderful *Skylark*.

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### *Poet Bio:*

Janet lives in a rustic, forested area of southeast Texas, a little to the north of Houston. Her tanka have appeared widely in print and online venues over the past decade or so. She served a two-year term (2014–2015) as vice president and contest coordinator of the Tanka Society of America. Examples of Janet's work may be found on her poetry blog, *twigs&stones* (<http://twigsandstones-poems.blogspot.com>).

*Publication Credits:*

The tanka included in the above interview were first published in *A Hundred Gourds* (“silhouettes” and “a jumbled heap”); *Simply Haiku* (“homemade books”); *Eucalypt* (“ornate”); *kernels* (“each time I wake”); *Prune Juice* (“spill your tanka”); *Notes from the Gean* (“on bare ground”); *Modern English Tanka* (“never thought” and “into steaming tea”); *Wisteria* (“a stranger's card” and “the crackle and pop”); *The Pebbled Shore*, the Tanka Society of America's 2009 Anthology (“three of them”); *Frameless Sky* (“a gleam”); *red lights* (“a gift”); *Fire Pearls 2* (“postage stamps”); *Ribbons*, Tanka Café (“how light”); Tanka Splendor Awards 2007 (“my next home”).



## Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 5:1, summer issue of *Skylark* will be read through December and January and will close on February 1st 2017.

Kindly submit up to ten original, previously unpublished tanka &/or one sequence\*, tanka prose, tan renga, articles etc. with the subject heading “Skylark tanka submission” to [skylark.tanka@gmail.com](mailto:skylark.tanka@gmail.com).

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

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

In addition to your regular submission, you are also invited to submit one tanka for the “Skylark’s Nest” prompt (see page 19). Unfortunately, we are not able to reproduce colour images in *Skylark*, but poets wishing to submit tanka-art may do so; coinciding with the publication of each issue, a selection of the best will be added to a haiga gallery on the website. Alternatively, black and white ‘tankart’ may be considered for the print journal. Please send up to five pieces of black and white ‘tankart’ to our Tankart Editor, Sandi Pray:

[skylarktankart@gmail.com](mailto:skylarktankart@gmail.com)

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

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

[skylarkreviews@gmail.com](mailto:skylarkreviews@gmail.com)

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

Any queries should be addressed to the Editor:  
[skylark.tanka@gmail.com](mailto:skylark.tanka@gmail.com)

\* If you would like to submit more than one sequence (for instance, if you have collaborated with different poets) this is acceptable, although I request that you send no more than 5 individual/collaborative sequences.



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