

Skylark

A Tanka Journal

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Skylark is a bi-annual publication, appearing in summer and winter.

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

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Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Summer 2014: volume 2, number 1

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In memory of
Martin Lucas
1962-2014

from **Summer**

. . . Summer days for me
When every leaf is on its tree,
When Robin's not a beggar,
And Jenny Wren's a bride,
And larks hang singing singing singing
Over the wheat fields wide

—**Christina Rossetti** (1830-1894)

Editor's Message

This third issue of *Skylark* is a milestone, as it marks the first full year of what has become a labour of love. You will see that the journal has grown in many ways and I am particularly delighted to see not only an increase in submissions of tanka prose but am also grateful for the initiative shown by a number of poets who submitted black and white tanka-art for consideration. *Skylark* is now truly embracing tanka in all its forms.

It was a challenging winter on many levels; while our friends in the United States were bearing the brunt of the polar vortex, the UK was at risk of sinking and Australia was sweltering. And in the midst of this, we all had our private battles to face. My husband's response to being made redundant was to buy a tandem. This is our only means of transport and our lives have been transformed. Not only have we grown closer as a couple (riding a tandem is not unlike marriage— you have to work together and trust is a wonderful thing!) but we also feel even more connected to this beautiful land of ours.

It was on one such ride out into the Yorkshire Dales, that I realised *Skylark* has grown to such an extent that I may need some editorial assistance and the result of this pedal-powered musing, is that I am delighted to announce that Jenny Ward Angyal has agreed to take on the role of *Skylark* Reviews Editor. Please refer to the submissions guidelines if you have a book that Jenny might like to review. Writers are also invited to submit articles for consideration.

I hope as many poets as possible will feel moved to enter the next *Skylark's* Nest competition which, along with this issue, is dedicated to Martin Lucas, poet, scholar, and founding editor of *Presence*. Back in January I was honoured to receive a submission from Martin, and Amy's prompt, inspired by one of his tanka, seemed a fitting tribute at a time when words are simply not enough.

—Claire Everett, April 2014



The Skylark's Nest

The Winners

Selections by *Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

I am honored to choose the winners of the third 'Skylark's Nest' competition. The image of badgers in their underground burrow proved to be a challenging prompt, but poets rose to the occasion with poems exploring themes of home and safety, of light and dark, and of voyages inward and downward, both real and metaphorical.

First, the runners-up, in no particular order:

midnight—
a badger dashes
across white snow
its beating heart
in unison with mine . . .

Hazel Hall, Australia

Combining visual, auditory, and felt sensory images, this poem paints a scene of contrasts—a glimmer of light on snow at midnight—and yet ends in unity, capturing a moment of wonder as the narrator recognizes his or her identity with the badger, expressed imaginatively as the unison of beating hearts. The ellipsis at the end leaves the poem open to the reader's speculation as to what that unity may signify.

the darkness
of a basement apartment
before dawn . . .
lighting up his office desk
a small lamp and her picture

Joyce S. Greene, USA

Here the badgers' burrow inspires a reflection on its human equivalent, the basement apartment, with contrasts of light and darkness that set up strong emotional resonances. The concluding image of "her picture" lighting up the darkness moves the poem into metaphor and creates an interesting middle-of-the-story, allowing the reader to enter into the poem and wonder who "she" may be, and what her relationship is to "him."

turning inwards
away from all I know . . .
still searching
for that flicker of truth
just below the surface

David Terelinck, Australia

This poem interprets the prompt psychologically, with the narrator burrowing inside him— or herself. Its strength lies in the contrast between "all I know" and "that flicker of truth," leading the reader to ponder the differences between truth and knowledge. The poem is saved from being overly abstract by the single image flickering below the surface in the concluding lines.

The winning poem deftly combines both literal and metaphorical interpretations of the prompt:

a badger safe
surrounded by warm breath
down in the tunnel . . .
I remember what it was like
to move by instinct

Beth McFarland, Germany

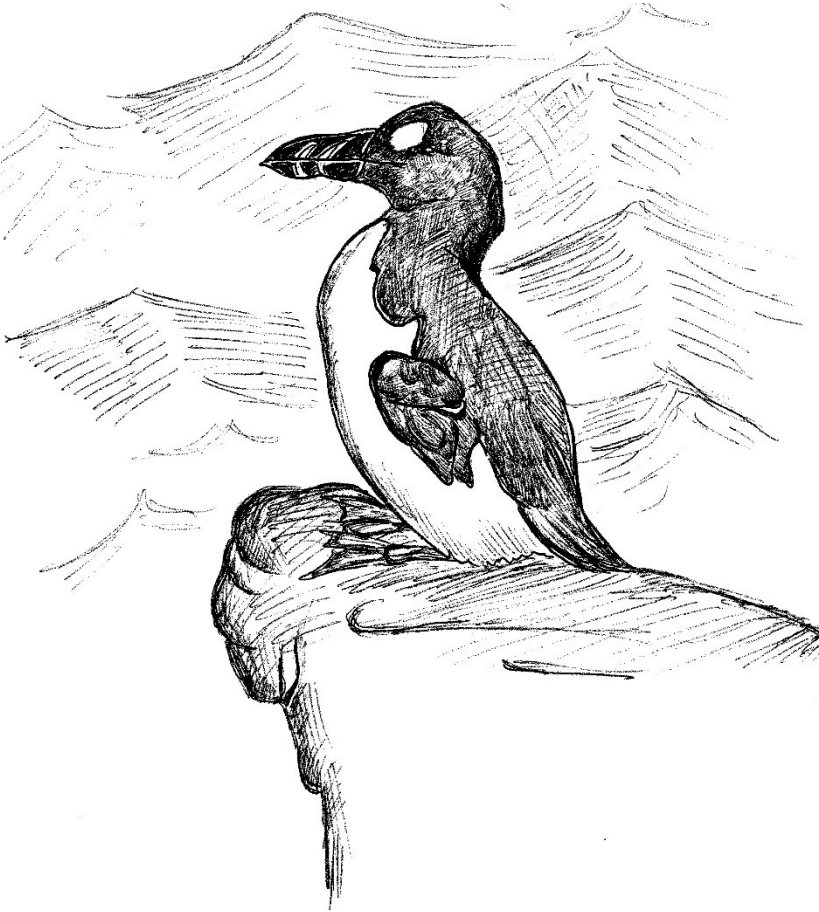
The poem begins with a literal description of the prompt picture, enhanced by the imagined and psychologically significant detail, “surrounded by warm breath,” creating a feeling of intimacy. The final two lines carry the poem in an unexpected and thought-provoking new direction. When do human beings move purely by instinct?

In our forgotten infancy, or in previous, more primeval lives? The coziness of the upper verse establishes a feeling of yearning for a simpler, surer, more intuitive way of being in the world, now largely lost to most of us. There is plenty of dreaming room in the badger burrow of this poem to wonder what that might be like.

Thanks to all the poets who shared their work with the ‘Skylark’s Nest,’ and to Amy and Claire for making this opportunity possible.

Congratulations to Beth McFarland who will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the ‘Skylark’s Nest’ competition for issue 2:2, Winter 2014.

The Skylark's Nest Prompt
2:2, Winter 2014

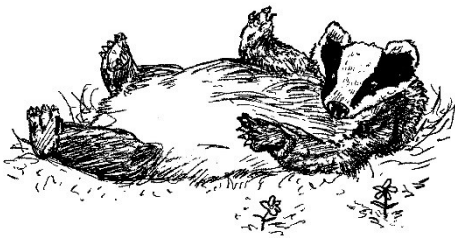


Amy writes:

The Great Auk was a flightless bird whose range spread across Northern Spain, the coast of Canada, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Ireland, and Great Britain. It bred on the rocks and cliffs of isolated islands. It was a stunning bird, standing up to 33 inches tall, with a heavy hooked bill, and in summer, a white patch could be seen over each eye. The Great Auk is now a symbol of the damage humans can cause— it very sadly became extinct in the 1800s due to being killed for its meat, eggs, feathers and oil. Despite this exploitation, the Great Auk was a very sacred animal for many people: A 4,000 year old burial site in Newfoundland uncovered 200 Great Auk beaks which were attached to ceremonial clothes. In 1844 the very last pair attempted to escape in vain from hunters, smashing their single egg in the process.

Poets are invited to meditate on the image of the Great Auk and write a tanka inspired by it. This does not mean the tanka has to be specifically about the bird; you might wish to explore themes such as extinction, erasure, loss, greed, absence, desolation, or any others that speak to you as you consider the image, especially in the context of Martin Lucas' tanka. (page 53)

Individual Tanka



she says
I'll die penniless
in the park, alone
wishes gleaming
in the well

when the first leaf turns
green to gold
child of autumn
for a beatnik lover
you fall and fall and fall

S.M. Abeles, USA

late summer
rain on the river
turns to fog and ghosts
lost to mist
and rain again

Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA

just when I heard
a sparrow's song
winter rain
one frog croaks
then another

starlings
in the vastness of sky
back and forth
the dance
we dance

Asni Amin, Singapore

one by one
red-shouldered hawks
slip into the blue
beyond the hills. . .
this fire in my hearth

moving by moonlight
to the words
dancers must practice
where they are—
my heart's slow tango

poetry—
a river to the sea
cleansed
of the heart's darkness
in marshes where the reeds sing

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

polychrome world
i, a monochrome
woman
standing shadowless
at moonset

why is it hard
to release our childhood
wounds?
i sit alone in church
i sit alone with God

your words of affection
spilling over freshly cut
lilacs
i wrap my body
in a turban of silk

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

starlight
flickering through white steam
my limbs
and the heated waters
of Yashio Onsen

Stewart C Baker, USA

as a little girl
I perched on my father's feet
in this way we danced . . .
the scent of his clean shirt
music enough

third trimester
her skin so taut
I think of palimpsests
and footprints
freed by the waves

Stephanie Brennan, USA

equinox winds
a little earlier this year—
the door swings open
to a rush of blossoms
across a just-washed sky

free concert
at the botanic gardens
—unplugged—
from the treetops
a magpie's symphony

Michelle Brock, Australia

at her wake
the fluttering of a hundred
origami birds,
each wing touched
by the glow of sunset

next-door's cat
stretches vowels into
the emptiness
of this wintry night . . .
I light a candle

Dawn Bruce, Australia

listening
to the baby monitor's
static
unable to work
since they took him

a magnet
with "poet" on it
stuck to my fridge
for years
a little white lie

Susan Burch, USA

the old blue ford
he slips it into neutral
around the curve
the sunset catches
us by surprise

Anne Elise Burgevin, USA

quartz crystals
in the welcome mat—
the glacial path
i've carved to be
alone with my past

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

leaning in
she asks about death
leaving the monk
to fumble with words
he knows are empty

Matthew Caretti, USA

my face
in the mirror
I can't forgive the ones
who left me
with those eyes

Peggy Castro, USA

the hours he spends
flicking Japanese beetles
into a tin of gas
the fragrance of roses
beaded with rain

desiccated moth
on an attic chest . . .
I remember when
words flew on paper wings
and love was worth the wait

the way she tells us
her cancer
has metastasized . . .
soon the meadow will be choked
with wildflowers and birdsong

James Chessing, USA

as if
still waiting to be claimed
a leather suitcase
in Auschwitz with the name:
M. FRANK, HOLLAND

sun-lit teak leaf
each vein so clearly etched . . .
why couldn't he see
my silence was wordless grief
not a plea for privacy

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

moondrunk
we speak of God
in whispers . . .
my ache for touch bathed
in the music of his eyes

I have no need
of all these peacocks
to teach me how to cry
last night I felt you
in my arms at last

where does
the pain go
when I can't feel it—
a lilac sunset soft
on the year's first day

Kirsten Cliff, New Zealand

these words
on scraps of paper
like petals
littering the table,
they cannot make a rose

the frustration
of one broken thing
after another . . .
until he waltzed in
with a rose between his teeth

a skiff of snow
clinging to the grass
long after she's gone
her silver medal
deep in my pocket

the space
between you and me
after all these years
we cannot separate
the ivy from the wall

Susan Constable, Canada

Green Man
with your face of leaves
 through the ages
how many rebirths
inside those steep church walls?

