

Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Winter 2013: volume 1, number 2

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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 haiga.

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Contents

Editor's Message	by Claire Everett, 4
The Skylark's Nest	by Christina Nguyen, 7
The Skylark's Nest Prompt	10
Individual Tanka	13
Tanka Sequences	63
Tanka Prose	101
Articles, Essays, Reviews etc.	115
Submission Guidelines	138



Editor's Message

As I write, the leaves are turning and there is a chill to the air. I am grateful for the wonderful reception our first *Skylark* enjoyed at the start of what turned out to be an unusually long and glorious English summer and I believe my life has never been so full of song. On our walks as a family, it seemed that once you'd tuned in to the skylark's song, there was barely a moment when it wasn't audible; this reminded me very much of the place tanka and haiku have in my life and I am sure, as a poet, I am not alone in finding it difficult to imagine what my moment to moment existence would be like if these short songs had not become something akin to spiritual practice— meditation, comfort, joy.

Another reason to celebrate came along early in the summer, when I heard that my tanka had won second place in the 2012 British Haiku Society Awards. This was the first time tanka had been represented in the annual competition and I was thrilled that Linda Jeanette Ward selected this tanka:

once more, the robin
whose every word
is song
the weight of my pen
in this eggshell world

Congratulations to Clare McCotter (*N. Ireland*) whose tanka was awarded first place:

now the pleiades
and my dark horse have gone
winds from the mountain
come to howl
inside this cage of bone

A few weeks ago, I was invited by the BHS committee to be the adjudicator for the tanka section of the 2013 Awards. What an honour! I hope as many poets as possible will enter. The in-hand deadline is 31 January 2014 and all details can be found on the website: britishhaikusociety.org.uk

You may have heard about the plight of our beautiful English badger which has made the headlines throughout the summer. Despite a public outcry, the Government has defied the recommendations of top scientists and gone ahead with its senseless and barbaric cull as part of its measures to fight bovine tuberculosis. We were fortunate to discover a very old and thriving sett in nearby woodland and even caught a glimpse of what looked like the patriarch, venturing out just after nightfall to sniff the hawthorn-scented air. You will see that the badgers' plight has inspired the artwork for the next 'Skylark's Nest' prompt. As you can imagine, this is a cause close to Amy's heart. Feel free to interpret the prompt in whichever way you choose; you may want to write about badgers, or a similarly endangered species, or the image might speak to you of things secret or hidden.

David Rice (Editor of *Ribbons*) and I have discussed how much we would like to encourage more young people to write tanka and even submit to journals, perhaps to a specially designated youth section. I was delighted to hear that Amy has been invited to be Ambassador to Youth for the newly-formed *UHTS* (an off-shoot of the former *Kernels* journal) and coincidentally, during the submissions period for this issue of *Skylark*, I received a strong set of tanka from a Melissa Stewart of Wales. In response to my acceptance of one of her tanka, came the reply, "Thanks, Mum!" Amy had wanted her work to be judged on its merit and had created a pseudonym and email in order to make her submission. I insisted she used her own name on publication!

All that remains is for me to thank you all for your continued support and I hope you enjoy the second issue of *Skylark*!

—Claire Everett, October 2013



The Skylark's Nest

The Winners

Selections by Christina Nguyen, *USA*

I'm honored to have this opportunity to choose the second Skylark's Nest competition winner. Reading through all the entries was such a pleasure, and picking just a few favorites was hard. The image of a field mouse seemed to stir up feelings and images of autumn, darkness, and impending winter both physically and metaphorically. Even though this is a time of worry for so many people, the poets who responded to the prompt still conveyed a bit of hope as we move through these challenging times.

First, the clutch of runners up.

this year's harvest
will be another struggle
at the kitchen table
i leave an extra kernel
for the household mouse

h.gene murtha, USA

I admire a good pivot line and I like the way "kitchen table" holds the heart of the home and the heart of the poem. Here the table belongs to everyone, even the lowly little mouse. Everyone shares their challenges and takes comfort in what food they have.

ears of wheat
swaying beneath the weight
of a fieldmouse—
your bend-but-never-break
approach to life

David Terelinck, Australia

This one is the most playful of the clutch. I like the idea of a “bend-but-never-break” attitude that can carry us far, even when our storehouse of grain has been exhausted.

spent seed shells
left by a winter mouse . . .
my days
still long enough
to spin new dreams

Michele L. Harvey, USA

The voice hints at old age but confirms that there is still life enough to continue dreaming. The poet takes us from empty shells to the eternal space of dreams. This resonates with my favorite tanka, the winner:

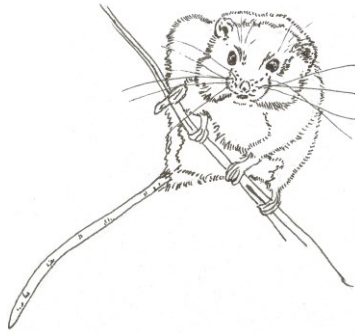
a harvest mouse
gathering seeds
she didn't sow . . .
in my seventh decade
a thin sheaf of poems

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

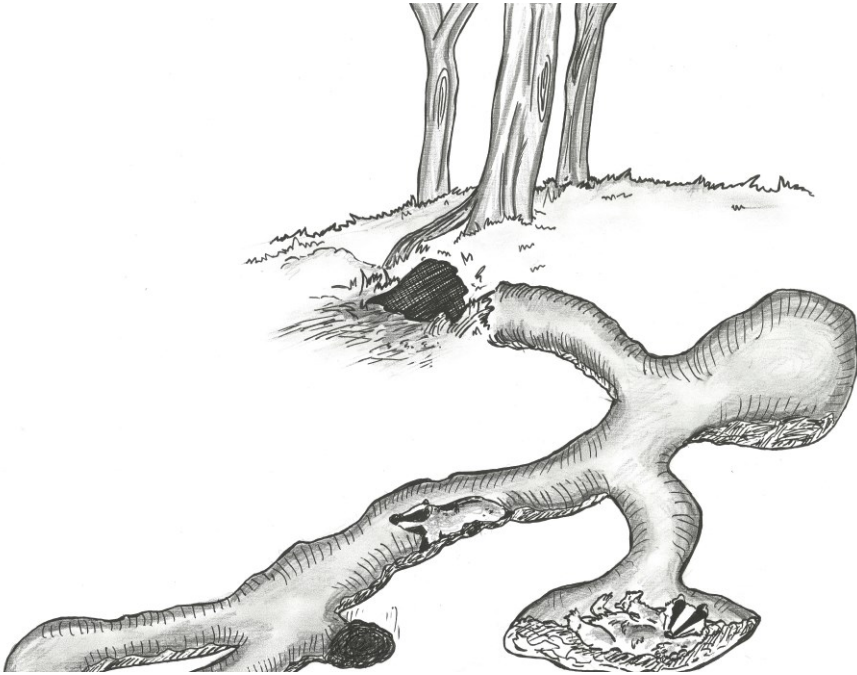
When I first read this tanka, I thought, “I’m sure this poet is being too modest. Perhaps the sheaf of poems is not large compared to some, but surely it is a strong collection.” As I sat with the words and let them sink in, I felt the truth it holds for me as a poet: our task is to gather poems that find their way to us from across the universe, seeds we did not sow. If we listen carefully, we can catch them and gather them up. Sometimes a poem arrives fully formed. Other times, it needs some fine tuning. After many years, maybe seventy or so, we’ll have a collection, a sheaf that reflects the joys and sorrows of everything that has come through our senses.

Thank you to all the poets who shared their words with me and to Claire and Amy for this special opportunity!

Congratulations to Jenny, who will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the 'Skylark's Nest' competition for issue 2:1, summer 2014.



The Skylark's Nest Prompt
2:1, Summer 2014



from **Daybreak**

Daybreak—
On the corn shoots
White frost of spring

It's summer; then
'Oh, let's have winter,'
Some men say.

Will there be any
Not wielding his brush?
The moon tonight.

—**Uejima Onitsura**
(1661-1738)

Individual Tanka



in this month
of leafy willows fluid
with windy ways
perhaps it's fated that we
will brush against each other

an'ya, USA

again I am
the man in the moon—
an object of wonder
broken most days
with light, my greatest illusion

exploding stars
on the river
every night
I play god
with my stones

S.M. Abeles, USA

you hesitate
startled to discover
just one
of my secrets— initials
in unexpected places

once prized for strength
the Japanese knotweed
held its ground
in uncertain sands how quickly
one becomes pariah

Beverly Acuff Momoi, USA

left behind
those deep glens and glades
still dressed
in Robin Hood green
our childhood summers

Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA

shutter speed
too slow to catch
the gloss
of falling water. . .
my sixty-third year

these bobolinks
migrating home—
sojourners
in a Sabbath meadow
with Emily and me

ripples
passing through
each other
in an ink-dark pool
our mirrored faces

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

fire-orange poppy
ablaze with desire
i pluck its
fever-hot petals
& place one on your tongue

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

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

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

day lilies by the tracks
shaken by the wind
of a passing train
I want to go somewhere
I've never been

Bob Brill, USA



an undertaker
carries her tiny coffin
to the graveside . . .
a jenny wren flutters
over upturned soil

like feathers falling
from the old nest
this quiet death
of no phone calls
from my sister . . .

in a brown paddock
the scarecrow seeping
burnt straw
lists to one side . . .
my love-drought lingers on

Dawn Bruce, Australia

for four years
clothes in my closet a size
too small
how I looked
before the divorce

Susan Burch, USA

we lean back
against our car doors
hazy moonlight
and women's voices
that give and take

Anne Elise Burgevin, USA

half awake
rearranging
parts of seventy years
—clouds move
to suit the wind

one stroke
his body
sliced in half—
slow but sure return
waxing moon

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

streetlamps
circles of light
circles of dark
a drunk staggers into
the human condition

wind in jack-pines—
Breath of the Spirit said the Blackfeet.
Under a Montana heaven
I forget
to breathe.

the moon a magic lantern
O pocked and pitted mirror
giving us back to us;
in my dimming vision
the word reads *tragic*.