The Three Graces
Beauty, Joy, and Charm
linked in dance . . .
if I were the fourth
what would be said of me?

sprinkling glitter
on my childhood artwork,
brushing away
the bits of sparkle
that just won't stick

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

looking at houses
too large for the two of us
what makes us think
we can renovate
a ramshackle property

grainy photographs
of children imprisoned
in an internment camp
matching that half-smile
to tonight's presenter

waiting all day
for sunlight to lose
its blue wavelengths
the camera lens picks up
each intrusion of shadow

Cherie Hunter Day, USA

the skies
of their companionship
a soft broad blue
felicitous for this journey
midway through my life

Susan Diridoni, USA



over and over
the lesson I must keep on
learning . . .
so necessary until
I hear a hummingbird's song

marble gods
at play in a fountain
built by Bernini . . .
one baroque heart breaking
free from a pagan past

one strand of Mylar
dangling from last year's nest . . .
still we wait
for barn swallows to return
needing nothing more than that

Margaret Dornaus, USA

me, the autistic one
trying to hold
my sister's hand
she, the social one
pulling it away

Seren Fargo, USA



over the roofs
the dull suburban roofs,
pale purple clouds
of jacaranda float
and catch my useless dreams

celebrating
the wisdom of graceful age
with morning tea
in the college gardens,
golden graduates

not for nine years
have the wild lilies bloomed
in such profusion—
that was the end of one life,
is this the end of another

Amelia Fielden, Australia

summer rain
sweeps the church steps—
in the priest's arms
a gang member bleeding
into the news

Seánan Forbes, UK

he asks
the wrong question
but gets the right answer
a dandelion
beneath her chin

Terri L. French, USA

the shadowy fingers
of night enter my room . . .
missing childhood
I reach for the hand
that used to scare me

I wonder how many
ghosts walk the streets
of this old port town—
the half moon, a ship
in a bottle of clouds

Chase Gagnon, USA

three times I've read
this book now passed to you
a tinge of envy
how can I not wish to be
reading it a first time too

so much
that's *ho-hum* at Christmas—
when your card arrives
I receive it in both hands
sit in silence for a while

Beverley George, Australia

tides rise and fall
with the cycles of the moon—
PMS
now a thing of the past
on what can I blame my moods?

Joyce S. Greene, USA

summer sandals
lined up in the front hallway
wait to go out
the rainstorm passes
into the next town

Joann Grisetti, USA

from next door
this borrowed dog
leads you
over those old tracks
to a healing heart

not far
from the boarded church
box gums
dance with shadows
in cemetery road

Hazel Hall, Australia

my wildest dreams
nothing
to tame them
except
an empty bed

my garden of Eden
apple green and fecund—
a place to hold you
in finite time
for an infinite moment

Devin Harrison, Canada

as insects strum
in weeds by the lake
late afternoon sun
fires the tall clouds
of a fleeting eden

the night I caught the big guys
deep in the rectory ferns
with our cutest homegirl
no one raced me back
to kick the can

William Hart, USA

heathen enter
through the north door
the cathedral
soaring, quiet, dark
of my inmost heart

snow arrives
in the teeth of a gale
up, down and sideways
falling short, this life I've lived
to be your everything

the anchoress
walled up in the shadow
of the church
my life too, curtailed
by shalls and shall nots

Michele L. Harvey, USA

viewing
many famous portraits
in the gallery
I see my own face
drained of all but hunger

black tea
in the darkened forward lounge—
the ship
holding its course
north to Burnt Island

the harvest mouse . . .
his soft gray belly
exposed
is not let go
without a blessing

Ruth Holzer, USA

between pews
on any given Sunday
young swallow
spreading her wings
for a new kind of free

Janette Hoppe, Australia

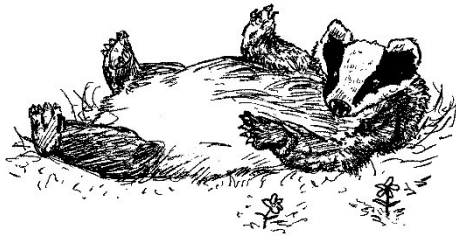
at the mall
pigeons pick crumbs
among many feet . . .
against a brick wall
the homeless beg

Central Station
the emo boy flips his hair
for an emo girl—
tail fanned
a lyrebird struts

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

he asks
can i draw your eyes?
i pucker my lips
into dusk the cricket's
hoarse vibrato

Alegria Imperial, Canada



henge forlorn
robbed and revved and hooted
bisected
by people
driving to Swindon

my childhood street
double lined with cars
no urchins
play there now
no cricket now . . . no conkers

Gerry Jacobson, Australia

paddling
the California shore
unforgettable
an otter that brushed my boat
then rolled to meet my eye

in the quiet
of our eighth decade
let's contemplate
the clever caterpillar
weaving its cocoon

the petals
on the blue veronica
remain closed
I understand this habit
on a dark drab rainy day

Kirsty Karkow, USA

no swishing skirt
to dance around tan legs,
no red blooms
to make me think
of other petals

I wonder if
they muse on me
as I muse on them,
these small barnacles
I knock from the oyster shell

M. Kei, USA

genuine amber
or just an imitation
the jeweller
examines my necklace
. . . do I really want to know

Keitha Keyes, Australia

she doesn't seek
unbroken shells
after the storm
washed up and bleached
you held her close . . .

look how
high we toss them
in the air . . .
do we or our grandchildren
see the moon for the first time?

Kathy Kituai, Australia

before my time
a wavy wheat field
I pace off
the room, both hands
brushing those stalks

all windows
of the empty house
open smoothly—
in comes tomorrow
with the scent of snow

Ingrid Kunschke, Germany

our wedding quilt
my mother swore she'd sew
still in scraps
our love stronger
than broken promises

purple stone
in my hand with the etching
strength
the hours my laboring
body opens for you

Jessica Malone Latham, USA

night after night
shackled slaves screamed
in distress
Barack Obama stands
at the Door of No Return

—The former slave house with its "Door of No Return" was the
last location for slaves being shipped to North America.

rewriting tanka
I'm reminded of her words:
a silkworm
weaves the cocoon to seal
its grief-stricken heart

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

mother asks
why she went to
that cancer treatment center
sometimes in clusters
the falling leaves

Gregory Longenecker, USA

moon to the west
sun to the east
and someone in the park
juggling
the autumn morning

pulling a thorn
from a bicycle tyre
a spring day
of putting small things
right

whatever it is,
the swallows' word
for *sparrowhawk*—
I hear them crying it
over the fields

200 years on
there are still
some days at sea
touched with sadness at
the loss of the great auk

Martin Lucas, UK

dry champagne
and some nibbles
quiet anniversary
the big hunk of stinky cheese
almost gone

Bob Lucky, Ethiopia

outliving
two lovers who left
their mark—
the tall old poplar
with a scarred heart

Carole MacRury, USA

apples
redden on the tree
as autumn
slowly measures out
leaf by crimson leaf

minutes
by the water
become the span
of great light that is
wordless, like this river

summer morning:
suddenly
the tree comes to life—
leaves become
wings

A. A. Marcoff, UK

a dream
of starlings
trapped
inside my house . . .
so much I long to say

Lauren Mayhew, USA



sometimes
in the quiet
of a pause
a song begins
that never ends

thin smoke
rises, curling
through old webs
a light dust settles
on tables and chairs

Joy McCall, UK

these old codgers
at coffeeshop tables
living on caffeine—
when do they arrive?
when do they get up and go?

this cat I live with
has a steady soul
and owns me
without making me feel
there's some kind of issue

wise koi!
what do these lazy fish
know about love?
how tender they appear
nestled together, sleeping

the frogs I heard
singing along the creek
must be napping
or perhaps it is my turn
to tell them a story

Michael McClintock, USA

the wind's wildness
then nothing
in the eye of the storm
the only sound a child
singing to her imaginary friend

the straight-back chair
where she sat studying
her Bible
brooking no argument
from her arthritic spine

Beverly Acuff Momoi, USA

more bombings
on the TV news
I put
Stairway to Heaven
on repeat

Mike Montreuil, Canada

weekend soundtrack
her bath toy turtle sings
the Blue Danube waltz
how we dance along
the banks of childhood

the blue light
of dusk on the page
this moment
I claim
for myself

ten thousand years
of women's stories
lost at sea
tiny wooden boats
against the great swells

Christina Nguyen, USA

where did
this old age come from
overnight
so many autumns
my youth driven by the wind

by the Liffey side
a discarded
syringe
some trips
are only one way

Eamonn O'Neill, Dublin, Ireland

I stop to rest
in a field of sunflowers—
halos
without saints
to weigh them down

ivy
how tight it clings
this vine
that cures my sorrow
like a poem in the dark

Sergio Ortiz, USA

waking up
to the full moon slung low
over a prairie horizon
for the first time seeing life
through my father's eyes

standing in the hallway
outside my mother's room
nurses at her bedside—
I know she is too busy dying
for more goodbyes

Marianne Paul, Canada

from the hallway
she wakes me in the night
the daughter
who left twenty years ago
still has nightmares

googling earth maps
my daughter finds the house
in England
where she was born and where
her placenta remains

walking the beach
the tide casts a starfish
at my feet
spread-eagled on the sand
like a something from space

Patricia Prime, New Zealand

a lingering breath
through the reed flute
shapes his raga . . .
on night's inverted stage
the stars keep beat

learning to swim
I'm told you'll know it for life
once you learn . . .
was it a different me then
in my mother's womb

Kala Ramesh, India

kindergarten morning
I watch my grandson
use a shoe horn
and tie double knots
 guess he'll be driving soon