Steven Carter, USA.

grandfather
how you held our daughter
in a dream
as if it were
enough

David Caruso, USA

the cracked face
of the ceramic clock
still tells the time
I've known earthquakes
my fault lines run deep

tonight's the night
when sweet plum perfumes
each naked street
when each star's a destination
and gravity lets go

James Chessing, USA

depression
lightens its grasp
after last night's rain
the croodling of pigeons
under a blueberry sky

where the river ran
across a farmer's field
this silt and stone . . .
what you might discover
in the things I leave behind

when all this
comes to an end . . .
a remembrance
of soft rain and lilacs,
a loon calling from the lake

runnels of water
down a picture window
. . . even rain
looks for a way out
of this bitter wind

Susan Constable, Canada

teapot knocked
off the stove again
I put the pieces back together
no matter how many
times we break

late autumn
the aging alley cat
slinks from window
to window to lick
lamp oil

Aubrie Cox, USA

and now
without a lover
my eyes turn . . .
mountains, rivers
backpack and boots

Barbara Curnow, Australia

council estate
on the forest edge
lurking
on street corners
twisted pines

Robert Davey, UK

motionless
on a gurney—
sky blue socks
with nonskid treads
to steady me

your green tail
thin as this brown limb—
o chameleon
in a parched world
why the half-hearted disguise?

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

a house wren
busy with wiry roots
for his nest
he's already made a home
in my winter heart

I'm awake
an hour before dawn
through the stillness
the jubilation of robins
one voice at a time

raindrops
entering a dark pool
create bubbles
that last several seconds—
isotopes come to mind

Cherie Hunter Day, USA

what if
all exists in this
gold flower
spider chrysanthemum
nowhere else to look

Diane Dehler, USA

waves of fog
obscure distant trees
then return shapes
how many moments a day
am I as ephemeral to myself

fronds shifting
the fingers of fronds
we speak
of suicide unspeakable
a palm's hidden heart

Susan Diridoni, USA

squirreling away
words for the long winter . . .
my sister asks me
to remind her of life
before dementia

reading Shakespeare
I try to teach my students
metaphor . . .
shaken by the music
of bare ruined choirs

Margaret Dornaus, USA

this grief
knots between
throat and sternum—
a bird silenced
mid-song

tattered stuffed lamb
with me since infancy,
worthless when I die,
not even progeny
to keep its meaning alive

Seren Fargo, USA

dead stars
cradled
in my cigarette smoke
all the things
I used to believe

Chase Fire, USA

no longer a child
Billy The Kid's Colt 45
six-shooter
strapped inside my holster
no longer a toy

Al Fogel, USA

yellow rose planted
to honour my grandmother
I lift my grandchild
to smell the perfume
. . . this ancestral link

Jan Foster, Australia

counting rings
on the fallen oak—
how many heartbeats
have brought me
to me

all the children
chasing bubbles
these days
I find myself rooting
for the wind

Terri L. French, USA

drifting clear of sleep
I hear the children stirring
and the small dog wake . . .
rejoice in gentle company
and all this day may hold

art gallery—
awash with Turner's skies
I step out
into a pale blue day,
the reassurance of old trees

Beverley George, Australia

I let her shining hair
fall slowly through my fingers
as if by a fairy's wand
this child of grace
drawing sunlight

Ferris Gilli, USA

tonight I play
solitaire for beginners
on the PC—
my partner left without
showing me his cards

a day
for sunlight and friends—
watching TV
in a dark room
she texts her bff

Joyce S. Greene, USA

she slept beside me
I know— but at first light
she must have set off
such a long flight
back into darkness

he cushions
his swivel chair
shifts age into it
numbs his mind
spinning in twilight

Devin Harrison, Canada

apple season
beneath the tree
like deer
we're gathered by the scent
of ripe and overripe

the kitchen steams
at canning time
bosom friends
we share tales of first love
and trysts in grassy meadows

he tells me
I'm still beautiful . . .
wherever
sun touches snow
it melts

Michele L. Harvey, USA

within uncertainty
that doubling back
onto self—
let me see
the flame

this full moon
is a portal tonight
in the curve
of cicada call
your name

I place
my sister's obituary
beside Kwan Yin
they are similar
in their beauty

Marilyn Hazelton, USA

Poetry Workshop
after months of meetings
the leader tells me
you'll never be a good poet,
you're much too happy

Peggy Heinrich, USA

my rainbow kite
above grey clouds
jiving
to the handler's
secret tune

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

night song
at his fingers the rasp
of organ music
as in my heartbeat
your touch sustains

Alegria Imperial, Canada

now I am
that crazy old lady
in the straw hat
strange men speak to me
on the street

Carole Johnston, USA

there are wings
beneath your eyelids beating
your dream's rhythm
you are always too restless
even when held in my arms

in this small book
poetry he wrote about them
all the women before me—
I step on something dead
the stench follows me home

Violette Rose-Jones, Australia

all week long
a heron haunts the pond
in silence
he departs heavily
leaving not one croak behind

beside the sick bed—
I tend to her needs with love
thinking back
to sun-filled days when we ran
through fields of purple vetch

Kirsty Karkow, USA

I wasn't born
for this century;
I'm happy
with a dry blanket
and a sky full of stars

a tree limb
stripped of bark where
lightning struck—
alive, raw, wounded
like my nephew after Iraq

marching
around the capstan
on a spring evening—
the main topsail rising high
and my dreams with it

we are the refuge
for hearts that have
flown south;
let us be a gentle winter
for the world-weary

M. Kei, USA

Paradise begins
with a leap off the dock:
from the seeds of my feet
longing's old tree
explodes into leaf

They should teach us peace
or at least instill some levity
but cast in lead today
these *sakura* fall straight through
a heart that has no trusses

Pulled over to look
for somehow the world's fate
rests on that very foal
wobbling in a meadow
on spindly legs

Gary LeBel, USA

Leaving her
I look back down the dirt road . . .
Daylilies
lambent in the sunlit dust
from a passing car

Kris Lindbeck, USA

we parted
and after the tears
petal by petal
I pulled together
a poem of you

Gregory Longenecker, USA

dressed in black
widows sit around the table
shelling peas
all afternoon
till the end of time

peering down
a dark snickelway
in York
my Viking ancestors
now ghosts and tourist traps

Bob Lucky, Ethiopia

wrapped in fleece
I ponder the suffering
of this world . . .
the heron huddles in silence
on the frozen pond

broken twigs
and feathers wet with snow
fallen to the ground . . .
yet high above, the wren
fills its throat with song

Carole MacRury, USA

in the circle
on the windy hill
a small box—
inside, a tied scroll
with the words 'there is no end'

the nurse says
describe the pain
I find no words
but a dark ugly gremlin
appears in my mind

I want
to swim with him, down
the long river
my feet touching the reeds
where silver fish light the dark

Joy McCall, UK

I took my sorrow
into the countryside
wanting to hear
the song a skylark sings
to clouds above a meadow

as I shave
an expansive calm
surprises me
I am doing something
serene and eternal

old autumn
when your colors
fade in the bone
my story too
will be over

Michael McClintock, USA

my lean bows
the split rail fence
a meadowlark
riding the timothy
whistles me home

a sandal
bounces off
jetty rocks
I think of you
who almost were

nothing works
not even a smile . . .
tonight
three woman walk
through my cigar smoke

h. gene murtha, USA

staring out
I greet morning's ache
one bare foot
at a time
in the dust

two little girls
invite Buddha
to a tea party
ten thousand daisy chains
knotted through time

in her bio
the patient says
cancer
does not
define her

Christina Nguyen, USA

a swarm of bees
awakens the stars . . .
in this long night
homesickness
takes me by the throat

our bodies,
seagulls surrendering
to the wind . . .
time brings us into bloom,
is it for miracles we live?

soft I go
to gather sun and wind,
my speech
the speed of darkness,
I am the tree that trembles

Sergio Ortiz, Puerto Rico

how far
can my ambition
take me?
your voice an echo
from beyond a cage

the need
more than anything
to be liked
so much of me
comes and goes with the tides

Clive Oseman, UK

your youthful caregiver
I praise her support skills
you look astonished
had always thought that you
were looking after her

Elaine Riddell, New Zealand

come sundown
the memory of
this morning's quarrel
the burr clover I pulled
now wilting on the burn pile

Leslie A. Rose, USA

His old slingshot
in the shed—
the pebbles that hurt my calves
now my brother's
stinging words.

Where did she get
that pearl bracelet
I ask myself—
my mother
lying in her casket.

Alexis Rotella, USA

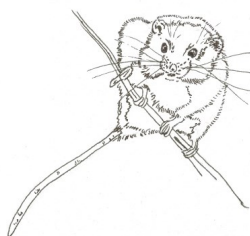
counting
the years
in days in cells
dividing by handfuls
of hand-rolled excuses

my clothes
strewn across the floor
the closest
you'll get to
a suicide note

Brendan Slater, UK

Sometimes all it takes
is one hand to lift you
from the dusty kerb . . .
I watch the glitter return
to the damselfly's wings

Amy C. R. Smith, UK



every dewdrop
on this tattered web
confirms it—
I'll never write
the perfect poem

there's no turning back
no start again—
in the mind of the universe
everything is nothing
in the end

Paul Smith, UK

on father's coffin
the cowboy hat and polished boots
of a prairie Gael
the skirling pipes
that sing him home

Debbie Strange, Canada

fingers of moonlight
string each blade of grass
with beads of dew—
the fight for her costume pearls
that neither daughter wants

you choose not to
tell me of your cancer—
the bowl of evening
overflowing
with darkness . . .

for KvK

David Terelinck, Australia

not snowdrops
nor iris nor rose to tally each week
till your return:
just the grind of
the garbage truck

even in sunlight
this loneliness . . .
I hose the garden
just to get
some rainbows

Anita Virgil, USA

by fine threads
suspended
the bag for life
that is
your heart

half-rendered
in the amber night
a younger self
out for sea air and
any excuse for a poem

in the glow
of the light
from a forty watt poem
the nineteen year old
who'll one day be me

your absence stands
with its arms outstretched
between my ears
grief in its many notes
stuffs my senses

Liam Wilkinson, UK

puzzle
as a crossword clue
confounds us
till mum nails it— *enigma*—
despite forgetting my name

Rodney Williams, Australia

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

you at my window
nightingale
bring morning early
awake half the night
in my dream

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

dreams flicker
skip frames
unmask a phantom
still nothing but
a made-up monster

my last day
as this last of June
place lightly
on my tongue
a tiger-lily petal

Brian Zimmer, USA

Tanka Sequences, Solo & Responsive



My begging bowl

I hold out
my begging bowl
you gift me some time
to retrace the path I've walked
in unfinished dreams

to behold her face
my mind had almost erased,
to breathe
her sandalwood scent
to feel her arms enfold me

but as I sip
this *amrita* of love
you summon me
in dreams of the full moon
ripping the swollen sky

I hold out
my begging bowl once more
but all that fills it
is my pleading voice
and its pitiful echo

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

Deep

January
heavy snow on the evergreens . . .
even one of my boots
has gone off
without me

putting aside
the letter written
on coarse paper
I now turn your envelope
from front to back

no doors, no tail-gate
the old pick-up truck
glides and bounces
quite content
with Lake Erie's sheet of ice

Tish Davis, USA

A Long Way from Home

for the Tanka Concert in Nara, May 19th, 2013

in my porthole
clouds piling high on clouds—
somewhere beyond
are the lofty turrets
of Osaka Castle

breakfasting here
an ancient pagoda
within sight,
I am blissfully
a long way from home

choice no choice—
were I to live again
in Japan
Nara would satisfy
most of my desires

luminous balls
of bilingual tanka
tossed from the stage
caught by an audience
of poetry lovers

canopied
with the brilliant green
of young leaves,
the old capital's park spreads
serene in early summer

the plane lifts
and already I'm back there
in the land
of responsibility
checking my diary

Amelia Fielden, Australia

Passage through Japan

a lone flute
wails *tamuke* . . .
we did not know
a kamikaze
mother's pain

hidden hands
guide puppets through
old rituals—
my grandson's first
escalator ride

trees lean
to dangle green sleeves
in a stream—
fleeting images
of geishas dancing

Shinkansen
through Sendai station—
on wet panes
passengers' faces
mirrored over mine

Note: *tamuke* is a traditional Japanese lament for the shakuhachi
(Japanese bamboo flute)

Hazel Hall, Australia

Resurrection

magnolias
in the lower Ninth Ward—
this crescent moon,
the scent of spring
brings you home

evanescence
New Orleans style
hot jazz riffs
transform
a funeral dirge

—Remembering Hurricane Katrina, August 2005

Carol Judkins, USA

When Will the Spring Come Again?

anything
new under the sun?
my shadow
and I come back
where cherry blossom fell

as the moon appears
with the coming of stars
a part of her
unfolds toward me . . .
a midsummer night's dream?

the conversation
between my hands and her body
deepening
an autumn breeze covers us
with a quilt of crimson leaves

a trace of blood
on the icy floor
this moonless night
the gaze of memory
penetrates my heart

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

a swatch of gauze

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA
& Janet Lynn Davis, USA*

the clear wings
of a dragonfly
on my hand
a treasure map
of copper veins

poking
into the hollow
of an oak
I search for pennies
stashed away by an elf

hidden
among apple blossoms,
a gray tree frog—
I follow the trill
of another world

visions
of a watercolor
mountainside . . .
how to get there
when I have no brush?

quilting
the blue ridge
in light and shadow
I slip through the eye
of my own needle

left right
north south east west—
a feather
on a course of zigzags
becomes my compass

a sparrow
missing one eye
alights on my knee . . .
the distant music
of a blind harper

rendered mute
by a waterfall—
in a grotto
of lava and fern
I speak in poems

a scallop shell
bound in a bale
of mulch—
my inland journey
to the sea

at home
among pine needles
a strand
of golden thread
to bind my seams

Note: Jenny & Janet requested that no clue to the authorship of the individual tanka was given for this sequence.

The Detour

Kirsten Cliff, New Zealand
& *Pamela A. Babusci, USA*

a breakfast
of pills & cold toast
out the hospital window
this world i used to know
passing me by

*who am i
trapped in this body
invaded with cancer?
looking at the infinity of stars
i touch the hand of grace*

still unsure
of how long this ordeal
will last . . .
the stories i tell myself
between waves of nausea

*losing all my hair
from chemo . . .
gaining
more humility & compassion
on my life's journey*

a new awareness
of my inner strength—
free in the wind
these Tibetan prayer flags
frayed, but full of colour

Kirsten Cliff is a Leukaemia cancer survivor
& *Pamela A. Babusci* is an Ovarian cancer survivor.

The Edge of Hope

Seánan Forbes, UK/USA
& Kirsten Cliff, New Zealand

moonstruck
in the fringes of my dreams
Mare Marginis
my evening meditations
on the edge of hope

*falling again
down this hand-dug well
on the edge of hope
I recite lines of poetry
without moving my lips*

circling your garden
I speak of love
without moving my lips
I lift your name
to the gods

*my fears
push against this ritual
to the gods
I pledge my truth
with the scent of myrrh*

autumn leaf-song
we sketch memories
with the scent of myrrh
old dreams
become new vows

things done

Sanford Goldstein, Japan
& Joy McCall, UK

*tax return done,
the family birthdays
remembered well,
the old man's mind turns back
to the beloved five lines*

and will my life
be over before I reach
eighty-eight?
Cohen sings "a crack in everything"
and age is waiting, waiting

*waiting always
for some kind of healing
of my dark pain—
his old light creeps through
these thin jagged cracks*

today's
breakfast dishes washed, dried,
and the laundry clothes folded,
a wind-blown morning for tanka
to submit by this month's end

*the small list
of ordinary things
done for the day—
my poems too, fall
into orderly place*

stillness inside

Tim Lenton, UK
& Joy McCall, UK

reeds by the stream
direct the sun downwards,
opening doors:
I stand rooted to dry land,
locked in an old landscape

*a bare branch
above the water
a scratch of stalks—
as harsh and as sharp
as this life torn by pain*

no clear path here
in this shadowy web
of tangled twigs:
I tilt my head to discern
ripples of the future

*listening
for small sounds of life
and renewed hope—
the splash of a fish
catching frail damselflies*

sounds of the past
roar along the river,
shifting focus:
here at the eye of the storm
stillness reaches inside

Perhaps Another CD

Mike Montreuil, Canada
& *Luminita Suse, Canada*

1.

*twelve strings
on the Aranjuez guitar
played allegro gentile
how many would
make you happy?*

the missing string
of the troubadour's lute
along with your voice
is what I desire
to listen to

2.

*oh well
he doesn't seem
impressed by Albinoni
perhaps another cd
and the scarlet lingerie*

not yet
I murmur softly
there is a time
and a place
after the Super Bowl

3.

quiet time
a Haydn string quartet
and a cup of tea
I drift off and dream
of courtly favours

*Ravel's Boléro
in ostinato rhythm
for snare drums
a constant motif
in your presence*

4.