David Rice, USA

waiting
for the knee surgeon
to read the MRI
he talks faster
than I can follow

Barbara Robidoux, USA

one eye on the 'scope
and the world
falls away . . .
only this twist of shine
on the sparrowhawk's talon

from my window watch-point
I watch the hare rise
from her form
if only you were here to share
this frost-glittered morning

Amy Claire Rose Smith, UK

when we
were chinook clouds
arching
across evening
swallowing the sunset

Debbie Strange, Canada

The towering ginkgo
we planted when knee-high
has lost all its leaves—
in time I will recall
whatever it is

Forces beyond control
made and now destroy me
bit-by-bit—
a second frost coming for
the three last lantana blooms

George Swede, Canada

visiting her grave
in the early morning . . .
dew droplets on
the white mums
in his hands

Diana Teneva, Bulgaria



the glissando
of light across water—
a slow lapping
of the moon's reflection
against the hull

those men drawn
to the worship of foam
and salt—
I do not question my need
of you, or the way you came

David Terelinck, Australia

blue dragonfly . . .
the coolest nights of fall
make me remember
all the promises
he never made

Christine L. Villa, USA

sparrows
fighting over my crusts
again he explains
trickle-down-theory
as if I just didn't get it

all those days
and nights reading
Kawabata
never having
seen the snow

Dick Whyte, New Zealand

was it that the real world
didn't want me
or I it?
these pages and pages
of fantastic escapes

I used nothing of today
to make a sound
the city night
is a vast audience
blinking in confusion

sandblasted sorrow
towering
over contentment
how you've become
my only landmark

Liam Wilkinson, UK

too many sounds
I try without success
to shut them out
my thoughts become casualties
in traffic-heavy streets

Steve Wilkinson, UK

winter's egg
a white that cannot hold
your being
I feel the rush of wings
inside the stone

it was on the melting
river that we met
seen from above
the ice still
breaking

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

the now full
now empty
tide pool—
a starfish and I
lock fingers

Tad Wojnicki, US/Taiwan

little girl laughter
wading down the creek
those years
spent nursing a man
locked inside his body

she is off
with a simple
goodbye
stepping from her bed
into elegant shoes

— for Joy

Brian Zimmer, USA

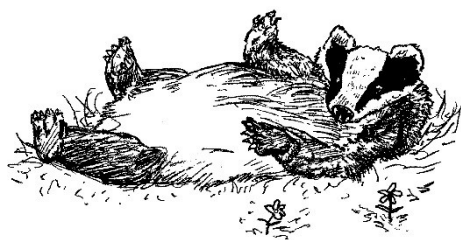
a whooper crane
the milky way sparkles



tonight our glass dish
of dreams hit the floor

an'ya

Tanka Sequences, Solo & Responsive



Small Mountains of Loss

how could it happen
once again my body fails
this dark, cold winter
the roses buried in snow
have a scent I cannot name

in the hospital
I imagine your last days
here on this earth—
but your ghost visits me—
that nurse with Chiclets in her mouth

somehow
I know my life
is circled by sleep
it is a deep dark well
into which we throw our wishes

if only
we could talk on the phone
after death
I would call you now
and ask for your love

forgotten fragrance
of the vibrant rose garden
haunts me this winter
as if I have been unfaithful
to the only one I love

coffee in the morning
tea at night
catching my breath
small mountains of loss
I need to climb daily

growing old
ungracefully
regretfully
in sickness and in health
I feel you got short changed

crossing my arms
over my chest before sleep
I gasp for breath
will I wake in the morning
to another day with you

Marjorie Buettner, USA

The Song of a Broken Reed

Auschwitz night sky
mica-flakes of the Milky Way
in growing darkness
bare poplars moan
muffled cries of the dead

numbing silence
of worm-worn and illegible
words furtively etched
on wooden sleeping pallets
in rows of airless huts

bombed gas chambers
lie in heaps of charred bricks . . .
a cartography
of the prodigious black
of the human mind

the road
cobbled by bleeding hands
leads through icy mists
to a solitary wagon
on rusted rail tracks

silhouette
of Arbeit Macht Frei
against colonies
of abandoned crow nests . . .
this shrine to our time-wound**

**** time-wound:** *I have taken this concept from Yves Bonnefoy's writings, notably The Arrière-pays in which he talks about how a place is imbued with a force of revelation not only of elevated beauty and thought but also of a 'penury' of spirit and the vicissitudes of life itself. This is not altogether dissimilar to the Tibetan Buddhist concept of a landscape being densely-packed with gods, demons and spirits (lha, dü dre). Thus a place can be imbued with the sacred energy of the good (lha) or the destructive energy of the demons and evil spirits (dü, dre).*

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

Gabriel O

the wailing blood
of injustice seeps across
this wide land
Gabriel o teach us
the Lazarus heart

towers tumble
take us to the sunshine
Gabriel
where elevators
yet rise

Susan Diridoni, USA

Shades of water

—After Liu Zongyuan (773-819)

how to describe
the bright . . . the subtle
shades of water . . .
this boat I drift in
washing into wonder . . .

sunup— the scent
of last evening's camp ash
still lingers . . .
row through crowded clouds
accompanied by doves

brush strokes
of light on a keel
write lyrics
of jade limestones looming
through an empty sky

lake's edge—
I moor the boat awhile
play my flute
and feed golden carp
with stray rays of sun

in dusk's mauve mist
I seek deep waters
for fishing . . .
my good friend solitude
keeps me company

ruby leaves
over west lake's shimmer
winter will send
five snow drifts before
spring breezes blow me home

the water
ripples its secrets
briefly I see
the wise and wily one
fisher of life's mysteries

Hazel Hall, Australia

The Morrigan Returns

who is
that old woman
in my dream
why does she lurk
black wings folded?

she stalks me
in the shadows
of morning
I find black feathers
in front of Starbucks

I ignore
the first sign
shoving
the feathers
in my pocket

I ignore
the second sign
crow prints
on my windshield
every day

four A.M.
waking dreams
like crows on
carrion
murdering sleep

sun pops
orange on the city
fills the sky
with copper light
as feathers fall

I ignore
the third sign
black wings
stretched across
russet dawn

a thousand
feathers follow me
my black wings
beat with the hearts
of a thousand crows

silver bells
on my black feathers
moon drums
dancing in darkness
skinny legs, wrinkled claws

I become
that girl again
black wings
soaring
the manic dawn

Carole Johnston, USA

Dominus Insularum*

sweet Cara
the dear island
calls to me
storm-tossed, wind-swept
across the strand

desolate
she bears the brunt
of wild waves
feral goats, her lovers
under dark skies

I lie there
in my night dreams, curled
in long grass
in the solitary house
fallen to ruin

I listen
to the goats, to the wind
to the waves
and I want him to come back
and hold me through this dark night

Lord of the Isles
do not forsake me
winter is coming
and I hear the pipers playing
the last high song of the sea

***Dominus Insularum** - Lord of the Isles - the title of the most powerful landowners of old Scotland —the Celtic/Norse Somerled - summer wanderers.

Cara:(dear one),a tiny island off the coast of Scotland, is still under the independent rule of a descendant of the great Lords, although no one lives there. It has one ruined house and a herd of feral goat

Joy McCall, UK

Ward 229

the ward
has a new TV
a doctor says
we'll see tomorrow
I tell him I'm not blind

it's always the same
drip feeds
of everything
this year I wonder
will she touch snow

Eamonn O'Neill, Dublin, Ireland

spring blues

the robin calls
from dawn to dusk
constantly
alas, happiness
is never on time

a day-long concert
if he had posted it
on eHarmony
he would have found
a partner by now

finally an answer
from a distant maple
not sure
if the robins will settle
in my garden

Luminita Suse, Canada

Editor's Note: Please take time to enjoy Luminita's "spring blues" companion piece tanka-art in the *Skylark* online gallery.



this riotous flower
like her bohemian spirit
tossed in the wind
torn petals settle upon
a restless heart

Pamela A. Babusci
1/24/14

Photo by: Diane Dehler 2014

Everyone but Me

Pamela A. Babusci, USA
& Claire Everett, UK

we are
always tethered
to our mothers
severing the umbilical cord
it grows back

*a spiderling
and its silken parachute . . .
knots in the strings
of an apron
I never saw her wear*

our arguments
were many & hugs
were few
the silk thread that bonded us
thinning in the mist

*slicing sweet peppers
I find one growing inside
another . . .
mum and baby photographs
for everyone but me*

inside mother's locket
hair from my stillborn sister
i try to unburden
her sorrow by being
the perfect child

*a daughter
who danced for me alone . . .
baby steps
never more than a dream
imprints on my heart*

~ ~ ~

Sounds of your Absence

Anne Benjamin, Australia
& Carmel Summers, Australia

this morning
after days of rain
soft sunlight
those paths we walked together
still deep in muddy waters

2 Jan 2014

in a scooped-out hole
I plant the rose
Remembering . . .
finally
the tears, my tears

6 Jan 2014

rain clouds
level with my eyes
unravel
I find it hard to trust
that blue skies lie beyond

13 Jan 2014

storms
pound the steamy afternoon
in early darkness
the boat in which I dream
begins to flounder

17 Jan 2014

a tiny brown wren
hides under the lavender
in my French garden
I open your emails
cradle a warm mug of tea

18 Jan 2014

*rain plops in the drain
and slides down the roof
while I read
late into the night—
the sounds of your absence*

24 Jan 2014

~ ~ ~

Sanctum

Janet Lynn Davis, USA
& Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

ancient chapels
carved into the rock face
of Mönchsberg . . .
once the tourists are gone
I crawl inside myself

~JLD (Salzburg, Austria)

inscribed
on the torii gate
spirit of light—
fountains flowing
in the falling snow

~JWA (New York City, USA)

Beyond Closed Doors

Claire Everett, UK
& Kathy Kituai, Australia

a day
for honeybees colliding
in pincushion flowers . . .
for reminding my children
I loved their father, once

*too busy
to notice the sweetness
of fatherhood
you flew here and there
gathering nectar elsewhere*

little feet
up and down the paths
of our walled garden . . .
thyme and sweet violets
to fill the cracks

*walking together
were we ever in step?
I stumble
down dead-end streets
now that you are ill*

a labyrinth
long overgrown
my mind wanders
where gatekeeper butterflies
out-dance their shadows

*the cat chases
silhouettes on the wall
intangible
all those promises he made
days afterward*

moving on
but the gibes have followed me
beyond the closed door
a rusted metal bucket
still catching the drips

*is it too late
to see things differently
in the desert
windmills filter light
falling on hard baked earth*

~ ~ ~

Wings

Matsukaze, USA
Joy McCall, UK

this rustic life—
well now Rain
don't you have any
earthy songs
to lie on my tatami mat?

*I am bones
under the ground
pale and stained
come, drop your prayers
on the trodden grass*

in dense darkness
beneath bleached bones
we expel
angry breath—
a midnight moth rises

*frail wings
do not carry us
high enough
we fall again
to the heavy ground*

naked
swimming through
rough soil—
she arrived on a
mourning dove's cry

~ ~ ~

The Longest Nights

Giselle Maya, France
& David Terelinck, Australia

(mid December 2013)

to measure
the time of one's life
observe
each gesture each wish
embracing all

*the watchmaker mends
and rewinds each frozen hour—
not the first time
she calls her adult son
by his father's name . . .*

secrets
hard to share
let them take flight
with the autumn wind
blend with the river of stars

*with no need
of clock and calendar
beyond the bars
the yearly ebb and flow
of a willow's leaves*

when we speak
of past events
they are with us still
the time it takes
for a persimmon to ripen

*trees heavy
with the taste of summer
their daily prayer
that she carries her third
pregnancy to term . . .*

old cherry tree
sheds leaf by orange leaf
stark naked now
light all the candles in the house
for these are the longest nights

*this longing
for sleep without dreams—
Morpheus molds
each ebony hour
in the shape of your face . . .*

like clockwork
the artist* collects pine pollen
each spring
museums of the world
show his small bright mountains

*waiting for
each layer of oil to dry . . .
remembering
a life that was thick
with colour and movement*

in search of timespace
from the day I moved nests
to this mountain village
my mother's tiny gold watch
no longer shows the hour

*crossing
the international
date line
a whole extra day
without you in it . . .*

night time
profound winter silence
wakes me
i write short songs
drift back into dreams

*in the post
a musical card proclaims
I'm fifty . . .
the darkness between
each and every star*

*Wolfgang Laib

~ ~ ~

Night and Day

Genie Nakano, USA
& Amelia Fielden, Australia

the morning glories
didn't bloom this spring
as you promised . . .
blue, pink, or purple
I shall never know

GN

my own tears
cherry blossom tears
in chill winds
of separation
tulips flame by the path

AF

your lips
have lost their fire—
oh why can't
night and day remain
the way we began

GN

young and lustful
I wanted everything
all at once—
now a gentle sequence
of pleasure, suffices

AF

the summer river
takes me where it wants,
cascading
down a waterfall
into warm surrender

GN

turning the tap
to 'full' for fluency,
I shower
considering my words
for the next compromise

AF

Sunday, 'our' day,
reading the newspaper
his priority—
I write ten tanka
before we breakfast

GN

tonight's the night
for our anniversary waltz
. . . too bad
you are no longer forty
and there are fewer roses

AF

last night
we laughed so hard and long—
never knew
that funny side of you
glad to meet it, finally

GN

eventually
after weeks of heavy skies
the mountain
snow-crested, soars into view
and my lover's plane lands

AF

~ ~ ~

Two Daughters

Genie Nakano, USA
& Kath Abela Wilson, USA

in my dream,
father is young
I choose to stay
in a light airy room
not married yet

*a pen
an instrument
you gave me
my name on the night sea
in your handwriting*

he tells me
you look just like your dad
the same expression
i love it when my husband
sees this happen

*before my birth
mother drew gold circles
a spell around the rim
your white cup
how could it break*

clatter
of fallen china
lilies of the valley
scatter into pieces
kept in a lacquered box

*I plant lily pips
in a memory garden
shady perennial
you bloom fragrant
under evergreens*

your ashes
an Egyptian cedar urn
safe
inside my studio
here we dance and meditate

*I never knew
when you died
she told me later
how you fell sight unseen
on our wedding day*

he took Mom away
only Dad and I
in a lonely house
thirteen I grew up too fast
coffee and cigarettes

*I was driftwood
in his wake other loves . . .
lost at seventeen
without his strength
without his weakness*

I didn't think
I could go on without you
so strong in my life
now my hands are full
of falling stars

*a smoky signature
invisible words
white waves onshore
a childhood home
fills with lovers*

the sage
who makes us laugh
one more story
before lights out
do you have to go away

*your suitcase
by the open door
packed for another life
you left me twice
with no goodbye*

~ ~ ~

Star Anise

*Sheila Windsor, UK
& Brendan Slater, UK*

miles away
I drop through steam
another star anise . . .
in her garden of childhood
my neighbour sings

each idea
a new dimension
crumpled up
out of sight
in aloneness

from the
wire bin of snowball
poems I fished out,
set on the mantelpiece
faces of moon

dust
settled for
and now
hauling the rubble
of my decision

there again
the child I picture
waving
from a dark corner
cupboard of my mind

where
the fantasies
evolve
I crouch
naked

on the cutting
edge of eggshell
shadows
I have lightly
stepped my last

koshed
by pigs
in the back of a van
past the edge
of the universe

drip
drip
drip
night falls
dressed in

black
where the sun was
I grasp
at the ocean, it
does not respond

~ ~ ~

blue

Brian Zimmer, USA
& Joy McCall, UK

the wind
among new leaves
wild seedlings
sprout along the highway
the curve of a snowy hill

heather
purple on the foothills
wild thyme
cold spring water
wild blueberries

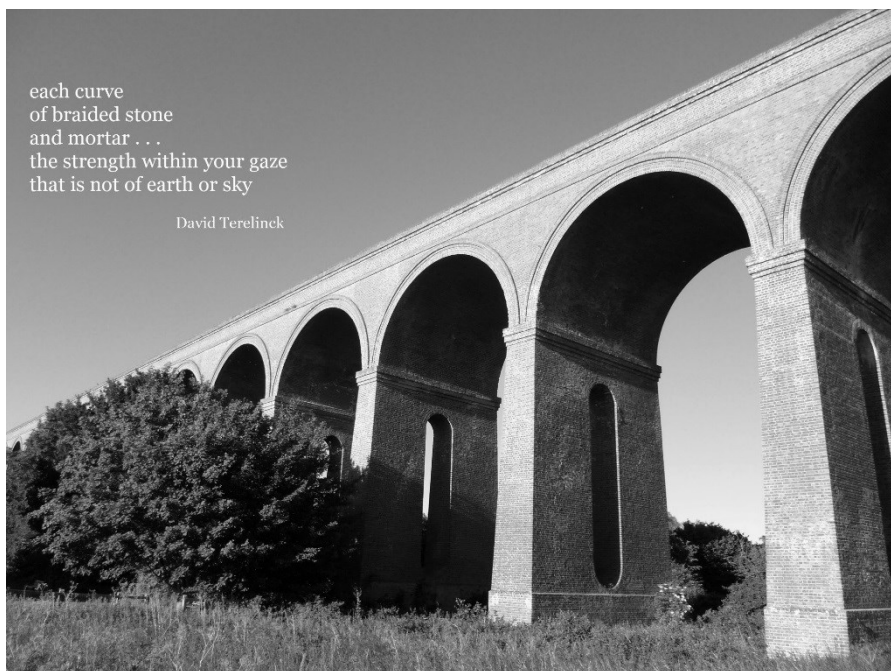
narrow creek
a snake threads through it
warm shade
the distant horizon
shimmers blue

dawn frost
on the red brickweave
sun coming up
a robin singing
in the wild violets

~ ~ ~

each curve
of braided stone
and mortar . . .
the strength within your gaze
that is not of earth or sky

David Terelinck



Tanka Prose



Long Shadows

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

Among the haunting images of animals— bison, bear, and spotted horse— painted on the walls of caves, human handprints catch the eye. Careful measurement reveals that most are the hands of women. Could they be maker's marks?

firelight
dancing on the walls
the sister
I never had
touches my hand

~ ~ ~

Sweet Rolls

Donna Buck, USA

It's a drizzly Saturday morning. I decide after five years of living in this house to learn how to use my new oven. I have avoided the electronic settings for too long; it's ridiculous how I yearn for that old oven with the easy turn-on dial, the 15-minute heat-up.

I assemble the ingredients and tools on the counter. I have a bread machine for the dough but I want to make the sweet rolls and bread the slow way. To knead the dough and get the counter messy and sticky with flour. Raisin cinnamon rolls with currants and white icing, like Mom's. No other plans for today, just this self-lesson with the oven, and the quiet kneading, the dough rising. If they turn out, I'll give some to my neighbors. I have decided that I live here now and should get on with it.

First the right music. Alternative, of course: hip music is in order for my new venture. I find the section in the oven manual for "oven preheat". Flour sifts into the bowl, the salt, the off-white yeast. So many whites. A bit of milk for moistening; more white. Then the last bit and the sticky folding and kneading begin. I do this mindfully to a *Foo Fighters* melody.

scent of incense
white veil pinching my temples
sunlight through the stained glass
a kaleidoscope
my first communion

* * *

It's Saturday, still early but too late for breakfast— that's the rule in this house, sister— and make toast and grab some leftover coffee. Mom has already started on the bread and rolls, the rectangular aluminium baking pans already greased and lightly-

floured, four loaves already set to rise, and a fifth mound waiting to be rolled out flat, buttered, then layered with brown sugar, rolled up, sliced and placed on the baking pans. This is my favorite ritual, these Saturday cinnamon-miracle mornings. The yeasty smell permeates the kitchen. It's almost happiness, what happiness might be. Mom in her apron, her hair tied back in a bandana, is moving quickly so I stay out of her way. She is frowning— this is work, not a meditation. It's just Saturday, bread to make and the rolls for after mass tomorrow for when Father O'Leary comes to breakfast after church. I'm not sure where everyone is. Not sure where Dad is. I'm often not sure where he is.

Mother's hands. Always in motion. Stirringkneadingfoldingironing. The clothes she takes in for the extra money she needs to make it through the last week of the month. The hiss of the iron as it sizzles on the sprinkled garments. Her hands in the dishwasher. Her hands drying the dishes.

Her hands on the curtains in the living room as she draws them aside and watches for Dad. Dinner is ready, ready, and he's late again. Late is not good. Late— the look on her face set with worry. Late is never good. If he's late he's been drinking and we eat in tense silence and wait to see if we are going to need to leave. If he falls asleep we can clean up quietly, talk in whispers, go to our rooms and read or do homework. Later when I read about the air raids in the war I imagine I know those people, waiting . . . Otherwise, if he's awake but moody, we are just alert, ready to leave, our coats in our rooms, a few things ready. This is mostly the big kids' job but we all know where everything is. I am the in-between, but I decide it's my job to be sure my little sister, who often has bronchitis, keeps still so she doesn't cough too much. I get water for her and keep it in the room, read to her, help her with her pyjamas and put a sweater for her nearby.

But the curtains aren't pulled aside tonight. It's not yet dusk and Dad's come in a little early; he's smiling. He's been with his buddies on the base, just cards, and the other men are home with their wives and kids. He says how good the kitchen smells, puts on an LP, a swing tune. One of their favorites. He smiles again and takes Mom's hand and twirls her in the living room as they jitterbug. As the next

track spins out a slow song, Dad leans down, his lips in her hair, and Mom puts her arms around his neck.