Mars plays
from the speakers
the rhythm
of war hides
inside the violins

*the last page
of Hemingway's
Farewell to Arms
Venus chimes gently
in dark speakers*

5.

I would like
to dance with you
all night long—
to learn my steps
for the last waltz

*early morning
a rose blooming
on my lips
the promise
of a new waltz*

6.

*after debating
the art of aging peacefully
I play Saturn
my mother re-reads
Nostradamus' prophecies*

in and out
of the inner rings
I become tired
unable to harvest
a place in your arms

This Other Way of Seeing

David Terelinck, Australia
& Kate Kituai, Australia

Prague's pewter skies
laden with the promise
of snow . . .
this passage of dreams
through the longest night

*all those gifts
he said he'd purchase
hot air balloons
golden orbs at earth-rise
disappearing in the mist*

so many questions
I am desperate to ask—
it wasn't
all that long ago
we spoke the same language

*summer lit oaks
and liquidambars whispering . . .
that pause
before the falling
of the first leaf*

how late
the coming of spring—
Salzburg nockerln
served by a waiter with eyes
bluer than tomorrow . . .

*apple tree shadows
stencilled on the wall
this other way
of seeing such fine fruit
before the image fades*

good jazz,
and far too many
bad whiskies
I trace your initials
on the wine-stained table

*gum tree limbs
outlined with the sun's finest gold
the richness
of not pondering
why this is so . . .*

the lure
of fishnets and neon—
Amsterdam's trees
with just enough leaves
to stir the senses

*just a shower
pinging on our roof
steam rising
the sudden sweetening
of each other's thirst*

slow-cooked rabbit
washed down with Belgian beer
such delight
in knowing I still crave
the taste of you . . .

*short and fast trips
to cities you have loved
regular now . . .
how not to notice lengthening
spaces between your words*

booksellers
on the banks of the Seine
at the end
of each travel chapter
the sequel of us . . .

~ ~ ~

Rusted anchors

*Rodney Williams, Australia
& Patricia Prime, New Zealand*

*fiercely debated
these alpine grazing leases . . .
a skylark flits
through high-plain grasses
just as native here as us*

a rainbow
arcing over the city
tui shift rain clouds
with their invasive calls
and flash of lacy white collars

*the copper sheen
from a shelduck's chest
glinting
in the sunset's glow
this burbling stream*

yet to be named
a rare rowi kiwi chick
released
to a new home on
predator-free Mana Island

*rusted anchors
beside anglers with tans
bronze-brown
by the breakwater lamp
a brahminy kite*

forest daybreak
the jubilant dance
of water, leaf and light
and the flight of a fantail
from tree to tree

*beside this bay
with two splendid shades of blue
a fairy-wren
in the brightest western sunlight
you and I again as one*

after the rain
swallows come gliding
through clouds
in this isthmus of volcanoes
cloaked with green on green

~ ~ ~

Redbreast

Brian Zimmer, USA
& Kath Abela Wilson, USA

a robin
continues calling
undeterred
spring bubbles-up
through broken ice

*against the snow
a warming song
your breast so red
as if a body can't
contain such heart*

first to rise
under fading stars
the robin
rouses a choir
to sing-up the sun

*what then
of this
glistening silence
essence of absence
before the bird*

blue eggs
beneath a hen
dream
of skies
cracked-open

*last to fall
one red leaf
a meteor
swan song
into the nest*

you winter
by the brook
to feed
on crimson berries
among the evergreens

*full-throated
you melt the rose
moon that sets
inside you
on your hidden branch*

cold rain
after a week
of heat
your breast a hearth
for nestlings

*microtonal
drops and chirps
final notes
to wet and warm
time's manuscript*

tentative step
to the woven edge
feathers flap
inscrutable as wind
blowing from behind

*no holding back
a thrust into the blue
brave little flock of us
burst and float beyond
what we can know*

face it flock
nature is not kind
with broad brush
she paints a single redbreast
most will not survive the year

*enduring rose
life's unfolding wings
gold beak sung sky
each chirp each sip
spread eons deep*

Tryst

Brian Zimmer, USA
& Kath Abela Wilson, USA

sometimes
when the sun burns hot
I find shade to write
five lines on the sea
to wash-up at your feet

*tip-toe wet
relaxing in the flow
five deep sighs
the breaking waves and one
deep indrawn breath*

first whispers
pass through the leaves
but no!
it is the leaves
she is teaching to sing

*patient her heart
the awakening stir
too loud
a mockingbird inside her
says stay stay*

the point is
he kept at it for hours
grackles, robins . . .
what were they
that none would yield

*a nosegay
early by the stream
his gift
in the sound
of unseen birds*

that cicadas
are music boxes
whirring down
what wound them
could not be argued

*and in the stream
beneath moss covered arch
forever frogs
sing impossibility
and wish for more*

Introduction to “What’s Underground: A Tanka Quartet.”

By Carmella Braniger & Aubrie Cox

Scattered across Illinois, Indiana, and Florida, we composed the quartet “What’s Underground” over email, starting in the early months of 2012. Although the quartet as a whole is a collaborative effort, the individual tanka were written alone. Each poet had his or her dedicated turn, round-robin style, within the sequence to respond to prior links that would both resonate with and shift away from the prior links. Edit suggestions were usually not provided nor requested during the original draft. In fact while emailing, we rarely communicated beyond the poems. The poems were the conversation. However, upon completing the sequence, all four composers came together to discuss and edit the project as a whole.

The three of us in the Midwest were able to meet in person, while Natalie Skyped in for an afternoon. Face-to-face allows for the editing process to happen at a quicker pace, but also for a different interplay of voices. In writing we each engaged the sequence individually and communicated with the poems. Going through the sequence together, we acted as readers and writers simultaneously as we shared our editing ideas, inspirations, and readings for each link with each other. The sharing between reader and writer, which often happens over a longer span of time, became instantaneous. In being able to hear each other’s ideas about the parts and whole, we fine-tuned the structure and dynamics of the quartet in order to create something that could then be opened up to a wider readership. During the editing process we engaged the sequence and each other as a unified quartet.

String quartet is a composition as well as the group who plays the composition. The composition is composed for four string players—two violinists, a viola player, and a cellist—in four movements. Our tanka quartet is both written in four distinct movements but also involves an ensemble of four, which makes our work comparable with many of the traditions of the string quartet, including: interpretation, ensemble, and balance & blend.

Certainly, readers of tanka know the responsibility they bring to the composition process. As the performance of a string or tanka quartet requires a keen sense of interpretation on the part of the players and writers, the reader might encounter such shared sense of interpretation by noticing linking objects, such as snow, silence, toes, trees, and colors, like red and blue. This is not uncommon to find similar topos of conversation throughout a quartet, as the very nature of its composition involves intimate listening to create a conversation worth listening to. What's more important than the speaking is the interplay among voices.

In Stowell's *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, David Waterman notes: "a quartet is naturally suited to musical textures in which the voices are deliberately separated . . . each of the voices may have its own role as if the players were four characters on an operatic stage singing simultaneously in their different ways" (107). While moments of linking and connecting are important for the unity of the whole, separation of voices is necessary to provide variety and diversity to the composition. The complete construction of the quartet requires each poet's unique phrasing and articulation of the common topos or theme, which results in a blended lyrical narrative structure. For example, in the first octet of our quartet New Year's Eve and new beginnings thematically connect the tanka, but there are moments when a primary voice breaks out into solo and introduces a new theme. Natalie's tanka, "snowflakes skate figure eights," accomplishes just this. This tanka carries along the New Year spirit while introducing what will become the heart of the sequence: what's underground. A kind of silence settles into the remaining octet. Foxes and children play in the snow, but the unspoken mystery of it all remains yet unvoiced. The tension between silence and scene carries the reader through to the next octet.

By linking thematically, and balancing the roles among the four composers or “performers,” no one poet carries the full weight of the composition. In fact, such diversity in phrasing and articulation in voicing allows each voice to be more individual—which is necessary for achieving balance and blend. We see the blend in the connections between stanzas. This is perhaps most evident in octet four. The movement opens with a plea to not be left behind. We move from this childhood fear of abandonment. Abandonment leads quickly to a sense of imprisonment and longing for escape juxtaposed with a series of “Trojan horses” that play tricks with such desire. Finally, all tricks fall away as the primary voice closes the octet and sequence rather abruptly as she asks us to leap out into the possible. We take the trail not knowing what to expect, and perhaps not even fully prepared. But now is the time to take it. Ready or not. And so the quartet closes with an opened ended invitation for the reader to join in the exploration of paradox.