We set the table quietly and my sister takes the roast from the oven as we wait for dinner.

knee deep in the stream
fish line arches over the water
and a trout leaps upward—
lies on the bank and begs for air . . .
catch and release

* * *

The dough is ready. I shape three balls into loaves and place them in the buttered pans and check the oven temperature. Next, my favorite part of Saturday, rolling out the last bit of dough on the counter, rolling it flat, flatter, and I spread the butter with my fingers for the hell of it, it feels so good, and I smooth it out across the circular dough and smash in the brown sugar. I toss the currants onto this brown-gold layer and then sprinkle the cinnamon and it falls softly onto the dough. After rolling it up like a fleshy rug I slice it into sections and place these on the cookie sheets. A sweet smell permeates the air.

this morning
the old bucket
so full
of wild berries
transubstantiation bell

~ ~ ~

Unlimited Scope
Matthew Caretti, USA

On the outskirts of every agony sits some observant fellow who points.
—Virginia Woolf

We are reminded that the Milky Way is just one of many little islands of stars. The cosmic perspective, the master calls it. Boils it down to a question of relevance. And ego. Reasserting the wonder found in our connection.

pinpricks
in Maya's veil
stardust
seeping in
to all things

~ ~ ~

Yellow Bird

Marilyn Humbert, Australia.

The sun is hiding behind storm-driven clouds. Wind slinks around corners, along the eaves into cracks and crevices. In grey elf-light, the house is silent and cold.

my reflection
in the mirror
is a shadow—
old blackbird squawks
in the winter tree

The phone rings. “Hi Mum”.

this chill
is carried away
on the melody
of a yellow breasted
song bird

~ ~ ~

Wrapped Up
Gerry Jacobson, Australia

I leave the railway station and turn towards my childhood. It's where once upon a time my dad walked home from work each evening. But it's changed now. Busy street in the middle of the day. Lots of traffic. Cafes. Bookshops.

from West End Lane
to Fortune Green
I walk
the landscape of my past
seek refuge in the present

Turn the corner into Dennington Road, NW6. Jewish delicatessen now a pizza place. Smells of smoked salmon, pickled herrings, linger in memory. Crisp bread rolls on Sunday mornings. Taste lingers. And the library is still there, that haven where I hid playing truant from school or from the long boring synagogue service.

God
is in the soft sunshine
on *Yom Kippur*
forgiving all . . .
our sins washed away

And then I stop, disjointed. Am I dreaming? The synagogue is wrapped up in a plastic bag. Unreal! I'm so looking forward to seeing it. I have this recurrent dream of climbing inside a building, sometimes with companions. Sometimes we climb right through, sometimes not. I think that these dreams are based on my childhood exploration of the back stairs and attics of that synagogue. I want to go inside the building and have a look. I notice a side door, shut. But of course there is security on Jewish buildings in London. I ring the bell and speak to someone on an intercom, trying to explain. A man comes out and chats and tells me that the building is closed for renovation. Well it's more than 100 years old.

West Hampstead . . .
the synagogue is barred
and shuttered . . .
our Jewish God
secured within

~ ~ ~

Awakened
Gary LeBel, USA

*'A fiction, believed in even though you know it is a fiction,
can only be validated by sheer will.'*

—Harold Bloom, *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*

One by one they climbed out of their glass boxes
and brushed the ash from their faces, breasts and shoulders.
Some were having difficulty scaling their walls
and so others rushed to help them.

A man reached into one and brought out a dog in his arms,
its tail wagging as if it had seen its master,
and once its paws touched the floor, it, too, shook off the dust.
None was abashed by their nakedness, nor that all their hair was
gone,
not even the women who'd been so proud of their elaborate tresses
then in fashion.

Soon the space was abuzz with the velvet chatter of Latin.
Everyone looked at the ceiling and wondered where the ash came
from
and laughed as they watched their bodies flush with color under the
florescent lights,
having been so long away from their beloved Neapolitan sun.

Amid the chatter, speaking above the rest, one of the older women
pointed to a girl in a pink dress on the far side of the room, and
everyone turned to look.

The girl had traveled with her family all the way from Genoa: how long
she had dreamed of coming!
ever since that rainy afternoon she'd opened a picture book in her
parent's modest library,
and so, for her birthday this year, her wish was granted.

Now that all the awakened had turned their gazes upon the girl in
wonder, she approached and moved among them, greeting each by
name as hand took hand,

the women pressing her to their bosoms.

Her parents sat on a bench and watched proudly as the chattering flock engulfed her,

for knowing their daughter well,
they knew just what to expect.

*With the soundless turn
of a skeleton key, locked are the tumblers
of yesterday's sky
but what lemon-wind is drifting
through the door you left ajar?*

~ ~ ~

Diagnosis

Bob Lucky, Ethiopia

Sitting in the clinic waiting for results. The list of things the doctor wants to rule out is enough to make me ill. I think of writing a letter to my wife and son in case I don't come out of this alive. "If I should die" I begin, but that's the beginning of every story, and the end.

a scribbled map
in my notebook
the stars
at the end of the road
pointing every which way

~ ~ ~

This Woman Thing

Kala Ramesh, India

Being the third daughter, I was still ignorant about menstruation. Not surprising in that age and time. I remember the day, it was our summer vacation, and I had just turned twelve. My sisters and I were playing a game of carom.

a sudden spurt
of warm feeling . . .
my blood
from a womb
I knew nothing about

My mother said we'll keep it a secret from the older members of the family, for then I'd be forced to wear a half-sari* to hide from the world my becoming a woman.

*half-sari is three meters of cloth, much like its name.
'a sudden spurt' —*Eucalypt* #8, 2010

~ ~ ~

SAN FRANCISCO/DUBLIN, on the cusp

Charles D. Tarlton, USA

rust red Golden Gate
over the Golden Gate Strait

The streets of Dublin ran fluent and glossy in the rain. The walk from Ballsbridge toward Trinity College took us over the Grand Canal, down Merrion and Shelbourne Roads, to Lombard Street, then Pearse Street Station and the DART train coming up from Greystones and on to Hough. We watched the Irish Sea from the top of the hill.

on the seas a dream
of sea rushing in and out
the *Tsing Ma Bridge* to Kowloon

thirty-six thousand
feet above the frozen north
then down past Iceland
and the Faroe Islands
to Dublin, Terminal 2

Along the “silvery lough” in Glencar Valley, we were looking for the famous waterfall in the pouring rain. The driver was from around there, he said, and showed us his mother’s house above the lake. Then, he pointed us up into a green dingle from the road, a twisting path into greener drapery, when the path pointed straighter upwards, where the waters fell in a roar— “Where the wandering water gushes/From the hills above Glen-Car.”

under the bridge sea
blue to rock gray, from calm
To rough, pushing the mast

you can see the bridge
in its many disguises
walking Crissy Field
see the headlands on both sides
hear high and low-toned fog horns

In the pond in Herbert Park a boy with a boat on a string tows his dreams around. The pond's full against his tiny frigate (modeled on *Méduse*) with ducks and swans cruising in blockade. The boy dreams up a wind and pulls on his string across the waters.

of a black and yellow
sloop all the way over.

The tall ships, sailing ships from another era, came into Dublin's Docklands and tied up along the quays. Where we stood on Sir John Rogerson's quay was the German boat, the *Alexander von Humboldt*, and the Mexican *Cuauhtémoc*, its hull brilliant and hugely white and flying a gigantic Mexican flag in Christmas colors. I went aboard the Danish ship *Danmark* and stood next to an officer as he gave polite orders to his crew. My historical footing gave way for just a second.

the first classic Fords
and Dodges crossed the Golden Gate
the year I was born

from our apartment
out the windows to the hills
Balclutha's masts
like sights on a transit-level
rise and fall on changing tides

We rented a Ford *Fiesta* in Dublin for a trip to the West Coast and the *Burren* where the moon-like rocks run down from the escarpment into

the sea. We found an abandoned farm in a million dollar location overlooking the western surf. Its stone walls falling down, its roof was long since gone, but you could dream up the life once lived there. Goats ate the grass around and we made a picnic there as if in a film. Later we drove to Dingle over Conor pass in the rain, the road just wide enough for a single car. We prayed no one would be coming.

the towers rise from the fog
impossible testaments

~ ~ ~

Purple Tapestry
David Terelinck, Australia

The lake, copper-plated by the setting sun, makes Midas of every reflection. In this upside-down world, water-polished branches reach out to a spring too far away to see. A cormorant stands at the edge, wings extended, soaking up the meagre warmth from the last rays.

Lakeside strollers pick up their pace, spurred on by the evening chill. The bells of the carillon ring out, and seem to echo forever in this leaf-bereaved world.

We pause on a bench by the hospice and chat in the still of deepening dusk. Lights come on inside, and beds are turned down; some, perhaps, for the last time. As we sit we watch young children at play on the swings, and listen to laughter that does not contemplate beginnings or endings.

swathed in
the purple tapestry
of night . . .
hearts that are anchored
with moonlight and dreams

~ ~ ~

**Articles, Essays, Reviews
& Announcements**



Across the Universe — Tanka Dreaming

Michelle Brock, Australia

Since 2008 I've been meeting once a week with a group of local writers at various locations around Canberra. We call ourselves *Friday Writers* and follow the time-honoured format established by Kathy Kituai in her *Kate's Kitchen* journal classes. Initially encouraged by Kathy and writing with people like Barbara Curnow, Maureen Howard, Gerry Jacobson, Liz Lanigan and Catherine McGrath, it's inevitable that there's a hint of tanka in the air.

Shortly before Christmas we met on a balmy summer morning at Gerry's favourite bakery in the suburb of Yarralumla. I'd brought along the 2013 winter edition of *Skylark* which we decided to use as a writing prompt. We each opened the book at random and chose a tanka. I was delighted by the beautiful poem on page 61 by Kath Abela Wilson:

first word
fuzzy
on my tongue
yet already
the taste of peach

The poem immediately brought back memories of the Australian summers of my childhood. As a special Christmas treat my mother would buy a case of plums and I remembered the agonizing wait for the fruit to ripen in the laundry. I penned the first draft of a tanka prose (*The Ripening*) that morning and shared an edited version a few days later with 'Kathabela' in the USA and Claire in the UK via the global village on Facebook.

I feel extremely lucky to be part of the tanka community and love how this beautifully powerful form brings the world together in such a positive and inspirational way. Thank you to all the creative and generous people who make this happen.

The Ripening

In the laundry, where it's cool and dark, that's where her mother has put them, 'to ripen' she says 'for Christmas'.

The young girl can smell them from the bottom of the stairs— plush, round, luscious. She can taste their sweet and sour on her tongue, feel the syrupy juice trickling down her throat. 'Is it Christmas yet?' she asks, already knowing the answer.