What’s Underground: A Tanka Quartet

by Carmella Braniger, Randy Brooks,
Aubrie Cox and Natalie Perfetti
all USA

in the eye
of the hurricane
our hearts sync—
dragon claws click
across the roof

the calm
of your voice
breaking up
in the confetti
of Times Square

talons clutch
last year's heartaches
my tired hands
trying to pray
them open

snowflakes skate figure eights
in the air
just above the asphalt
you answer
with acceptance

silence settles
at first light
in a world of white
only a fox knows
what a fox dreams

cousins' tracks
left in the snow
the remains
of a game
of fox and geese

pies in the oven
violin playing *run pony run*
the bandit's heart
more than you can catch
and carry away

wolf preserve
hands cupped
we howl to the wolves
those nearby are silent
those distant answer back

~ • ~

the dial tone
after another late call . . .
I hold nothing
but the moon
in my coffee cup

broken cup
how I scramble
to put the pieces
back together
again

not enough
for a country song
or a love poem
just her quiver
of moonlight

she follows
my words
through the dark
winter night
to my good side

rain drops
in a puddle
the way memory
moves through
my body

today
unaccountably
heavy
rain stains
the bottoms of my jeans

last of the magnolias
muddied
on the water's surface
a couple jon boats
down the flooded street

mud line
to the second step
of our porch
somebody's tracks
already home

~ • ~

nail spa
at the strip mall
painting my toes blue
a war refugee
makes confession

bright red
the toe of one sock
dyed with blood
we look for bleach
for the wound

salt in the wound
Father McKenzie
pulls his needle
through the sock's sole
with red thread

Ash Wednesday
a prayer
for forgiveness
he is unable
to give himself

red and white cane
tucked under his arm
his hand
along the wall, mine
constantly at his elbow

wristwatch still running
each step
slower
he struggles to grasp
this limp without injury

tucking into his jacket
I watch him disappear
up the stairwell
always alone
even among friends

below slabs of sidewalk
and city dirt
they work on wires
I've never seen, these men
who know what's underground

~ • ~

two pennies
tightly grasped
in my palm
please, don't
leave me behind

waiting for the sun
to return
I'm on a short leash
under a pear tree
in full bloom

outside the window
golden leaves
shake in the wind
I long to feel my feet
touch ground again

the front door falls
into flakes of rust
I listen
to your steps
or a stranger's

under the salt shaker
slugs sizzle
dissolving
whispers
of your name

beer set out
on the back porch
a Trojan horse
for her gossipy
neighbor boys

coyote
crosses our path
without looking back
you drive on
without notice

before the branches dry
we leap a puddle—
not quite
in sync
we take the trail

• ~ •

link authorship:

Octet 1 = 1-ac • 2-rb • 3-cb • 4-np • 5-ac • 6-rb • 7-cb • 8-np ~ • ~

Octet 2 = 9-ac • 10-cb • 11-rb • 12-rb • 13-cb • 14-np • 15-ac • 16-rb ~ • ~

Octet 3 = 17-cb • 18-np • 19-ac • 20-rb • 21-ac • 22-np • 23-cb • 24-np ~ • ~

Octet 4 = 25-ac • 26-rb • 27-cb • 28-np • 29-ac • 30-rb • 31-cb • 32-np • ~ •

~ ~ ~

Tanka Prose



Faith

Michelle Brock, Australia

5am Mass at Tabulam in that little bush church of timber and tin—
click of shoes across the floor, shuffle of bums on seats, chants,
candles, incense rising. Kneeling, sitting, standing, then kneeling
again.

kyrie eleison
... rituals of death
and rebirth
so easy to believe
when you're ten years old

Outside afterwards— toddlers giggle through milk-teeth grins,
chasing footprints across the frost. Round bellied mothers stand in
clumps marvelling at how their children have grown. Peak-faced
men with snap frozen ears worry that it will never rain.

Dew drips from the gum trees. The sky opens to a magpie's song.

Years later. The Green Cathedral down a winding path, between
casuarinas, to a clearing— rows of timber seats, an altar by the
water's edge.

'If I ever get married this is where I'd like it to be,' she says.

Destroyed by bushfire in January 2013.

studying
ant trails along the grass
she still follows
those dry creek beds
in search of miracles

~ ~ ~

Mother's Day

Donna Buck, USA

Everywhere today: ads for specials on champagne brunch, the floral bouquets. Reminders to those who don't qualify. A friend takes me out and I am offered a free dessert. When I inquire, the server tells me, "It's for you, Mom." I smile and don't argue. I raised kids, didn't I? Two foster kids and the two I step-parented when the 'real' mom couldn't be bothered with teens. But there is no day for almost-moms who almost made it but whose babies disappeared. So many false starts; I stopped calling them pregnancies. Then the shots, the in vitro, that foray into five-for-one. Two more would-be babies suspended in a nitrogen tank float several hundred miles away. I get the call because it's the five-year decision deadline.

This Mother's Day I drink champagne to the hopeful moms who receive these last two almost-babies. I toast all the mothers.

in this space
once a zapote tree
memories
of fallen fruit
haunt a parking lot

~ ~ ~

The Ghost of Rimbaud

Steven Carter, USA

"A bird doesn't sing because it has a song. It sings because it has an answer."

I take a sip of chard. "Um, isn't it—?"

"The other way around—of course it is!" Rimbaud laughs. "But hey, I'm not a Chinese philosopher. Besides, this is the West, Bubba, where there are only questions and answers."

"Thank Zeus—I think."

"Thank Zeus—I was about to say that!—although I *did* once overhear a guy in Beauvais say, "Answering one of the real questions ought to be punishable by death."

We drink in silence watching osprey watch themselves in the green mirror of the lake.

"So, Kid, tell me: why does a wife leave her husband?" I hold the Brownstone up to see how much is left.

"Because she's looking for answers—"

"Why—"

But something unusual is happening on the lake.

Maybe it's the barometric pressure, or utter lack of wind; but we can hear voices from across the water. Someone asks a question: we can't hear the words exactly, but the inflection is clear, as is a rising tone in the last syllable.

Leaning forward in our chairs, we wait for the answer; but a brisk
wind springs up, and the reply is lost.
The lake comes to life.
And the sudden whitecaps remind me of scrollwork on a casket.

rain
sifts the wind;
fog forms on the lake
therefore
I am not

~ ~ ~

The Significance of Words

Seren Fargo, USA

I often wonder how different some things may have been had my sister not “lost” the letter my mother wrote for me to read after she died. I dwell on what she was never able to share with me and what I was denied knowing.

my sister catches herself,
nearly fifty years
she still can't help saying
“my mother”
when she speaks to me

~ ~ ~

Falling Petals

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

Arriving by express post from the Australian Department of Defence.
A pocket watch. Scratched casing, fob chain missing, glass broken,
hands bent.

Engraved— 18/9/1962 Love Mum and Dad.

My brother always liked an old fashioned watch.

I saw him the day before he shipped out, proud, and so grown-up.

marching to battle
soldiers imagine glory
watched
by wolves and ravens
the dead dream alone

My parents became older overnight, their only son missing in action.
Then news he was a POW.

Much later, Red Cross confirmed he died, a prisoner.

Buried in an unmarked grave.

white lilies
fade and droop
summer ends
petals one by one
return to earth

Yesterday I visited my childhood home, a broad acre farm on the
plains of Northern Victoria. Memories, a sharp pebble in my gut.

harvest morning
finger-tips of breeze
through wheat fields
the chiming
of wind bells

~ ~ ~

Leylines

Gerry Jacobson, Australia

*The autumn tempest:
Looking at one another
In the candlelight.*

—Sekito

Sometimes she told him that she didn't trust this relationship. Was she right not to trust it? After all, two lives, male and female, lived in parallel. Rather like those great leylines, Michael and Mary, mystical lines of earth energy. Roughly parallel, they cross the breadth of England for five hundred miles.

my love
she walks the midnight
tightrope
wearing high heels
she can't get down

The leylines twist and intersect at great energy centres, chakras or kissing points like Glastonbury; Avebury; Bury St Edmunds. So, in those two lives, that fifty year parallel journey, there were intersections, node points, energy centres. Wedding. Birth of Baby. Second Child. Empty Nest. Retirement. Grandchildren.

for better
for worse . . . sometimes richer
often poorer
often rough . . . sometimes smooth
never plain sailing

Was there one more node point to be reached? He didn't want to think about it.

waiting
at a bus stop
day fades
stray leaves blow in the wind . . .
the ache of twilight

Note: the tanka 'for better' first published in *GUSTS* 13 (2011).

~ ~ ~

Scattering Pearls

M. Kei, USA

I read about a Japanese death row inmate publishing a collection of tanka.

Joshua Bell
busking in the Metro,
the sounds of the Stradivarius
pure and clear
above the rush hour rustle

~ ~ ~

Emily at the Window

Gary LeBel, USA

"I am small, like the wren, and my hair is bold, like the chestnut bur,
and my eyes like the sherry in the glass that the guest leaves."

The house is quiet. You rise and go to the window. You open it; it sticks a little. The night is dressed in a veil of crickets. The air rushes in, cool and damp on your forehead, blowing a few strands of hair across your cheeks, hair unbound for sleeping, split like the wake of a boat by the keel of your fine-boned shoulders.

You are fifty-five, fifty-five! How is it possible? You feel an old hunger rise up from your belly, and when it reaches your eyes you close them and bite your lip: an ageless thing, it chills you bittersweetly to the bone as it did when you were twenty, making you shiver. It knows that you have embraced your life, and that it has loved you as ardently as you gave. Your bedclothes flutter lightly as the breeze seeks and finds its way past your modesty through the openings in your nightdress .

. .

and in the depths of the quiet night you hear them as they march in step, the lines you wrote that morning, and the newer paths they cut at dusk as you tap their rhythms out with a slippered foot.

You open your eyes. A lantern shines in your desk drawer but you don't see it, for you have no idea of the wick you've lit, no idea of the dazzling light that will surround your voice and name for all of time like an Egyptian queen's cartouche . . .

instead, you hear only the muffled, familiar creaks of the old house where you were born and have lived for most of these fifty-five years of quiet nights, alone as the red fox that pads through clearings beyond the reach of Amherst's flickering gaslights,

touched by fields that bring you the *lustrum* of their fragrance like an offering: you inhale it deeply, and with the swoon of a lover you close your eyes once more, your lips breaking into a smile that only the window sees

and when you open them, flushed as if the whole world were suddenly coursing through the chambers of your heart at once, with everything strangely in place,

covered in gooseflesh, you close the window . . . and when you do

you catch your image
in the black of the glass,
and between your being and its reflection
how much closer they seem tonight,
the huddling stars of Orion . . .

Remembering Emily Dickinson (1830-86)

The introductory quote above was taken from her correspondence.

~ ~ ~

Inside a Tea Jar
TSUBO NAKA NO

Giselle Maya, France

a string
of words
on paper
diaphanous riddles
grafted from the heart

During a long rainy spell a Japanese friend told me this story.

On a shikishi (a square cardboard for writing poems) she showed me a calligraphy in brush and ink which reads:

“tsubo naka no kumo tsuru”
inside a jar a cloud, a crane

She explained that when slightly inebriated with sake the painter of this grass script calligraphy peered into the darkness of a large clay jar and saw his friend Yasuo Mizui at a gathering of friends.

The sculptor Yasuo Mizui carved stone sculptures, commissioned in many countries of the world. He invited friends for o-shogatsu, with traditional New Year's food. When visitors came to his studio he made time for conversation, tea and walks in his sculpture garden and pine forest. Each year he created a calendar on which he marked the times of day to practice various art forms— archery, koto, shakuhachi, haiku, calligraphy.

a man
who loved stone
sculpted a frog
smooth as silk
darkened by rain

~ ~ ~

**Articles, Essays, Reviews
& Announcements**



A Brief Appreciation of Akahito

Gary LeBel, USA

1.

*All day long
I wandered gathering violets,
the fields so lovely
I fell asleep . . .
and stayed the night*

This poem is arguably Yamabe no Akahito's finest *waka*: did the poet go out to pick wild violets or chase the flowing skirts of maidens all that day? Not knowing the answer is half the charm of this poem. To sleep in an open field: ah, what luxury! Wrapped in layers of fine robes, what pleasures would have sought you, bringing the music of leaves and unseen birds that come and go offering only a wisp of melody as proof of existence. You could inhale the fragrance of young grasses, have felt the twilight's dampness seep out of the forest as if from under the weight of the night as it fell, drawing its cloak of dew across your shoulders and perhaps over those of another with whom your robes are 'overlapped'. We fall under the spell of this poem without an intermediary of nostalgia because it instantly wipes away engines and electric lights, jets and the sneeze of a semi's airbrakes; how dark and lovely earth's night must have looked from the moon in those Man'yōshū times! The very warp and weave of timelessness spins its ethereal cocoon around the heart and mind in this short and elegant poem composed some thirteen centuries ago.

2.

*If only I
were cormorant instead of man,
for diving round Karani Isle
where the glistening seaweed's cut,
I'd never long for home*

Since seaweed-cutting was often performed by women, there's a pinch of the erotic here. From before Akahito's time and onwards down the centuries, poets were fond of employing sea-weed imagery— and not only because Japan is an island nation— because they took an especial delight in observing village girls and women at their work with their 'gleaming knives' as they sailed past them on their journeys. But the poem also suggests a longing to quit the drudgery of official travel that separates one from their loved ones. Surrounded by pristine beauty, and sheltered by its island, the cormorant is always home.

3.
*While the courtiers
prepare for the royal hunt,
the maidens left behind
stroll the river's promenade
dressed all in pink*

In naming just one color, Akahito paints a *niji*, a rainbow, evoking at once the blue of the river, its lush, verdant banks, the bright imperial tents bellying in a breeze with their nobles' pennants flying, the fine robes courtiers would have been wearing, the horse blankets and elaborate tack, and of course, stallions and mares whose shining hides would have evinced the meticulous sheen of groomers, their tails twitching black and russet, tawny and white. But maidens are the key to this word-picture and to the ordering of Akahito's world, its axis, as they are the natural and abiding spindle in ours.

4.
*Through deep night
where the hisagi hangs thick
over the inlet's beach,
piercing the borderless dark,
plovers cry on and on*

I imagine this poem to have been conceived and written down on site. It begs me to wonder what accommodations for travelers were like in the Nara period, and if in those days a number of nights on a journey would have been spent under the stars. As the sometimes guest of Emperor Shōmu, could Akahito have heard these cries through a thin-walled tent and brushed his poem by torchlight shining in? No doubt this was a poet that was, as Robert Frost has written, *'acquainted with the night.'*

5.
*As we sail on
past the island breakers
oars from Kumanu
rowing homeward for Yamato
fill my heart with envy*

Throughout the canon of Man'yōshū poetry it is understood that many of its poets, both men and women, had to leave their families for missions, business or marriages in far provinces at the discretion of the royal court; this poem epitomizes that hardship, if not with a keen and bitter edge.

I always return to Man'yōshū poets for their exuberance, their joy and freshness, their pathos, and equally as much for their reliance on natural, crystalline images of great simplicity, clarity and beauty. Though there are often hidden meanings and parallel resonances disguised, for example, in homonyms that only a Japanese speaker or scholar could intuit, still Akahito's is a poetry refreshingly free of the coding and obfuscation with which so much of our modern poetry seems afflicted, a condition whereby the primacy of a poet's internal labyrinth is held above the desire for a universal vision that truly great poetry promises and delivers. For these reasons and many more I return to Akahito often; he occupies a prominent place in my world poetry view, and one that I have often used as a model in my own attempts at writing tanka, good, bad or awkward as they may be. My only hope in writing this piece is that those who might be unfamiliar with the poet's work will seek him out, and that those who know him merely in passing might grant him a closer reading.

Notes:

- (1) The Man'yōshū era spanned a period from about 629 to 759 ME and was then succeeded by the Heian era. Akahito's time belongs to the third period, or c. 710 to 730, when Nara became the permanent capital.
- (2) This piece assumes the reader's knowledge that the first imperial anthology (and many believe the greatest) was called the *Man'yōshū*, or *A Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, from which Akahito's poems were drawn.
- (3) These translations of Akahito are the author's versions. Highly recommended are those of Kenneth Rexroth from his fine *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* and *One Hundred More Poems from the Japanese* as well as Takashi Kojima's invaluable translations of five hundred poems from the *Man'yōshū*, in his *Written on Water*. Featured in many anthologies, Harold Wright's translations are not only pleasant to read but also worthy of study.
- (4) As regards the poems themselves, since I have no personal aversion to it, I have capitalized the first word in each first line. The fact that capitalization is not used in Japanese when beginning a sentence has no bearing on these renderings. Being a native English speaker, I begin my sentences with capitals, an old habit I suppose. I have left off periods at the ends of the poems because I believe they disrupt the flow. Commas, which are considered by some to be anathema to tanka, have been added where I felt a pause or breath was needed; as with capitalization, I have no aversion to using commas either.