She's given a chore for her impudence and dawdles to the clothesline, washing basket full of wet nappies against her hip. After pegging just two or three she starts collecting frangipanis. She'll float them in a bowl; make an arrangement for the kitchen table. Then perhaps her mother will relent.

gathering
the petals of youth
so tight-fisted
the promise
of budding dreams

Instead, her mother is annoyed to find a dozen soggy nappies still lying in the bottom of the washing basket so the young girl changes tack. She offers to rake up the frangipanis that have fallen on the lawn. Oh the scent of summer, of lazy watermelon afternoons, of lying in deep cool grass, of stringing tin-can telephones from tree-tops, of stealing gooseberries from next door's garden, of buzzing flies, sunscreen and the beach.

seal-skin smooth
she tumbles in the waves
till her hair
turns to seaweed
and starfish sparkle in her eyes

Lunch is ready so she piles the frangipanis under a philodendron leaf and races inside.

Afterwards she offers to clear the plates and heads into the laundry to scrape the scraps into the bin. She spies them underneath the concrete tub, a whole case, crimson, glistening.

She watches her hand dive in . . . firm . . . firm . . . firm . . . ah, soft!
Juice trickles down both arms.

sweet tang of childhood
those firm round years
but oh!
the delicious delight
of a soft ripe plum

~ ~ ~

A Sprinkling of Starlight

Versions of Fujiwara no Teika
and sequences of poems
inspired by his vision

Gary LeBel, USA



1.

<i>ka</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>mu</i>
<i>ge</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>me</i>
<i>zo</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>no</i>
<i>a</i>	<i>ru</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ha</i>
<i>ra</i>	<i>tsu</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>so</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>tsu</i>	
<i>u</i>	<i>no</i>		<i>su</i>	

*as the fragrance
of plum blossoms drifts over my sleeves,
not to be vanquished,
the flood of moonlight
on the roof*

Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241 M.E.)

The long white shingle
curves onward toward its headlands
shrouded in mist . . .
how cold and good it feels
after 'an eternity and a day'.

Giving each a name,
she peoples her finished sandcastle
with a host of pinecones—
how nicely in her world
they all get along.

Drawing his wrist closer,
looking deep into the locust's eyes,
just thirteen,
he asks it about its life
in camouflage.

Have my thoughts
invaded this high ridge,
for sunlight
has just now slipped away
behind a stand of poplars.

Endless
the nightly surge of the Amicalola's
cold depths—
deep into its nebula
I plunge my hands.

Forgetting
to roll her trousers up
her lean and girlish joy
runs lightly as a sanderling
down the evening beach.

2.

ya	yu	a	so	ta
ma	u	ki	de	bi
no	hi	ka	fu	bi
ka	sa	ze	ki	to
ke	bi	ni	ka	no
ha	shi		e	
shi	ki		su	

*while stopping to rest,
the autumn wind fills my sleeves:
bridging two mountains together
for one brief moment,
the lonely sun*

Fujiwara no Teika

That time of evening after a rain
when swallows venture out,
I strain to hear that song
for which a boy within
still listens.

Ticking away
with a furious precision, the clock
on the old Czech's mantel
beside the pictures of those not seen
since '68.

“You can’t take him anywhere,”
was what she said as he appeared
in a thin black tie and worn-out sneakers—
“because he’s already *there*,”
I added proudly.

That sweet wet smell
of hayfields at moonrise
has fallen yet again
like Saturn’s trusty rings
into old Sir Isaac’s groove.

Trailing the old man
as he makes his way with a cane,
the little Pomeranian
whose world is also tethered
to a ‘dying animal’.

(after W.B. Yeats)

3.

<i>i</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>ho</i>	<i>ha</i>
<i>zu</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>ru</i>
<i>ru</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ku</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>re</i>
<i>o</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>ba</i>
<i>ya</i>	<i>shi</i>		<i>i</i>	
<i>me</i>	<i>ni</i>		<i>ni</i>	

*down the spring paths
of the misty palace
like a sprinkling
of star-light
go the coy young maidens*

Fujiwara no Teika

As you undress, you lead me
down the mountains of your shoulders
to your belly's rounding bay
that so patiently awaits
this barnacled keel.

The night entwines us,
braiding us like serpents to wind
ourselves more tightly
into that stronger rope to bind and keep
time from passing.

Our faces worn and given
to eyes downcast with the tedium
of a weekday evening
and yet a fire's ashes
wait merely to be stirred.

There, did you feel it,
autumn's dark fingers,
that leaning down out of a cloud
just now swept a wisp of hair
across your forehead?

I have wrestled you midnights
and over countless pale horizons
like a Jacob,
yet all you bring to the battle
are the lips I once kissed.

4.

yo	mi	to	yu	ha
ko	ne	da	me	ru
gu	ni	e	no	no
mo	wa	shi	u	yo
no	ka	te	ki	no
so	ru		ha	
ra	ru		shi	

*a spring night's
bridge of dreams lies scattered
in myriad pieces,
pierced by the mountain-peaks
into long thin strands of cloud*

Fujiwara no Teika

Deep in southern woodlands
where no moon penetrates,
a seamless pelt of darkness
wrests from the chanting grasses
the scent of a younger earth.

I wet my sleeves
as did you, Lord Teika,
but by another, northern sea,
though it is the same pale sun
that dries them both.

Let them flow
and nourish the thirsty nation
of your gladness, let them flow
down the long and loving aqueducts
of your deepening lines of smile.

Kudzu shrouds
the boundary pines
with an ever-enclosing dark:
never did I think I'd wear
so blatantly such shame.

Ancient poet,
just as *shimizu* slakes a healthy thirst
after a long and quiet woods-walk,
that is how my inner ear
always drinks your words.

Thirsty
we are born and so remain
for after mother's milk
comes the lifelong quest
for oases within the other.

5.

<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>mo</i>	<i>chi</i>	<i>ji</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ki</i>
<i>ka</i>	<i>fu</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ya</i>
<i>ge</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>ro</i>	<i>ri</i>
<i>zo</i>	<i>ho</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>shi</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>do</i>		<i>mi</i>	
<i>tsu</i>	<i>wa</i>		<i>no</i>	

*as I lie here
 combing your long raven hair
 with my fingers,
 your loveliness
 floats before me*

Fujiwara no Teika

The miles and miles
 of traveling,
 yet it is to the landscape
 of a single face I owe
 this long and startling continuum.

*ever mounting,
 the dew, the tears . . .
 through these rooms
 she loved so deeply
 a cold wind blows*

Fujiwara no Teika

⁴
shimizu’ clear spring waters

Net of Stars

A Review of *A Solitary Woman*, Tanka by Pamela A. Babusci. *Jenny Ward Angyal, USA, February 2014*

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013, 92 pages, paperback, 5.5 x 8.5, introduction by David Terelinck, cover art by Larry DeKock. ISBN 9 781492 846741. US \$15 from www.createpace.com or from the author at moongate44@gmail.com.

In Buddhist myth, the great god Indra has suspended in the heavens an infinite net with a glittering jewel at every node. Every single jewel reflects all the others; each hangs alone and yet is bound to all that is, in an infinite web of reflection. Pamela A. Babusci has named her second tanka collection *A Solitary Woman*, and indeed many of the poems speak of loneliness and loss, yet the solitary woman she portrays does not drift alone. Her life, like the lives of many women, is bound up in a web of relationships. Ms. Babusci, founder and editor of *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*, the first international tanka journal exclusively for women poets, acknowledges her “seamless fabric of good friends,” and writes with a distinctly feminine voice about many of the concerns traditionally explored by female tanka poets: passion, love, and loss in the cosmos of lovers, friends, and family. *A Solitary Woman* should be read and savored by both men and women for its intense and honest expressions of the human predicament—solitude in the midst of connection.

Ms. Babusci has stated, in an interview with Angela Leuck in *Ribbons* 9:1 (spring/summer 2013), “Tanka, I believe, should be a ‘tanka diary’ of one’s life,” and the present volume fulfills that autobiographical mission. Structured as a single long sequence of poems without subdivisions, the book does not, however, appear to be a true “diary” with poems presented chronologically in the order they were written. Although themes of love, loss and longing recur throughout the volume, tanka on other themes such as the poet’s parents, her childlessness, and her struggle with cancer are grouped together. However, the 146 poems are thoughtfully sequenced to flow seamlessly from one to the next. The tanka are laid out attractively two to a page, inviting the eye to linger on each one.

This is a strong collection and it is difficult to choose favorites, but I would like to present a few outstanding examples to illustrate the lushness and passion with which Ms. Babusci handles her dominant themes.

By far the largest group of poems deals with romantic relationships. Ms. Babusci uses exquisite images to convey the rapture of being in love:

he tattooed
his heart into hers
slowly
a crimson hibiscus opens
scattering pollen

the intense white
of chrysanthemums
while making love
i become
a thousand petals

Her frequent use of flower imagery bespeaks her strong aesthetic sense, her connection with the natural world, and her awareness of its rich metaphoric possibilities. As in the first example above, Ms. Babusci's imagery sometimes approaches the surreal, yet the juxtaposed images possess an intuitive clarity of meaning to which any reader can relate.

With delicacy, simplicity, and beautifully apt images drawn from nature, Ms. Babusci explores the feminine aspect of eros:

what gives me
more ecstasy
a calla lily opening
or your fingers
exploring me?

A large number of the poems delve into the bitterness of ruptured relationships, the loneliness of loss and the pain of disconnection:

folding up
her heart into a neat
origami box
careful not to spill
out the brokenness

how translucent
the heart
of this pink waterlily
& yours walled off
like steel petals

Writing “from the heart” as she does, Ms. Babusci uses the word “heart” freely and frequently— the word appears in one form or another in at least 22 poems. But the tanka are saved from cliché by the vividness and originality of the surrounding images.

Although the poet mourns her many losses, the persona we hear in these poems is not that of a victim full of self-pity. Instead the voice is strong, self-assertive, sometimes frankly angry and occasionally humorous:

i am sorry
i broke your heart
but, what about mine?
we are all living
fiery star to fiery star

no sleep
for the jilted lover
the incessant drip
of lingerie
gives her a migraine

Ms. Babusci has also experienced the pain of difficult relations within her family of origin, particularly with respect to her mother who is portrayed in the tanka as cold, remote, and even abusive.

However, these poems reflect not adolescent whinings but a mature struggle to come to terms with deep and lasting harm through the power of forgiveness.

prayers
for inner-healing
thoughts of mother's
abuse
thinning in the mist

first calligraphy
the feel of it
on rice paper
writing a love letter
to my deceased mother

The first poem above illustrates Ms. Babusci's willingness to break rules and experiment with form— more traditional line-breaks might have placed "thoughts" alone on line 3 and "of mother's abuse" on line 4, but this arrangement would have sacrificed the stark power of "abuse" standing alone on its own line. The often non-traditional forms of her tanka give them the feeling of spontaneous journal jottings, although I suspect that most have been finely polished.