~ ~ ~

Each Koala

A Review of *Eucalypt* 14, May 2013

The internet is a wonderful thing. I've never had the good fortune to visit Australia, but in a matter of seconds I can google *eucalypt* and discover that it is an umbrella name for three closely-related genera (Corymbia, Angophora and Eucalyptus— although there seems to be some disagreement among the taxonomists about who is part of the family, and who isn't). I learn that many, but by no means all eucalypts, are commonly called gum trees on account of the copious sap they exude from the slightest nick in the bark. I read about their glossy leaves, their perfumed shade. I am familiar with the healing, comforting qualities of eucalyptus in the form of cough drop, balm and tincture, but can only imagine what it is to breathe the scent exhaled by the living tree. An aura of fascination surrounds these mythic beings whenever I bring them to mind, much like the blue haze that shrouds them on a warm day. It is not difficult to see why Beverley George might have chosen *Eucalypt* as the name for her acclaimed tanka journal, especially when we consider that the word derives from the Greek: *eu* (*eu*) "well" and *καλυπτος* (*kalyptos*) "covered", in reference to the bud cap that conceals the nascent bloom. Tanka is the perfect vehicle for conveying the whole gamut of human experience and emotion; by virtue of it I can walk a path through the eucalypts; I can witness rainbow lorikeets sipping dregs of milkshake from emptied glasses; I find myself wrapped in the crocheted afghan belonging to someone else's mother; I can feel the truth of Sonam Chhoki's words:

my aunt
who has no English
understands cancer . . .
no language can describe
the terror in her eyes

Eucalypt does much to honour the tradition of tanka. Beverley George is an award-winning poet and an accomplished editor. Contributors can rest assured the fruits of their labours are in safe hands. Appropriately, issue 14 opens with the following tanka by Rodney Williams:

the old bush track
scarred with wheelbarrow ruts
a path well-worn
by first-settler gardeners
pushing their wares to market

Themes that preoccupied the waka poets of the Heian court are no less relevant today and a skilful editor acknowledges this whilst encouraging vibrant imagery, new twists; tanka that polish the family silver, but only after its been melted down and turned into pendants and bangles. Even one of our most ancient muses can be seen in a whole new light:

forgetful
I bring in the washing
at midnight
my moon-laundered sheets
now whiter than white

Michael Thorley

It is refreshing to see very modern tanka which address contemporary issues alongside more traditional poems:

on the table
beside a weeping rose
two empty cups—
she finds friends on facebook
he clicks through his email

Michelle Brock

morning twilight
slipping away with the last
of the stars—
how brief the courtship
between arrow and bow

David Terelinck

Still, we have love:

the sun beats
like a metronome against
the steel kitchen door . . .
I love you because you want me
to catch the mouse in the cupboard

Bob Lucky

Longing:

you should have seen
this heart before the vessels
all were ruptured
how with every lover's moon
in and out swept a strong tide

an'ya

And loss:

cat-clawed
wings torn and featherless
you'll never sing
dawn to the edge of blue,
I struggle to rise

Kathy Kituai

But many other themes, and nuances of shade and tone within those themes, are woven into the rich fabric that is *Eucalypt*. Beverley George has an uncanny knack of placing tanka in sequence in such a way that they link and shift, chime or contrast with each other, so that each is enhanced and reverberates with meaning. Take these three:

this empty house waits
chores done, I stare out
at the winter garden
realise how her quiet
presence fills my life

John Parsons

fresh snow
in the wagon road
to the old graveyard
the weight of his life
carving deep ruts

Elizabeth Howard

a sky writer
graffitis the blue
with love
is it you who sends
this delightful message?

Jo Tregellis

Notice the recurring themes of quiet, presence versus absence, weight versus weightlessness; a wagon's tracks in the snow as opposed to a contrail's cursive (yet both are transient). Notice the subtle shifts in mood. As much thought goes into Beverley George's ordering of the tanka and their placement on the page as went into the tanka themselves. She has turned editing into a gentle art.

Certainly, *Eucalypt* seems to be akin to a symphony, wherein each theme can be regarded as a movement consisting of several 'short songs'. One tanka might be a tuning fork for another, but chiaroscuro is also used to full effect, though never intrusively, like the sun through the trees, spreading its shawl. Sit awhile with the following two poems:

there is no equal
to summer cicadas
for serenity—
listen to their voices
at autumn's approach

Michael McClintock

crickets
chirping at dusk
the small child
runs crying
from an unknown song

Dy Andreassen

There are many beautiful, reflective tanka, but equally, contributing poets don't shy away from difficult issues; just as death will come knocking on everyone's door, for many of us, hard times, or at least the memory of them, are never too far away:

welfare mom—
on the kitchen table
the scattered pieces
of her picture puzzle . . .
just the border done

John Quinnett

'I'm always afraid
it will come back'
he says
of childhood poverty
and looks at his hands

Belinda Broughton

I would find it very difficult to choose a favourite tanka from *Eucalypt* 14; there are so many fine poems from relative newcomers and seasoned tankaists alike. Much depends on my mood when I'm reading (and re-reading) which, for me, is one of the many joys of the genre, added to which the overall emotional impact of the poem is a two-way process, between poet and reader. As I write, the following two tanka particularly speak to me; both are uncluttered, contain simple but evocative imagery and leave ample room for dreaming:

sewing
a button back on
the way
I was shown by my
estranged mother

Robert Davey

second-hand shop
in an old book on the art
of Raphael
an inscription to Miss Court
for lonely evenings

Andre Surridge

What makes *Eucalypt* even more special, is its website, hosted by John Bird. Not only is this an excellent resource, complete with articles and details of Beverley's own collections, but it is home to The *Distinctive Scribblings* awards which recognise two outstanding

tanka from each issue of *Eucalypt*, selected and appraised by the award winners from the previous issue. The awards have been archived since the first issue in 2006 and make excellent reading. Why *Distinctive Scribblings*? Well, it's all about those gum trees again. Apparently moth larvae, who spend their days nibbling the living wood are responsible for this swirling graffiti which comes to light when the tree sheds its bark.

Eucalypt, Australia's first tanka journal, is published twice a year and subscribers receive an occasional lively newsletter and have the opportunity, from time to time, to take part in the *Eucalypt Challenge* on a chosen theme. Tanka has firm roots in Australian soil, but *Eucalypt* has a very international flavour.

In the words of Julie Thorndyke:

each koala
needs eucalypt leaves
and the wombat
his own soil to burrow . . .
our stories feed and ground us

Claire Everett, UK, September 2013

~ ~ ~

Sisters Are Doin' it for Themselves . . .

A review of issue #8 of *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*

In this age of modern violence and warfare, where too often men commit atrocities against women, it is comforting to find a place of sanctuary to escape from all of this. Pamela A. Babusci gives us this haven in her stance as editor of *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*.

Moonbathing cycles through our lives twice a year as a print-copy journal. Issue 8, as with each issue before it, is rich with poems that sing from, and of, the heart. The tanka are deeply resonant and underscore the loves, lives and losses these women have been exposed to.

Many of these women tanka poets within the pages of *Moonbathing 8* are dedicated, credible and highly experienced poets. There are many names that always shine on the international tanka stage and include people of renown such as Margaret Chula, Susan Constable, Margaret Dornaus, Margarita Engle, Claire Everett, M.L. Grace, Peggy Heinrich, Lois Holland, Alegria Imperial, Jeanne Lupton, Adelaide B. Shaw, Kozue Uzawa, Aya Yukhi, and an'ya to name just a handful. And the names that are not familiar to this reviewer, but are likely to become so given the quality of their work, have also contributed tanka that are insightful and engaging.

All of the writers in *Moonbathing 8* fully understand the nuance behind "show, don't tell." Again and again I am drawn to this exquisitely crafted tanka by Elizabeth Howard:

for the first time
I sit alone by the lake
a flock of mallards
calling to each other
in the gathering fog

There is no mention of death of a life partner, the deep grief, the loneliness, the despair that can come with this loss. And there is no

need. Elizabeth has expertly illustrated this by the analogy she has drawn. The poem is made all the more poignant by the choice of birds – mallards do not usually mate for life. Thus the poem develops a further, richer, layer of sadness.

There is a very real sense of community and sisterhood among these poets. Claire Everett's tanka speaks of the commonality of finding kindred spirits within the *Moonbathing* clan.

magnolia blooms
anointed with moonlight . . .
tanka by tanka
it seems I'm not alone
in this loneliness.

The women within *Moonbathing 8* are confident of who they are, and where they have come from to arrive at this point in their lives. There is the importance of memory and the effective use of the senses in this tanka by Cara Holman.

the elusive scent
of wild sage and eucalyptus
walking
in the footsteps
of my younger self

Tzетка Ilieva also echoes the theme of knowing one's place in the context of living within this world.

a row
of tulip petals
alongside the path
the woman
I've pretended to be

Margaret Dornaus shows us that these women are not afraid to look at and acknowledge the shadow side of themselves as well.

new moon
a cluster of stars lights
the vineyard . . .
through shadows and darkness
I see myself clearly

There is a sensuous intelligence to the poems in *Moonbathing 8* that present the reader with new ways of seeing in this world. This is evident in the poems themed around the nascent stirrings of life and love.

between us
and warm summer sun
white lilac buds
on the very brink
of becoming scent

an'ya

letting go of things
I embrace emptiness
curl up around
the immaculate seed
birthing within

Peggy Castro

Susan Constable, a favourite poet of this reviewer, exposes a brave and vulnerable heart in her elegantly constructed tanka:

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

But do not mistake the absence of Y chromosomes between these pages as a sign of weakness. These poets do not shy away from

the difficult topics. Rather, they are addressed with compassion and a perceptive understanding.

hospice
trying to cope
thinking only
of the red lilies
you gave me last year

Stevie Strang

morphine drips
into her frail body . . .
lying in wait
among the tree veins
a hawk's dark form

Lauren Mayhew

spring snow
three weeks
after her funeral
we divide her clothes
by what might fit us

Aubrie Cox

This journal contains polished poems that can excite, arouse, and move us to tears. Each skilfully written five-line revelation gives us pause to stop and consider our own place in this world, whether we are male or female. There is a great deal of sensitivity to be found in these poets who are, in the words of Annie Lennox, *standin' on their own two feet, and ringin' on their own bells*.