Other, briefer poem sequences grieve the narrator's childlessness and record her journey through cancer:

never pregnant
i cut into a ripe
pomegranate
red seeds flowing
down the barren sink

pure moonlight—
three years post cancer
the long surgical scar
fading into the belly
of my womanhood

The first poem above is remarkable for the dignity and restraint with which it allows the single, vivid image to convey in so few words the unique and complex grief of childlessness. Similarly, in the second poem, the phrase “pure moonlight” is a wonderfully rich and economical way to express the poet’s feelings about her recovery from the ovarian cancer that struck at the core of her womanhood.

Feminine identity and creativity are the themes of some of the most interesting poems in this collection. These are themes to which I hope Ms. Babusci, an artist who has illustrated several books, might devote more attention in the future, as she brings to them much life experience and the skill to treat them with evocative and thought-provoking images:

who knows
how to live with
heartache?
finishing my self-portrait
with layers of regret

at night
she sheds her veneers
& escapes
into a blue river
of morning glories

At times the themes of womanhood, sensuality and art converge in truly stunning tanka:

deep inside the core
of O'Keeffe's *Red Canna*
is a fiery river
flowing into the canyon
of every woman

The vivid blue and red colors of the last two poems cited are typical of Ms. Babusci’s best and most painterly work. She makes frequent use of color, predominantly blue, white, and red, hues that carry deep and broad emotional connotations:

pure red
the saturated color
of a broken heart
i plant wildflowers
on my mother's grave

with blue irises
a woman in white
carries sorrow
down a path
nobody wants to go

A handful of poems, though, seem to rely more on telling than showing:

when i think i know
everything about love
i fall in love
for the
first time

it's over & then you
kiss me
that kiss
that transcends
all unforgiveness

Tanka such as these might be strengthened if the intense feeling they express could be evoked through sensory images. Overall, however, the book is a richly sensuous account of one woman's life; a life embedded in relationships, not only human but cosmic:

starless sky
i stir the windchimes
to convince myself
i am not alone
in this vast universe

river of stars
in the pond
i scoop up
Orion's belt & tie it
around my heart

The sensitive painting by Larry DeKock that graces the cover of Ms. Babusci's book beautifully illustrates her title poem:

a solitary woman
knows a heartache
or two
tossing scarlet petals
into her evening bath

The woman in the painting, her back turned to us, gazes ardently into the distance and appears poised to rise from the pool of golden light that envelops her. Readers of *A Solitary Woman* will be confident that the woman portrayed here will step with courage and longing toward new connections, bearing with her like scarlet petals the weight of loss, the awareness of risk, and the necessity of love. I look forward to reading more of the tanka that will surely arise— weaving connections between writer and reader— from Ms. Babusci's reflections on her place in the net of stars:

will i be remembered
as a poet
a lover or a fool?
wild asters flooding
in autumn rains

~ ~ ~

Editor's Note: Pamela A. Babusci's *A Solitary Woman* has been enthusiastically received by the international tanka community. I thought it might be interesting to solicit two reviews of this intensely feminine collection.

A Solitary Woman, Pamela A. Babusci

(self-published, 2013). Perfect Bound, 76 pp. plus an Introduction by David Terelinck.

Reviewed by *David Rice, USA*

Pamela A. Babusci is an award-winning tanka poet and *A Solitary Woman* contains 146 joyous, sexy, sad, contemplative, and hopeful tanka that describe the emotional ups-and-downs of an adult woman's life. The language is specific and the images are varied. Ms. Babusci is also an artist and some of these tanka reference painters and paintings. As Claire Everett notes in her back cover blurb, Ms. Babusci paints with words, and the book "is an invitation to a private viewing of a remarkable collection."

When publishing a tanka collection, a poet not only needs to decide which poems to include, but also how to arrange the poems. To use M. Kei's terminology, individual tanka are both "slippery" and "sticky." When placed next to each other, individual tanka can become part of a sequenced larger poem. The imperial Japanese anthologists understood this and sequenced their collections, and M. Kei's recent *Fire Pearls 2* is a sequenced English-language tanka anthology. Tanka poets who have published individual collections have solved the problem of how to arrange their poems by having numbered sections, titled sections, and no sections. Whatever the solution, however, the poet has to decide how to connect the individual tanka to each other.

I read *A Solitary Woman* as one long sequence. Although not an exact parallel, her book reminded me of *Salad Anniversary*, the enormously popular Japanese tanka sequence by Machi Tawara. (I read the Jack Stamm translation.) *Salad Anniversary* describes an affair of a young adult woman that ends with her being alone. *A Solitary Woman* is an adult woman's version of love and loss. I read it as a tanka memoir, not as a work of fiction. (If that is incorrect, Ms. Babusci has done an excellent job creating a fictional character.)

Read as a sequence, things go well for the first four poems but, by poem five, the poet starts experiencing problems ("I had my reasons/for leaving"). Things improve in poems eleven and twelve, but the pain returns. By poem twenty-six, she writes "drawing bath water/tepid not hot/i hate/that I still/love you."

In poem thirty-four, she switches her attention to problems she had with her mother: "six years old/always trying to please/my mother/by being the/surrogate mom." This is psychologically accurate. Our relationship troubles do have roots in our past. She then addresses her mother's death, her father's death, the fact she never had children, problems with a friend, and the affair again (or another affair) that goes well and then doesn't ("after/the break-up/she comes home/with a deep-red/dragon tattoo"); that is, she looks at the emotional nuances and complexities of life as an adult.

Then she gets cancer: "after chemo/getting thinner and thinner/my body/its shadow/fading on the wall." Fortunately, she recovers. The sequence then returns to love: the pain ("biting into/a ripe pomegranate/it was you/who cheated/not me"), and the joy ("what gives me/more ecstasy/a calla lily opening/or your fingers/exploring me?"), and the pain ("rejected love/ she sucks/all the marrow/from the/bones"), and the joy ("gazing at a field of /wild crimson poppies/all their fire/ignites a passion in me/i thought was dead"), and the pain ("how do I cure/this deep-seated love?/you've moved on/& i stand in the pouring rain/without an umbrella"). The collection ends with joy. She has started a new relationship: "her porcelain skin/newly washed like/a fresh water pearl/she awaits her lover's footprints/across the dewy path."

Compared to Tawara's young adult sequence, *A Solitary Woman* has the added depth that only age can bring. I agree with David Terelinck's introduction: "when *A Solitary Woman* comes into your life, her story will be one that will touch you personally . . ."

I have one quibble and one general comment regarding *A Solitary Woman*. The quibble has to do with ending lines with articles ("the," "a") or prepositions ("with," "to") that, to my mind, stretch the limits of

enjambment beyond recognition. She does this about six percent of the time. Ms. Babusci is not the only tanka poet to do this, but I fail to see how ending a line with “the” or “to” improves a poem.

More generally, *A Solitary Woman* makes me think about the current state of English-language tanka collections. Ms. Babusci writes 13 percent of her poems in the third person. Ms. Tawara wrote one poem in the third person, and her collection was longer. Writing in the first person is more emotionally direct, and I found the third person poems slightly distancing. Although I might be wrong, my guess is that Ms. Babusci did this because the individual tanka determined the arrangement of the sequence, rather than having the idea of the sequence determine the overall arrangement— and form— of the tanka. I found the title, *A Solitary Woman*, somewhat puzzling for the same reason, because at the end of the collection she is starting a new relationship and is not solitary. (In the last poem of *Salad Anniversary*, Ms. Tawara is alone.)

I think English-language tanka poets are in the process of discovering the implications of individual tanka's “slipperiness” and “stickiness.” Publishing a collection is an opportunity to create a long tanka poem that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Ms. Babusci has certainly done that with *A Solitary Woman*, but I think there are more sequencing possibilities available to tanka poets that they have not yet explored. To do so, poets would need to consider the shape of the sequence first, and fit the individual tanka to the sequence, rather than arranging individual tanka into a sequence of poems.

Quibbles and sequence-comments aside, *A Solitary Woman* will, indeed, “touch you personally” if you let her.

***Another Garden: Tanka Writings* by Jeffrey Woodward**

Tournesol Books October 2013, (available at Amazon.com), 180 pages, perfect bound.

Reviewed by *Ruth Holzer, USA*

Following his recent volume of haiku and haibun, *Evening in the Plaza*, Jeffrey Woodward's new book gives us a generous collection of tanka and tanka prose as well as two thoughtful essays on the genre and an interview with Claire Everett. Many of the poems in *Another Garden* have been previously published, and it is a pleasure to have them assembled here, where they can resonate with each other and allow the reader a full experience of Woodward's artistry.

One of the hallmarks of Woodward's style is its reticence, expressing just enough to involve us in further thought, without overdoing explanation or emotion. He finds the right word, places it where it belongs, and makes it seem effortless. Another is his eye for line and color, his ability to create strong visual imagery, especially in the case of haibun inspired by paintings. And a third is its drawing upon a wide range of artistic, literary and historical references; there is no such thing as a "typical" haibun in his repertoire. In every tanka prose piece, the prose and the poetry work seamlessly together.

The poems in *Another Garden* include those of a personal nature, which explore memory and imagination. "Photograph at 19," expertly blends the social and political concerns of an earlier generation. The moving "The Girl from Shanghai" views disparate yet similar worlds of despair and hope, while "Halo" considers a life's choices and concludes with a calm detachment reminiscent of Yeats:

I sit beside
a lamp
and in the warmth
of that company
turn a page

Poems such as "Drifter" and "The Trial of Dorothy Talbye, 1638" display a convincing empathy for the characters. Poems of landscape such as "Needles by Night" and "Soberanes Point" carry us directly to the place, as does this homage to Robinson Jeffers:

not far from the house
I find the wind-worn
Monterey cypress
did you plant this twisted one,
this gaunt one, this evergreen

(“Tor House”)

Some of the most intriguing poems are based on works by Matisse and Cezanne.

these lips of the conch
pink enough to startle
the beholder’s eyes
and handleless in the background
a black clock’s blank face

(“The Black Clock”)

Woodward’s versatility is everywhere in evidence. The sequences, especially “Little Fig,” and “Behind Your Name” resemble mysterious fugues that invite re-readings, and end with a sense of space, of continuing; for example, the concluding tanka in the long, dream-like sequence “Resident Angel”:

ice pulls back away
from the wind-protected,
sunny island shore
and, into that unexpected
pond, the cold, the quiet swan

As “*Lagniappe*,” Woodward adds two essays, “The Road Ahead for Tanka in English” and “The Elements of Tanka Prose,” and an in-depth interview with *Skylark* editor Claire Everett. These pieces effectively round out the volume and provide a wealth of scholarly and personal material to inform and guide contemporary tanka practitioners. *Another Garden* is a must-read for everyone interested in Japanese forms, and in poetics generally.

Circling Smoke, Scattered Bones

Tanka by Joy McCall

Keibooks, Perryville, Maryland, USA, 2013. 174pp, perfect bound. Available for purchase at Createspace/Keibooks@gmail.com

Reviewed by *Claire Everett, UK*,
with an afterword by *Gerry Jacobson, Australia*.

It is impossible for me to begin a review about Joy McCall's first solo collection of tanka without echoing David Rice's comments about the propensity of individual tanka to become "sticky" or "slippery" (to use M. Kei's terminology) when arranged sequentially, since the latter not only published *Circling Smoke, Scattered Bones*, but also sifted through the 2200 tanka the author sent him, searching for themes and arranging the tanka into distinct 'chapters'. M. Kei explains the process in his Afterword to the collection, and it becomes apparent as one reads, that not only does each tanka have a life of its own, it also leads the reader deeper into the labyrinth that is Joy McCall's life; a life that is as much a part of this beloved land as the tors, fells, henges and hollow hills, the chalk horses, moors, fens, dales and hedgerows; a life that sings with a longing to be truly 'home'.

in the ruins
ivy covers the bell
the wind
sets it to ringing
songs carry across the field

Joy is paraplegic as the result of a motorcycle accident many years ago, and she has many health issues. Tanka is not only breath to her, it is two strong legs allowing her to wander; it keeps her sane. Joy's physical incapacity is never far from her poetry, nor is her wry sense of humour. The first three tanka from the opening chapter, "after the crash", immediately make it clear that in this conversation between poet and reader, there is no danger of there being 'an elephant in the room':

nothing compares
to the old motorcycle
throbbing along
leaning into the bends
eating the miles— not even you

after the crash
left me paralysed
forever—
a fortune cookie:
'you will always be safe'

how strange
that I have no memory
of my left leg
which changed gear so many times
on the old motorcycle

Turn the page and there's no swerving to avoid this one either:

how is it
that I miss the old bike
more than my feet?
the sound of an engine
brings instant tears

At the same time, her work, often reminiscent of that of Shiki, is never maudlin, or self-pitying, quite the contrary, her tanka are strong, passionate, accepting, embracing, full of longing and yet grounded in the 'what must be' of daily life.

But Joy McCall is as much a dreamer as she is a realist. Two consecutive tanka from the 'chapter', "wanting the snake" speak volumes:

my fingers
stroking the new tattoo
on my old stump
wanting the snake to wake
uncoil and fill the space

my tattoos
all swimming, slithering
flying things
as if I knew
walking would be lost

The snake seems to me to be a particularly powerful symbol when seen in the context of Joy's life and work, and it brings Eastern and Western spiritual traditions into perfect harmony; in Hindu mythology, *kundalini*, is a dormant energy that lies deep within us, and is often depicted as a sleeping goddess, coiled around the base of the spine, waiting to be awakened. In Celtic/Gaelic mythology, Brighid, is associated with Imbolc, the pre-Christian festival, roughly halfway between the winter solstice and spring equinox, which marks the time when the earth begins to stir; it is associated with snowdrops and "ewe's milk"— as suggested by the etymology— as well as, quite literally, "in the belly". Brighid, hailed as a goddess of fire and poetry is associated with the light half of the year and the serpent is one of her totems. An ancient proverb declares: "the serpent will come from the hole/On the brown Day of Bride". New Grange passage tomb in the Boyne Valley, Ireland, is adorned with serpentine spiral and triskele markings, typical of the cult of Brighid. Such imagery is particularly poignant when viewed in the context of Joy's disability, but like an enchantress, she draws us into a spiral dance in which we feel the inescapable pull of time, the unravelling of the seasons, of ourselves.

Don Wentworth in his foreword, aptly titled "invocation", writes:

"As you are about to feel for yourself, Joy McCall knows all about conjuring.

Word after delicately chosen word, she brings her spells to life. Be sure, however, that these words are but signs, grooved etchings that signify.

The medium is not stone, though, no; the medium wherein they are carved is flesh, the living Flesh of Self, the resonant Flesh of Other.

This Flesh is the flesh of the heart”.

It is no surprise to learn that Joy’s Twitter handle is ‘witchsinger’. As Don Wentworth observes, there is no shortage of magic in this collection. The chapter, “the black wand”, has the reader hanging on to every word like a wizard’s apprentice: As Joy reminds us, “sacred things/seem to come in threes”; again, a string of three tanka, but I might just have easily chosen another set of that magic number:

I pass the black wand
through the curling incense smoke
and say your name:
peace to your high mountain home
from my old flint-walled city

end of the day
blowing out the candle
I pass the dark wand
through the last thin drift of smoke
and again bless the woodman

just enough space
in the long oak box
for the dark wand
and for my sadness for him
to fill the gaps

As M. Kei points out in his Afterword, although Joy McCall’s work is intensely autobiographical, it also celebrates the connection she feels with family, friends, neighbours, community, the land that she loves, and beyond, to realms peopled by those who have gone before her.

I just want
to sit in some quiet place
and write poems
but oh, the lovely world
keeps knocking at my door

Kei writes:

“Her connectedness extends to the past; the ghosts of the dead walk the pages of her book as they walk the streets of Norwich. When we meet the young priest who blesses her, we don’t know if he is a corporeal person or is the priest that haunts her usual pub”.

The three opening tanka from “walking the labyrinth” take me back to a Norwich in which I lived for ten years. It is a city that boasts as many churches as it does public houses, many of the latter having been built on sacred ground:

the landlady says
that ghosts are haunting her pub
on cold mornings
she finds her softest chairs
have moved closer to the fire

by dark beams
in the ancient pub
we share lunch
where long-dead monks
prayed and brewed ale

even now, drinkers
at the old pub watch their words
it is holy ground
the buried bones in the yard
have the right to rest in peace

There are flashes of colour in this collection; take this spell of three from “two for joy”:

under the hedge
a small green bottle
small and stained
I breathe the old scent
of april violets

washing earth
from the green beans
I slip away
wanting to be that small mouse
raiding the vegetable patch

pale blossom
on the dark green privet
the scent
goes to my head
like whisky, like love

—but Joy McCall has unashamed affection for swirling smoke, incense, bones, slate and stone, flint and upturned soil. It would not surprise me to hear that she had pulled each tanka from the bare earth. The chapter “all that I like is brown” is the song of a woman who craves the blood-heat of terra firma, just as much as she longs for fins and wings:

on the lawn
in my nightgown
after dark
the full moon rises
the moles come, sniffing the air

Do not be mistaken; as M. Kei explains in his Afterword, although she is dependent upon a wheelchair, Joy spends as much time as she can outdoors, enjoying the lanes and hedgerows of her home county, and venturing further afield to visit ruins and sacred sites. It seems to me,

that in the midst of much suffering, Joy finds comfort in the small, simple things, the fine-details that many might overlook. That is not to say that she does not see— and inhale deeply— the roses, but she is more inclined to attend to the blossoms in the privet hedge. A skein of three from one of my favourite chapters, “the spiders have awoken”:

small green spider
on the steering wheel
my driver sighs
it takes me a while to find
the right tree to re-home it

on dark chestnut leaves
cabbage-white butterflies
wings catching the sun
my fragile, flitting dreams
bright against the sadness

a bumblebee
walked across the boy’s chest
he stood still
making it welcome
a brief small bonding

Joy is a no-frills, no-nonsense poet; her tanka aren’t always the most lyrical of the genre, but she has an uncanny knack of turning plain-speaking into plainsong. In my opinion, the quality of the tanka, read individually, as stand-alone tanka, is uneven, but one of the great strengths of *circling smoke*, *scattered bones*, is M Kei’s superb editorial skill. To quote from David Rice’s review of *A Solitary Woman*: “Publishing a collection is an opportunity to create a long tanka poem that is greater than the sum of its individual parts”. This is certainly true of this collection, but the result is nothing short of alchemy.

To read Joy McCall’s poetry is to welcome her into your life. It is to embrace a woman who is capable of giving so much more than she would ever take. There are many hurts for which there is no salve, but there is always tanka:

I touch
my own broken-ness
like a mother
rocking a child to sleep
like the gentleness of a lover

* * *

who's script is this,
green on the inner petals
of every snowdrop?
all the angels I have known
were of this earth

Claire

—From my journal, for Joy and her mum.
Imbolc, 2014

Note: The following is excerpted from an email to myself from Gerry Jacobson, and is reprinted here with his permission:

Re. Joy McCall's book. Some poetry gets under my skin. A lot doesn't. Don't know why. Fact is I haven't read all her tanka. I dip into the book, read one or two or three. Then I can't see anymore, my eyes are blurred with tears. Is it because I know her situation, her pain? Or is it the words themselves?

Recent meeting of the Friday writers. We pass the book around, choose a tanka at random to use as a writing prompt. Ten minutes scribbling. Share and feedback. My reaction to one of her published tanka is below:

Cross Street

*we search
for even the shadow
of a God
and by the roadside
a ragged man, begging*

—Joy McCall

My neck prickles. Shoulders shake. I think of M over there in the darkness. Ring him on Christmas Day and he doesn't answer the phone. So we send a text and he lets us know that he's alone. Nursing a cold. Doesn't want to talk to anyone. And it stabs me still. Though my head knows he's 40 and busy and a millionaire and generally sociable.

I walk the streets near his Islington pad. Early one summer morning. In a side street there is a church. Not sure which denomination. There are two people sleeping there on the porch. Later in the day two sleeping bags are left there. Cross Street I think it's called. I go to the little Italian deli there for cheese and olives. Wealthy part of London. Wonder what they do in winter?

Of course I sleep 'rough' quite often. But for me it's what I love, a romantic mystical experience. The mountain bivvy. The swag under the stars. The corner of a field forever England. Not a public place in a city street. Not forced on me. Not.

greyness descends
deepening into night
looking
through bare branches
listening to rain on roof

Gerry Jacobson, January 2014

Apologies to Susan Constable for the slight error in her tanka which was included in “Sisters are Doin’ it for Themselves”, David Terelinck’s review of Moonbathing 8. (*Skylark* 1:2, Winter 2013).

The tanka should have read, as follows:

the stage bare
save for a harp
waiting
for hands to caress it—
this need to be touched

Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 2:2, winter issue of *Skylark* will be read through June and July and will close on August 1st 2014.

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

skylark.tanka@gmail.com.

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

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

In addition to your regular submission, you are also invited to submit **one** tanka for the "Skylark's Nest" prompt (see page 10). Unfortunately, we are not able to reproduce colour images in *Skylark*, but poets wishing to submit tanka-art may do so; coinciding with the publication of each issue, a selection of the best will be added to a haiga gallery on the website. Alternatively, black and white tanka-art may be considered for the print journal.

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

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

skylarkreviews@gmail.com

Similarly, submit all articles for consideration to the address above. Any queries should be addressed to the Editor,

skylark.tanka@gmail.com

NB: *Following notification of acceptance, please refrain from sharing your work online prior to the issue going to print. If you do so, your tanka will be withdrawn from the print issue.*