Some may ask why have a tanka journal that is dedicated solely to tanka by women. I have not asked Pamela, as editor, why she has chosen to do this. But after reading *Moonbathing* I feel it has much to do with the meld of ancient and modern. There is a sense running

through these journals of a connection with, and the honouring of, a lost era . . . those times of the female court poets from centuries ago who were confident, and in charge of their own lives, even in heavily patriarchal societies. Women who dared. Women who had something important to say about life and love, about grief, and about all the aspects of their being. *Moonbathing 8* continues to be a celebration of this history.

I feel that Pd Lietz has captured the essence of why we need journals like *Moonbathing* in our lives.

in that moment
pushing forth
beauty under layers
sprouting into spring
a seed states, I am

Pamela A. Babusci is to be commended for continuing *the conscious liberation of the female state* and for promoting excellent tanka with the publication of *Moonbathing 8*.

Any female tanka poet who wishes to submit, subscribe/donate or any male tanka poet who would like to subscribe/donate to *Moonbathing*, please contact: Pamela A. Babusci
moongate44@gmail.com

David Terelinck, Australia 2013

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Mint Tea from a Copper Pot and Other Tanka Tales

A few months ago, I was delighted to be asked by Amelia Fielden to write the back-cover blurb for her new collection of tanka prose. This is a limited edition publication and copies are only available from the author. Ordering information: anafielden@hotmail.com

It was during the Sui Dynasty (581-601 AD) that China first introduced tea to Japan, but the gentle art of tea-drinking did not fully take root until the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279 AD) when a Japanese monk called Eisai returned from the Zhejiang Province, bringing with him the seeds for the first plantations and the principles of the Tea Culture. Eisai's book on the subject, *Kissa Yōjōki*, began with the sentence: "Tea is the ultimate mental and medical remedy and has the ability to make one's life more full and complete". Building on another ancient tradition, *utamonogatari*, (poem stories), Amelia Fielden brings us "Mint Tea from a Copper Pot and other Tanka Tales". Coming from "a nation of tea-drinkers", I do not underestimate the significance of this everyday tradition. A cup of tea is curative, calming, ceremonial. For many of us, it is almost an act of ritual. It can be solitary, meditative, but like a memory, allowed to steep a while, it is made for sharing. It is comfort in a crisis, or while we wait for news. In her Tanka Tales, Amelia Fielden invites us to partake of these recollections of a long life, well-lived, a life filled with love, loss and longing; whether we are sipping Ceylon tea from porcelain cups in Japan, orange pekoe from the best china in an English country garden, mint tea behind wrought-iron gates and bolted cedar doors in the midst of a Moroccan revolution, or green tea in a temple precinct as we contemplate a dancing black butterfly, we are fully involved in Amelia's experience. Moreover, the eponymous mint tea from a copper pot is the image that permeates the collection and lingers long after it is finished. Mint: sharp, tantalising, refreshing, so exciting to the palate. Copper: the metal that redoubles the richness of a flame's reflection. The poet's mind is a fire-bowl for memory, the "sunset fire" that "flares above the charcoal mountain rims".

Claire Everett, Tanka Prose Editor, *Haibun Today*

Keibooks Announces *January, A Tanka Diary*, by M. Kei

January, A Tanka Diary, by M. Kei is now available for purchase at AtlasPoetica.org or at your favorite online retailer.

"Step inside this book and meet a magician— a man who knows the secrets of the sea and the land and the sky; a man who can catch the vastness of oceans and the smallness of sparrows in the same few words in five lines." —*Joy McCall*

Opening with the cold days of January and following the poet through a year of his life, *January, A Tanka Diary*, is the latest collection from the internationally respected tanka poet and editor, M. Kei. Melancholy, hopeful, or satiric, these are poems alive to the beauty of the world that surrounds us. He has the ability to capture subjects as small as a single snowflake or as big as history, all told with an intimate honesty. In Kei's hands, the ancient five line tanka poem breathes with contemporary life.

Each tanka appears in the order in which it was written with a date attached. We can see the poet sitting down to write on New Year's Day, and the multitude of poems and subjects that flow from his pen. We can follow him as he hikes and writes tanka over the bones of a dead deer, and explores the mysteries of the natural world. And of course, we follow him to sea in the company of sails and pelicans.

A large collection, *January, A Tanka Diary*, contains 640 poems of which more than 220 have never been seen before. The rest are collected from the scores of venues in which he has published around the world. Fans of his work will no doubt recognize some of their favorite tanka, but will see them in context, as they were written, in the company of other poems from the same date.

From Sanford Goldstein, author of *Journeys Far and Near*:

In the past sixty-five years I cannot remember a tanka collection as long as M. Kei's *January, A Tanka Diary*. The collection contains 640 tanka, 420 published not in his previous collection, but in journals and other places, and 220 new poems. It is a fascinating voyage of discovery of a Kei we have not known this well. The book starts from January 1, 2007 to the next January 1. It surprised me that Kei is so interested in flowers, birds, grass, clouds, sky—of course with his duty aboard floating vessels he is intimate with the ocean. The subjects vary of course, but what I found particularly fascinating is that the two final lines of the tanka bring a surprise and hold up the entire poem.

I have no room to cite individual poems, but one that appeals to me is a laundry day in which Kei's larger underwear is drying outside with his son's much smaller underwear. Another poem is about his daughter— Kei has come home, opens the refrigerator door to find the chicken inside had been plucked, so he knows his daughter had visited him. Poems of a sexual nature occur, one of which I once criticized as not being in the right order for a sequence.

Such an enormous undertaking cannot be read at a sitting. Take your time in reading it. On a second reading I discovered elements I had not thought of. Yes, do read it and experience a new tanka view of Kei's world.

From *Joy McCall*, tanka Poet, Norwich, UK:

M. Kei blazes a trail. This is a big beautiful gathering, to keep forever.

There is great sadness in these poems. There is deep longing. There is humour, too. He makes me smile. There are insights which surprise. There are poems of great beauty that catch the breath. There are everyday poems which remind us we are all human.

This book will be going with me everywhere I go. I love every poem in it. But if I have to pick a favourite, it's this one:

it's a day like any other,
full of melancholy
pessimism,
and yet— somewhere
there are herons

Some things are beyond my words. If you buy nothing else this year, not even food, buy this book.

January, A Tanka Diary

ISBN 978-0615871561 (Print)

274 pp also available for Kindle

\$18.00 USD (print) or \$9.99 USD (Kindle)

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Treewhispers
By Giselle Maya

Treewhispers is a collection of tanka, 77 pages, illustrated; a handmade book with fine recycled paper and a papermill thick handmade cover, hand-stitched, Koyama Press 2013. These are tanka published in all the major journals.

Here is the preface by *Michael McClintock*:

Do trees whisper? In these poems they do. And people who love whispering trees have for twenty years turned to the tanka poems of Giselle Maya, the legendary poet of Saint Martin de Castillon, in Provence. Besides translating for me the language of the trees, this magical poet shows me the "creatures who dwell among clouds" and takes me down the path to the home of the fox, the brown cow, the cat and the lizard.

Tanka is a form and genre of poetry that is ancient in its origins. When set down in Giselle Maya's ink, it is fresh as spring rain. Or is it ink at all that writes these poems so deftly, clearly, on our hearts? Who can know such things? Can there be such earthly ink?

Giselle Maya's tanka have an emotional and magnetic gravity that draws us out of ourselves and into the profound, intimate rural settings of country life in Provence. These are poems of owl and dream, earth and sky, light and darkness. Their author is an enchantress, pure and simple, a singer of short songs. Each song is a seed grown to fullness in its season. This is a book of memories and transient things, which I trust eternity will keep for those mortals yet to wake.

The earthlings that inhabit these pages are musical and affectionate. They are wholly of this world, true, but— somehow, sometimes— certainly they tread, fly, and prowl those other recesses of light and shadow encountered in dreamtime, in

imagination, where all barriers are transparent and consciousness loses the burden of its body. There are moments in *Treewhispers* that will never change nor stop being on the edge of change. You will want to re-read these poems, I think, for their truths and seeds of beauty— one's understanding of them never so full but may hold another grain.

Bring good shoes— you will need them. And carry a handkerchief to wipe loam and dew off your face.

Michael McClintock

Clovis House
Clovis, California
April 27, 2013

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Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 2:1, summer issue of *Skylark* will be read through December and January each year and will close on February 1st.

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 haiga 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.

The website **skylarktanka.weebly.com** will be updated regularly. It is hoped that 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.

Any queries should be addressed to the Editor,
skylark.tanka@gmail.com



from **Song of the Dawn**

Birds of omen dark and foul,
Night-crow, raven, bat, and owl,
Leave the sick man to his dream—
All night long he heard your scream.
Haste to cave and ruin'd tower,
Ivy tod, or dingle bower,
There to wink and mope, for, hark!
In the mild air sings the lark.

—**Sir Walter Scott**
(1771-1832)

